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CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEERISM WITHIN A CULTURAL COMMUNITY:
CASE STUDY OF YOUNG HMONG ADULTS
IN KITCHENER-WATERLOO

By

Melanie Heu
B.A., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2006

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Master of Social Work degree
Wilfrid Laurier University
2008

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Abstract

Volunteering is an act of civic participation where members of a community engage in a social process of performing activities to assist in achieving a certain goal. This study looks at volunteerism in the context of a cultural voluntary organization within the Hmong community in Southern Ontario. The study presents findings of a case study conducted with young Hmong adult members about their perspectives of volunteering within a non-profit organization, which incorporates three generations of members. The study reveals intergenerational and cross-cultural challenges and discusses how these challenges impact the volunteer experiences of the participants. The study advances our knowledge of volunteerism among minority populations in the context of their cultural communities and informs society of the experiences that may need to be considered when developing strategies to increase volunteer participation within Canadian society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation and thanks to the young Hmong adults who have shown dedication to the K-W Hmong community by sharing their volunteer experiences to inform this study. Your courage and support has made this research a success. I extend this gratitude to the administration of HAC that was willing to support this study in order to learn more about their youth.

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INTRODUCTION

“Volunteering is the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy in our society. It is offering time, energy and skills of one’s own free will” (Volunteer Bénévoles Canada, 2008)

Volunteering contributes to the development of Canada’s diverse communities and is a strengthening factor of the country’s growing economy (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). According to Statistics Canada, the number of hours invested in volunteering in 2004 was comparable to 1 million jobs. The majority of these hours were invested in volunteer activities relating to sports and recreation, education, social services, research and religious organizations (Imagine Canada, 2004).

Among the many diverse communities in Canada, the Hmong community of Kitchener-Waterloo (K-W) is one that thrives on the helping hands of its members. The Hmong are a diaspora nation from Laos that immigrated to Canada in large numbers from 1975 to 1980. Since their move to Canada, the population has doubled as a result of a growing second and third generation as well as the sponsorship of a few Hmong families that arrived throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s (Hmong Association of Canada, 2006; Hillmer, 2005). Over the years, the Hmong have become well established. Statistics gathered by the Hmong Association of Canada (HAC) (2006) shows that there are 767 Hmong living in Canada; more than half of this population is Canadian born.

The Hmong are well known for sustaining strong ties through the practice of reciprocity. To preserve this mutual form of help and the culture of the community HAC was founded in 1980. This Association is a voluntary national cultural organization that is

based in K-W and represents three generations of the Hmong immigrant population of Canada.

Statistics Canada shows that immigrant populations that live in Canada for over 26 years volunteer at a higher rate than recent immigrants living in Canada less than 6 years (Canadian Council et al, 2006). This is true for first-generation Hmong that have lived in Canada since the late 1970's and continue to perform their civic duty to give assistance to others. This can be seen in the consistency among first-generation Hmong in their volunteer commitment to HAC, as leaders of the organization primarily include elders and middle-aged men. Unfortunately, this consistency is not prevalent among the younger generation. In fact, in the past decade, HAC has experienced a decrease in volunteer participation among Hmong youth.

This thesis explores the challenges of volunteering experienced by HAC young Hmong adult members living in K-W. Young Hmong adults (18-30) represent one of the three age groups that classify as "youth". In the Hmong culture a youth is generally considered a person over the age of 12 and unmarried. I define the other two age groups as adolescent youth (12-17) and mature adult youth (31 and over). Among the three groups, young adults appear the most active youth members within HAC. Thus, I focus on this particular niche of youth volunteers to understand the challenges they experience when volunteering for HAC.

Arriving to the idea of exploring the volunteer challenges of young Hmong adults transpired over months of volunteering with HAC, researching the topic, conversing with my thesis committee members and overcoming personal doubt of tackling an untouched issue that seemed so complex and sensitive to the K-W Hmong community.

Being a young Hmong adult, I began my journey towards this study as a volunteer for HAC between 2006 and 2007. I committed to the role of being a youth executive leader for HAC and during this time, I experienced many challenges recruiting other Hmong youth to participate in the Youth Committee of the Association. As a leader, I listened to the different reasons given by these youth that explained their lack of motivation. Many of the reasons connected to feelings of dissatisfaction that youth experienced when volunteering or participating in events hosted by HAC.

This was a theme that mirrored one of the common reasons that influences many Canadians to disengage from volunteering: dissatisfaction with previous volunteer experiences. This information is found in the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) that was produced and conducted in the years of 1997, 2000, and 2004. The survey is a federal government initiative to explore the extent to which Canadians give their time and money to help communities and is a response to the growing concern in the decrease of youth volunteerism. The study reveals that from 1997 to 2000, the number of volunteers had dropped by 8 percent. Other general reasons that explained why Canadians volunteered less were lack of time, the unwillingness to commit to long-term activities, and the lack of interest.

Although the study identifies reasons why Canadians are unmotivated to volunteer, the information discounts what is happening in the process of volunteer disengagement in order to capture the life experience of volunteers. For instance, the time frame of when a person begins to detach from the culture of volunteering is not well known along with how challenges of volunteering may impact the process.

In hopes to offset the lack of knowledge around the lived experiences of volunteering among young Canadians belonging to minority groups, I set out to explore the lived experiences of young Hmong adult volunteers of HAC by drawing on qualitative methods of one on one interviewing. I designed an interview guide that allows young Hmong adults to speak of their general volunteer experience with HAC and enables me to gather data from 18 research participants who identify as Hmong, between the ages of 18 and 30, and who have volunteered or participated in HAC.

From these interviews, emerged themes that describe perspectives of volunteering that are specific to the sub-culture of HAC as well as the determinants of volunteer dissatisfaction. When looking at the themes, an overarching pattern emerges to illustrate a push-pull process whereby young Hmong adults, despite their disenchantments with volunteering for HAC, remain committed to the organization. Young Hmong adults disengage from HAC by slowly de-intensifying their volunteer commitment after their initial stage of committing to a volunteer activity but do not disconnect from HAC entirely.

I questioned this social phenomenon and was motivated to understand the process of how young Hmong adults experienced the challenges of volunteering for HAC in order to understand where certain experiences may lead to decreased levels of volunteering and why young Hmong adults remained involved. To understand this process, I turn to symbolic interactionism (SI) as the theoretical backdrop for this study. The use of SI guides the analysis of this study by examining the complex nature of volunteering in the sub-cultural context of the Hmong community. SI helps to look at how the perspectives of volunteering from young Hmong adults emerge from a system of

social interaction and examines the process of volunteer disengagement to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges that represent sources of volunteer dissatisfaction, as experienced by young Hmong adults.

By exploring the social process of volunteer disengagement one can begin to identify areas in the organization where improvements are needed. Thus, in my attempt to understand the challenges experienced or anticipated by young Hmong adults and to honor the voices of the participants that desire to see improvements, I aim to achieve the following:

- To grasp the deeper cultural meaning of volunteering among young Hmong adults living in K-W.
- To understand the challenges of volunteering perceived and experienced by young Hmong adults in order to learn how these experiences impact the process of becoming disengaged as volunteers from HAC.
- To raise awareness of the challenges experienced by young Hmong adults to the Hmong community as well as the larger mainstream community.

Above all, by pursuing this research study, I aim to pioneer work that will shed light on the unheard voices of youth who volunteer for their cultural communities such as, the young Hmong adults of K-W in order to understand the impact these youth have on the socio-economic development of their communities. Thus, this research study represents new scholarship as it is the first and only one of its kind in Canada, which significantly contributes to knowledge in the field of academia and social work. This

thesis is a stepping stone to creating further knowledge around the development and organization of cultural communities that may live in solace among the dominant society but experience challenges when compromising their cultural views to adapt to Canadian culture.

SECTION I:

LITERATURE REVIEW, METHODOLOGY & THE PARTICIPANTS

There are three chapters in this section. In chapter one, I present a literature review of the existing research on volunteerism, to identify gaps in the current literature. I also present knowledge of the Hmong living in North America and the Hmong of Kitchener-Waterloo. In chapter two, I present the theoretical backdrop of this study and discuss the methodology used to guide the conduct of this project. In chapter three, I present the characteristics of the research participants and introduce the individuals, using simulated identities.

CHAPTER 1

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present the Hmong diaspora by sharing their history, their transition to North America and the societal and political structure of their community. I specifically introduce the Hmong community of Kitchener-Waterloo and the cultural voluntary organization, the Hmong Association of Canada. Furthermore, I discuss the cultural changes that have occurred among the Hmong living in North America and the challenges that young Hmong adults experience as a result of these changes. I present information about volunteerism in Canada. I primarily discuss volunteering among youth living in Ontario and the contributions of immigrant Canadian volunteers. I then explain the nature of this research project and the purpose of its exploration.

1.1) The History of the Hmong

1.1.1) Persecution of the Hmong in China

The specific origin of the Hmong remains a mystery but the historical record of the Hmong's resistance to assimilation under nation states where they lived continues to be well documented (Quincy, 2000). Historical events date far back to the fifth century A.D where there once existed a Hmong kingdom in China that came to ruins by the Chinese (2000). From then until the early 1800's the Hmong suffered persecution by the Chinese and were forced to assimilate to the Chinese culture as well as the feudal system. As a mark of the past, the Chinese still refer to the Hmong as Miao, meaning "savages". (Thao, 1999.; Quincy, 2000; Lee, 1996).

1.1.2) Migration to Laos

Survivors of the Chinese persecution fled to the remote mountainous regions of Guizhou, Yunnan and southwestern Sichuan, where most Hmong in China still live today (Quincy, 2000). Those resisting Chinese rule moved to countries in South East Asia, mainly Laos, where they lived as farmers practicing slash and burn agriculture (2000). When the French colonized South East Asia, the Hmong experienced tension with the French government as they were obligated to participate in the system of paying taxes. These tensions slowly subsided and for some time the Hmong lived in peace. (2000)

1.1.3) The secret war in Laos

The Hmong were once again disturbed with war and violence at the end of World War II. Laos and Vietnam had gained full independence from France but were left divided by two political systems, the Communist regime and the Democratic Party. Conflict between the political groups resulted in the Vietnam War (Thao, 1999). As an attempt to prevent the spread of communism the United States sent ammunition and food supplies to support the fight against the communist regime in Vietnam.

The Hmong were recruited by the American CIA in 1960 to train and fight against the communist regime. This lasted until the end of the war in 1975. Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam fell to the communist regime and thousands of Hmong were forced to flee their homes to escape persecution (Quincy, 2000). It is estimated that during this escape, about half of the Hmong population vanished (Tatman, 2004). Between 1973 and 1980 many Hmong refugees fled to Thailand before immigrating to the United States and other countries such as Canada, Australia, France, and Germany (Quincy, 2000).

1.1.4) Hmong resettlement in North America

The majority of Hmong refugees from Thailand immigrated to the US between 1975 and 1980 (Quincy, 2000; Xiong, Tuicomepee, LaBlanc, & Rainey, 2006; Tatman, 2004). A smaller number of less than 1000 Hmong refugees immigrated to Canada during this very same time (Thao, 1999; Hillmer, 2005). Today there are approximately 200,000 Hmong living in the United States (Xiong et al, 2006; Tatman, 2004; Tsai, 2001) compared to approximately 800 living in Canada (Hmong Association of Canada, 2006). It is believed that 56 percent of the US Hmong population is under the age of 18 (Xiong et al, 2006); this is similar to Canada's statistics that show over 50 percent of the Hmong population to be Canadian born (Hmong Association et al, 2006).

Hmong living in both the US and Canada share a common geographical pattern. Hmong families relocate to areas where there are large Hmong populations. In the US three states hold the largest concentration of Hmong people: Minnesota with a Hmong population of 45, 000, California with 65,000, and Wisconsin with 34,000 (Xiong et al, 2006; Tatman, 2004). The largest Hmong population in Canada is found in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

There are many reasons that explain the preference of living in large numbers. The Hmong enjoy living close to relatives of the same sub-lineage and clan group. This allows Hmong families the opportunity to build strong social support networks among a local clan system (Forward & Rick, 1992). Also, the Hmong are more likely to live in areas that either have high employment or a welfare state program that provides adequate resources to low income families (Forward & Rick, 1992).

Over the years the Hmong have become well established in North America and in many other continents. They have come to abide by the policies of their government states and have been shaped by the mainstream culture of these places (Julian, 2004). However, despite the changes, the Hmong continue to function within a culturally specific structure that sustains their culture and connects them to community members (Julian, 2004). This cultural connection has become world wide as the Hmong have become well equipped with modern technology such as, the internet, television, and radio broadcasting. These tools serve as a means to unite the Hmong and their experiences in different parts of the world. (Julian, 2004)

1.2) Hmong Society

1.2.1) Social structure

The Hmong survive as a collective civilization where objectives are achieved through cooperative group activity (Dunnigan, 1982). The social organization of the Hmong is established on a 12 clan system (see Appendix A) that is based on a patriarchal lineage (Thao, 1999). Members of each clan share a common ancestral origin and are tied to commitments that support their clan (Dunnigan, 1982; Thao, 1999). Within each clan lineage there exist sub-lineages that are associated by kin. Each sub-lineage selects a leader to represent the political voice of the group (Dunnigan, 1982; Thao, 1999). This person is responsible for mediating conflict and resolving disputes between clan and sub-lineage groups. As a method to maintain this clan system and build alliances with other clan groups, the Hmong have made it taboo to marry within one's own clan lineage.

1.2.2) Family unit

The family household is the most important kinship unit that extends to the larger sub-lineage (Tatman, 2004;Thao, 1999). This kinship unit usually includes extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and grandchildren (Dunnigan, 1982) In North American, this household setting can still be seen among Hmong communities. A member of a household is seen as a product of their family and is expected to sacrifice their needs for the common good of the community (Dunnigan,1982). Spouses are viewed as an addition to the family lineage in which wives take on the clan name of their husband, which is passed onto their children (Dunnigan, 1982). The highest authority of a household is assumed to be a male elder who is believed to have invested time in improving the structure of his family and sub-clan lineage (Dunnigan, 1982). Women and children have the lowest status and authority in the family household (Dunnigan, 1982; Tatman, 2004)

1.2.3) Political organization

The political system of the Hmong is built on a male-oriented clan system that generally operates on a local level (Dunnigan, 1982). Political strength is built upon kinship coalitions that support one another through a system of mutual assistance (Dunnigan, 1982). The political system is led by male leaders of each sub-lineage that must collectively agree to policies and objectives before they are carried out in the community (Dunnigan, 1982). Members of each sub-lineage are required to remain loyal to their clan leaders as they are dependent upon these relations to have their rights defended during disputes (Dunnigan, 1982).

In this Hmong political system, women are placed at a disadvantage. When married, women are bound to the negotiation structure of their husband's lineage (Dunnigan, 1982). If the male leaders of the family do not support her, she must appeal to the leader of the local sub-lineage belonging to her husband's clan (Dunnigan, 1982). Culturally, women usually leave their lineage of origin to join their husband between the ages of 13 and 16 (Ngo, 2002). In North America, this practice remains ongoing as young Hmong girls usually marry between the ages of 11 and 23, the majority being married by the age of 16 (Ngo, 2002).

1.3) The K-W Hmong Community

1.3.1) Arriving in K-W

According to the Australian researcher, Paul Hillmer (2005) who came to Kitchener-Waterloo to conduct research on the Hmong living in Canada, Hmong families began to arrive in Canada between 1979 and 1980. Many Hmong families resettled in the province of Quebec while others scattered throughout the country. In time, families began to relocate to Kitchener-Waterloo where employment was on the rise and relief organizations were available to provide resettlement assistance. K-W was also attractive for its strong Mennonite Christian community that was willing to embrace the Hmong in their endeavor to create a Hmong church.

1.3.2) Division in the community (see Appendix B)

Currently, there are 767 Hmong living in Canada with the majority of this population residing in K-W (Hmong Association et al, 2006). Although the community is

perceived as small and homogenous, Hmong members are distinguished by their religion, dialect, and place in the cultural social structure. This creates certain divisions within the community. The two dominant religions in the community are Christianity and Shamanism. Some years after HAC was founded the First Hmong Mennonite Church was created to cater to the Hmong Christians. This religious institution has grown to attain their own building that belongs to the members of the Church. In many cases, some Hmong members categorize themselves as belonging to neither religious group while others identify as being involved with both.

1.3.3) The local system

There are two different dialects spoken within the community, white and green. The green dialect appears to be dominant within the church while the white dialect is mostly used among non-church members. Another divide in the community is observed through the local clanship system that exists within the community. There are 8 different clan groups: Her, Vang, Lee, Moua, Xiong, Chang, Thao, Hang. Over the years, these clans have built stronger ties through the marriage of their children or other family members. These clans have also created relationships from the sharing of resources and information.

1.4) The Hmong Association of Canada (HAC)

1.4.1) The development of HAC

In Laos, Hmong families lived in close proximity in villages that were comprised of 30 households. These villages were spread in close geographical locations, which

made it easy for the Hmong to trade resources and favors (Thao, 1999). In North America the Hmong experience challenges being dispersed throughout the different city districts. Voluntary Associations were generally created to help connect different Hmong families living in the same local area (Dunnigan, 1982). These organizations provided space for Hmong communities to build a social network with different families and practice cultural political arrangements among clan groups.

1.4.2) The purpose of HAC

The Hmong Association of Canada represents one of the many volunteer organizations that exist to connect members of its local Hmong community. Currently, there are approximately 200 registered HAC members that include men, women and children. The Association was founded in 1980 by the Hmong living in Kitchener-Waterloo and is the oldest grassroots Hmong non-profit organization in Canada (Hmong Association et al, 2006). Under its constitution the Association continues to serve the KW Hmong community providing resources and planning events that help sustain Hmong culture as well as acculturate Hmong families into Canadian society. This primarily involves access to interpreters, educational workshops, and financial support for funerals, along with planning events such as the Hmong New Year, picnics, and other fundraising socials.

1.4.3) The structure of HAC

The structure of HAC is currently comprised of a board of directors, four officers, a New Year Coordinator, a Hmong School Coordinator, and four committees: the

Newsletter Committee, the Men's Committee, the Women's Committee, and the Youth Committee. People are nominated and elected into leading positions through a voting system that takes place every year. A registered member who is over the age of 16 is eligible to vote. (Hmong Association et al, 2006)

1.5) Young Hmong Adults

1.5.1) Cultural identity

In a study that examines the transnational cultural identity of the Hmong, Roberta Julian (2005) finds that there are underlying similarities among Hmong communities around the world in how they perceive their cultural identity. These similarities come from the shared struggle of escaping war and bringing old customs and traditions to new lands of resettlement. However, since the Hmong have been displaced in different localities where policies, resources and opportunities reflect the host country in which they live, individuals have been shaped by new prospects presented to them by the mainstream culture. This can be observed among young Hmong adults living in North America, where they acculturate to western culture while remaining closely connected to their cultural community.

Since little or no research has been produced on the acculturation of young Hmong adults living in Canada this section will present the experiences of young Hmong adults living in the United States (US). This will provide a general overview of the different types of cross-cultural challenges that young Hmong adults encounter when living in western society.

1.5.2) Changing values

A study that explores the cultural orientation of young Hmong adults in the US reveals that young Hmong adults raised in the US are more culturally oriented to western American culture (Tsai, 2001). This acculturation process is connected to the “melting pot” mentality that the US has produced to assimilate all citizens, despite their racial and ethnic background, to become “American”. This mentality is generally learned throughout childhood and adolescence in educational institutions where Hmong children learn western values and norms. This mentality is further perpetuated in the competitive workforce that predominately operates within a western structure.

This acculturation experience is comparable to minorities living in Canada. Although Canada is distinguished for its efforts in promoting the concept of multiculturalism whereby foreign cultures are preserved, many individuals from cultural communities feel that their cultural values are overlooked by the dominant system. Thus Canadian minorities also encounter the challenge of being placed into systems where they must acculturate to the mainstream in order to function as a member of society.

Despite the government’s ongoing initiative to help minorities acculturate, research indicates that young Hmong adults are unassimilated to the American way of life (Tsai, 2001). Young Hmong adults continue to maintain a strong sense of Hmong cultural identity. One study that explored the perceptions of young Hmong adults on “good” parenting (Xiong, Eliason, & Detzner, 2005) reported that this group of young Hmong are protective of their Hmong cultural practices and are sensitive to the way outsiders falsely perceive the Hmong community. Thus, young Hmong adults make the

effort to be socially aware of how their cultural community operates in the host country by being connected to family and the community.

1.5.3) Connection to cultural community

The close connection that young Hmong adults have with their cultural communities can be observed in the degree to which the cultural norms of the Hmong influence the daily lives of these young Hmong adults. In a study done on Hmong immigrants and their perceptions of family secrets (Xiong, Tuicomepee, Lablanc, & Rainey, 2006) young Hmong adults expressed their fear of stigma and are consciously aware of keeping family secrets to “save face”. The idea of “saving face” is to act in a respectable manner that will keep the family honor, which includes refraining from revealing information on what occurs inside the home. As a result, many young Hmong adults will consciously make decisions that are influenced by their concerns to assure that their family honor in the Hmong community is kept.

How young Hmong adults perceive the concept of self might also have an impact on how they engage with members of their cultural community and may reflect their cultural values. According to Ching-Yun Lee (1998) populations from China, such as the Hmong, perceive the self as being an integral part of their relationships that they form with family and community members. Westerners, on the other hand, perceive the self as a midpoint where relationships form around the self. Given that the Hmong are a community that prides on the practice of cultural reciprocity, the idea of perceiving self in unity with ones relationships can be validated.

1.5.4) Cross-cultural challenges

Furthermore, young Hmong adults struggle to meet the expectations of mainstream society while respecting the cultural norms and values of their cultural community. For instance, a growing number of young Hmong adults are holding off on early marriage as they pursue higher education to achieve their own aspirations. This trend is becoming more frequent among young Hmong adult women (Lee, 2001; Ngo 2002) who are often expected to marry between the ages of 11 and 23 (Ngo, 2002). This lifestyle change may be a result of the adopted western value of “individualism” that encourages people to look at their personal goals before serving the needs of others.

This mentality clashes with the collective mentality of the Hmong culture that values community before the individual (Lee, Vang, & Su, 2005). Thus, many young Hmong adults struggle to maintain an understanding relationship with parents who expect their children to sacrifice individual needs for the family. A coping method that young Hmong adults often use is “avoidance” of the issues (Xiong et al, 2005). By avoiding conflict, young Hmong adults steer away from confrontation with parents on issues that involve value differences. However, studies have found that this coping mechanism creates increased stress among young Hmong adults that can interfere in their daily activities (Xiong et al, 2005).

On the whole, young Hmong adults generally know more about American culture but continue to be aware of what is expected of them in their cultural communities. These young adults generally experience stress and conflict when faced with the pressures to meet cultural expectations of both societies, Hmong and Western. This struggle can

influence the way young Hmong adults interact with members of the cultural communities who are less acculturated into Western society.

1.6) Volunteerism in Canada

Volunteering is one of the many activities in which Canadians participate to give back to their communities. The definition of volunteering refers to the willingness to provide one's time, advice, and skill without the expectation of monetary compensation (Volunteer Bénévoles et al, 2008). According to Statistics Canada (2004) about 45% of Canadians volunteered in the year of 2004. Of this percentage, 17% were youth between the age of 15 and 24.

1.6.1) Types of volunteering

On average, a Canadian contributes 166 hours per year to volunteering. Volunteer activities can range from helping a neighbor paint a garage to being an active board member of an organization (Statistics Canada, 2004). The two exemplify the dichotomy of volunteering: formal and informal.

Formal volunteering involves the act of committing to an activity that is directly associated with an organization (Statistics Canada, 2004). Formal acts of volunteering are generally long-term and likely serve to support the cause of an organization. Volunteers usually become involved in formal volunteering out of interest and to build work experience (Statistics Canada, 2004). Informal volunteering or "helping out" refers to performing an activity that is unassociated with an organization (Canadian Council et al, 2006). In 2000, 79% of Canadian volunteers said they provided assistance to others on

an informal basis (Canadian Council et al, 2006). Certain activities included housework, yard or maintenance work, providing care or support to the sick or elderly, babysitting, teaching or coaching (Canadian Council et al, 2006).

Organizations often document the contributions of their volunteers, which means records of formal volunteering are more accessible and easier to measure. On the other hand, informal volunteering is usually undocumented making it difficult to understand the extent to which Canadians engage in this act. Most of the literature gathered in this study will pertain to acts of formal volunteering; however, the study itself aims to look deeper into the experiences of volunteers who engage in both forms of volunteering.

1.6.2) Youth volunteers in Ontario

Volunteering is an activity that is commonly practiced among youth living in Ontario. In 2001, the Canadian Centre of Philanthropy reported that about 511,000 youth in Ontario volunteer (Febbraro, 2001). This presents hope for Canada's future generation as research suggests that early learning of philanthropic values and positive integration of volunteer behavior carries forward into adulthood and leads to long-term volunteering. (McLellan et al, 2003; Schmidt et al, 2007; Planty et al, 2006).

1.6.2) A. Volunteer benefits

Additional long-term benefits of volunteering include the development of innate civic values that sustain people's willingness to remain law-abiding citizens (Planty & Bozick, 2006). Research indicates a strong relationship between volunteering and social responsibility. According to Planty and Bozick, social responsibility is a concept that

refers to a person's understanding, recognition and acceptance of the legitimate societal rules that are constructed for the greater good of society. The qualities of social responsibility include self-control and benevolence as these qualities are portrayed when respecting the boundaries of communities. It is assumed that as youth adopt the qualities of social responsibility they prepare to make decisions that deter them from delinquent behavior and continue to do so throughout their life long journey.

Aside from positive social integration and increased community involvement, volunteering provides opportunities for social development. According to Statistics Canada (Febbraro, 2001), Ontario youth describe volunteering to be of personal benefit as it helps to enhance skills, increase networks, build work experience, and develop knowledge. Research also shows that while volunteering, youth build healthy interpersonal connections, peer support and positive role models that guide them throughout the difficulties of adolescent life (Canadian Council et al, 2006). Overall, youth who volunteer are generally healthier, perform better in school and have a stronger sense of civic identity (Planty & Bozick, 2006).

1.6.2) B. Motivations to volunteer

Like the benefits of volunteering, motivations to volunteer are closely linked to personal gain. The list below indicates some of the reasons why young people in Ontario volunteer (Imagine Canada, 2004, p.16).

1. Believe in cause supported by organization
2. Use skills and experiences
3. Explore one's own strengths
4. Personally affected by cause
5. Improve job opportunities or skills
6. Friends volunteered

7. To fulfill religious obligations or beliefs

Speculations from the list above may include the following: youth are attracted to organizations that have a clear mission statement supporting an honorable cause. They may also choose to volunteer for organizations that have values which coincide with their own. Youth selectively participate in activities that give them the opportunity to offer their skills and expertise. Most importantly, youth prefer to select activities that connect them to peers. A supporting study by McLellan & Youniss (2003) suggests that youth are motivated to be involved when volunteer activities are connected to friends and family. Lastly, youth choose volunteer activities that build work experience pertaining to their career interests.

1.6.2) C. Volunteer challenges

Youth are motivated to volunteer to fulfill personal goals. Coincidentally, challenges of volunteering among youth appear to be a result of the time constraints of other personal goals and interests. The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) points out the different barriers that youth in Ontario encounter when contemplating their volunteer involvement (Imagine Canada, 2004, p.17).

1. Did not have enough time
2. Unable to commit long-term
3. Had not been personally asked
4. Didn't know how to become involved
5. Had no interest
6. Give money instead of time
7. Financial cost of volunteering

The most common theme in the above list is lack of time. It appears as though youth are short of time due to the demands of other life commitments. Another is lack of

interest that drives youth away from volunteer activities and as youth learn to understand the time consuming nature of volunteering they pick volunteer activities that are most appealing to their interests.

Furthermore, volunteering can be a financial sacrifice as youth indicate the financial costs of volunteering to be a challenge. This may be more prevalent among youth living in low income households. According to the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (2004), youth living in a low income household volunteer at a lower rate with fewer hours compared to youth living in higher income households.

Another important pattern to recognize is the lack of communication between youth and organizations. Some youth are unaware of how to become involved in volunteer activities and some feel they are uninformed about volunteer opportunities. This may be a result of youth being disconnected from resources. A study looking at high school volunteerism among youth revealed that youth are more involved when resources are easily accessible (McLellan & Youniss, 2003). By exploring the reasons why youth are disconnected from resources, the communication gap between organizations and youth may be lessened.

1.6.3) Mandatory volunteering among youth

Canada's initiative to implement mandatory volunteer requirements to graduate from high school is a strategy that works to connect youth to community resources. In Ontario, the volunteer high school program is known as the Community Involvement Program (Waterloo Region District School Board, 2005), which was implemented as part of Ontario's new high school standard curriculum in 1999. Students in grade nine

beginning in September of 1999 were required to complete 40 hours of community involvement activities in order to receive their high school diploma (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998; Waterloo Region District School Board, 2005). The purpose of the community involvement program is outlined as follows:

- To encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility.
- To increase awareness of the role students can play and gain satisfaction from the contribution they can make in supporting and strengthening their communities.
- To develop a positive image and a greater sense of identity within the community. (Waterloo Region District School Board, 2005, p. 1)

As previously discussed, research has shown that required volunteer hours in high school effectively works to increase youth participation in communities. Youth who have participated in volunteer work during adolescence are more likely to volunteer in early adulthood than those who have not. However, some studies refute the assumption that mandatory volunteerism helps youth develop a sense of civic responsibility that is carried forward into early adulthood. Planty and Bozick (2006) found that mandatory volunteerism produces an opposite effect whereby youth who feel forced to give their free time to participate become resentful and look to reinstate their individual freedom after high school.

Planty and Bozick (2006) also found in the same study, which explored participation in service work in adolescence through to young adulthood, young adults volunteered less during their two year transition from high school to post-secondary education or the workforce. The study also found that the percentage for volunteerism

remained low eight years after graduation. Speculations about these results includes the lack of incentive for participation, limited free time and changes in social networks. This may be true among Canadians between 25 and 34 as statistics show this age group to be the least involved in volunteerism (Imagine Canada, 2004).

Although research has looked at the present and long term participation in volunteerism among youth, Sandi Nenga (2004) looks at whether the “central claim” that volunteerism positively connects youth to their communities is a valid assumption. The claim that youth who volunteer build positive relations in their communities, which in turn helps them to develop a positive identity with their local community may be a false pre-assumption. According to Nenga (2004), this pre-assumption is a form of social control that is produced by policy makers and does not reflect the perceptions of youth who volunteer.

Power exercised by policy makers to create their perceptions of youth volunteerism is power exercised over youth. This power can be observed in the way youth volunteers are marginalized and displaced in volunteer work activities. For instance, Nenga (2004) found that youth experience challenges in building positive relations with community members because they are assigned to work in isolation. Other challenges are related to the unequal power dynamic between volunteers and members with positions of authority (Planty & Bozick ,2006; Nenga 2004; McGuire & Gamble, 2006). Since youth volunteers feel marginalized, it is common for them to build relations among each other as a support network (Nenga, 2004). The unfortunate result is that a youth’s expectation to build social networks outside their peer group is not always achieved.

1.7) Volunteer Contributions of Minority Youth in Canada

The marginalization of youth in the spectrum of volunteering is a phenomenon that is being newly explored. Many youth populations that are often overlooked and marginalized as contributors to Canadian society belong to immigrant or cultural communities. There are over 200 different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds that exist in Canada (Canadian Council et al, 2006), yet there continues to be a lack of information produced around the volunteer experiences of these cultural groups.

In attempts to further understand volunteerism among immigrant populations in Canada, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) launched a project in the year 2000 that specifically looks at the contributions of some immigrant populations. The study draws on information from a variety of resources and makes additions to this knowledge by conducting further investigations.

The information collected by CCSD (2006) found that youth born in Canada (15-24) were almost twice more likely to volunteer than immigrants born outside of Canada. There is also a volunteer rate difference between established immigrants and recent immigrants. Immigrant populations living in Canada for over 26 years volunteer 10% more than recent immigrants living in Canada for under 6 years. A similar pattern was found among the different generations of immigrants when looking at organizational membership. Second and third generation immigrants are more likely to become members of voluntary organizations at a higher rate than first-generation immigrants.

Reasons that explain the lack of volunteer participation among recent immigrants include time spent re-establishing themselves in a new country, language barrier, lack of awareness of volunteer opportunities, and different cultural understandings of

volunteering. The motivations and challenges of volunteering among immigrants were similar to Canadian-born volunteers, except that immigrants were more motivated to volunteer to gain work experience in order to improve job opportunities.

Furthermore, education appears to have an influence over the number of hours invested in volunteering among immigrant populations. Immigrants with less than a high school degree volunteered an average of 133 hours in comparison to those with a university degree who volunteered on average 151 hours. The commonality between the generations of immigrants appears to be the types of organizations in which immigrant populations join: religion, culture, sports, recreation and social services.

Although the efforts of CCDS presents important data that acknowledges the crucial contributions of minority Canadians, many cultural communities remain missing from this data. Other studies follow a similar pattern of looking at the contributions of individuals from various ethno-cultural communities and how they give to mainstream organizations. There seems to be need for research that examines the extent to which individuals from cultural communities give to cultural organizations. There is also a need to look deeper into how these cultural organizations meet the expectations of the cultural community they serve, as well as the western society in which they operate.

1.8) Need for Further Research

Thus far, existing literature on volunteerism presents knowledge of the benefits, motives, and challenges that are experienced by youth and young adults that live and volunteer in Canada. Until recently, new studies have explored the unique volunteer experiences of individuals belonging to minority populations and the contribution that

these people make in the development of Canada. Current research points out the volunteer perspectives of minorities and their experiences volunteering for mainstream institutions but appear to overlook the perspectives of volunteering that emerge from the specific cultural community in which they identify.

As discussed, cultural communities are components of Canadian society. These communities constantly strive to maintain their identity as they must learn to operate within the structures of a mainstream society and look to their younger generations for assistance in sustaining the values and traditions of their culture. But most communities encounter difficulties motivating their young to engage in this endeavor. This is seen among the K-W Hmong community, which has established a voluntary organization, HAC, as a means to maintain their cultural identity. To understand the decrease in volunteer participation among young Hmong adults in HAC, this study explores what is happening in this cultural community in terms of volunteering among young Hmong adults and the factors that influence the lack of volunteer motivation of these individuals.

This study aims to answer the question:

“How do young Hmong adults perceive challenges of volunteering with HAC?”

To assist in answering the above question, the following questions will be used to understand volunteering among young Hmong adults.

1. How do young Hmong adults perceive volunteering?
2. How do young Hmong adults perceive volunteer challenges?
3. How does a person's encounter with a volunteer challenge influence one's level of commitment to HAC?

By exploring the challenges experienced by young Hmong adults, the study hopes to reveal the volunteer perspectives of young Hmong adults that impact the way they approach volunteering in their cultural community as well as the larger mainstream society.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is separated into three sections. In the first section, I present a coherent explanation of the theoretical backdrop for this study to provide an understanding of the analysis process of my findings. This section will introduce symbolic interactionism (SI) and its premises, the concept of the mosaic sub-culture, and processes of becoming disengaged from a sub-culture. In the second section, I locate myself in this study as the researcher and explain how I came across this research interest. I will also share my experience of being a member of the Hmong community in Kitchener-Waterloo. In the third section, I explain the data collection process of this study and I discuss certain ethical considerations.

2.1) Theoretical Framework

2.1.1) Symbolic interactionism

To grasp the deeper meaning of volunteering, symbolic interactionism (SI), an extension of the Chicago School of thought, will be used to inform the backdrop of this study. SI examines the process of how social meaning is constructed through social interaction and understood from a system of shared meaning. Thus, through the use of SI, this study intends to reveal how volunteering is perceived and understood by young Hmong adults; it explores how concepts and meaning develop from their social interactions with other members of HAC and members of the community in which they serve, the Hmong community of Kitchener-Waterloo. The study also identifies the

culturally specific mutual forms of communication described by young Hmong adults to comprehend how meaning is communicated and shared within HAC.

By examining the culture of volunteering that is specific to young Hmong adults in HAC, the study sets the stage in the exploration of how young Hmong adults experience challenges of volunteering in HAC and how these challenges lead them on a path of becoming disengaged whereby they decrease their levels of volunteer participation.

According to Herbert Blumer, SI is founded on three premises:

“...the first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they have for them...The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.” (Blumer, as cited in, Prus, 1997; 5)

Blumer’s three premises of SI outline a general course of how people come to understand their social world through the process of attaching meaning to concepts and social objects. This process includes the interactions of people and their interpretation of their social encounters with others. Given that there are multifaceted ways to encounter, interpret, and create social meaning, Robert Prus (1997, p.11) provides seven premises that frame and explain the many occurrences that can simultaneously take place when creating and sharing meaning.

Human Group Life is Intersubjective
 Human Group Life is Multi Perspectival
 Human Group Life is Reflective
 Human Group life is Activity-Based
 Human Group Life is Negotiable
 Human Group Life is Relational
 Human Group Life is Processual
 (Prus, 1997: 11)

To provide a better understanding of these seven premises, the following section will discuss how the social meaning of volunteering emerges among young Hmong adult through the human activity of social interaction. Human activity refers to any type of action (physical or non-physical) that a person employs to develop, understand, and communicate social meaning.

2.1.1) A. Human group life is intersubjective

Every social group uses a set of linguistic symbols that allows them to communicate knowledge and to define their social group reality. The members of this study identify two communal languages that are used to communicate and exchange ideas: Hmong and English. Most of the members are fluent in both languages while some are fluent in one or the other. There are also non-verbal forms of communication such as body language or touch that are performed to communicate meaning. An example of this could be the common practice of shaking hands between Hmong men to show respect when greeting one another.

2.1.1) B. Human group life is multi-perspectival

Although the members of this study share common forms of communication, each member can perceive volunteering in various ways. It is assumed that social perspectives are limitless and transform as the social experience of a person changes. Thus, volunteers will understand volunteerism based on the experiences they encounter when volunteering. For instance, some people view volunteering in accordance with the types of commitments they become involved with. Certain people may perceive volunteering as

a long-term commitment to a formal position with HAC whereas others may see volunteering as simply offering help to clean after an event. Both perspectives are equally accepted by the group as acts of volunteering; however, the value attached to each perspective may depend on the volunteer and how he or she attaches meaning or value to the perspective.

2.1.1) C. Human group life is reflective

Members of a group can see themselves objectively from the view point of other group members. This allows group members to share perspectives and plan out social actions based on their anticipation of how others will respond or interpret their social behavior. In the context of HAC, volunteers assess their role in the community in relation to how other volunteers or members of the Hmong community view them. Overall, volunteers build an awareness of these different perspectives and strategically modify their social behaviors when interacting with other people.

2.1.1) D. Human group life is activity based

Social interactions between volunteers and members of the Hmong community involve some form of human activity. This is generally true among all human group life. As mentioned thus far, the activities that volunteers exercise to develop social meaning include inter-subjective communication (verbal and non-verbal), objective reflective thought (non-physical activity), and engagement in social activities (physical activity). All these forms of social action are inter-related and can be carried out differently when interacting with members of the organization. These interactions allow members to

understand, reassess, anticipate, redefine, and resist perspectives of others as well as implement lines of actions (Prus, 1997).

2.1.1) E. Human group life is negotiable

People have the ability to influence and be influenced by the perspectives of others. To do this people share their perspectives by listening and examining one another's social ideas and actions. Volunteers generally spend time assessing the interest of people that they serve in the community, and strategically plan out their interactions. However, the underlying reason that drives each volunteer towards a certain protocol may differ according to their own interests. For instance, certain volunteers may be more concerned with the outcome of a social encounter, such as an encounter with an individual who is responsible for providing a work reference. Those that do not share the same concern will likely engage with the same individual to meet the desired outcome of the organization. Volunteers will likely experience each instance depending on the value they place on the outcome of a social interaction.

2.1.1) F. Human group life is relational

As volunteers interact with one another they begin to form relationships where they identify perspectives that differentiate or bond them closer. When volunteers are attentive to the similarities and differences among members they learn to understand the various experiences that each member brings to the organization and the experiences developed while volunteering. It is through these volunteer relations that the identity and human activity of volunteering of the group is maintained.

2.1.1) G. Human group life is processual

Perspectives of volunteering undergo processes of change where shifting factors such as age or marital status push a person to move forward and encounter different dynamics of life. In time generations of volunteers introduce new ideas that will change the experience of volunteering. It is thus important to explore the lived experiences of volunteers in a particular time frame to understand the historical process of changing perspectives.

I refer to the seven premises above when presenting my findings on the human activities that occur in the ongoing process of developing and communicating meaning among young Hmong adults as well as the changing nature of volunteering in HAC. This process reflects the life experience and perspectives of young Hmong adults, which I distinguish as a secondary sub-culture within the organization. To further understand how young Hmong adults are a secondary sub-culture of volunteers, I present the concept of the sub-cultural mosaic to discuss the intricate world of sub-cultures.

2.2) The Sub-Cultural Mosaic

Culture refers to a system of beliefs, symbols, customs and traditions that is shared among a group of people. Nation states usually have one or two overarching cultures that connect citizens to one another. In Canada, the dominant cultures are known to be English Canadian and French Canadian. Despite the dominance of these cultures, there exist smaller cultures that belong to specific groups within Canada. This group association can be viewed as a sub-culture, which is defined as "... a set of interactionally linked people characterized by some sense of distinctiveness (outsider and insider

definition) within the broader community” (Prus, 1997; p. 41) The K-W Hmong community is a sub-culture where members relate to one another on the commonality of specific language, customs, and beliefs. This shared culture gives members the ability to associate and build relationships with one another across an array of situations.

The Hmong Association of Canada can also be described as a sub-culture. Members of this organization are inter-connected as they identify as being members of the K-W Hmong community and share the experience of being volunteers who work to serve their cultural community. When examining the sub-culture of HAC one can find that there are multitudes of secondary sub-cultures that form as a result of social factors or experiences that bond members with others. This reflects the intricate perspectives of members that develop as a result of the many types of interactions a member has with others. Prus describes this as the sub-cultural mosaic, which he defines as being “...the multiplicity of subcultures, life-worlds, or group affiliations that constitute people’s involvements in societies or communities at any point in time” (Prus, 1997; p. 36)

Young Hmong adult volunteers are an example of a secondary sub-cultural group. These young volunteers sustain relationships with one another by sharing similar experiences and challenges in the community. For instance, young Hmong adults relate to similar factors such as social location in the Hmong community, common levels of acculturation into western society, and the experience of being second-generation.

Throughout this study, participants describe themselves as being affiliated to different secondary sub-cultural groups in the Association and the Hmong community. Some participants also identify as being uninvolved with the sub-culture of volunteering in HAC due to their affiliations with other sub-cultural groups, primarily the First Hmong

Mennonite Church. The sub-cultural mosaic is present among the Hmong community of HAC. It helps place one in the perspective that the culture of the Hmong community is complex as there are secondary sub cultures that inter-relate and work together to form the organization.

2.3) Exploring Processes of Volunteer Disinvolvement

When looking at the challenges of volunteering expressed by the young Hmong adults of this study, it was apparent that young Hmong adults were becoming detached from their volunteer commitments with HAC. In this section, I provide a working definition of volunteer involvement to provide an understanding of the time frame and nature of being involved as a volunteer for HAC. I then refer to Prus (1997) and his explanation of the many processes that occur when becoming disengaged from the sub-culture of volunteering, and how these processes guide the organization of my findings.

2.3.1) Volunteer involvement

There are different components of being “involved” as a volunteer in the sub-culture of HAC. This is due to the variety of volunteer commitments that people pursue when initiating or continuing involvement. To incorporate all the experiences of the participants of this study, the concept of “volunteer involvement” will be defined as the act of volunteering during any point in time throughout the duration of being a young Hmong adult. It is important to note that the degree of involvement may intensify or lessen as a volunteer’s perspective of volunteering for HAC changes.

2.3.2) Becoming disinvolved

According to Prus (1997) the process of becoming disinvolved from a community takes place any time throughout the length of a person's involvement and occurs in different stages of increasing and decreasing their levels of involvement. While some research participants were less hesitant to cut ties immediately, most volunteers describe a longer process of disengagement from HAC. These committed volunteers describe how they distance themselves from HAC by limiting the time they invest. The study will refer to Prus's (1997) definition of disinvolvement to discuss the different experiences that research participants describe when experiencing the process of becoming disinvolved from HAC.

2.3.3) 13 processes of disinvolvement

There is a small number of research participants that do not identify as volunteers. Rather, these participants have engaged in the process of preparing to become involved. This is known as the act of immersing oneself into a sub-culture without committing to the group life of the community. These participants introduce themselves to the sub-culture of volunteering by participating in events as guests. The dissatisfactions that these particular participants experience, when learning about HAC, deter them from becoming volunteers. Later, the study will reveal that there are similar dissatisfactions that these participants experience in comparison to those that have volunteered or continue to volunteer for HAC.

Regardless of the time of a person's final disengagement from a sub-culture, Prus (1997) assumes that there are processes that a person experiences when experiencing forms of detachment. They are as follows:

1. Questioning the viability of sub-cultural perspectives.
 2. Reassessing identity in the setting.
 3. Finding sub-cultural activities troublesome.
 4. Experiencing relational difficulties with sub-cultural associates.
 5. Defining themselves as unable or unwilling to maintain sub-cultural commitments.
 6. Encountering emotional setbacks in the sub-culture.
 7. Lacking linguistic fluency.
 8. Experiencing disenchantment with collective events.
 9. Free from existing sub-cultural commitments (available to relocate).
 10. Rejected by sub-cultural associates (e.g. conflict, animosity, exclusion).
 11. Disenchanted with changes occurring within the subculture.
 12. Encountering opportunities and / or encouragement for alternative involvements.
 13. Preparing for new role involvements.
- (Prus, 1997, 61)

These processes will be used to organize the development of themes that emerge from the data of this study.

2.4) Researcher Perspective

In the empirical world of science, researchers are often expected to achieve objectivity. In doing this, researchers strive to rid themselves of their biases and pre-assumptions when collecting and analyzing data. The notion of objectivity, however, is often debated by others who believe in the inescapable presence of social experiences that influence a researcher's perspective and approach. This generally pertains to researchers who share similar life experiences with their research participants.

In this section, I discuss my experience of being a member of the K-W Hmong community and a previous volunteer for HAC. In this discussion, I explain how my

experiences parallel those of my research participants and how through this study I have come to walk the same path as my research participants who have worked to contribute to the Hmong community. I will explain how I have journeyed to this project and how my experiences may influence the product of the study.

Processes of disengagement and re-entry into sub-cultural worlds, specifically in the Hmong society, are social experiences that have often intrigued me. This is mainly due to the personal experience of being detached from the Hmong community in K-W for a period of time only to find myself currently re-immersed into the community.

After encountering certain cultural challenges that brought about feelings of disenchantment, I walked away from the Hmong community to recuperate and ponder the potential explanations for these occurrences. During my absence, I embraced different areas of my life to assist me in my process of healing. This included motherhood, friendships, education, and single young adulthood. All of these important aspects worked together to bring about new experiences and knowledge that helped to shed light on the question I most desperately wanted answered: How did this happen to me?

2.4.1) My story

My story begins when I entered adulthood at the age of fifteen. Like many other Hmong women during their adolescence, I married a man who was much older. Cultural marriages are common among the Hmong and are conducted within a Hmong cultural context that exists outside of the legal system of the dominant society. Following three months of courtship my suitor engaged in the cultural tradition of respectfully asking my parents for my hand in marriage. I consented to this marriage and took my role as a wife

and daughter-in-law to my new family. It was then that I officially became an outsider to my family of origin.

In this marriage I bore a child and carried out my part to care for my husband and his family. The course of my life, however, shifted in a direction that challenged the norms of the Hmong culture. At the age of 20 I became a young, divorced single mother who felt hurt by the structure of the Hmong culture that worked against my endeavors to pursue a life on my own. I had been bruised from the pain of being ridiculed for making a stance against a marriage that I felt was unhealthy, and swollen from the manipulation of others who were unwilling to listen to my voice of reason. It was then that I felt it was time to leave the community that was unprepared to accept the person I wanted to be.

Six years later, I accomplished the goals I had set out to achieve. With the help of allies, advocates, friends, and family, I pressed on to finish an Honors Bachelor's degree in sociology and a Master's degree in social work at Wilfrid Laurier University. The pursuit of these goals was driven by the love I shared with my daughter and the passion to grasp a deeper understanding of the structures that I experienced as hurtful rather than nourishing of the growth of communities and individuals. Most importantly, it has been, and continues to be, my goal to explore these structures closely in order to create knowledge around the issues that are silenced in the Hmong society.

2.4.2) Re-entering the Hmong community

Re-entry into the Hmong community occurred right after completion of undergrad and throughout my first year of graduate school. I felt I was prepared to re-join the Hmong community since I had learned the skills and tools to maneuver my way through

the community. I joined the Hmong Association of Canada in its initiative to recruit young volunteers in March of 2006 when a Youth Committee was created. The Committee invited unmarried members over the age of 12. I engaged in this committee as an executive youth leader and was primarily responsible for coordinating and facilitating meetings as well as educational activities. I was also responsible for informing the community about the Committee, representing the voices of the youth in the community, recruiting youth members, and maintaining trust among them.

Four youth leaders were involved in the development of this Committee. By the end of the first year, this number had grown to an executive team of eight and the Committee had grown to one hundred youth members. The turnout appeared promising as the youth committee seemed active in hosting activities such as weekly volleyball sessions, summer picnics, youth night for New Year, fundraising events, and educational information sessions such as Youth Connection Day. During the second year, volunteer commitment of youth members deintensified and many executive members disengaged from their roles. Participation among youth had also decreased as there were fewer activities taking place. According to the current President of the Youth Committee for 2008, the committee is at a standstill as there is little support.

2.4.3) Encountering my research interest

Being a youth leader, I felt it was my responsibility to bring forth issues of concern to HAC leaders. In doing this, I spent time and energy listening to the reasons given by youth members of why they lacked motivation to sustain involvement. The explanations consisted of stories that occurred over many years where youth encountered

conflict with elders that were left unresolved. It was then that I realized that my absence from the community provided me with little knowledge of the issues that were being experienced by most of the youth who remained constant in the community. With the help of my peers, I became educated about the cultural structure and politics of the Hmong community.

While listening to their struggles, I empathized with the feelings of frustration being expressed as I also shared similar volunteer dissatisfactions with the Association. However, my motivation to continue in the struggle for change made it difficult to accept defeat as was expressed by youth. Many youth felt it was pointless to pursue change due to the resistance from elders and thus felt hopeless in attempting change.

I felt the conversations I had with youth were short and lacked depth. Many times I felt that certain individuals had so much more to say but were reluctant to express their thoughts in certain contexts and situations. It was then that I was curious to further explore these lived experiences among young Hmong adults and their process of becoming disengaged from volunteer involvement with HAC. I was also keen on learning more about the dissatisfactions that resulted from cultural conflict between first and second-generation Hmong people. Ultimately, it is my hope to bring forth these stories to give voice back to young Hmong adults.

2.4.4) Self-reflection

Having been a member of the K-W Hmong community for most of my life, I approached the population of study as an insider. I believed this position worked to my advantage as it provided me access to key informants and community stakeholders. On

the other hand, my suspicion of encountering cultural challenges as a result of my social location and reputation in the K-W Hmong community turned out to be valid.

Social location in the Hmong community is determined by gender, marital status, and age. Thus, being a young female, divorced, and single parent I am placed at a lower spectrum compared to persons who are men, married, and older. This lower status is a drawback as it gives me less power to voice my opinions and to influence the community. Also, I may be viewed as a disloyal member of the Hmong community because I left the community for a few years and I am currently living a lifestyle that is culturally frowned upon. I live on my own and I am financially independent. Furthermore, people have questioned my intentions because of the stigma that has been bestowed upon me. My decision to divorce without the approval of my family and to pursue a life of my own has portrayed me as untrustworthy and a disobedient daughter.

Although I was prepared to meet anticipated challenges, I did not expect to experience tension with members of the community who felt I was exploiting my education to meet my own agenda. I slowly came to understand and accept this perspective as I learned that my tactics to engage the Hmong of K-W failed to align with the cultural protocol of the community. I had unknowingly portrayed myself as arrogant by being bold and direct when presenting new ideas. Furthermore, I had forgotten my privilege as an educated woman and the power I possessed to assess the organization using outside resources, such as this research study. From this experience, I have learned to be conscientious of my privileges and to be sensitive to the cultural norms of the community that questions my unconventional actions.

Fortunately, my role as a youth leader helped to connect me to Hmong youth. During my two year commitment, I built new friendships with many youth and became familiar with the different peer groups. Youth seemed more accepting of my presence especially the young adult age group. This younger generation was also more responsive to the projects I developed and appeared more appreciative of my efforts. In retrospect, I perceive one of my faults that drove other youth members away from my presence was my aggressiveness to make change. I was less sensitive to the pace of other youth who were slow in their process to contribute to the community.

I am aware that I carry certain biases that may skew the objectivity of this research project. This includes the western theoretical lens that I have developed throughout the course of my academic career, which may influence how I analyzed and approached the research study. Also, my perspective of the Hmong community is seen through the lens of a Hmong woman and thus my life experiences may influence how I engage in the structure of the community. Since my return, I have learned humility as there are many aspects to the Hmong culture as well as the community itself that I have yet to learn and understand. I believe my knowledge of the Hmong community will expand as I enter new stages of my life and I look forward to this learning curve.

2.5) Data Collection

2.5.1) Inviting HAC to the study

Prior to the recruitment of research participants, I approached the administration of HAC to discuss the purpose of the study in order to gather support and constructive feedback. In May of 2007, I attended an HAC meeting to present the details of the study.

In this meeting, I provided copies of my research proposal and showed examples of theses written by previous students to provide an idea of the finished product. After distributing the information, I explained the nature of the study in the Hmong language and answered questions that were raised by administration members.

The administration voted to support my research study so long as I agreed to return to the administration with the results of my findings. To honor this request, I will provide HAC with a written report of my findings and organize a public presentation to present the report to the Hmong community.

2.5.2) Recruiting participants

Between the months of July and October of 2007, I successfully recruited and interviewed 18 participants for the study. Each participant identified as Hmong, was between the ages of 18 and 30, resided in Kitchener-Waterloo, and claimed to have volunteered or participated with the Hmong Association of Canada.

Given that the community is quite small, I was knowledgeable of the research participants prior to their agreement with being involved in the study. However, since the nature and strength of my relationship with young Hmong adult members of the community varied, I continued to use three types of sampling techniques: purposeful sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

Purposeful sampling is a sampling method that invites participants to the study based on their role as being “key informants” or members that have knowledge of the information and are willing to give their reflections or meaning of the phenomena (Richards & Morse, 2007). Many of the participants of this study have been involved

with HAC on a long-term basis and are considered key informants for the knowledge they have developed over their years of involvement.

Convenience sampling is a sampling method that recruits participants that are available to the researcher (Richards & Morse, 2007). This technique was used to recruit participants that I built relationships with during my volunteer participation in the HAC Youth Committee.

Lastly, snowball sampling is a sampling technique that was used to recruit participants through the recommendation of participants who were already involved in the research study (Richards & Morse, 2007). Using this technique, I was able to recruit participants who were indirectly connected to me.

In the next chapter, I will briefly introduce each research participant under pseudonyms and provide some background information on their involvement with HAC. This will help to frame the results of the study that will be presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

2.5.3) Providing information to participants

Participants were contacted through email and phone. All participants were emailed a package that included a formal letter inviting the participant to the study and a release form that explained the details of study along with the risks and benefits (see Appendix C). On the day of the interview, I provided a hard copy of the package to the participant and provided a verbal explanation about the study. I also gave the participants the opportunity to raise questions, which I answered to the best of my ability.

2.5.4) Conducting the interview

I referred to the interview guide (see Appendix D) for a sample of the interview questions) to conduct a semi-structured interview with each participant. The questions in the interview guide were open-ended questions that included planned and unplanned probes. Questions were arranged in a logical manner; however, the arrangement was subject to change depending on the interview process. An audio-recorder was used to tape the interviews. Each interview lasted between 30 to 80 minutes, and took 2-3 hours to be manually transcribed into Microsoft Word.

The site of each interview was decided together with the participant to find a comfortable location that allowed for limited distractions. Sites where interviews took place were the participant's home, the researcher's home, a classroom in the Faculty of Social Work campus in Kitchener or a table outside the campus. In appreciation for the contribution from participants, each participant's name was placed in a draw for a chance to win a gift certificate to HMV worth \$100. The award has been presented.

2.5.5) Analyzing data

There were three stages relative to data analysis. The first was the process of transcribing data from each interview into Microsoft Word to be coded and analyzed manually. Notes that were written on paper throughout each interview were also transferred onto Microsoft Word. The second stage of analysis involved the use of "processes of disinvolvement." These processes were used to organize the data where quotes were placed into the context of each process. From there, themes emerged to identify the dissatisfactions of volunteering among research participants. Simultaneously,

while going through the data to find emerging themes associated with certain processes, other data that described the culturally specific definitions and techniques of volunteering were organized into a separate document. The purpose of doing this was to identify the social meaning that is shared among young adults when communicating volunteer actions and ideas.

2.6) Ethical Considerations

2.6.1) Voluntary participation and informed consent

All participants of the research study were involved on a voluntary basis and were not, in any way, forced or coerced to participate. All participants were informed of their option to withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to do so. Participants were instructed to read over and sign a consent form as proof of having read and understood the details of the research, and that they were volunteering to contribute to the study. (see Appendix C for a sample consent form.)

To the best of my knowledge, as the researcher, I did not engage with participants in a way that intended to mislead them. I aimed to maintain honesty and trust with all the participants by encouraging discussion around doubts, questions, concerns, or contemplation of their participation. My identity as the researcher was shared with each participant and my purpose for pursuing this research project was opened for discussion.

2.6.2) Anonymity and confidentiality

While each research participant was informed of the potential publication and sharing of the research results, research participants were made aware that their identity

would remain unknown and unconnected to any direct quotes made public. Access to the research data was limited to the research team, which included Melanie Heu and her research advisor Dr. Ginette Lafreniere. Documents containing research data will be kept in a secure location for 2 years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

2.6.3) Risks

As the researcher, I recognize that I come from a place of privilege and understand how my role may overpower the role of the participant. To prevent the hierarchical objectification of each role whereby the researcher is perceived as the “scientist” or the “knower” and the participant as the “subject” of study, I openly discussed the nature of each role using inclusive language. In this discussion, I described the relationship between the participant and researcher as being a partnership that involves both parties as having equal contribution to the knowledge creation of this study.

Furthermore, research participants were asked to share their personal experiences of social, economic and cultural barriers, which may stimulate uncomfortable feelings or memories. I anticipated the potential psychological and emotional risks relating to these sensitive topics and provided participants with contact information for counseling agencies that provide clinical services (see Appendix E). Also, I made efforts to pace each interview process in a way that was safe, comfortable and sensitive to the research participant.

I intend to share the results of this study with members and leaders of HAC in a public presentation. The purpose of this public presentation is to inform the community about the volunteer challenges perceived and experienced by young Hmong adults in

hopes of initiating a collective discussion about the topic. Every research participant will be made aware of the presentation's scheduled time and location. The idea of presenting research results in the form of a public forum might sit uncomfortably with participants, despite their knowledge of anonymity. Thus, I openly discussed the intent of presenting the research publicly and the ownership of knowledge produced in collaboration with participants in the research study.

The purpose of this study is to raise community awareness about the dissatisfactions of volunteering experienced by young Hmong adults. This information sharing does not guarantee changes that are desired and expressed by the participants but will serve to inform the community of the dissatisfactions. This was explained to every participant in the consent form under "potential risks and benefits."

In the next chapter of this thesis, I introduce the research participants of this study using pseudonyms and descriptions of their backgrounds.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The stratification of persons belonging to the K-W Hmong community varies in accordance with their dialect, religion, age, gender, education, and clan. In this chapter, I lay out the social division of the young Hmong adults of this study by providing a summary of the group's social characteristics. To protect the identity of the participants, I provide a pseudonym for each individual. Overall, this chapter serves as a preliminary to the following chapters where I discuss the results of this research study.

3.1) Brief Profile Description

In total, 18 young Hmong adults were successfully recruited for this study. Of this number, 7 are women and 11 are men. During the data collection of this study all the participants describe themselves as being current residents of Kitchener-Waterloo and members of the Hmong Association of Canada. The ages of the participants range from 18 to 30. The majority of the participants are single as there are only 2 participants that are married. In this study, married individuals will be referred to as married young adult youth while single participants will be referred to as young adult youth. There are 6 participants that identify as Christians and 3 that describe themselves as being practitioners of shamanism. The rest describe themselves as being non-believers and do not specify commitment to a religious belief. Almost all of the participants describe various amounts of volunteer involvement with HAC. Three of the participants have never been involved as volunteers with HAC and perceive themselves as member participants.

To reflect the local clan system of the Hmong community, I include participants from each of the 8 clan groups. All the participants are fluent in both Hmong and English; however, most of the participants appear to be more fluent in English than Hmong. The white dialect is dominant among the participants as there are 11 white dialect speakers and 6 green dialect speakers. The educational background of the participants ranges from completion of a high school diploma to the attainment of a bachelor degree from an accredited university. Three have completed a university bachelor degree and 2 have attained a certified college degree. Three are entering the first year of university while 3 are nearly finished university. Six of the participants have high school diplomas.

In the following section I introduce the participants. I provide each participant with a pseudonym and a simulated age

3.2) The Research Participants

- 3.2.1) Zong Lee, 29 years old, male
- 3.2.2) Cy Lee, 29 years old, male
- 3.2.3) Sia Cheng, 23 years old, female
- 3.2.4) Ninda Moua, 23 years old, female
- 3.2.5) Seng Xiong, 26 years old, male
- 3.2.6) Nathan Vang, 26 years old, male
- 3.2.7) Tank Vang, 25 years old, male
- 3.2.8) Mai Chua Lor, 23 years old, female
- 3.2.9) Long Yang, 28 years old, male

- 3.2.10) Lena Her, 26 years old, female
- 3.2.11) Jeff Thao, 30 years old, male
- 3.2.12) Annie Cha, 24 years old, female
- 3.2.13) Daniel Lee, 27 years old, male
- 3.2.14) Bee Hang, 18 years old, male
- 3.2.15) Gina Vang, 21 years old, female
- 3.2.16) Pheng Her, 19 years old, male
- 3.2.17) Michael Xiong, 20 years old, male
- 3.2.18) Shouna Yang, 23 years old, female

Through the voices of these young Hmong adults emerge concepts and themes that inform the result of this study. These results will be presented in the next three chapters, to provide further knowledge and insight on the volunteer experiences of these particular young Hmong adults in the context of their cultural community organization, the Hmong Association of Canada.

SECTION II:

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the methodology of this study, the following premises of symbolic interactionism (SI) are constantly occurring among members of HAC to create a sub-cultural group life of volunteering.

Human Group Life is Intersubjective
Human Group Life is Multi Perspectival
Human Group Life is Reflective
Human Group life is Activity-Based
Human Group Life is Negotiable
Human Group Life is Relational
Human Group Life is Processual
(Prus, 1997: 11)

Within this sub-culture of volunteering lies a secondary sub-culture of volunteers, young Hmong adults, who experience a process of becoming disengaged from HAC as they lessen their volunteer involvement with the organization. This process, however, is generally slow for young Hmong adults who experience a push-pull relationship where they decrease their levels of volunteer commitments yet continue to be involved members by volunteering for the organization from time to time. I present the findings of this study in four separate chapters to identify the sub-culture of volunteering in HAC and to illustrate the process described above. I refer to the premises of SI and the processes of disinvolvement, established by Prus (1997), to guide the organization of my findings. In the last chapter of this section, I discuss the result of my findings.

In chapter four, I present the cultural forms of communication that enable members of HAC, mainly young Hmong adults, to interact, construct and share experiences of volunteering. From this shared system of communication emerge common perspectives of volunteering. In chapter five, I present the volunteer perspectives that describe the nature of volunteerism in HAC and the role of the organization. In chapter six, I present the perspectives that describe the reasons why young Hmong adults are motivated to volunteer for HAC and the types of benefits that draw young Hmong adults back to the organization. In chapter seven, I present my findings on sources of volunteer dissatisfactions that lead to decreased levels of volunteering. In chapter eight, I discuss my findings.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Perspectives on volunteering are built and sustained among members of HAC through a system of communication. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which social meaning is communicated by members of HAC, particularly young Hmong adults. I present the different forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, and discuss their specific cultural meanings in relation to volunteering. I also share my findings around cultural expressions of volunteer appreciation to illustrate how social meaning is communicated through a process of human activity.

Please note that certain direct quotes will be written in the Hmong language as expressed by the research participants. Please refer to footnotes for translation.

4.1) Speaking Hmonglish

In this segment, I present the two languages that are used by members of HAC to verbally communicate meaning. I will specifically describe how these languages merge to create a new shared language among young Hmong adults, Hmonglish. Furthermore, I will discuss the non-verbal gestures used by members of HAC to communicate feelings of confusion when communication is unclear. This generally occurs when there is a language barrier between members who are more fluent in one language than in the other.

The participants of this study identify as being fluent in English and Hmong; however, most of the participants describe themselves as more fluent in English than in Hmong. While communicating with first-generation members who are primarily fluent in Hmong, young Hmong adults often engage in the simultaneous use of Hmong and

English. Given that English is more frequently used by young Hmong adults, it is often used to fill in large gaps when attempting to express thoughts in Hmong. The combination of these two languages produces a form of communication that I will call Hmonglish.

Cy Lee describes the process of switching from Hmong to English when engaging in conversations with members who speak mostly Hmong.

“I speak Hmong as much as I can with the elders...but when I don’t know certain words I switch to English...it is hard expressing myself fully in Hmong...” Cy Lee

Cy illustrates how Hmonglish is used to converse with elders when he feels inarticulate in the Hmong language. This is an experience that most participants relate to. This new language, however, appears to produce confusion for elders who are less fluent in English. To decrease occurrences of miscommunication, young Hmong adults learn to identify non-verbal cues that signify ambiguity.

Pheng Her explains how he perceives uncertainty from elders.

“You talk English with them it’s okay...it depends on who you’re talking to because there’s a lot of og’s¹ who don’t know what you’re saying... When you talk English lawv cia li xa xa xwb na”²

Pheng describes how certain physical indications, such as a confused facial expression, can tell a young Hmong adult that the listening elder lacks understanding. This may suggest to the young Hmong adult that further engagement in conversation is

¹ Old guys

² They start to wonder.

required to ensure that the intended message is being properly received by the non-English speaking elder.

Although Hmonglish might pose a barrier between young Hmong adults and elders, it is a language that connects young Hmong adults who share and understand its usage. This is advantageous for youth who look for support and feedback from younger members to accomplish certain goals and tasks in the organization.

Daniel Lee feels he is able to communicate with members of the younger generation because of the styles and techniques of communication that he shares with his peers.

“...I connect more with the youth...I can engage them for um what would you like to see in this and would you like to submit anything....”

Hmonglish is a uniquely formulated language of English and Hmong that defines the social reality of young Hmong adults as a secondary sub-culture group in HAC. This language allows young Hmong adults who are less fluent in Hmong to maneuver through conversations with elders and other members who struggle with the English language. Consequently, Hmonglish produces confusion among members who are less familiar with the language. Thus, Young Hmong adults have learned to recognize this confusion by identifying the non-verbal gestures that signify a lack of clarity. By recognizing the lost lines of communication, young Hmong adults engage in the effort to produce meaning in a manner that is clear and concise.

Thus far, I have presented some specific verbal and non-verbal cultural forms of communication that are used by young Hmong adults. In the following segment, I

elaborate on the topic of communication to discuss how meaning is implied and understood through a process of human activity.

4.2) Culturally Expressing Volunteer Appreciation

In the Hmong culture there are indirect ways to express appreciation without verbally stating the obvious. These expressions involve touch, physical interaction or expression, and indirect or direct verbal interaction. I will illustrate how young Hmong adults learn to recognize these forms of communication and how they perceive them.

4.2.1) Expressing praise silently

An act that implies meaning without gesture or touch is silence. This act is a physical expression of gratitude that young Hmong adults describe as “silent praise”. Having been raised in the western culture of Canadian society, young Hmong adults are familiar with the verbal expression of appreciation: “thank you”. However, as members of the K-W Hmong community, these individuals understand that verbalizing appreciation is not often practiced. In fact, young Hmong adults describe expressions of thanks to be non-verbal and indirect communication.

The following quotes describe how young Hmong adults perceive appreciation as a silent non-verbal expression.

“It’s more like silent congratulations” Jeff Thao

“So I guess the silence is showing that they did it right and the job was good enough that the person is satisfied and just doing that is good enough, and then there’s a second time to do volunteering.” Bee Hang

As described in the quotes above, silent thank you is one of the many ways in which volunteers understand and recognize that they are being appreciated. According to Bee, silence implies that a member is satisfied with the contribution of a volunteer and provides little or no criticism of their work.

The social meaning of silence is often learned at a young age and carries forward into the community as an adult. Jeff Thao shares his experience of learning about the meaning of silence while growing up in the home.

“I think that’s just being Hmong. I think I’ve learned from my family...they don’t always say thank you or pat you on the back. It’s always a silent treatment. You know you’ve done something good and they won’t admit it to you. They just put you down when you don’t do something good...” Jeff Thao

Like many other youth, Jeff quickly learned that his faults in the family were received with criticism while his achievements were received with silence. From this experience, Jeff has accepted silence as a display of appreciation from members of his family and the community.

According to Ninda Moua, there are cultural expectations that override the condition of expressing appreciation to young volunteers. Young Hmong adults are expected to place the needs of the community before their own and are thus required to offer assistance without the request of community members and expectation of receiving recognition.

“I find it very rare...Hmong people are not very formal. It almost seems like thank you is not always necessary because you’re expected to do it...” Ninda Moua

Communicating gratitude in the Hmong culture differs from the western practice of verbally expressing compliments or praise. For the Hmong, gratitude is expressed through silence that generally implies satisfaction. Silence is meant to reinforce humility among community members and reinforces the value of offering help without the expectation of praise.

4.2.2) Indirectly criticizing volunteers

The opposite of silent praise is indirect criticism where criticism travels to an individual through gossip and rumors. This is an oblique way of sharing dissatisfaction between members of the community.

Cy Lee explains how he came to learn of dissatisfactions.

“...you don’t really see it coming because it’s kind of hidden until you hear rumors that ‘oh this person wasn’t happy about it’ then you say ‘oh okay’ then you have to go talk to them.” Cy Lee

Cy explains that after learning about a person’s dissatisfaction with an event or activity, he will take the initiative to speak with the dissatisfied person. Before Cy can approach the person, however, he must verify the information as true.

4.2.3) Performing the handshake

There are non-verbal ways to communicate appreciation that involve touch. The participants of this study share how they learn to recognize the physical non-verbal cues that communicate meaning of appreciation. One form of communication that involves touch is the “handshake”. Upon greeting, Hmong men engage in a handshake to

acknowledge each other's presence and to show respect. This gesture is also used when parting ways. Young Hmong adult men often encounter the "handshake" as volunteers for HAC.

Michael Xiong perceives himself as a respected member of the community when he is greeted with a handshake by his male peers and mentors.

"...you usually greet elders and friends with a handshake...it is a sign of respect because you are there" Michael Xiong

As men learn the significance of handshaking, women learn to perceive this gesture as a male practice. Thus, women refrain from engaging in handshaking when greeting men in the context of HAC.

Lena Her describes her experience of encountering Hmong men in the organization who are reluctant to greet her with a handshake.

"When I volunteer for an event I avoid handshaking because I could tell that the older men are not very comfortable with this..." Lena Her

Although handshaking excludes women, it is a practice that both genders recognize as a signature of respect and appreciation. Men, however, have the advantage of controlling how they communicate their respect to other men by choosing to engage or withdraw from handshaking. Overall, the handshake is an example of a physical non-verbal interaction that is used to communicate appreciation between Hmong men in the community.

4.2.4) Approaching volunteers

A social interaction that involves direct verbal communication while indirectly implying appreciation is the act of approaching an individual to request their involvement. When young Hmong adults are approached by involved members of HAC to volunteer, it may imply that the Association values them as a member and recognizes their potential as volunteers. It may also imply that the Association perceives the individual as trustworthy and dependable.

Daniel Lee volunteered at the request of HAC leaders who believed he offered valuable skills. This encouraged Daniel to become heavily involved with the administration.

“Well I think when you get approached...“Daniel, I would like your help with HAC and stuff...I think you’re valuable because of this and this.” Which kind of justifies you right?” Daniel Lee

Asking young Hmong adults to volunteer shows initiative on the part of the organization, as well as appreciation of the individual. This tactic appears to draw in young Hmong adults like Daniel who feel they are valuable when they are approached by dedicated members of HAC.

4.2.5) Expressing public acknowledgement

Volunteers are also shown appreciation for their commitment to HAC at the annual Hmong New Year celebration. During this event, HAC leaders have the opportunity to give public acknowledgment to those who have been greatly involved in the planning of the New Year celebrations and operations during the past year.

Pheng Her and Mai Chua Lor describe this annual tradition in the following quotes.

“When you do something it’s like they call you up to go dance.”
Pheng Her

“You know I see that sometimes they do it like during New Years they will call up Hmong teachers or dancers you know...” Mai Chua Lor

As described by Mai and Pheng, certain volunteers will be invited to the dance floor where a song will be dedicated to them on behalf of HAC. This publicly displays appreciation towards a volunteer without specifically mentioning the work they have done for the organization.

4.3) Summary

Young Hmong adults have become familiar with the linguistic forms of communication and the methods of expressing volunteer appreciation that are specific to the Hmong culture. Knowledge of these cultural forms of communication enables young Hmong adults to construct and share perspectives that reflect their group experience of being volunteers for HAC. I present these common volunteer perspectives in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 5

VOLUNTEERISM IN THE HMONG ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

While volunteering, young Hmong adults engage in a social process of involvement whereby physical and non-physical acts take place. In this chapter, I present the perspectives on volunteering that describe the nature of volunteerism in HAC. This includes the definition of volunteering, the different types of volunteer commitments and the role of the organization in the community.

5.1) Defining Volunteerism

When we examine the participants' definitions of volunteering, a group meaning of the activity emerges. This group definition incorporates elements of the definition discussed in the literature review, which describes volunteering to be an act of giving one's time and energy to assist others in achieving a goal without monetary compensation. For young Hmong adults, volunteering is perceived as *offering one's time without pay to help the community*.

The following quotes illustrate the meaning of volunteering that is shared among young Hmong adults.

"Volunteering for me is helping others and organizations by giving your free time and your advice. You do this without pay and you do this because you want to help out in the community." Shouna Yang

"I guess spending time freely without asking for compensation..."
Lena Her

“Just helping out the community I guess, giving them a hand....”
Seng Xiong

“...helping one another out is my definition of volunteering.”
Michael Xiong

Young Hmong adults agree that volunteering is a performance that is freely done to assist the community in its development. In the next segments, I discuss the types of volunteer activities that young Hmong adults perform and the different values they attach to the objective of volunteering.

5.2) Engaging in Volunteer Activities

Volunteering is a human group life activity that is generally perceived by young Hmong adults as a physical performance which bonds and sustains relationships among HAC members. These volunteer activities vary and require a certain amount of time to accomplish. Since the participants of this study describe volunteering to involve a range of volunteer activities, the process of “doing” a volunteer activity will be referred to as a *volunteer commitment*.

Given that the participants of this study identify as HAC members, their volunteer contribution will be perceived as formal volunteering. The volunteer activities that the participants describe fall under two categories of formal volunteering: *organizational commitments* and *functional commitments*. In this discussion, I will limit the use of direct quotes to avoid the risk of jeopardizing identities and will provide general examples that describe the two types of formal commitments.

5.2.1) Organizational commitment

This type of volunteering requires committing to a position or role in the administration of HAC. These commitments vary in length as some positions are long-term while others are shorter. Long-term commitments generally consist of leadership positions that perform certain operations in the organization. Short-term positions include coordinating events or activities such as a fundraiser. This can also include running activities or programs for the Hmong Heritage School.

5.2.2) Functional commitment

This type of volunteer commitment involves completing a task or activity as a non-member of the administration. This generally refers to the idea of “helping out” where members of HAC offer assistance in the operations of an event such as selling tickets or cleaning up. This also includes “on the spot” recruitment of volunteers that initially attend events as participants. This often occurs when there is a shortage of volunteers or when participants offer to help.

Nathan Vang and Michael Xiong describe the nature of their volunteer involvement as “helping out”.

“I do little things, just like cleaning up here and there and helping out.”
Nathan Vang

“...common courtesy, putting away chairs...even though I’m not part of the committee I just do that on my own...just helping out in general is really important.” Michael Xiong

Most of the young Hmong adults of this study describe having been involved in one or both of the two types of volunteer commitments, however, young Hmong adults appear to be more frequently involved in functional commitments as it is less time consuming. This information will be presented in the next two chapters.

5.3) Defining the Role of HAC

Through interactive communication, members of HAC create shared perspectives of the organization's purpose as well as the cultural characteristics of the group. The participants of this study mutually describe HAC as an Association that works to connect K-W Hmong members, promote cultural identity, and sustain cultural traditions. These objectives combine to preserve the culture of the Hmong and distinguish the group life of the community from other cultural groups.

5.3.1) Connecting members

Young Hmong adults perceive HAC as an organization that strives to bring members of the community together. This is described by Zong Lee in the following quote.

“I think their general mission statement is to bring Hmong people together...” Zong Lee

HAC achieves the goal of connecting community members by organizing social gatherings, such as summer picnics, entertainment parties, sporting events and activities, and the Hmong New Year. These gatherings offer activities that attract the different age

range of members so that the different generations may interact in the community. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the additional objectives that HAC hopes to accomplish when bringing Hmong members together.

5.3.2) Maintaining cultural identity

Young Hmong adults perceive HAC as a community of people who work together to promote cultural pride and identity. This is done by organizing cultural events where Hmong members can gather to celebrate customs and traditions.

This is illustrated by Sia Cheng who views HAC as a group that encourages cultural pride when bringing members together.

“...they (HAC) just try to promote Hmong pride and they try to organize events so we have opportunities to get together.” Sia Cheng

HAC is also seen as an organization that invites members to connect on the basis of culture. Nathan feels that although members of the community are socially divided they continue to share a cultural space that identifies their community.

“I think it’s very important that HAC exists because...HAC really identifies Hmong people in Canada... it’s a community, it’s a body of Hmong people, whether you’re Christians or not, it’s still a community.”
Nathan Vang

Hmong celebrations are coordinated by HAC so that members, such as young Hmong adults, have the chance to absorb into their cultural community where they can associate with people of a common history and origin. These events also serve to place members in a space where the physical features and mother tongue language of group

members reflect their own. By connecting with peers and other HAC members, young Hmong adults build confidence in being Hmong and are educated about their Heritage. This cultural pride is essential for young Hmong adults who must cope with the everyday struggles of being members of a minority in Canadian society.

5.3.3) Practicing traditions

There are many cultural traditions that continue to be practiced in the K-W Hmong community. However, HAC primarily focuses on hosting the annual Hmong New Year where cultural activities and food are available to the community.

Shouna Yang describes how every year volunteers collaborate to make this celebration a success.

“(HAC)...helps out and does the Hmong New Years and something like that. They do the tickets and they organize it.” Shouna Yang

Members of the Hmong community generally appreciate the work that is invested in the planning of New Year as the celebration marks the end of one year and the beginning of a new one. Tank Vang explains the meaning of Hmong New Year in the following quote.

“New Years is just to celebrate the harvest...if it’s a good harvest then hopefully the next year will be a better one and so on. It’s to relinquish all the old stuff in the past so that you can start fresh in the New Year.”
Tank Vang

The New Year is also a time when people become reunited to share their past experiences and prospects for the future. Annie Cha sees the New Year as a way of bringing the Hmong people together.

“I think the New Years is the main way of connecting the Hmong people in Kitchener Waterloo, regardless of being a part of church or not.”
Annie Cha

The Hmong New Year is an example of a cultural event that is annually organized and hosted by HAC. At this event, members engage in traditional activities, observe the entertainment of traditional music and dance, and consume the unique foods of the culture.

5.4) Summary

The perspectives on volunteering in this chapter provide working definitions that describe how volunteering is perceived and occurs among young Hmong adults in the context of HAC. The chapter also presents findings of how young Hmong adults perceive the organization from their involvements as volunteers and their social interactions with one another. This information is helpful as HAC is an organization without a mission statement and clear goal objectives.

The findings in chapters 5 and 6 provide background information on HAC's volunteer sub-culture. This information will be drawn from when presenting the perspectives on volunteering in chapters 7 and 8, which inform the struggles young Hmong adults encounter when negotiating their levels of involvement with HAC.

CHAPTER 6

MOTIVATIONS & BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Young Hmong adults engage in a process of negotiation where they determine their level of commitment to the organization by weighing the costs and benefits of being involved. In this chapter, I present the perspectives on volunteering that describe the benefits that are anticipated and experienced by young Hmong adults. This information illustrates how young Hmong adults are attracted to HAC and why they remain involved with HAC as members.

6.1) Motivation to Volunteer

Volunteering is not limited to the physical “doing” of an activity but also includes the non-physical process of interpreting and assessing an activity in relation to the perspectives of other volunteers. While assessing the act of volunteering, young Hmong adults consider their personal agendas along with the agenda of the community. During this process, young Hmong adults discover reasons to volunteer that are related to helping the community. These reasons include bringing members together, giving back to the community, and reinforcing reciprocity. I refer to these reasons as *community motives* which young Hmong adults perform to achieve secondary advantages. A secondary advantage is a secondary benefit that young Hmong adults gain from volunteering.

Although volunteers consider the needs of the community, they often experience situations where their personal interests override community motives. While exploring the personal reasons that motivate young Hmong adults to volunteer, two themes emerge: *self-practical motive* and *personal motive*.

Self-practical motive refers to the incentive to engage in an activity that will meet a productive goal. These goals include increasing work experience, fulfilling high school requirements, re-entering the community, and developing character.

Personal motive refers to the desire of pursuing an activity that produces emotional fulfillment. These personal motives include self-satisfaction, believing in a cause, and making a difference. I refer to the two types of motives as primary advantages because they produce benefits that are most important to the volunteer.

6.1.1) Community motives

Young Hmong adults are attentive to the interests of the community when contemplating involvement as a volunteer for HAC. This is done by identifying the needs of the organization and members of the community. As discussed earlier, members of HAC mutually perceive HAC as an organization that promotes cultural identity, maintains cultural traditions, and brings members together. The following motives relate to these objectives that are meant to benefit the cultural community. They include bringing the community together, giving back to the community, and reinforcing cultural reciprocity.

6.1.1) A. Bringing the community together

Young Hmong adults recognize a need to bring members of the community together. Thus, volunteers work to break down barriers in the community that divide members.

Jeff Thao and Mai Chua Lor illustrate their motivation to bring the community together in the following quotes.

“...there were a lot of youth people...we noticed we needed to bring these youth together...that motivated us...” Jeff Thao

“...when I volunteered I wanted to bring the youth together because there’s segregation there...” Mai Chua Lor

6.1.1) B. Giving back to the community

Young Hmong adults feel it is their responsibility to give back to the community. In doing this, they search for opportunities where they can contribute their skills and expertise to strengthen the Association.

Daniel and Xy are educated young Hmong adults who feel it is important that they give back to the community after having gained their skills through education.

“I wanted to give back something. I saw an opportunity to improve something and I took a chance...” Daniel Lee

“I find it like it’s easier for me because I can give something back...at least for HAC...it is very important to me.” Xy Lee

6.1.1) C. Reinforcing reciprocity

A cultural tradition in the Hmong community is the practice of reciprocity. This involves the mutual understanding that community members provide assistance to one another in a time of need. This cultural practice gives members assurance that they have community support.

Ninda shares her perspective of reciprocity in the community.

“...right there’s this mutual understanding...it’s like you do all this stuff and next time they do all this stuff too.” Ninda Moua

Reciprocity is often practiced among members who are related through family or who have built close friendships. Thus, young Hmong adults engage in volunteer commitments to support members who are closely connected to them.

In support of their family, Mai Chua Lor and Long Yang are motivated to give their time to help out HAC. They illustrate the sustained practice of mutual assistance in the Hmong community.

“I think I would say that I have been involved with HAC for a long time because my family is so we’re always there to help set up New Years or take down stuff...” Mai Chua Lor

“I’d say for the last 10 to 15 years. My dad was a part of the Board and I was there helping out.” Long Yang

Furthermore, volunteering is an activity that allows young Hmong adults to create and maintain relationships among their peers. Lena describes her volunteer involvement as an act of supporting her friends.

“...I want to help my friends out you know, then I’m helping out HAC right...” Lena Her

6.1.2) Self-Practical Motives

Self-practical motives are reasons to volunteer that relate to the self-interest of an individual. These interests motivate young Hmong adults to engage in activities that

contribute to their self-development. The self-practical motives described by the participants include increasing work experience, fulfilling high school requirements, re-entering the community, and building character.

6.1.2) A. Increasing work experience

Often, young Hmong adults find themselves in transitional stages of their life. In these stages, young Hmong adults familiarize themselves with different career options by volunteering for a variety of organizations. This engagement increases their work experience and knowledge of a particular field.

Ninda Moua describes volunteering as a way of gaining work references.

“...Most of the time you volunteer because you need something, like good references....” Ninda Moua

6.1.2) B. Fulfilling high school requirements

Young Hmong adults who are finishing or have recently completed high school often refer to their involvement with HAC as a means to gain volunteer hours that are required for graduation.

Pheng Her, who will soon graduate from high school, describes his volunteering as mandatory.

“...for school because you have to do 40 hours for high school, you have to volunteer.” Pheng Her

6.1.2) C. Re-entering the community

Many young Hmong adults leave the Hmong community to pursue other experiences and goals. However, this absence is usually temporary and individuals find

themselves returning to the community. Volunteering for HAC provides these particular young adults the opportunity to rebuild trust and friendships with members.

Xy Lee describes his purpose for volunteering as a way of coming back to the community.

“...at the time it was important for me because I just got back from school and it was a way to get back into the community...” Xy Lee

6.1.2) D. Building character

Young Hmong adults perceive the act of giving as a ways of building character in the Hmong community. Volunteering teaches young Hmong adults to respect others who are helping to build the community, which motivates them to want to volunteer.

Nathan Vang describes volunteering as a way of showing respect to those who have taken on heavier loads in the community.

“I feel...for me it’s a show of respect...show to the people who are working hard, running the event...that hey, you know Nathan is helping out to clean,” I think that they might appreciate it...So just to show respect.” Nathan Vang

6.1.3) Personal motives

An additional reason that motivates young Hmong adults to volunteer is the desire to attain self- fulfillment. This type of fulfillment is a primary advantage that is intrinsically triggered when the values of a volunteer align with the activity being performed. Thus, young Hmong adults strive to engage in activities that agree with their personal values in hopes of achieving emotional satisfaction.

6.1.3) A. Making a difference

Volunteers feel satisfied when they believe their contributions are positively impacting the community. Zong Lee explains how he likes to know his work is making a difference.

“I like knowing that my contribution will actually be doing something or worth while.” Zong Lee

6.1.3) B. Believing in the cause

Many young Hmong adults describe themselves as passionate individuals who wish to volunteer to support a cause in which they believe. Annie Cha stresses the importance of believing in a cause prior to making a commitment.

“I like the things that I do to have a certain kind of meaning...if I volunteer...I want it to be for something that I firmly believe in. Like a good cause.” Annie Cha

Young Hmong adults believe in HAC’s objective to create a sense of community among the Hmong in K-W. Believing in this cause motivates Daniel Lee to volunteer for HAC.

“That caused me (to volunteer) I suppose not losing one’s values and traditions and culture, and kind of just reuniting Hmong people that are separated from the Diaspora. That’s the cause really, to be with your people...” Daniel Lee

6.1.3) C. Experiencing self-satisfaction

Young Hmong adults volunteer to experience altruistic emotions such as the feeling of happiness for giving to another. Michael Xiong emphasizes the importance of feeling a sense of satisfaction for offering his time to help others.

“...you feel happy... it’s just the joy of helping others...it’s internal satisfaction.” Michael Xiong

6.1.3) D. Gaining respect

Young Hmong adults understand that respect is often given to those who have spent time building trust in the community as volunteers. Jeff Thao illustrates this in the following quote where he describes the respect that he gained during his involvement with HAC.

“Respect from the older people...being involved, you get a whole lot more respect from them... You feel like a great appreciation for what you’ve done.” Jeff Thao

Long Yang shares this similar experience and emphasizes the need for young adults to engage in volunteering as a way of building respect with elders.

“...it’s for the respect because the only way the younger generation will get the elder’s respect is to show them that you do care about them and that you are there to help them out when they need you.” Long Yang

In summary, Young Hmong adults are motivated to volunteer because they desire to help their community and they wish to meet personal interests. When preparing to become involved with HAC, young Hmong adults will refer to these internal and external reasons for volunteering and the types of benefits they offer, primary and secondary. In

the next segment, I present the benefits that young Hmong adults experience when volunteering for HAC.

6.2) Benefits of Volunteering

While the participants of this study largely reveal determinants of volunteer dissatisfactions, they also share the many benefits of volunteering for HAC. It is important to discuss these benefits to illustrate the reasons why young Hmong adults continue to be involved with HAC. Many of these benefits are linked to “volunteer motivations”; young Hmong adults volunteer because they anticipate benefits. These motivations guide volunteers to plan their actions in order to achieve these benefits.

6.2.1) Building relationships

A popular benefit that young Hmong adults experience from volunteering is relationship building. HAC gives young Hmong adults the opportunity to become familiar with their peers and with members who belong to the older generation. These relationships help break down communication barriers and overcome misconceptions of others. Relationship building also helps young Hmong adults network in the community and learn skills from other members.

6.2.1) A. Connecting with elders

An issue that is often experienced by young Hmong adults is the challenge of communicating with elders of the community. HAC provides a context where young Hmong adults can learn to build relationships with elders through volunteering.

Sia Cheng describes how she formed relationships with elders by being involved with HAC.

“I’ve gotten to know a lot of the elders. If I were to get know them outside of HAC it just wouldn’t work. I also met a lot of the youths, but it seems like HAC is the only connection.” Sia Cheng

As young Hmong adults form relationships with elders, they begin to see elders from a different perspective. Xy Lee shares how his negative perception of elders changed when he began to work closely with HAC members.

“You learn so much from the elders that you wouldn’t expect, you expect them to be these grumpy people but they’re not grumpy at all. They’re hard working people...” Xy Lee

6.2.1) B. Connecting with peers

Young Hmong adults feel linked to the Hmong community when they are regularly exposed to Hmong peers. Daniel Lee describes how volunteering has connected him to peers. Daniel feels that these friendships are cultural rewards that support and nourish his Hmong identity.

“I would have to get something back right, not monetary...I would have to receive some kind of reward like culturally per say, friendships or relationships that I value...” Daniel Lee

The experience of having one’s cultural awareness heightened as a result of associating with Hmong peers is an experience that Mai Chua also encounters as a volunteer.

“I think it’s more important that, just knowing that there are younger people out there at my age that does care about having HAC grow and change over the next few years.” Mai Chua Lor

In order to feel connected to peers young Hmong adults need to be familiar with their peers. Volunteering has helped Bee Hang learn more about his peers and the types of interests he shares with them. Bee now perceives certain peers in the community differently as a result of becoming better acquainted with them.

“I met some youth that I hadn’t talk to in a long time. We reacquainted with each other and talked to each other. I also met some that I’ve never really talked to before but I know they live in Kitchener Waterloo but I didn’t really talk to them. I met them and talked to them, got to know them in the little time that we had in that day” Bee Hang

Volunteering also raises a person’s awareness of the different skills that friends and family offer to the community. Xy Lee shares his experiences of learning about the unknown abilities of his friends whom he has known for years.

“I wouldn’t have gotten to know so many people on a personal level...I discovered their talent and skills. In that sense it’s rewarding because that’s what you take away from it because you get to know people. You get to see the community from a different perspective...” Xy Lee

Connecting with peers also decreases the tension between groups in the community such as youth who are segregated by clan name. Participation in HAC events has brought certain peer groups together that disliked each other for their differences. Gina describes how she came to build friendships with certain females in the community that were once her rivals.

“I know when I was growing up, it’s all about “oh I don’t like that person because they’re in their own crew...but now since everybody started hanging out with each other...I’ve noticed a big change from when we were younger, when we were always hating on this person but now this person’s our friend...HAC helped bring us together...”

Gina Vang

6.2.2) Maintaining cultural identity.

One of HAC’s objectives is to promote cultural awareness and traditions. Young Hmong adults feel that this cause is of great importance as they value their cultural identity. Volunteering for HAC can help young Hmong adults have a sense of cultural identity given that they are associating with their cultural community and engaging in cultural events.

Shouna Yang would agree with Daniel as she describes the benefit of volunteering with HAC as a means to sustain her cultural roots.

“One benefit would be that I would be still sticking to my roots and I would be able to create more networks in the community and that is something that would attract me to that.” Shouna Yang

6.2.3) Learning the different perspectives.

Being involved as a volunteer can help a person understand the different perspectives in the community. This can be beneficial as it helps volunteers become aware and informed about the needs and interests of community members.

Both Daniel Lee and Tank Vang had opportunities to take on formal positions that allowed them to engage the community in a way that raised their awareness around different sub-group perspectives.

“...I learned what I needed to learn about the community...I understand what the kids want and I understand what the youth want, I understand what the young adults want...” Tank Vang

“It was really good. It was an interesting experience in that you get to bring all facets of the Hmong community together...it gives you a better outlook as to what’s going on in the community other than your own perspective.” Daniel Lee

6.2.4) Developing skills

There are certain skills that volunteers can develop throughout their volunteer commitment. This may depend on the type of work that they become familiar with when working with HAC. Volunteer activities range from long-term responsibilities to simple forms of helping out during events. Despite the differing activities, each experience can contribute to the personal growth and development of a person.

Jeff Thao believes he gained knowledge around leadership, which may be applied to future experiences related to work or family.

“Yea I’ve learned a whole lot more about leadership. That really affects to go to work. You need that experience towards other things. Yea it’s helped me out a lot. You gain a better understanding on how to deal with things more in a professional way other than to hold up fists and start cussing. I think it’s a great opportunity to help them in my way.”
Jeff Thao

Sia Cheng has built communication skills while volunteering to work with different age groups in HAC. She also mentions how the experience has contributed to her character as a person.

“It definitely made me learn how to deal with people who are difficult...it definitely made me a better person...” Sia Cheng

6.2.5) Gaining respect

Young Hmong adults learn that when they volunteer they build trust with members of the community. This trust turns into respect as members, especially elders of the community, view young Hmong adults as responsible. Thus, young Hmong adults have been able to gain respect from elders as a result of their involvement. Having respect gives young Hmong adults a sense of belonging to the community.

Seng Xiong feels that he has been able to regain the respect with elders that he lost during adolescence. During adolescence, individuals may engage in acts that are frowned upon by elders. Thus, elders begin to perceive certain individuals negatively. However, when young Hmong adults volunteer, elders change their perspectives and begin to treat these young adults differently.

“I guess you can gain some respect...from the older people from helping out. Make them realize that you just don’t go ua laib³ and ua sis⁴ all the time and that you’re not that bad of a person.” Seng Xiong

Jeff Thao feels that volunteering has helped to build his reputation as elders begin to trust and value him as a member of the community.

“I think I’m doing this for the community, you have to help them out. Let’s just do it and that’s how you work up your reputation. That’s how we gain trust with the old people.” Jeff Thao

³ Be delinquent

⁴ Play

Michael Xiong perceives volunteering as a way to gain respect from parents. Usually parents are proud to see when their children are helping the community because it gives the parents as well as their children respect from the community.

“I think it will make your parents proud of you...” Michael Xiong

6.2.6) Building confidence

Building confidence is an important factor that helps young Hmong adults feel competent. Gina Vang describes how volunteering changed her life because it gave her the skills and confidence to become engaged in the community. As a member of a minority, she experienced challenges defending herself. Volunteering has helped connect her to community members who care about her contribution and who support her as a person.

“I think volunteering changed me because I used to be very shy...if people made fun of me...I couldn't have that courage to...stand up for myself. When you volunteer with people who care about you...who appreciate the effort you're putting into helping the community. It makes you want to be a part of the community.” Gina Vang

In this section, I present the benefits of volunteering for HAC by illustrating the rewards that sustain volunteer involvement. These positive experiences help shape the perspectives on volunteering and influence a volunteer's level of commitment to HAC.

6.3) Summary

Young Hmong adults describe cultural and personal values that influence their motivation to volunteer for HAC. A main value is their desire to see the Hmong

community strengthen its resources and social networks. Young Hmong adults also describe the anticipated as well as the unexpected benefits of their volunteer experiences. The degree to which these benefits meet the expectations of young Hmong adults appears less clear. Often, young Hmong adults encounter challenges when working to achieve certain goals in the Association. These challenges work against their volunteer objectives as well as the objectives of the organization.

In the next chapter, I present the volunteer dissatisfactions that young Hmong adults experience while volunteering for HAC, in order to identify the challenges of volunteering that young Hmong adults encounter. These volunteer dissatisfactions influence the process of involvement of young Hmong adults as they begin to disengage from the organization.

CHAPTER 7

SOURCES OF VOLUNTEER DISSATISFACTIONS

The most common perspectives revealed by the participants of this study were volunteer dissatisfactions, which emerge from the challenges they encounter while volunteering. According to the participants, experiencing volunteer dissatisfactions led them on a path of becoming less involved with HAC. I refer to this phenomenon as a process of becoming disinvolved. In this process young Hmong adults engage in stages of decreasing their level of volunteer commitment within in a time frame that is comfortable to them.

I draw on Prus's (1997, p.16) thirteen processes of disinvolvement to guide my analysis of the experiences that young Hmong adults encountered when contemplating leaving HAC. According to Prus, people who are becoming disinvolved from a sub-culture engage in many types of processes of disinvolvement. These processes are interactive, they overlap and they occur non-chronologically during a person's involvement.

When looking at the data of this study, ten processes of disinvolvement surfaced. They include the following:

1. Experiencing relational difficulties with sub-cultural (insider) associates.
2. Rejected by sub-cultural associates.
3. Questioning the viability of perspectives
4. Lacking linguistic fluency.
5. Finding activities troublesome.
6. Reassessing identity.
7. Experiencing disenchantments with collective events.
8. Disenchanted with the lack of changes occurring within the sub-culture.
9. Encountering emotional setbacks.

10. Defining themselves as unable or unwilling to maintain sub-cultural commitments.
(Prus, 1997, 61)

Under each process there emerged concepts and themes of volunteer dissatisfaction that have been experienced by young Hmong adults. To provide a framework of how these concepts emerged I provide a working definition for each process and present direct quotes to illustrate the concepts. In the next chapter, I will recap the significant themes that arise from the findings where I present the discussion and implication of the study.

7.1) Experiencing Relational Difficulties with Sub-Cultural Associates

While volunteering, young Hmong adults experienced difficulties building relationships with different members. These difficulties arise from the social segregation that exists among secondary sub-groups in HAC. These secondary sub-groups are constructed to meet the social arrangements of the cultural community and to emphasize the dissimilarities between members. These structures also act as social barriers that keep members from building relationships. Segregation commonly leads to tension among secondary sub-groups. Members will engage in the act of “othering” where they perceive other groups as different and prejudge them for these differences.

There are also external structures that create barriers for young Hmong adults to build relations with Hmong peers. I will discuss how these external barriers isolate certain young Hmong adults that experience a lack of peer motivation to be involved with HAC.

7.1.1) Structural segregation in the Association

HAC is hierarchically structured as follows:

- Board of Directors that oversees the direction of HAC
- Administration that runs HAC
- Committees that organize events or activities for the community
- Volunteers

This hierarchal divide is also present within the youth committee where there are organizational leaders and youth volunteers. According to the participants of this study, this structure influences the way members perceive and interact with one another.

This is illustrated in the following quotes:

“I do see a big segregation among the youth members and the executive members within HAC just because we all have very different...perspectives on what HAC is.” Mai Chua Lor

“I think the hierarchy is a big division, there’s like the upper level people like the executive and then there’s the lower people like the volunteers themselves.” Michael Xiong

Mai Chor Lor speaks of the different perspectives among the two groups. Youth leaders experience a leading role that gives them privileges in the organization whereas youth volunteers experience a following role that is supervised by the youth leader. The nature of the relationship between these two groups may perpetuate a state of inferiority among general youth volunteers. This relates to Michael Xiong’s comment on the hierarchal division between the two groups where power differences separate their experiences. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of the two types of volunteer commitment create a social gap among volunteers. Youth leaders are more occupied

collaborating with fellow youth leaders operating an activity, which leaves them fewer opportunities to build strong working relationships with general volunteers.

7.1.2) Generational segregation

There is also a hierarchal division among the different generations. In the Hmong culture, age contributes to the amount of respect and authority one has in the community. Thus, elders have more influence over decisions that are made in HAC. These members are defined as first generation Hmong, who were born outside of Canada and raised either in or outside of Canada. Among this generation exists a younger age group who were also born outside of Canada but primarily raised in Canada.

The K-W Hmong community also holds a growing second and third generation. These members are Canadian born with parents who are first or second generation. There are three age groups among the younger Hmong generation: mature youth (30 and over), young Hmong adults (18 - 30) and adolescent youth (12 - 17). Although the younger generation makes up for almost half of the Hmong community population, HAC predominately consists of first generations that run the organization. Thus, the values generated in the organization reflect this particular segment of the group.

Lena Her illustrates this in her quote below:

“HAC is catered to the elders. There’s no tip toeing around that cause it is. Like there’s not much for the youth...like for New Years we’re supposed to have our own youth night on a Friday night...but you know, you want participation from both generations and I don’t think it’s going to be that way.” Lena Her

The tension between these two groups creates a barrier between the different generations in HAC. Young Hmong adults feel powerless and wait for their opportunity to have political power in the organization. Sia Cheng illustrates this in the following quote.

“Well there’s definitely growing among the youths and the elders...we just wait for our turn to come into power and then we’ll do as we like.”
Sia Cheng

There is also tension among the differing age groups of the younger generations, adolescents and young adult youth. Since leaders of the youth committee are mainly young adults, events are geared to meet the interests of this group. Thus, adolescents feel left out and less motivated to volunteer. Jeff Thao illustrates this in the following quote:

“...what we’re...lacking now is the much younger generation...people under 18...They feel like they don’t belong...It’s mainly just people in our age group...I want our generation to reach out to the younger generation below us. That’s a mistake that Hmong people have done as older youth. I think that’s where we need to work at” Jeff Thao

Jeff perceives a lack of involvement from adolescents and believes adolescents feel left out from the youth committee. Lena Her believes one way of reaching out to adolescents is encouraging young Hmong adults to act as mentors to younger adolescents.

“I think the...younger youth that is 18 and under, I think...we have a responsibility...to be good examples...and mentor them.” Lena Her

Culturally, age determines a certain amount of status in the community. HAC is structured to incorporate this age hierarchy as first generations represent the leadership

that run the organizations such as the Administration and Board of Directors. This unequal representation of the age groups in the organization of HAC creates power tension between members.

7.1.3) Marital status segregation

Marital status is another factor that heightens a person's status within the community and creates a relational barrier between single and married youth. Married people are given more respect compared to members who are single. They are also expected to associate with other members who are married as it is culturally frowned upon for married persons to regularly associate with unmarried persons. HAC is organized to respect these cultural expectations as there are committees designed to group the different marital status and genders. These committees include single people (youth committee), married women (women's committee), and married men (men's committee).

This greatly affects the involvement of married young adults who feel connected to the youth committee but are culturally restricted from involvement due to their marital status.

According to Xy Lee, young couples are less likely to become involved in HAC.

“I want to see the young couples come out more. I want to see them more involved...I want to see them come out because it's a large group of them...” Xy Lee

Sia Cheng believes married young adults experience difficulties finding their social place in the community.

“Yea it’s really hard for married people to find their place because it’s either the men’s committee or the women’s committee and then young couples they never fit in...” Sia Cheng

Overall, married young adults experience challenges building working relationships with young adults that are single.

7.1.4) Gender segregation

Not only are the leaders of HAC first generation members, they are also male members. This is due to the fact that men have higher authority over women and are expected to take on leadership roles, whereas women are expected to follow. This creates a barrier for women to build working relationships with men in the organization. It also makes it difficult for women to work towards being leaders in HAC and the community.

Lena shares her perspective of the issue:

“...the people who are in HAC and who are running it...all you really see are just the men. To me this is sad...and it’s not going to get us anywhere” Lena Her

Lena feels discouraged seeing that women are excluded from leadership and believes the organization will not progress for this reason. Ninda Moua expresses a different concern. Ninda speaks of the cultural rules that restrict men and women from being friends.

“You’re always afraid that if you sit beside a guy...there will be gossip or if you start talking to someone people start to wondering what’s going on... so it’s really hard.” Ninda Moua

The fear that Ninda has deters her from activities that involve mostly men and also limits her choices in the types of involvement in HAC. This gender barrier assigns women a low social status and perpetuates the perception of women as followers rather than leaders.

7.1.5) Family segregation

Secondary sub-groups are usually made up of family related members. In the Hmong culture, it is preferable to maintain close connections with persons who are related through blood and marriage. This cultural practice creates a barrier between members who are unrelated.

Shouna Yang perceives the challenge of becoming immersed into groups that are not family related.

“Well one thing is that the people who are together, they’re usually family so it’s usually like group of girls who are cousins and sisters. You can’t really penetrate into their family relations because they all know each other and it’s just different unless you were dating one of their brother’s maybe...” Shouna Yang

According to the participants of this study, Hmong people choose to associate with family members because family is perceived as trustworthy. Jeff Thao and Pheng Her illustrate this in the following quotes.

“Hmong people only trust their family. No matter what, if you were brought up in the Hmong community your family always comes first.”
Pheng Her

“Well usually they seek family first.” Jeff Thao

Preference to maintain relationships among those who are related is a cultural practice that creates a barrier for individuals that desire to create friendship with people to whom they are not related. This cultural practice also teaches members that trust should be maintained among family members rather than members who belong to HAC.

7.1.6) Clan segregation

The Hmong community is built on a clan system where groups are divided according to their last names. The purpose of this system is to create a marriage system so that individuals may build relationships with other clan groups. It is unacceptable to marry within one's own clan. The clan system also helps clan groups maintain political power within the Hmong community.

Seng Xiong expresses his perspective on clan segregation in the community.

“...every clan has their own group and they're always stuck in that...they'll never get treated the same as their own clan.” Seng Xiong

Sia Cheng talks about the prejudices that are attached to clans that make it difficult for younger generations to get along.

“I hear people say “oh yea that girl from that clan they are so like blabla,” but you don't even know them you're not even their friends.”
Sia Cheng

Sia Cheng also believes that prejudices come from past events that first generations experienced during the war.

“...especially because of the clan names and the things that happened in the old country before everyone came over. There are still a lot of

grudges and prejudices that come along with the life in the old country...a lot of people who want to hold those grudges will...be distrustful.” Sia Cheng

Although the clan system serves to unite the Hmong by building marriage ties between clans, it also segregates the Hmong as clans discriminate against each other. Young Hmong adults are reluctant to build relationships with clans other than their own because of the mistreatment they may experience when befriending members of different clans.

7.1.7) Religious segregation

In the K-W Hmong community there are two dominant religions, the Christian religion and the Hmong religion. The Hmong religion consists of shamanistic traditions and rituals that honor a variety of gods and ancestors. Christianity, on the other hand, consists of practices of worshiping one God.

Daniel Lee describes how he perceives the community as religiously segregated. He uses the term *the old way* to describe those that practice the Hmong religion and the term *new way* to refer to the practice of Christianity.

“it’s pretty evident that in our community...is segregated and divided into two camps. One camp is the camp that tseem coj kev cai qub na⁵, in terms of belief, religion, culture and tradition...Then there’s those who coj kev cai tshiab⁶...” Daniel Lee

Religious differences make it difficult for members of HAC to build working relationships. Each religious group perceives the other based on preconceived notions of

⁵ Practice the old religion (Shamanism)

⁶ Practice the new religion (Christianity)

how they are viewed by the other group. These notions create distance among members and uncertainty of whether members genuinely respect one another's differences. These differences create social barriers between the two groups when there are community events held by HAC.

Zong Lee describes his perspective of being discriminated against for being a Christian.

"...whenever the Church and the Non-church do events together ...there's always the underlying politics...the church verses the non church...I know for a fact that a lot of non-church people talk about the church people ...they're really against it so since they're really against religion, they kind of just lump you with it. They don't really give you a chance." Zong Lee

"I hear some people say, oh you know the church, oh they're so great and stuff like that," Zong Lee

Jeff Thao perceives a lack of involvement from the church group in HAC and feels that he is negatively viewed for being heavily involved with the Association despite his belief in God.

"I've really noticed that...Christians don't come to HAC events...being involved in both worlds, (I see) both sides...I just find that they don't participate due to their Christianity ways or their fear to lose face. They probably look at HAC as a worldly" Jeff Thao

Lena Her perceives this religious tension to be greater among parents and elders. Younger generations appear to be cordial and respectful of one another's differences, whereas the older generation creates ways to distinguish these differences.

“cov nsteeg⁷ and cov tsis ntseeg na⁸, it’s like they can’t see eye to eye...the bottom line is that we’re all Hmong...I see the younger generation and it doesn’t matter if we go to church or not, we can still get along we can still do things together and still be all friends. But the older people, they... for example have picnics for church people and picnics for cov tsis ntseeg⁹...why do you guys do that?...we’re all Hmong.” Lena Her

Religion is a social barrier for members in HAC as there are stereotypes that deter people of different religious groups to become acquainted and events that separate these groups.

7.1.8) Geographical segregation

Hmong families live in different localities in K-W. The most popular local community where Hmong people reside is the Stanley Park area of Kitchener. Fewer Hmong families live in Waterloo: however, this number is growing as families are beginning to purchase homes in the Waterloo area. Young Hmong adults feel that the location of where they live influences their opportunities to connect with Hmong peers.

Xy Lee perceives a division between Hmong residents living in Stanley Park and Hmong residents living in areas of Waterloo.

“The Hmong community within KW is divided because you have those who live in Stanley Park area and those who live in the Waterloo area...” Xy Lee

Shouna Yang believes that Hmong student communities develop in high schools where there are a lot of Hmong students.

⁷ The believers (Christians)

⁸ The non-believers (Non-Christians)

⁹ The non-believers (Non-Christians)

“I pretty much grew up in Waterloo...there weren’t a lot of people in the Waterloo area. They’re mostly in the Cameron Heights or Grand River area and so they all went to school together and knew each other. I didn’t have that...that’s why I’m not friends with many of them.”
Shouna Yang

For Shouna, high school played a contributing factor to why she is unconnected to Hmong peers. She felt isolated from the Hmong community and had few opportunities to create relationships with Hmong youth. As a result, Shouna became less motivated to engage with the Hmong community and volunteer with HAC.

7.1.9) Friendships

Peer relationships motivate young Hmong adults to become involved with HAC as they provide support and comfort. The absence of friends makes it difficult for young Hmong adults to initiate or continue their volunteer involvement with HAC.

Shouna Yang and Ninda Moua share their experience of being disconnected from peers who volunteer for HAC. The two are deterred from the organization for this reason.

“Maybe if people I associated with were more interested with HAC I would be comfortable...I’m not the type who can just go and meet new people. It’s really hard for me to do that.” Ninda Moua

“...It’s kind of awkward when you go and volunteer somewhere and nobody really wants to talk to you because everyone has their own little cliques. They have their inside jokes, and you’re just left there working by yourself. You wouldn’t want to volunteer somewhere not fun...that is something...preventing me from volunteering at HAC.” Shouna Yang

For Annie Cha, being involved in HAC is a way of supporting friends that are connected to HAC. Her support, along with her family, is not to the organization but to the individual involved.

“I know that last year, the leader...and their family is very good friends with our family. My parents they would definitely go to these events to support him because he is their friend and because he’s within the church....people didn’t really care to go and support HAC...” Annie Cha

Young Hmong adults perceive friendships as a motivating factor to being involved with HAC. The lack of friendship makes it less enjoyable to participate as a volunteer.

HAC is culturally structured in a way that unequally distributes political power to secondary sub-groups. This creates tension between members who exercise authority and members who belong to marginalized groups. Furthermore, young Hmong adults perceive tension among groups that identify with different religions. These tensions come from preconceived notions that influence how members from these two groups interact. Some young Hmong adults encounter external structures that pose barriers to their connections with Hmong peers. Overall, young Hmong adults perceive these social barriers as problematic and experience these relational difficulties as unpleasant.

7.2) Rejected by Sub-Cultural Associates

Young Hmong adults experience rejection when their ideas or physical presence are neglected or abused. These experiences discourage young Hmong adults to continue their volunteer involvement with HAC. I present the social interactions that young Hmong adults encounter when experiencing rejection from members of HAC. These

members, described by young Hmong adults as having cultural authority over younger generations in the Association, are the elders.

7.2.1) Exclusion

Young Hmong adults experience exclusion when they are disliked by members of higher position in HAC. According to Pheng Her, members of HAC, mainly the elders, will exclude from activities members who are unwilling to cooperate in carrying out certain tasks for the Association.

Pheng Her shares his perspective of being excluded in HAC.

“...if you say or do the wrong thing they’ll just cast you out.. If you don’t do what they want in the way that they want then lawv tsis tshua nyiam koj xwb na¹⁰.” Pheng Her

For Pheng, being excluded is an implication that a member is unappreciated and unwanted. Furthermore, young Hmong adults feel excluded when their ideas are rejected by members. This is described by Bee Hang in the following quote.

“...no matter what we try to do we know that the elders are just going to reject our ideas, reject what we want to do because the elders are very one minded people...” Bee Hang

Shouna Yang shares her experience of seeing a cousin being excluded from the organization because people disagree with her lifestyle. This discourages Shouna to support HAC because she views herself as similar to her female cousin.

¹⁰ They don’t really like you.

“I don’t think...elders and HAC members in the community really approve of her (an older female cousin) lifestyle...so they don’t really appreciate all the efforts that she’s making towards the community. That’s something that would deter me... doing all these great things but at the same time have people talk behind your back about how you’re living your life.” Shouna Yang

7.2.2) Favoritism

Members in high positions will generally recruit young Hmong adults they know and like. These young Hmong adults usually have good reputations because of their educational background and family connection to HAC. This selective system overlooks other young Hmong adults who are given fewer opportunities to participate with HAC.

“...people are looking for the people who are more popular in the Hmong crowd and so they pick those people to do it... I think they pick whoever they know well enough to participate.” Gina Vang

According to Gina, some young Hmong adults feel that the organization chooses volunteers that are ideal members, basically people they prefer. This deters certain people from becoming involved because they believe the organization is run by a group of people that are equally connected to one another.

7.2.3) Confrontation

Some young Hmong adults have experienced quarrels with elders of the organization during events. These quarrels involve arguments and or physical aggression. Since elders of the organization have higher authority in the community, young Hmong adults have less influence over the organization of events. They also feel powerless to defend themselves as it is culturally expected of them to give in to their elders.

Pheng Her describes an episode where he had a direct conflict with an elder during New Years.

“The og’s¹¹ especially. I’d probably get into a couple of fight with them...lawv ces ces xwb os¹²...I told them...I said “well why don’t you guys change the music...Hmong music xwb tsis xav hno lawv na”.¹³ And they were just like “Man nej twb yog Hmong, nej tseem tsis xav mloog Hmoob thiab.”¹⁴ And I was like What, I don’t care we speak English too man.” Pheng Her

Pheng requested that the elders play modern English music. The elder responded negatively by stating that Pheng was Hmong and should be accepting of the type of music being played. Pheng felt his opinion was devalued and became frustrated by the response. This incident remains with Pheng who continues to be resentful towards the older generation that runs New Years in accordance with their preferences rather than the tastes of all members of the community.

Similarly, Seng Xiong experienced a conflict with an elder during New Years. For Seng, however, the conflict became physically violent.

“okay I got pushed by him and that I did not like at all. Like you know, just think for yourself right, if someone pushed you in front of everyone, wouldn’t you be pretty pissed?” Seng Xiong

The humiliation and disrespect experienced by Seng during this encounter has pushed Seng farther from the organization and from the particular individual with whom he quarreled.

¹¹ The old guys – elders

¹² They only complain

¹³ Hmong music only is getting boring to listen to

¹⁴ Man all of you are Hmong and yet all of you are not willing to listen to Hmong

Overall, young Hmong adults describe three types of social encounters where they feel rejected by members of the Association. These include being excluded from activities, being overlooked by others, and experiencing confrontation with members. These social encounters generally occur with elders or first generation members.

7.3) Questioning the Viability of Perspectives

Young Hmong adults often find themselves questioning the attitudes, actions, and ideas of HAC that conflict with their own personal values. This usually occurs when young Hmong adults are asked to engage in undesirable volunteer activities and when young Hmong adults doubt ideologies in the organization. I will present the perspectives that young Hmong adults question and I will discuss how these experiences cause young Hmong adults to question their involvement with HAC.

7.3.1) Silencing issues

Tension among different secondary sub-groups in the community continues to exist as differences remain unresolved. HAC avoids addressing these issues by silencing or ignoring them. Sia Cheng questions this process of avoidance and believes it is driven by fear and cultural pressure to please others.

“...the censoring part...I am very committed and very controversial...if we want to clean a lake, you have to make the water ripple and you have to go into the water and make everything muddy so that we can take out the garbage. That’s the kind of person I am, I’m not afraid of...the controversial...but this process doesn’t work with HAC. You have to be very careful in how you deal with it. You have to work so slowly that one’s person negative comment could turn all your positive work aside...” Sia Cheng

7.3.2) Excluding women from leadership

Young Hmong adults question the position of women in the organization.

Generally, the men in HAC view women as incompetent to lead.

“...men think that women don’t have a strong enough opinion and a strong enough will to take on that role...I think they’re strong enough to take on that role.” Long Yang

This perspective influences the structure of HAC that limits women’s involvement in decision-making processes. Instead, women are assigned to volunteer activities that exclude them from making changes in the organization. This deters certain women from volunteering.

“...the regular girl stuff like cooking and cleaning and running those little things. Those aren’t that important, you don’t really create much change in HAC like that. For me I just got the little jobs.” Sia Cheng

Lena Her questions the agenda of women who are heavily involved with HAC. Lena believes these women follow the agenda that is bestowed on them by their husbands. This is discouraging for women like Lena who wish to see women bring in new perspectives to the community.

“...you look at the Nam Tsev¹⁵ in the HAC...it makes you question “are those women like us? Are they fighting for women’s rights or are they just speaking when their husbands want them to speak?...I see a lot of these older women...and they’re...carrying out what their husband would carry out if they were in that role... because they’re still going to be that person’s wife.” Lena Her

¹⁵ Women’s Committee

7.3.3) Discriminating against women

Lena Her perceives an unequal treatment of women in the organization. She believes this to be unfair and desires to see this change.

“...they don’t discriminate when it’s time to pay fees. It doesn’t matter if you’re a child, a woman, or a man, if you want to be a member you have to pay. Why then does it matter if you’re a woman or man? It shouldn’t matter. We should all be equal because we’re all paying the same fees. If you don’t want to see us participate...then don’t invite us out, don’t ask us to pay fee memberships, don’t ask us to donate money. It has to be equal, we have to be treated the same.” Lena Her

7.3.4) Unaccepting of religious differences

Religious differences create tension in the community. Instead of respecting one another’s beliefs, members will assume that different religious groups view them negatively. Young Hmong adults question this attitude and believe it works against HAC’s objective to unite the community.

Nathan Vang gives his opinion around religious differences.

“Christians, they don’t like parties ...it’s their choice if they want to join or not but I don’t think that they should condemn it. They shouldn’t say that “oh that’s bad” because it’s just an event. If you don’t want to be involved in that then just don’t come to the party. I think HAC should respect that too...there a lot of activities you could do like car washes, 30 hour famines, raising money for children in Africa. So there’s so many different activities...different kinds of events.” Nathan Vang

According to Nathan, HAC needs to create ways to incorporate events that will be interesting for both religions. This way the two groups can find common ground in the organization.

7.3.5) Questioning the skills of volunteers

Young Hmong adults doubt the competency of members that take on administrative positions. Generally, members are recruited into administrative positions based on their loyalty to HAC rather than their ability to carry out the responsibilities of their role. This impacts the efficiency of the organization and usually causes difficulties for volunteers to carry out their duties effectively. Young Hmong adults believe that members need to have the skills to lead an organization before agreeing to commit.

Daniel Lee illustrates this issue in the following quote:

“...the whole election thing, people are just voting on the basis of what they believe...Like say if a person wants to be a treasurer...the community votes on judging his...integrity...to hold that position...it’s not “Oh Daniel are you qualified to be treasurer? Can you balance a check book...?” It’s more, “Do you have the integrity to take on the position and to be trusted?”... with all due respects, I can’t balance a check book so I would never take on that position and I just think that we should take on positions when we have some expertise in it...I guess that’s my quome.” Daniel Lee

According to Daniel, positions that require specific skills or knowledge need to be taken on by individuals that have these skills. It seems almost unethical for volunteers to take on positions that they cannot perform. Daniel describes an experience where money in the organization went undocumented.

“But I know in the past, someone related to me was the treasurer and he has said that some of the spending habits of HAC...weren’t well documented. When we had finances, they would kind of just splurge and not spend wisely...in the end when it came down to balancing the check books accounts and expenses...things didn’t add up. Money disappeared. That’s why I think...some people I can’t say a lot of people mistrust HAC ...” Daniel Lee

7.3.6) Questioning the intentions of HAC leaders

Leaders of the organization sit on the administration and board of directors. These leaders are responsible to serve the community; however, young Hmong adults believe these leaders serve their own interests rather than the interests of the community.

The following quotes illustrate the intentions of leaders perceived by young Hmong adults.

“They want change...it’s opposite of what you would think is change. They want the outside to change to incorporate into them, rather than evolving themselves for the larger picture...” Tank Vang

“To me it’s kind of like they’re slowly trying to convert you, it’s kind of like propaganda, but what they should work on I think is something more like understanding everyone...” Sia Cheng

“...the most important thing you’re supposed to do is listen to what the people want and find out if you can give that service to them. Tell them if you can do it. If you can’t then tell them you can’t and I think that they will understand and if they don’t then tough.” Nathan Vang

According to these participants, leaders need to listen to the needs of the community and create change according to what the community wants.

Jeff Thao questions the handle on money in the organization and whether the organization uses the money for the interest of the community.

“I question myself because it’s money going into other projects that we don’t know about...Hmong people in the community are like Oh you know they are taking money and they’re going to go back to Laos with it.” Jeff Thao

When looking at the leadership of HAC, there is a lack of collectivity and consensus. Young Hmong adults perceive this to be a problem for the whole organization.

“...the biggest issues are that people are not seeing eye to eye. Not just people in the community but the people who are...in the leadership positions...if the leaders feel that then the followers don’t want to follow. If it’s an issue for the leaders then it’s an issue for the followers.” Nathan Vang

7.3.7) Resisting outside resources

Young Hmong adults believe that HAC lacks resources and feel that other agencies in the mainstream local communities can offer help. However, members of HAC appear to be hesitant in reaching out to outsiders for knowledge.

“...there’s bigger agencies out there that can help us or give us the resources. I think HAC just like it to be with Hmong people...”
Mai Chua Lor

“...lack of networking or resources...they really need to expand to get further growth...” Michael Xiong

Young Hmong adults perceive the members of the organization as comfortable with their own kind and believe that this does not help the organization progress.

7.4) **Lacking Communication Fluency**

Lacking linguistic fluency refers to the inadequacy of language skills and technological communicative devices to effectively communicate with members. These inadequacies create communication barriers between members and can make the

experience of volunteering difficult. I will present the language difficulties that young Hmong adults experience when communicating with certain members of HAC. I will also present the technological forms of communication that are lacking within HAC and how these communicative deficiencies keep young Hmong adults uninformed.

7.4.1) Hmong language

Young Hmong adults are less fluent in the Hmong language. As a result of this, they experience difficulties speaking the language as well as reading and writing the literature. This makes it difficult for young Hmong adults to express their ideas to elders and to negotiate objectives.

“...the language barrier with the youth and the elders in HAC...an executive in the youth for example has to communicate with the elders in the HAC...then there’s that language barrier...you don’t speak a lot of Hmong and they don’t understand you that much because they do speak some English but they don’t know English that well...”

Michael Xiong

According to Michael, the pressure of being fluent in the Hmong language is greater for youth leaders who represent the youth members of HAC. In order to communicate the needs of the youth it is important to be fluent in the language.

7.4.2) Uninformed about HAC

The participants of this study appear to have little knowledge about HAC despite their involvement or the involvement of family members. The following quotes illustrate this lack of knowledge.

“Not knowing who the leaders are or who’s part of it. Now that you told me that you’re a part of it you’re probably the only person I know.”
Gina Vang

“I didn’t even know they had volunteer opportunities.” Shouna Yang

“To be honest...I don’t know what their mission statement is or what they actually do on a day to day basis...what I do know is...that they run a New Years and they also run youth events. They run small parties here and there. That’s about it...that’s all I know.” Nathan Vang

Although most of the participants of this study identify as being members and have volunteered for HAC at one point in time, their knowledge of the organization is surprisingly low. In exploring this reality, I found communication barriers that result from the methods being used to disseminate information to the different age groups in the organization. In this next segment I discuss these technological methods of communication that are missing and reinforcing ineffective communication.

7.4.3) Ineffective channeling of information.

HAC lacks technical forms of communication to distribute information to age groups in HAC.

According to Zong Lee, it is important to be cognizant of the maturity level of each age group when presenting information. For younger generations, information needs to be presented in a manner that is less time consuming, clear, concise, and captures the attention of youth. Older people may be more tolerant of in-depth presentations that require a longer period of time.

“Each of them really needs a specific approach. There is no one solution. To me you really have to cater to their needs. I know for the younger youth they like energy type things. It can’t really bore them and if you’re going to talk to them you got to make it short and sweet. The older ones they’ll be a little more tolerant. They’ll sit still more. So you can talk to them a little bit more in depth...” Zong Lee

Furthermore, Zong Lee believes HAC needs to be aware of the confidence level of age groups when recruiting volunteers. Younger generations may be less bold to sign up for volunteer activities and may require encouragement by being approached directly.

“A lot of the younger generation, I realized that to involve them you have to go out there yourself. You just can’t say “Oh if anyone would like to sign up, just sign up”. The younger ones, you would walk right up to them and say “hey would you like to volunteer?” Zong Lee

Furthermore, there are technological forms of communication that are preferable to the different groups. Young Hmong adults prefer modern technology and will use resources from the internet such as websites and email. Another way of capturing the attention of youth is by presenting information decoratively on a poster. Older members, on the other hand, may prefer telephone calls and mailed letters.

The following quotes illustrate the different technological forms of communication that young Hmong adults perceive as being absent from HAC.

“...the older generation prefers to be contacted by phone versus via e-mail. For me I would check my email more then I would answer the phone. I guess it’s also the technology thing, the older one’s...like with my dad you know, he’s not confident enough to go to the store and run a program on the computer...even my mom she doesn’t know, she is kind of intimidated, she might think it’s going to burn up.” Zong Lee

“If you were to reach out to the younger people maybe to email them...that’s something that HAC could work on which is getting to know people...” Gina Vang

“HAC has not really been communicating well. I know they send letters. I’ve seen them with my parents. I see them receive 2 letters a year...but maybe if they...make posters...post them at public places.”
Nathan Vang

“Do they have an office or a telephone number? Part of the problem is organizational structure...I don’t know if they have one, but an email...even a website. Something that’s...the central spot...so even if you don’t know who the leaders are you can go there and find out.”
Zong Lee

“...most of the people get the news letter or the invitation to come out to New Years...sometimes it’s not made clear who to contact because there’s four or five different members on the letter. They are not specified in what...their role is for the New Year or for that event. They should be a little bit clear about that.” Zong Lee

Young Hmong adults feel that HAC may need to explore further styles of communication and technological devices to disseminate information. This may increase the awareness of volunteer opportunities and motivate young Hmong adults to become involved.

7.5) Finding Volunteer Activities Troublesome

There are volunteer activities that young Hmong adults find difficult to perform. Certain activities may conflict with the values of the volunteer, lack direction and/or feedback, and be perceived as unsuccessful. Some volunteers experience difficulties engaging in activities because they lack the personal drive to participate.

7.5.1) Undesirable activities

The volunteer may disagree with the volunteer activity and perceive the activity as unproductive.

“I had to write a speech for the president one year and it had to be really censored... had to be careful about the audience because they’re (HAC) very conservative. They didn’t want any new ideas or any controversial topics being brought up. They weren’t willing to explore the idea of change in the Hmong community or about their ideas of what Hmong was right.” Sia Cheng

7.5.2) Unauthentic involvement

The volunteer may feel coerced or culturally expected to volunteer. Thus, there is a lack of personal drive to engage in the activity.

“...it’s kind of like a job, you have to do it because your dad says so or your mom says so and if you don’t do it then they’re going to hate on you.” Pheng Her

“I think...people go because they have to...it’s not something like “hey let’s go!”...it’s the same thing that they discuss for three hours and I’m...bored out of my mind. It’s not even concrete it’s just up in the air.” Daniel Lee

“...my objectives don’t go along with the Hmong Association’s objectives...but when they come ask me I help them out because...I respect them as elders, not necessarily their ideas or their objectives but just because they are older.” Sia Cheng

7.5.3) Lack of direction

The volunteer activity may lack organization and direction, which makes it difficult for the volunteer to perform their duties in a pleasing manner.

“Everything was good until we met the og’s¹⁶ ...the old people don’t know what they want and they’re telling you to do this and to do that...if they were just to set their mind on one thing and you follow that plan, then everything would be okay...they have no plan, it’s just last minute of doing everything. It kind of stresses you out. You get stressed out and you really don’t want to do it no more... Seng Xiong

“...and a challenge would be doing what you have to do in the time allotted and well so that they don’t, so that they like, say you did it well so that you don’t have to re do it or they make you re do it.” Bee Hang

“I just felt that it lacked a lot of structure and direction. I didn’t really get much feedback from HAC on how they wanted it, not much input on what should go in. Not so much effort in collecting articles to put in. So I had to really do that myself. I think we were short.” Daniel Lee

7.5.4) Volunteer activities unsuccessful

Young Hmong adults perceive volunteer activities as unsuccessful because they fail to make a difference or create change in the community.

“I don’t think the Hmong New Years...was very unsuccessful. I guess after that a lot of people started dropping out...” Jeff Thao

“I’ve tried it. I’ve put in a couple of terms but it doesn’t seem like it’s going anywhere. Life is busy...I don’t see how I can keep on supporting it if I don’t feel that it’s getting to where I want it to...” Tank Vang

Young Hmong adults perceive volunteer activities to be bothersome because they are unproductive, unsuccessful, conflicting with one’s personal value, and lack direction. These perspectives make it difficult for young Hmong adults to engage and perform volunteer activities well.

¹⁶ Old guys - elders

7.6) Reassessing Identity

Young Hmong adults perceive inconsistencies between the intended image of HAC and the actual image that it portrays in the community. According to the participants, HAC contradicts its objectives by creating events that segregate members. These inconsistencies create a negative image of HAC that sometimes becomes attached to members. This may cause some young Hmong adults to disassociate from events where they believe peer behavior may clash with their own values.

7.6.1) Actions incongruent with objectives

HAC's main objective is to work towards uniting members of the community; yet, the organization appears to exclude the interest of certain groups of the community.

“Well if the organization is a non profit organization, they are supposed to represent a cause. The cause I read was something like keeping the traditions alive and bringing the community together. I don't see them trying to keep the community together...how can you keep a community together when you're only speaking on one or the other behalf, you're not speaking as a whole...” Tank Vang

Also, HAC hosts limited events, mainly parties, for the community. These events fail to draw in members who dislike party events, such as Christians. These members would prefer the organization to create events where they can participate without having to compromise their values.

“...they'll do things that I don't like...like New Years. Most of the time I don't like to go because people drink. I'm not discriminating against people who drink...I feel uncomfortable being in that environment. I just don't like seeing people drunk...” Ninda Moua

“...they hold the predominant parties and such like that, it doesn’t seem like that they are going that extra mile to bring the communities together.” Zong Lee

“...I do find that it doesn’t really reach out to the church...I think the people at church choose not to get so involved...because there are those certain things they don’t do...no partying, no drinking...I think the general idea is that we’re...separate from that...picnics then it’s okay but if its New Years we go to support but we just go for a bit and then we leave...” Annie Cha

Another HAC objective is to sustain cultural traditions. However, HAC does not provide a service where members provide helping hands on behalf of the organization during cultural events, such as funerals.

“...you know how you see people help each other only when there’s a time of need...you see that most when there’s a death, when somebody passes away. But you don’t really see HAC like sib pab na¹⁷ in terms of that...” Daniel Lee

Also, HAC is a non-profit organization that is dependent on membership fees, donations, and fundraising. Members offer their money to help sustain the organization; however, members feel that their money is not being spent towards beneficial activities. Thus, there is a negative perception of HAC in regards to how money is handled. This is disturbing for volunteers who respect the organization and wish to see others perceive HAC in a positive light.

“I had a friend who once told me that, “Oh I don’t really want to donate money to HAC because they’re very money hungry”...it was disturbing because you’re associated with HAC right, and your parents are associated...I was really disturbed at the time and mind you I quickly corrected them personally....” Daniel Lee

¹⁷ Help each other out

Overall, volunteers recognize that their association to an organization reflects their image. For this reason, volunteers will assess the image that HAC portrays in the community. Unfortunately, many young Hmong adults perceive that the organization contradicts their goals and values. They also believe the organization excludes those who cannot participate in events where certain behaviors take place, such as drinking. These images conflict with the image that volunteers wish to project and will influence their involvement with HAC.

7.7) Experiencing Disenchantments with Collective Events

HAC hosts annual events for the community, such as New Years, summer picnics, and fundraising parties. Other collective events include meetings, annual elections, and the annual general meeting. Many of the participants describe the nature of these events as unattractive and dissatisfying. I will present the dissatisfying characteristics of these events as well as the controversial issues that exist.

7.7.1) Lacks time efficiency

Young Hmong adults feel that HAC fails to follow the time schedules of their events. Often, events begin late and extend for longer periods of time without notification. This portrays the organization as unorganized and insensitive to the time schedule of members.

“...I don’t like to loose time...I have school, I have a job, I have a lot of responsibilities, so if I were to volunteer I want to know that I’m using my time efficiently...I want to know exactly what I have to do...It’s just more smooth and less frustrations and less mistakes...They will say that it starts at 5 but it’s going to start at 6 or 7...drags things out. I find that

Hmong people don't care about time, so if someone wanted to say a speech, it could go on forever...then it just ends up really late and everyone is really tired...I am frustrated sometimes with running events because they just don't think time is important." Ninda Moua

"...if I could suggest something...whenever people run events they have to be on time...even if there's nobody there just start ...teach people...teach them okay we're starting at 5 and if you're not here then we're locking the doors...then next time they'll learn that we better be on time next time... if I invited my Canadian friend to come to the New Year and on the agenda it said we're starting the Hmong girl dancing show at 6 o'clock right, they're going to be there at 6 but if they don't start at 6 then my friends will totally lose respect for this organization." Nathan Vang

As discussed in the above quotes, volunteers feel it important that their time is respected. Failing to meet this expectation discourages young Hmong adults from volunteering.

7.7.2) Uninteresting

Events are described as redundant and boring. Over the years, the attendance level at these events has decreased. According to the Young Hmong adults, the events do not cater to the interest of younger generations. Some suggest introducing new ideas to create incentives for members to participate and volunteer. However, for now, young Hmong adults appear to be unmotivated to attend events.

"...I don't know if it's enough to draw new members in...It's not really novel ideas...it's just the same picnic and New Year. You miss this New Year, oh well it's the same, you miss the picnic oh well it's the same."
Daniel Lee

"...you can notice the attendance on the decline for New Years...when I was a kid the halls were always packed and now it seems like attendance is going down..." Zong Lee

“I find the New Year Events really tedious. I try to avoid it at all costs. I go because it’s an obligation...My mom, she’s like you have to go you have to make an appearance. But this year I’m not going to go.”

Shouna Yang

“If it’s something that is important to me then I think I would but I have to be honest that I find the stuff that they have been doing is not a whole lot of interest. You know if I’m interested to go then I’ll go right, but if it’s not important to me, it always seems like there could be something else that I could be doing.” Annie Cha

7.7.3) Segregates sub-groups

Certain events are organized to segregate groups and defeat the purpose of uniting members of the organization. Young Hmong adults feel New Years 2008 is a prime example of how HAC structures events to separate age groups. This event had two separate evenings, one that catered to youth and another that catered to elders. Young Hmong adults prefer to have a collective night that includes both generations.

“I’d rather have the youth and the whole community involved in one big party instead of having a night just for the youth and a night for everybody... The youth, they’ll be out there on that night partying and then Saturday morning when we’re all suppose to be there, the youth are all going to be sleeping in. And who’s going to be there... Even though there is some Laus¹⁸ that will pov pob¹⁹, it’s mainly for the youth...so that’s why I have my opinion that it should be one big party instead of having a youth night and then everybody. I thought it was New Years. We’re all suppose to enjoy together and not as a separate night.”

Long Yang

“...we shouldn’t have to have our own night we should be able to have the night together...You know the older people they always want to have it their way or the high way which isn’t really fair...we only need one night where you play music for both people...It’s kind of sad that they’re dividing it like that cause see there’s that division right now and who’s going to show up on Saturday night.” Lena Her

¹⁸ Elders

¹⁹ Throw ball – a New Year tradition of man and woman throwing a ball to one another to build friendship.

There is also a division among men and women. Generally women are perceived as workers in the kitchen while men are hosting the event.

“Maybe, gender roles, because like for instance at New Years, the women are always in the Kitchen and then the men are always giving out drinks.” Shouna Yang

7.7.4) Informal wear at New Years

New Year is the most important cultural celebration in the K-W Hmong community. Some young Hmong adults feel the event is not given the cultural respect it deserves, such as formal wear.

“According to Hmong history, that’s the only time where people get to rest so why the heck do Hmong people go to New Years in jeans and a T-shirt when you should be wearing the most expensive suit or dress ... I see some people, like Chinese New Years, they go crazy about that. They take pride in what they really are but Hmong people it seems like they don’t really care.” Mai Chua Lor

“...makes me feel like I’m a minority. No one knows who I am but they know who Chinese people are because Chinese people they know how to promote themselves. They bring in the Chinese New Years, they do huge parties, huge things because they’re so many of them. But since there’s little of us here we just can’t do anything...” Gina Vang

7.7.5) Religious differences

At New Years, religious groups encounter differences that may cause tension. These tensions create a social barrier between the religious groups during events and can influence people to discontinue their participation.

“...prayer issue. They don’t want the pastor to say praise before they eat their meal...I do see why it would be offensive to people and as Christians it shouldn’t be really necessary for him to pray because if I’m a true believer then I should just be able to pray for myself at the table. It’s my own choice and if I can do that and someone sees then I can influence that person... Just to see Xib Fwb²⁰ pray at the New Years, it’s so discouraging...because he’s up there praying and it’s so noisy...it’s better if he doesn’t pray...” Nathan Vang

Overall, young Hmong adults perceive the attributes of HAC events as dissatisfying.

7.8) Disenchanted with the Lack of Changes Occurring within the Sub-Culture

Young Hmong adults are frustrated with the lack of change in HAC. In fact, they perceive a resistance to change that occurs in the organization.

Lena Her shares her perspective on this resistance.

“...I think a lot of the resistance that we’re finding is the elders because they’re so afraid of change...they’re afraid that if we change something the Hmong community is not going to be the same. But the whole fact of the matter is...we’re not the same...we’re all different now, we all grew up...in the end we’re all Hmong.” Lena Her

The lack of changes can be discouraging to young Hmong adults who are experiencing a process of progression throughout their life stages. Daniel Lee describes his experience of leaving the Hmong Association to pursue higher education, only to come back and find that the organization has remained stagnant.

“Like when I think about college, there was a few years I didn’t know nothing really. It wasn’t until my second year I was introduced to all the philosophy, ideas, international stuff, then you start thinking like gosh I

²⁰ Pastor

live in this tiny little bubble. And you got back to this bubble and it looks like nothing's really changed." Daniel Lee

There are many reasons that explain this resistance. Mai Chua Lor perceives the resistance as more of struggle adapting to the Canadian culture.

"I don't think they would listen. I think they would say that they will try either...they're very hard headed in what they believe in and they're still trying to adapt to this whole Canadian culture thing..." Mai Chua Lor

Young Hmong adults feel that there is little change that is occurring in the organization due to the resistance from elders who desire to maintain the organization as is.

7.9) Encountering Emotional Setbacks

While volunteering, young Hmong adults encounter undesirable feelings that discourage them from volunteer. I present these feelings and discuss how they contribute to the perspective that young Hmong adults are underappreciated and devalued for their volunteer contributions.

7.9.1) Feeling used

Elders generally look to the skills and knowledge of young Hmong adults when creating fundraising events. However, elders limit the amount of creativity that young Hmong adults desire to contribute by resisting their new ideas and input. Thus, young Hmong adults feel that leaders of the organization take advantage of the young Hmong adults' volunteer efforts to meet their own objectives.

Jeff Thao believes youth leaders perceive him as a puppet and request him to run tasks that serve their interest.

“...mainly running errands, meetings, and a lot of the youth leaders we helped out, a lot of people who just using me as puppets you know.”

Jeff Thao

Lena Her feels that her hard work has been exploited by HAC.

“HAC has taken advantage of all the hard work from the youth...I think they take advantage of us. They make us run their parties and what not but they only want us to do it to cater to them. We can't incorporate things we want to do.” Lena Her

Seng Xiong feels the organization overworks young Hmong adults to alleviate their own responsibilities. For Seng, this treatment portrays young Hmong adults as undeserving of respect.

“To me, we're just their slaves, we do the dirty work, that's it. Take less stress of them.” Seng Xiong

“They respect you but not in the way that you want. You want to be respected...They just respect you because you do things for them. You want to be respected because you made a contribution as a nice person. But...they're like “well we'll just get this person to do it and he'll do it.” Seng Xiong

Seng also feels frustrated that his efforts help raise funds for the organization and yet the organization refuses to financially invest in activities that support the youth committee.

“They say...have a party...so you hold it. Where are the funds going? It's going to them...we're setting everything up and we're getting all the

headaches. While they just collect the money...When we want to use the money for something they have to think about it...while we work our butts off to make that chunk of money for them.” Seng Xiong

7.9.2) Feeling disappointed

Young Hmong adults feel disappointed when the organization fails to deliver promises that are made to the youth committee. This leads to feelings of mistrust that Lena describes in the quote below:

“There’s no trust...especially the young people, because there’s a lot of resentment towards the organization...there’s promises and nothing ever comes of these promises. You get let down and you get let down and then you just give up after. You can only try so much right.” Lena Her

Also, feelings of disappointment lead young Hmong adults to perceive HAC as an organization that lacks integrity. Tank Vang describes this in the quote below.

“...basically integrity...If you say you’re going to do something, do something...it’s not... get them involved...drop it ...maintain what was already agreed...so that you keep that connection...that trust...that relation...even though they’re non-profit... they’re still a business and it still has to be run like a business...” Tank Vang

Young Hmong adults feel disappointment when their volunteer contributions fail to create change or make a difference. Daniel Lee describes his experience of feeling deflated from volunteering.

“At the end of it I kind of really felt deflated...it was kind of like futile. I’m not sure if anything changed as a result of my actions...It goes back to the way we think and our culture. We have to change...the way we receive new ideas and how to accommodate that.” Daniel Lee

Shouna Yang feels HAC does not offer her anything and has become disillusioned with the organization.

“I’m at a point in my life where I’m disillusioned with HAC. They haven’t really done anything. They have really bad events and I don’t want that in my life.” Shouna Yang

7.9.3) Feeling devalued

Young Hmong adults feel devalued when they are not shown appreciation or recognition for their efforts.

Zong Lee feels devalued as a member when his volunteer contributions are criticized by other members.

“...the biggest issue for me is...it’s political, you hear about half of the stuff that goes on...you know people talking behind you. You know when people make decisions for New Years...people mumbling about this guy he did this and that, that type of stuff that goes along. That stuff really turns me off. It’s just because I just don’t like that, gossip...some people are really critical...” Zong Lee

Annie Cha feels devalued when members fail to acknowledge the amount of work she invests into volunteering for the community.

“I just think a sense of acknowledgement that you are doing hard work and that they appreciate what you’re doing. You don’t need to be praised but if nobody takes notice of it then you kind of get discouraged...if somebody comes up to you and says “wow you did a great job today” ...it’s encouraging for you to do it even though that person may be the only person that is seeing what you’re doing...a sense of acknowledgement...some acknowledgement that what you’re doing is...making a difference.” Annie Cha

Daniel Lee feels recognition is given to the leaders who exploit the efforts of young Hmong adults and other volunteers that help to make events successful.

“I don’t think that they give enough recognition...I think the one who heads it like the president they get much of the recognition right. But all the people behind the scenes, they’re really the guys that can pull it all together.” Daniel Lee

Daniel continues with his experience of feeling unappreciated for his volunteer work.

“I can’t say I was recognized...I can’t recall anyone saying well you know thank you for you time and we know you put a lot of hours in this. I can’t say I was recognized for that.” Daniel Lee

Lena Her feels that the voices of young Hmong adults are devalued when elders refuse to listen to their ideas and opinions.

“I think it goes back to the elders, because they’re just not listening and valuing our opinion...I’m not saying that they have to cater to us only, but they have to know that we’re the future of our community...”
Lena Her

Furthermore, young Hmong adults feel intimidated about communicating with elders of the organization due to the language barrier. Elders appear unsupportive of young Hmong adults and their efforts to communicate with them.

“I think it’s because we’re loosing our mother’s tongue and cov laus²¹ are not very supportive of that. For example, if one of you have a speech and if they don’t pronounce the word properly, or say it in the way that it should be said. Everybody will laugh, especially the elders, and that’s

²¹ The elders

not very supportive. Scare them off and they don't want to volunteer anymore. That's what intimidates the youth the most." Long Yang

According to Sia Cheng, women's voices are devalued on a greater scale compared to men due to the cultural discrimination against women.

"I would like to have a say in other things. I wasn't allowed because I was girl. Those societal rules and the societal expectations I have to meet...as soon as I go over them then I would be disrespectful..."
Sia Cheng

Young Hmong adults feel disappointed, discriminated against, devalued and used. These undesirable emotions discourage young Hmong adults from volunteering and appear to disrupt volunteer commitments.

7.10) Defining themselves as unable or unwilling to maintain sub-cultural commitments.

Aside from volunteer dissatisfactions, there are external factors that contribute to why young Hmong adults become disengaged from volunteering. Volunteering requires time and energy and as young Hmong adults experience increasing demands from other life commitments they invest less time in HAC. Young Hmong adults invest time with family, work, school and extra-curricular activities.

"School, work, their daily activities. For me it still is just work and other personal family issues." Jeff Thao

"The challenge for me is I'd like to help them out all the time, it's just my everyday schedule. That's the biggest challenge. Working and fitting them into my schedule. Other than that, the communication is there."
Long Yang

“Right now I’m in a tight spot and I need to get my life together. I need to go back to school.” Pheng Her

Furthermore, some young Hmong lack the means to travel to and from volunteer activities. This makes it difficult to carry out volunteer commitments.

“...the hard part is... to get to them because they don’t have a car to come out and they don’t play sports.” Xy Lee

For many young Hmong adults, school and career plans take precedence. Thus, young Hmong adults will devote their time and energy to activities that are related to these priorities.

“...everyone is going their own way, they’re trying to graduate, they’re so worried about their own future that they don’t think about our culture. I think I kind of drew into that too because the only time I’ll do anything with the Hmong people is attend picnics and New Years. But other than that, throughout the whole year I’m just doing what I need to do.”
Gina Vang

Although there are disaffections that young Hmong adults experience when volunteering, there are also external reasons that contribute to their lack of involvement. These factors usually require time and energy and take precedence over volunteer commitment to HAC.

7.11) Conclusion

Although the participants of this study identify as members of HAC, their recurring experiences with undesirable volunteer situations discourage them from assisting the organization. Young Hmong adults slowly disengage from the organization

by decreasing their levels of volunteer involvement but will refrain from abruptly leaving the organization as there are aspects of the organization that continue to be pleasing to them.

Despite the differing experiences, when volunteering young Hmong adults encounter all ten processes of disinvolvement identified by Prus.

1. Experiencing relational difficulties with sub-cultural (insider) associates.
2. Rejected by sub-cultural associates.
3. Questioning the viability of perspectives
4. Lacking linguistic fluency.
5. Finding activities troublesome.
6. Reassessing identity.
7. Experiencing disenchantments with collective events.
8. Disenchanted with the lack of changes occurring within the sub-culture.
9. Encountering emotional setbacks.
10. Defining themselves as unable or unwilling to maintain sub-cultural commitments.

Themes around volunteer dissatisfaction emerge under these processes to illustrate the challenges that young Hmong adults encounter when volunteering for HAC. In the next section, I will discuss the implications of all my findings and offer suggestions for improvement. I will also discuss the limitations of my study and conclude with personal reflections on the knowledge that has developed from this project.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to understand how young Hmong adults experience challenges of volunteering in the Hmong Association of Canada (HAC), a volunteer organization of members from the Kitchener-Waterloo (K-W) Hmong community. To achieve this objective, symbolic interactionism (SI) is used to comprehend the perspectives on volunteering that are shared by 18 young Hmong adults who identify as members of HAC. From these perspectives emerge social processes of volunteering that are formulated under the seven premises of SI, where human activities of social interaction occur to create a sub-cultural group life of volunteering. These social processes are specific to the experiences of young Hmong adults, a secondary sub-cultural group within HAC that illustrates how these individuals understand volunteering in HAC, engage in activities with other members to bring about change and lessen their commitment with the organization.

Throughout this chapter, I assert my voice as the researcher to present my interpretation of the findings. I discuss how young Hmong adults perceive volunteering through a cross-cultural lens when volunteering for HAC, and how their perception impacts how they experience the benefits and challenges of volunteering. I also discuss how the existing cross-cultural differences, social stratification of members, and social location of the Hmong community in the dominant society contribute to the growing tension between members as well as the challenges to volunteering that influence young Hmong adults to decrease their levels of commitment.

8.1) Volunteering in HAC

The assertion that societies understand civic participation in accordance with how they perceive “self” (Ching-Yun Lee, 1998) is validated through the perspectives of young Hmong adults who volunteer with the Hmong Association of Canada. For this group, self is perceived as being a part of a system of family relationships, where family is translated to the larger community as relationships form through kinship and marital ties with outside clans. This differentiates from the western concept of self in which self is perceived as being a separate entity from the family. The concept of self alludes to the SI premise Human Group Life is Relational, which describes that individuals engage with others by how they perceive themselves as connected to others.

How young Hmong adults perceive self is seen in their definition on volunteering in the context of HAC that differs from that of general Canadians that volunteer in the dominant society. Young Hmong adults define volunteering in their cultural community as “*offering one’s time without pay to help the community*”, whereas general Canadians define volunteering in mainstream society as “*...offering time, energy and skills of one’s own free will*” (Volunteer Bénévoles Canada, 2008). Both young Hmong adults and general Canadians understand volunteering as an act that is performed without monetary compensation; however, young Hmong adults perceive volunteering as an act of giving to the community whereas general Canadians describe volunteering in mainstream society as a personal act of giving, without specifying the recipient of that giving.

Volunteering to assist the community among young Hmong adults can be further seen in the cultural practice of reciprocity, also known as “*sib pauv zog*” in Hmong. Reciprocity refers to the cycle of expressing loyalty and brotherly love to community

members through acts of helping out (Ching-Yun Lee, 1998). Functional volunteer commitments in HAC model the practice of reciprocity where young Hmong adults lend a hand in activities that combine to achieve a greater goal in the organization. Many young Hmong adults describe their involvement in functional volunteer activities as “on the spot” helping out and often engage in this to build reciprocal relationships with friends and family. A functional volunteer commitment can be perceived as a human activity that young Hmong adults perform to reinforce the system of volunteering in HAC. This reflects the SI premise Human Group Life is Activity Based.

8.2) Benefits of Volunteering in HAC

The primary benefit of volunteering for HAC is the reward of being a part of an ongoing intricate support system where volunteers share a mutual understanding of helping each other. In order to sustain this support system there are interlocking activities that are performed to produce interdependent cultural benefits. For young Hmong adults these cultural benefits include gaining honor and skills that enable them to improve their community relationships. Volunteering is a cultural expectation of young Hmong adults who, when fulfilling this expectation, portray themselves as dedicated and reliable members of the community. This earns young Hmong adults respect from elders and other community members which preserves and contributes to their family honor.

Furthermore, while volunteering, young Hmong adults gain skills that help them maneuver through the community. These include speaking the Hmong language, becoming knowledgeable about cultural protocols, and accommodating to the different communication styles of each generational group. This supports existing research (Xiong

et al, 2006; Xiong et al, 2005; Tsai, 2001) that suggests young Hmong adults are motivated to act in a respectable manner in order to save face, maintain family honor, and sustain cultural traditions.

Volunteering to attain interdependent cultural benefits is a motivation that emerges from a process of negotiation where young Hmong adults assess their interests as well as the interests of others to plan out their actions of involvement in the Hmong community. This process falls under the SI premise Human Group Life is Negotiable. This premise explains that people evaluate their own agenda, along with the agenda of the community, to determine how they will interact with members and perform activities in the community. In some cases the agenda of the individual may override the agenda of others and vice versa.

For young Hmong adults, however, the process of negotiating volunteer involvement with HAC is influenced by an interdependent agenda where young Hmong adults perceive their agenda as dependent upon the agenda of the community and vice versa. Then again, as research (Julian, 2005) shows, young Hmong adults have become shaped by new prospects that have been presented to them in mainstream culture. This is seen among the young Hmong adults of this study who express the desire to attain independent benefits that will contribute to their individual needs. This usually involves increasing skills that will improve their job opportunities in the dominant society. Young Hmong adults often describe their motivation to develop programs in HAC that will assist them in their career endeavors, such as educational workshops or tutoring services for youth struggling with homework.

Volunteering for HAC to fulfill high school requirements for graduation is another motivation that is related to the mainstream objectives of young Hmong adults. This extra incentive pushes young Hmong adults to connect with their community, which generally involves connecting with Hmong peers. Being among Hmong peers helps build upon the cultural identity of young Hmong adults who are exposed to peers of the same heritage and history. Then again, volunteering with peers places young Hmong adults in the habitual cycle of being isolated from other types of members. Thus, young Hmong adults continue to feel disconnected from the larger Hmong community. This outcome supports research that suggests mandatory volunteering helps connect youth to communities (McLellan & Youniss, 2003) but is unable to positively connect youth to all areas of their community (Nenga, 2004; Planty et al 2006) .

There are many benefits that young Hmong adults experience when volunteering to help their community. However, there are also many challenges that young Hmong adults experience when placed in a situation where they must compromise their changing values to meet the cultural expectation of the Hmong community. I discuss the social changes of the Hmong community within the context of HAC and how these changes have impacted the community.

8.3) Cultural Organizing in a Western Context

Members of HAC largely represent the Hmong community of K-W that organize under a western organizational structure in order to attain privileges to fundraise, collect charitable funds and to gain further recognition as a cultural community within Canada. Although becoming a recognized non-profit organization provides the Hmong with

advantages to mobilize in the dominant society, it is an imposed western structure that has marginalized and separated the Hmong from the larger society as the Hmong struggle to compromise their own societal structure in order to adapt to mainstream culture. As a result of this struggle, the leaders of HAC refrain from building support networks outside of the community and solely depend on the financial means and labor of its members.

The struggle to maintain cultural identity among the Hmong is evident in the infrastructure of HAC where a Hmong societal system has been reproduced to follow a standard non-profit organizational setting. HAC is designed to maintain kinship and clanship ties by following cultural protocols that respect the social boundaries of the community. For instance, there are committees designed to separate married and non-married individuals. Also, HAC is generally led by first-generation members, mainly elders, who engage in organizational commitments to operate specific functions in the organization, such as presidency. This reflects research that asserts Hmong communities in western society organize to sustain the societal system of the Hmong in order to remain connected to community members (Forward & Rick, 1992).

8.4) Tension in the Community

The marginalization of the Hmong in K-W is further identified in the lack of social support given to the Hmong to help them in their process of social change. It is questionable as to whether the objective to sustain unity and harmony in the community is plausible within HAC as new positions of power challenge the cultural roles of members and new western values, ideologies and religious beliefs adopted by members' conflict with that of the Hmong culture. Over the years, tension in the community has

developed as a result of the socio-economic changes of the community as well as the acculturation of members.

Given that HAC is a recognizable institution by the dominant society there appears to be a struggle for political power between families or clan groups in the community who appear to monopolize power and leadership in the organization. As the organization becomes a symbol for sustaining cultural traditions and beliefs, members who have adopted the Christian faith decrease their involvement as they encounter challenges compromising their religious beliefs that conflict with that of the Hmong traditions. Furthermore, as a second and third generation emerges, many intergenerational and cross-cultural tension arise as the generational groups experience different rates of acculturation and thus struggle to understand one another's lived experiences. Also, there is growing tension between men and women in the community as the roles of women are being challenged by females who are becoming educated and choosing to live an independent lifestyle.

I map out these tensions and differences throughout the following segments where I present the challenges that young Hmong adults experience while volunteering for HAC. These experienced challenges are influenced by the communication barriers among members and the social stratification of youth in the community.

8.5) Communication Barriers

HAC members' perception and use of traditional cultural and modern technological communication methods are connected to both their level of acculturation into western society and their perception of the purpose of volunteerism in HAC. Like

first-generation members, young Hmong adults of the second-generation perceive volunteering in HAC as an activity that is performed to build and sustain reciprocal relationships as well as cultural values in the community. However, young Hmong adults also perceive volunteering as an activity that is done to improve the resources and capacity of the community in order to advance with the dominant society. Thus, second-generation youth prefer to engage in forms of communication that will help achieve both objectives. However, first-generation members appear more concerned with avoiding controversy and respecting the social boundaries of the community as they desire to maintain relationships and harmony in the Hmong societal structure. These individuals will engage in communicative methods that help to achieve this goal.

In this section, I discuss how the intergenerational perspectives on volunteering between first and second-generation members influence how young Hmong adults experience challenges engaging in traditional cultural formalities of communication in HAC.

8.5.1) Linguistic challenges

The SI premise Human Group Life is Inter-subjective suggests groups or communities employ a shared system of communication where symbols of meaning, (language) are mutually understood to exchange perspectives and ideas. These symbols can be expressed verbally and non-verbally. Young Hmong adults who volunteer for HAC struggle with the linguistic system of the Hmong language. Being acculturated into western society, young Hmong adults have become more fluent in English than Hmong, as shown through their use of Hmonglish. Hmonglish is a developed form of

communication, using words and syntaxes from Hmong and English simultaneously, to communicate verbally. Hmonglish users, struggling to speak Hmong, employ English words and phrases to fill in sentence gaps.

Hmonglish can be appreciated as a language that symbolizes the desire of young Hmong adults to improve and maintain the heritage language. However, it is a language that creates a communication barrier between young Hmong adults and members who are less familiar with Hmonglish and less fluent in English, mainly first-generation members. These members appear frustrated and confused when young Hmong adults communicate to them in Hmonglish and will generally overlook their efforts to speak Hmong, by ridiculing their lack of fluency. This discourages young Hmong adults from communicating and negotiating their needs in the community.

8.5.2) Cultural gestures of meaning

In addition to their struggle to speak Hmong, young Hmong adults experience difficulties engaging in cultural forms of communication in HAC that they have learned to use and recognize but believe create barriers between generational groups. These forms of communication involve gestures and types of interaction that imply social meaning indirectly. This type of communication also falls under the SI premise Human Group Life is Inter-subjective, as the premise describes that meaning can also be communicated through physical gestures. This is evident in the cultural forms of expressing volunteer appreciation that informs young Hmong adults when their contributions satisfy or disappoint the community, and when these young Hmong adults are valued by the organization.

Young Hmong adults describe the act of “silence” as a gesture of praise where little or no criticism of their work is being communicated. Although the act of silence is perceived as a positive gesture, young Hmong adults believe this custom deters members from being open about sharing their opinions with one another. This is an experience young Hmong adults often encounter with first-generation members who refrain from providing constructive feedback of their work. Without feedback, young Hmong adults cannot identify ways to improve their volunteer performance and are unaware of people’s levels of satisfaction. Silence also fails to provide confirmation that community members are paying attention to the work of volunteers. This lack of acknowledgement produces doubt and discouragement among young Hmong adults who feel their work is being devalued.

Furthermore, silence is a form of communication that is used to avoid controversial issues in the community so that harmony among members remains consistent. However, issues that remain unresolved increases unspoken tension in the organization causing volunteers to feel stress about the recurring challenges in the organization. This phenomenon relates to the research that found young Hmong adult college students steer away from conflict with parents by avoiding issues. (Xiong et al, 2005). This research shows how avoidance is unconstructive as it increases the level of stress both for parents and for young Hmong adults.

Another cultural form of communication that creates a barrier between members is indirect criticism. Volunteers will learn about the disapproval of their work from other members through gossip and rumors. Indirect criticism is a formality that allows members to communicate their dissatisfactions without having to encounter heated

confrontation or direct controversy with individuals. This process of communication, however, is inefficient as the course of action needed to address or resolve issues in the community is delayed. In many cases, indirect criticism is ignored by members. Also, indirect criticism is a practice that teaches members to refrain from being honest and upfront about their opinions. This creates an uncomfortable environment for community members who are working together to build their cultural community.

Furthermore, handshaking is a cultural form of expressing volunteer appreciation that is exclusive to men; they are allowed to engage in a handshake with other male members upon greeting and parting ways. This can be perceived as a cultural tradition that emerged from the male entitlement to lead families and communities (Dunnigan, 1982; Tatman, 2004). Thus, male volunteers express feelings of validation and respect for each other with a handshake.

On the other hand, women who learn to refrain from handshaking follow the SI premise Human Group Life is Reflective where they assess their place in the community based on how others perceive and interact with them. Hmong women generally have the least status in their families and communities. With this knowledge, women learn to modify their social behaviors to meet cultural expectations, such as abstaining from leadership positions. Currently, the representation of women on the Administration and Board of HAC is close to none. This can be challenging for young Hmong adults who perceive women as equally competent to men and thus view the exclusion of women from leadership as discrimination against women.

Approaching volunteers to request their involvement is another cultural practice that young Hmong adults often appreciate as it implies to the person approached that he

or she is valuable to the organization. Many young Hmong adults describe their heightened involvement with HAC as a result of being personally asked to contribute their expertise and skills to the organization. Unfortunately, this style of volunteer recruitment can be perceived as selective and discriminatory; youth not recruited in this way experience negative feelings of being overlooked and less valued. Some young Hmong adults describe this cultural approach as being a system of favoritism where volunteers are selected based on their good reputation, status in the community and relation to involved members of HAC.

8.5.3) Inefficient technological systems

The organization lacks communication efficiency that stems from the limited technological devices used to communicate information to members in HAC. Youth are generally more frequent users of current technological devices, such as wireless communications and the internet. However, HAC limits itself to the use of letters that are written in English and Hmong and mailed out to families. This information generally reaches first-generation members such as parents, but fails to connect with youth. Thus, young Hmong adults are less informed about the ongoing changes and updates within the organization. As a result, many of the participants describe having a lack of knowledge about the administrative structure of HAC and the members that hold positions, as well as the volunteer opportunities that are available to youth.

While volunteering for HAC, young Hmong adults encounter communication barriers that deter them from communicating their feelings and ideas to members and that also discourage them from exploring new methods of communication that can advance

the skill, knowledge and education of the community. This is a result of the conflict of interest between the community agendas of the two generations. First generation members are more concerned with maintaining unity among members by avoiding controversial issues where as second generation members value the concept of nurturing unity but are also concerned with creating an open line of communication where constructive criticism and feedback is offered. Further barriers can be identified in the social stratification of members in the community; I discuss this in the next segment.

8.6) Isolating youth

Second and third generations of the community are encouraged to adapt to the infrastructure of HAC and to achieve cultural identity through their preference of creating friendships with peers who are related by marriage or kin. However, having been raised in western culture, young Hmong adults have become open to the idea of creating relationships on the basis of shared interests. The changing perspectives of young Hmong adults allude to the SI premise: Human Group Life is Processual which explains that the perspectives of people undergo change as they encounter changing factors in their lives. In this case, young Hmong adults have experienced socio-cultural and socio-economic changes that influence how they perceive volunteer relationships.

The structure of HAC creates barriers between young Hmong adults and other members who desire to create relationships of similar interests and endeavors. Young Hmong adults are culturally discouraged from associating with particular members of the community that are of the opposite sex, different marital status, and different age group. This division is presented in the organizational structure of HAC where committees are

specifically designed for certain social groups, such as the youth committee, the women's committee, the men's committee, the administration and the board of directors.

Since young Hmong adults are limited to working with members that belong to their peer age group, they are generally excluded from decision making processes that involve male elders or first-generation male members. This is evident in the planning of the Hmong New Year event. Generally, young Hmong adults feel disappointed with the schedule and details of the Hmong New Year and become less motivated to participate in volunteer activities that prepare and operate the event.

Furthermore, the imbalance of first and second-generation members represented in the leadership of HAC is another social barrier among young Hmong adults and elders. Generally, young Hmong adults are less favorable candidates for leadership positions in HAC as they have weaker relationships in the community. Generally, members are voted into the administration and Board of Directors (BOD) based on their integrity rather than their skill level. Since many first-generation lack the adequate skills to run positions the organization is operated less efficiently.

8.7) Division among youth

In addition to the segregation young Hmong adults experience between themselves and elders, they also experience segregation among their own peers in the Youth Committee. This occurs from the hierarchal structure that divides the different age groups. Young Hmong adults (18-30) generally take on organizational commitments to help operate the Youth Committee. Other young Hmong adults who are friends with these youth leaders will engage in functional commitments to support them. Similarly,

adolescent youth (12-17) also engage in functional commitments to assist the older age group, but often feel less valued for their work as they are less connected to their older peers. As a result, these adolescent youth become less involved with HAC compared to young Hmong adults.

8.8) Religious divide

A social division in the Hmong community, that appears to be lacking from the existing literature on Hmong communities in North America, is the growing religious divide between Hmong who have adopted the Christian belief (Believers) and those who have not (Non-Believers). In HAC, young Hmong adults experience challenges in creating relationships with peers from religious groups that differentiate from them. This is generally a result of the limited events and activities in HAC that provide opportunities for believers and non-believers to associate with each other, and negative preconceptions that the religious groups have of each other.

Believers feel that HAC generally hosts events that conflict with their religious beliefs and values. These events usually involve alcohol consumption and dancing that believers are uncomfortable with. Believers feel that HAC needs to create more events where believers are not forced to compromise their religious values, for example, educational workshops. Also, believers feel hurt when non-believers perceive them as self-righteous or judgmental simply because they choose not to be involved with most HAC events, and because they are Christians. Non-believers often question why believers avoid attending important cultural functions, such as the Hmong New Years. They also question the lack of attendance of believers at sporting events or activities such

as weekly volleyball sessions. Similarly, non-believers feel that believers perceive them negatively simply because they enjoy the activities that take place at HAC social events.

Segregation from members and lack of political power in the community create undesirable feelings of rejection that impact the developing social identity of young Hmong adults. This phenomenon illuminates the question that some studies (Nenga, 2004) have already explored: are youth being positively connected to their communities through volunteer participation? It appears for young Hmong adults, volunteering for HAC provides them opportunities to build relationships; however, social factors in the organization create barriers that keep them from developing the positive relationships that contribute to a healthy social identity.

8.9) Summary

The SI premise; Human Group Life is Multi-Perspectival can be seen in the varying perspectives of young Hmong adults that change as they encounter different experiences in HAC. Generally, these experiences are challenging for young Hmong adults who often encounter, within the community, relational differences that are cross-cultural, intergenerational and religious. These relational differences arise from the changing demographics, geographical structure and cultural organizational setting of the community. As a result of this social divide, young Hmong adults experience difficulties working with members who have different values and perspectives from them. This is more prevalent with first-generation members.

To avoid the undesirable feelings of stress and dissatisfaction that emerge from the challenges they encounter while volunteering for HAC, young Hmong adults will

slowly detach themselves from the organization by lessening their level of commitment. They remain involved with the organization, however, to express loyalty to friends and family who are also members of HAC and to support the cultivation of culture and identity in the community.

In the next section I discuss the socio-cultural implications of the relational differences in the community and map out the tension that evolves as a result of the conflict of interest between members.

SECTION III:

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSION

In chapter nine, I present the socio-cultural implications of my findings and some recommendations. I also present the limitations of this study, a reflection of my learning throughout this research project, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER 9

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Relational differences in the K-W Hmong community create social barriers and tension between members that divide members. In order to narrow the social gap between members, the Association may need to explore methods of social integration where tools and strategies are incorporated to harmoniously bring members together. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the socio-cultural implications of my findings and provide descriptive recommendations as suggestions to help HAC in its initial steps of improving community organization and the mobilization of members. Near the end of this chapter I discuss the contributions of this study to the field of social work and how it can inform community practice.

“Community organization is a planned process to activate a community to use its own social structures and any available resources (internal or external) to accomplish community goals, decided primarily by community representatives and consistent with local values.” (Bracht & Tsouros, 2003, p.201).

“Citizen participation refers to the social process of taking part (voluntarily) in either formal or informal activities, programs and/or discussion to bring about a planned change or improvement in community life, services, and/ or resources.” (Bracht & Tsouros, 2003, p.201).

I refer to the above concepts when discussing the implications of my findings and presenting effective strategies, tools, and methods that can be incorporated, as well as culturally modified, to improve community organization and citizen participation in HAC. These strategies, tools, and methods can also be applied to the general K-W Hmong community.

9.1) Constructing a Collective Ideology

Rubin & Rubin (2008) suggests community organizing begins with a solid ideology of core values and beliefs that guide people's understanding of how they envision their community and the paths that will lead them to this vision. This generally refers to the mission statement of an organization, which communicates direction and purpose followed by specific objectives to achieve this mission.

Young Hmong adults assume the ideology of HAC involves the value of sustaining cultural identity and bringing community members together through the planning and hosting of cultural events. However, since this assumed ideology is unwritten and stems from the values of first-generation male members, the purpose of the organization is unclear and questionable to volunteers who believe current activities, events and organizational structures conflict with the ideology of HAC itself as well as those of other community members.

In order to provide clarity and mutual understanding in the organization, HAC may want to explore the idea of re-creating an ideology that is inclusive of all community members. This new ideology could be officially documented to remind and guide members of their shared goals in the community and to inform outsiders of the

organization's purpose. To accomplish this goal, first and second-generation members might consider engaging in a process of community education (Homan, 1999) whereby members learn about issues in the community that stem from one another's differences. Some areas for consideration might be levels of acculturation, language abilities, political orientation, religious beliefs, socio-cultural values and work skills. By gaining knowledge of the diverse value systems of members, the community can begin to promote understanding and respect of one another's differences within a system of inclusivity.

9.2) Building a System of Sharing Information

In order to engage in community education, a system of sharing information may need to be developed to enable members to provide their feedback and knowledge through the use of communication tools and methods. When designing such a system, members may need to pay attention to the different communication styles of each generational group and the reasons why each prefers certain styles.. For instance, second-generation young Hmong adults prefer direct communication as they perceive this style to be efficient and effective for problem solving and channeling information. First-generation members, on the other hand, appear more concerned with respecting cultural protocols and social boundaries in the community, such as the cultural limitation of speaking too often with other people's wives, and thus these individuals engage in indirect forms of communication.

Other factors to consider when creating tools of communication are the language abilities of members and their skill and knowledge of modern technology. The following

paragraphs list methods of collecting information, which can be modified to meet the needs of members. I point out the challenges and benefits of these methods.

9.2.1) Surveying

Surveying allows members to anonymously provide their suggestions, advice, and comments without having to be verbally direct. This follows the style of communication among first-generation members of being indirect when expressing feedback or criticism. The survey can be modified into Hmong and English and can be distributed in a variety of ways: mail, online e-mail or the website, and handouts during public events. However, the difficulties of a survey pertain to members who are unfamiliar with how to fill out a survey and members who are illiterate in English and/or Hmong.

9.2.2) Public forums

A public forum invites all members to express their opinions and concerns openly with the whole community. This can take place at a particular location or can be done online. Public forums are ineffective for members that are uncomfortable with sharing their opinions openly and publicly; however, a public forum provides an opportunity for individuals who are comfortable with this process, mainly second-generation, to voice their concerns among community members.

9.2.3) Focus groups

Focus groups give members the opportunity to openly express their opinions in a controlled environment. Generally a facilitator is present to guide the discussion process.

This method may work for individuals who are more comfortable speaking in less open spaces. Then again, this method may continue to pose problems for individuals who perceive direct verbal statements as inappropriate. Also, given that the community is small, the possibility of participants and facilitators being of similar family relations may occur and impact the discussion process of the focus group. How participants perceive the facilitator may also influence the level of involvement of participants. It is important to be cognizant of these influencing factors when assigning participants and facilitators to a group. To prevent the risk of creating issues, the organization may want to consider investing money in hiring outsiders to be neutral facilitators.

9.2.4) One on one interviewing

This involves a conversation that occurs between an interviewer (the person bringing back the information to HAC) and an interviewee (the person providing their perspective of HAC). The conversation is generally audio-recorded and notes are taken. This method worked well with the participants of this study who felt comfortable expressing their views with a fellow peer. However, when applying this method, similar social and cultural values discussed in the above paragraph may also need to be considered for modifications of the method.

9.2.5) Introducing technological devices

While volunteering, young Hmong adults often encounter communication barriers that are related to the limited technological tools in HAC. This communication barrier keeps youth uninformed about the organization, mainly volunteer opportunities. The

following is a discussion of how HAC can incorporate current technological devices to create an intricate system of open line communication where members have access to one another through the use of technological devices.

Since younger generations are accustomed to communicating online, HAC might consider opening an e-mail account that can be used to channel information to members and among members. Currently, HAC does not maintain an ongoing website. A website is another online tool that the organization could develop to share updated information about the organization to community members and the public. This tool is attractive as it can internationally connect the K-W Hmong community to other Hmong communities in other countries.

Furthermore, wireless texts and calls are popular forms of communication that youth often use to converse with peers. Texting and phone calls are fast ways to advertise events and request volunteer help from youth members. By incorporating most recent technological devices of communication, HAC can begin to collect and share information with community members and outsiders in a more efficient manner. HAC will also create avenues for youth involvement since youth may be more interested to volunteer to become involved in developing designs or messaging systems that include new technology.

9.3) Building Capacity among Members

As mentioned in the section above, members of the community experience difficulties communicating with one another due to the lack of skill and knowledge they have in language and modern technology. In order to connect members and increase

member participation, HAC may want to build on the confidence of members by increasing their skills. This goal can be achieved through available training and educational programs, which provide opportunities for members to become connected through the sharing of learning experiences.

9.3.1) Developing computer literacy

This program can be designed as an introductory class for the use of modern computers as well as online tools of communication and research. Members can be given basic knowledge of computer software programs, such as Microsoft Word or Excel and shown procedures on how to maneuver through the web. The knowledge gained from this program can benefit members who struggle to understand a system of sharing information that involves the use of current technological devices.

9.3.2) Improving language fluency

First and second-generation members experience challenges in building relationships due to the different language skills of both groups. In the past, HAC participated in a government funded educational system known as Heritage School, where different cultural communities gathered in separate classrooms to teach children between the ages of 5 and 13 basic language skills and knowledge of their heritage. Unfortunately, this program did not extend to adolescent and young adults, which deprived these Hmong youth of continuing services to learn Hmong heritage and language. The lack of fluency in Hmong can be seen among the young Hmong adults of this study who are less fluent in Hmong than English. The development of language

literacy programs can help to break down linguistic barriers by providing training to first and second generations on reading, writing, and speaking skills in Hmong and English. This program might also include education on Hmong history, political structure, social organization, cultural formalities and values.

9.3.3) Promoting positive cultural identity

The concept of Hmong pride refers to the experience of feeling proud about one's cultural identity as Hmong. This concept is apparent among young Hmong adults who desire to cultivate their cultural identity by remaining connected to members of their community, mainly peers. However, given that members are primarily dissatisfied with the types of activities and events that reinforce social stratification in the community, they often associate negative feelings with these events. This fails to promote a positive cultural identity among members. In order to discontinue this pattern, HAC might want to explore new and fun activities that invite members to become familiar with one another in a positive atmosphere.

9.3.4) Mentorship

In the hierarchal structure of the Hmong community, members are segregated by age and thus experience difficulties building strong relationships with others who are older as well as younger than they are. To help connect the different age groups, a mentorship program could be introduced to encourage older members to mentor and tutor younger ones. This can be most helpful for younger generations who seek personal support and role models from whom they can learn. The mentorship program can also be

seen as a social networking tool as it connects educated and skilled members with those who are not.

9.4) Developing Leadership

“Remember that leaders come in both genders, all sizes, all ages, and from all geographic areas and neighborhoods.” Marian Wright Edelman

The above quote can be an important message to keep in mind when exploring ways to develop leadership in HAC. Young Hmong adults often describe their reasons for being less involved with HAC as being related to their lack of political power for influencing change in the organization. The same can be said for women and children who are also denied opportunities to participate in the leadership of their community. Young Hmong adults also feel there is a lack of trust in the organization given the recurring experience of being disappointed with activity plans and promises that fall through. In order to increase volunteer participation among all members, political power in the community may need to be shared and trust may need to be re-built. The following are some suggestions on how to improve leadership in HAC.

9.4.1) Measuring levels of involvement

HAC may want to develop methods of measuring levels of involvement to pinpoint areas in the organization where groups are being excluded and concentrated. With this knowledge, HAC can begin to even the imbalance in the organization and integrate members into a variety of areas. Some possible ways of measuring involvement include the following:

- opportunity for and level of decision-making or advising;
- amount and duration of time devoted to goal activities;
- representativeness of citizen and leader groups formed;
- degree of local ownership perceived and/or achieved;
- satisfaction with the processes of participation.

(Bracht & Tsouros, 2003, p. 201)

9.4.2) Inclusivity through structural changes

In order to begin the process of sharing power, changes in the leadership might need to be made where all voices from the community are incorporated into the administration and the board of directors. A symmetrical leadership arrangement could be developed where seats are reserved for women and youth, and cultural formalities are modified to create a circular system of dialogue where members are free to offer their opinions and suggestions, without ridicule, during meetings.

A symmetrical leadership arrangement can be seen in the Youth Committee of 2006-07, where titles were modified to clarify each role to the community. All positions were shared by more than one person to avoid the exploitation of power that was being invested in one person. This also helped to share ownership of responsibilities and to increase opportunities for youth to participate in leadership. Furthermore, inclusive language was introduced to the committee to promote equality among leaders. For instance, youth leaders perceived each other as an “executive team” and referred to one another as team players. The structural arrangement was as follows:

- 2 Presidents – Managed the committee by assuring that roles and duties were being accomplished by youth leaders.
- 2 Sports Coordinators – Organized sports activities, such as volleyball.
- 1 Communications Coordinator – Channeled information to youths and kept a record of all members.
- 1 Graphics Design Coordinator – Created designs for publications, advertisements and committee logo.
- 2 Events Coordinators – Organized fundraising events, such as parties.
- 2 Community Liaison Officers – Connected to resources in the local community.
- 1 Webmaster – Designed and updated the content of the HAC website.

Overall, by introducing a symmetrical structure into the administration of HAC, members can begin to see one another as equal team players who share accountability for the responsibilities being carried out by the administration.

9.4.3) Providing clarity of leadership roles

In order to share accountability and work cohesively as a team, players may need to become informed of the responsibilities attached to their position and the positions of others in order to understand how all are interrelated. To achieve this goal, an official policy book could be created to outline the structure of HAC along with the job description of each administrative and BOD position. The development of an official policy book can help alleviate the lack of knowledge volunteers and general members

have about the administration, and inform them of whom to approach when seeking advice or resources for a particular project or need.

9.4.4) Building trust among members

Although there might be numerous ways to build trust in the community, I provide recommendations that target three main areas where participants of this study have identified a need for developing trust. The first is honoring time commitments (Tropman, 1998) of members. HAC may want to develop methods to help efficiently operate events within their scheduled time frames. This helps members rearrange their daily schedules accordingly.

Secondly, leaders may want to respect the agenda (Tropman, 1998) of an event by informing members about the agenda prior to its occurrence. This gives members time to prepare for what will happen during an event or meeting. On the day of a scheduled function, leaders may also want to ensure that the agenda is being followed so that what was anticipated is actually offered. Lastly, the integrity of leaders (Tropman, 1998) could be improved by being honest and direct about what the organization can or cannot give to the community. Leaders can determine this by assessing the available resources and monetary funds of the organization along with the needs of the community. I discuss this further in the next segment.

9.5) Identifying Available Resources

According to Homan (1999, p.30) “a healthy community acknowledges its resources and uses them to foster growth of the community and its members.” HAC can

explore resources from both inside and outside the organization. Resources inside the organization are the skills and knowledge of members. Resources outside HAC include natural elements, and human-built resources in the mainstream society, such as schools. By mapping out available resources, HAC can become knowledgeable of its competency level, develop integrity by informing members about the services it can deliver to the community, and build upon the gaps in resources. Since HAC is generally dependant upon the helping hands of its members, it may want to focus on building resources through relationships.

As of now, HAC has mapped out the community through the gathering of statistics. These statistics illustrate the Hmong population in terms of their geographical location, educational background, different age groups and generations, marital status and gender ratio. These statistics give the Association an idea of the changing demographics of the community and of its socio-economic background. HAC has also made efforts to build connections with Hmong communities outside of Canada, primarily in the USA. However, HAC may want to learn more about its community by conducting a needs assessment survey where members can communicate their needs as well as what they can offer to the community.

9.6) Developing Support Systems

Young Hmong adults believe HAC is developing at a slower pace compared to other cultural communities such as the Chinese because it has limited connections to outside groups in the mainstream local community. HAC may want to explore available organizations that offer advice and resources to help non-profit organizations develop

strategies for organizational improvements. These resources can also provide suggestions on how to incorporate methods of resolving conflict in communities. Building relationships with other cultural groups can be a supportive and educational experience since these cultural groups likely share similar struggles of acculturating into mainstream culture and thus can share the steps they have taken to address issues in their communities.

Some recommendations were provided in this section to help direct HAC in developing community organization and civic participation in the community. However, there are many more strategies and methods that can be further explored, as well as current models of community organization that may have been developed and applied in other Hmong communities. The journey to make improvements in HAC and the Hmong community, however, can only begin with the effort of community members who are willing to take risks and implement new ways of integrating members into the Hmong community.

9.7) Contributions to Social Work

This study provides information about the multifaceted issues that can emerge when cultural communities such as the Hmong of K-W organize, within a Canadian western framework unlike their own, a non-profit Volunteer Association. This is apparent in the Hmong Association of Canada where intergenerational and cross-cultural differences exist among members. These differences have led to a decrease in volunteer participation among members, primarily second-generation young Hmong adults.

The knowledge that emerged from this study helps to inform social work practice in the areas of community development and civic participation. There are many variables that may need to be considered and further explored when providing cultural communities with tools to help facilitate change, organize members and develop strategies to increase participation. I present some of these variables and provide examples learned from this study.

9.7.1) Societal structure of the community

Cultural communities' possess developed structures and community organizing methods that have worked for them in their homelands. For the Hmong, community organizing is done to maintain kinship and clanship ties. The Hmong also prefer to live in close proximity in order to trade favors and share resources. However, there are cultural social boundaries in the Hmong community that stratify members as a method of avoiding issues that could break community relations. Thus, it is important to understand the cultural structure of communities in order to identify what is and what is not working in the new geographical areas. This understanding serves to honor the cultural structure of the community, while introducing new methods to assist communities in their development.

9.7.2) Levels of acculturation

It may be important to examine the acculturation process of cultural communities and how this process may have impacted their changing values and beliefs. Certain characteristics to consider when looking at the acculturation of communities are: the

differing generations in the community; cultural values; gender; social location; and religious beliefs. These characteristics may influence the level of acculturation of certain groups in the community and thus help to identify challenges that are cross-cultural and intergenerational.

9.7.3) Historical background

Learning the history of a cultural community and their reasons for coming to a new country helps to provide perspective on the challenges they experience when acculturating into western society. For the Hmong, coming to Canada was not to pursue a better life as is mostly assumed of immigrants. In fact the Hmong were happy in Laos but were forced to leave the country for political reasons. Therefore, the Hmong have often experienced difficulties accepting change as it was not their desire to pursue change in a new country. This may help one to understand the resistance that first-generation Hmong have towards outsiders and accepting external resources.

9.7.4) Social, economic & demographic changes

Cultural communities have undergone many changes that are demographic, economic, social, and cultural. By identifying these changes one can begin to look at the available resources in the community that have developed since their arrival in Canada. One can also learn of the shared interests, goals, and needs of community members, as well as the previous and current challenges that have been experienced in the community as a result of conflicting perspectives.

9.7.5) Relationships and behavior patterns

How individual members in cultural communities perceive their relationships to themselves may also influence how and why members build relationships with others. In the Hmong culture and in other Asian cultural communities, the 'self' is perceived as a part of family relationships, compared to western culture, where the "self" is perceived as separate. This perspective impacts the behavior patterns of people, such as their actions and the life choices they make. These actions and life choices also influence loved ones.

Overall, the knowledge produced in this study has helped to present some of the many variables that may need to be considered when working to help a cultural community develop and improve the participation of community members.

CHAPTER 10

LIMITATIONS, REFLECTIONS & CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I present the limitations of my findings, reflections of what I have learned throughout this research project, and a conclusion of the knowledge produced in this study.

10.1) Limitations

My social location and reputation in the Hmong community may have influenced the data collection of this study. Participants may have interacted and responded to me according to how they perceived my social role and thus could have been limiting or selective of what they shared. Some may have questioned the extent to which I valued the well being of the community as a graduate student and researcher. Also, my position as a youth leader in HAC may have influenced the types of young Hmong adults being drawn to and away from the study.

Furthermore, the sample of this study gives an impartial portrait of married and single young Hmong adults living in K-W. Of the 18 participants, 2 are married. This imbalance drowns out the voices of married young Hmong adults who experience volunteering differently from their single peers as their marital status presents them with different cultural expectations and social boundaries. Recruiting married young Hmong adults was a challenge as these individuals were less accessible and hesitant to participate as they have greater invested relationships in the community. As someone who is

divorced, I may portray myself as devaluing of these types of relationships and thus untrustworthy.

The study also overlooks external potential factors that may influence the lack of volunteer participation among young Hmong adults, such as socio-economic changes. Many of the participants mentioned financial hardships and school commitments as volunteer challenges; however, these challenges were not further explored. This failed to build upon knowledge on what is happening outside of HAC that is affecting young Hmong adults and their participation in the community.

The study is exclusive to one of the three youth age groups in the Hmong community; young Hmong adults. Challenges experienced by other youth did not emerge from this study and could be further explored to capture a better understanding of overlooked volunteer challenges among Hmong youth. Also, the research population represents one generational group in the Hmong community. In order to capture a clearer picture of the interlocking generational differences that exist in the Hmong community, future research may want to explore the different demographic components.

On a grander scale, this research is a case study that is representative of an Asian cultural community in Kitchener-Waterloo, which has proven to share similar qualities of other Asian populations. However, in order to understand the common widespread challenges that cut across the many diverse cultural communities in Canada, future research may want to conduct case studies that look at volunteering in other cultural groups from different parts of the world.

10.2) Reflections

When looking back to the beginning of this thesis, I am reminded of the extent to which I was unaware of the work that was required for such an accomplishment. For the past two years, I have planned and performed the necessary tasks needed to create a research project that would inform the community, through the voices of its youth, of the desirable changes needed to increase volunteer participation. I have endured days and nights isolated from friends and family processing and writing the knowledge provided to me by the participants and now that I have come to the end, I find myself anxiously awaiting the outcomes of this research study and the response of community members.

Though this journey may appear to have been grueling and long, in hindsight it has been a rewarding experience. It has validated my personal experience as a young Hmong adult and it expands on my understanding of the varying social roles that I possess in the community. As a researcher and graduate student, I have learned humility as I have come to perceive myself as the learner who has gained much knowledge from my Hmong peers, the young Hmong adults of this study. These individuals have shaped my understanding of the Hmong community. They have also challenged my biases that surfaced when my lack of knowledge (of cultural formalities and specific gestures that signify meaning) may have influenced how I interpret situations, perceive others, and interact with members.

As a young Hmong adult I have learned compassion and understanding. These are elements that are portrayed by the participants of this study who have been set apart by their social characteristics, values and beliefs, yet who are bound to one another by their shared fear of rejection, feelings of resentment, and desire to sustain cultural identity

among the Hmong in Canada. These shared experiences have brought them to this study and have helped people, like myself, understand how we members of the K-W Hmong community have much to learn, both from our differences and from our misunderstandings

As a Hmong woman, I have learned the value of patience and time. Given that women generally build trust, integrity, and reciprocal relationships through volunteer activities that fall under conventional female roles, I understand how members may continue to question my level of commitment as I embrace unfamiliar methods of helping out, such as this research project, and as I pursue prospective career goals outside the community. Similarly, as a Hmong daughter, I understand how my actions portray myself as selfish as I separate from my family to follow paths of personal importance to me. Thus, patience and time is needed to help family and community members understand my intentions and how certain actions can be perceived as performances that are connected to the community.

Being a peer of the participants of this study, I have learned the importance of honoring relationships with those who collaborate with me to make change. Unfortunately, during the writing stages of this project, I became withdrawn from the community. Friendships that were built became stagnant and my carelessness to update participants of my progress disconnected ties. It is my hope to rebuild these connections as I re-immense into the community as a person who has been transformed by the knowledge produced in this study.

Above all, I have learned that a healthy community begins in the home and as a mother who has endured the pain of being away from my child to complete this research

project, I have learned the value of creating a positive home environment as a foundation for the work that is to be done in the community.

10.3) Conclusion

The Hmong community of Kitchener-Waterloo is one of many cultural communities in Canada that has learned to organize within a western structural setting, the Hmong Association of Canada (HAC). Like most communities, however, the Hmong struggle to sustain and improve community involvement among their members, mainly their youth who are perceived as the future of their community.

Since the development of cultural communities impacts the social and economic growth of Canada, one would think that there would be a greater effort to understand the unique challenges youth from cultural communities experience when volunteering. However, there appears to be a lack of knowledge of this topic and in attempts to contribute to this gap, this research study strives to understand the challenges of volunteering experienced by young Hmong adults living in K-W who identify as members of the Hmong Association of Canada.

Symbolic interactionism is used as an approach to analyze the perspectives of the young Hmong adults of this study and has guided the emergence of social processes of volunteering that are unique to the sub-culture of volunteering in HAC. Overall, the findings show that young Hmong adults desire to be connected to their communities but become disengaged from their commitments with HAC as they experience challenges volunteering in an established first-generation structure. Young Hmong adults disengage to avoid intergenerational and cross-cultural issues as well as undesirable feelings of hurt.

This knowledge helps to inform the Hmong community of the changing socio-cultural factors that have impacted the decrease of volunteerism among youth and provides ideas on how to address the issues. Meanwhile the study also presents hope to the community, as the young Hmong adults of this study show devotion, persistence and openness to creating a new collective community vision

The experiences of young Hmong adults echo those of other youth from other communities in Canada. Youth generally feel disconnected from the older generation of their communities as a result of their exclusion from the planning and development of policies or social structures in society. As one continues to explore this phenomenon, one can begin to further identify these areas of exclusion and understand how youth may feel marginalized as well as isolated from those who possess power. Most importantly, by listening to our youth, we can learn to re-create new strategies and methods of integrating them into society that is inclusive of their voices.

Although the issues are complex youth have proven time and again that they too possess the power to make change and desire to be included in the planning processes of their communities in order to explore their potential and to build positive relationships with other members of society.

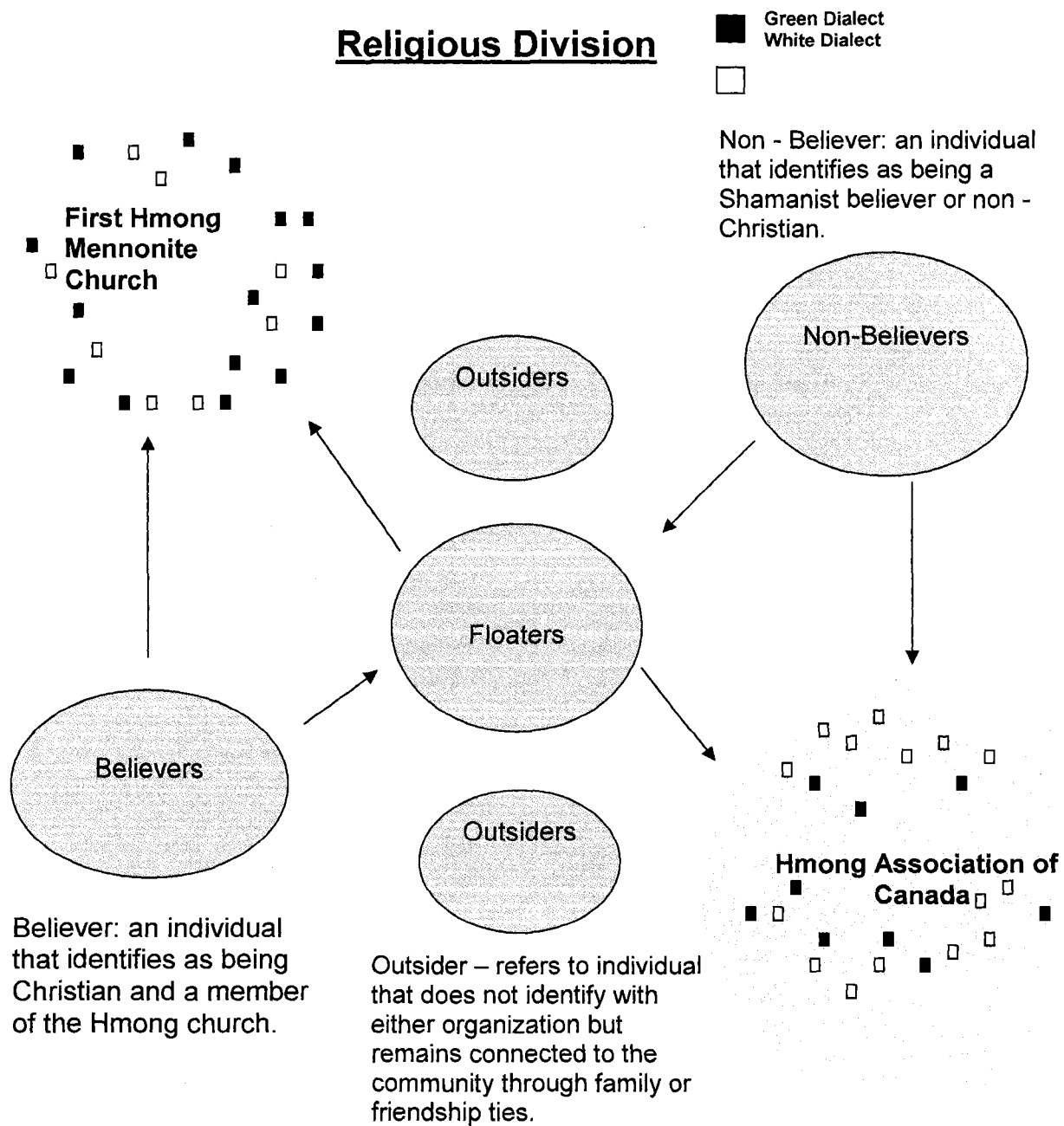
Appendix A

Clan Names

1. Change
 2. Hang
 3. Her
 4. Kue
 5. Khang, Phang
 6. Lee (li, ly), Lor
 7. Moua (Mua)
 8. Song
 9. Thao
 10. Vang, Cheng, Fang, Vue
 11. Xiong
 12. Yang
- (Thao, 1999, p. 13)

Appendix B

Religious Division



Appendix C

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Challenges of Volunteerism Among Young Canadian Hmong Adults in a Cultural Community Organization

Melanie Heu (principal investigator)
Ginette Lafreniere (research advisor)

You, _____ are invited to participate in a research study called Challenges of Volunteerism for Young Canadian Hmong Adults in a Cultural Community Organization. The purpose of this study is to learn more about young Hmong adults and the challenges they experience when volunteering for the Hmong Association of Canada (HAC).

The study is being conducted by Melanie Heu who is a Masters of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Ginette Lafreniere who is an Associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University and the Director of the Social Innovation Research Group.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

The process of this study will include:

- A recruitment of 15 to 20 research participants.
- An interview with each participant lasting about 1-2 hours long. The interview will include questions about yourself, your volunteer experience with HAC, your perceptions of HAC, and your connection to HAC as well as the Hmong community in Kitchener Waterloo.
- The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed (keeping information confidential) for inputting into N Vivo, a qualitative software program, where the information shared from all participants will be analyzed.
- The results of this research will be compiled into an academic thesis that will be available to the public at the Faculty of Social Work of Wilfrid Laurier University.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

The results of this study could provide some benefits to the development of volunteer initiatives by the Hmong Association of Canada that considers potential barriers or challenges experienced by young Hmong adults. However, such changes cannot be guaranteed by the researcher. The researcher does not anticipate that there will be any risks to each participant though the interview process could generate discussion

about sensitive topics that may be upsetting. The interview can be paused or stopped as needed to ensure the comfort and safety of the participant and if desired, the researcher can identify potential support services or counseling options.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You, the research participant, will remain unknown and unconnected to any direct quotes made public about the research study such as a newspaper article, a journal, or an academic thesis. Research data and records identifying you, the research participant, will be protected by the research team and locked away in the office of the Social Innovation Research Group located on the fourth floor of the School of Social Work of Wilfrid Laurier University. These documents containing research data will be kept in this location for 2 years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. Please note that accessibility to the raw research data will be limited to the research team, which includes Melanie Heu and her research advisor Ginette Lafreniere.

However, all audio-taped interviews will only be transcribed by the primary researcher, Melanie Heu who will keep all audio-taped and transcribed interviews confidential. Any information collected from the interviews will be stored away in the same location where all research data connected to this research study will be kept, as previously mentioned and destroyed 2 years after the completion of the study.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study you will receive a chance to win a \$100. Your name will be placed into a draw that will be drawn at the end of the study. Your odds of winning the draw are about one in 20. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, your name will remain in the draw.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,*) you may contact the researcher, Melanie Heu, at melanie_heu@yahoo.ca, and 519-885-6605. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

Each research participant will be given a copy of their own interview after it has been transcribed. All research participants are welcome to send the researcher, Melanie Heu, comments about the transcribed interview.

The researcher's analysis will be compiled into an academic thesis that will contribute to her academic requirements. Please be aware that publications (such as news or academic journal articles) and or other forms of public distribution of this study's finding may result. This could happen for an indefinite period beginning as early as spring of 2008. Participants will be notified when the completed academic thesis is released. Participants can further access the thesis by contacting Wilfrid Laurier University.

In addition, the researcher intends to present the final report to the Hmong Association of Canada in a public forum presentation. Participants will be notified of the confirmed date and where the presentation is scheduled to take place.

If you would like Melanie Heu to contact you regarding the completion of the final academic thesis please indicate by stating your preferred mode of contact and contact information (phone, email, mail etc.) here:

Please check one of the following boxes.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, my quotation may be used in this research study.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, my quotations may not be used in this research study.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____
Date _____

Investigator's signature _____
Date _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Background Information (This information will be gathered by the researcher at the beginning of the interview session)

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Marital Status
4. Clan name (The kinship group to which the person belong)
5. Educational background
6. Country of Birth
7. Languages spoken
8. Membership: member or non-member

Potential Interview Questions:

1. When did you become involved with HAC and for how long?
2. What is or was the nature of your volunteer involvement? Describe this experience. Probe: what do you do or did you do as a volunteer?
3. How did you become connected with HAC?
4. What motivated you to become involved and what were your expectations?
5. Tell me what you know about HAC, its structure, social network, objectives etc.
6. Describe what volunteerism means to you.
7. What kinds of relationships have you built while volunteering for HAC? Probe: Did you build any friendships or professional relationships? How did they form? Were they positive? If so, how? If not, why?
8. Do you think there are sub groups that exist in HAC? An example of a sub group would be the youth. There may even be sub groups within the youth such as, executive members vs. youth volunteers.
9. Do you believe HAC values its volunteers? If so, how? If not, why?
10. What have been the benefits and challenges to your volunteer involvement with HAC?

11. Are there certain enhancements or changes that you think would be necessary for the overall direction of HAC?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add

Appendix E

List of Potential Support Services

Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Region Branch

Address: 67 King Street E, Kitchener N2G 2K4

Phone: 519-744-7645

Fax: 519-744-7066

Email: cmhawrb@golden.net

Hours: Mon-Fri 9-5

Catholic Family Counselling Centre, Region of Waterloo

Address: 400 Queen Street S, Kitchener N2G 1W7

Phone: 519-743-6333

Fax: 519-743-3496

Email: cfccentr@golden.net

Hours: Mon-Thu 9-8:30, Fri-Sat 9-5

To Apply: Appointment Required

Kitchener-Waterloo Counselling Services Inc

Address: 480 Charles St E, Kitchener N2G 4K5

Phone: 519

Fax: 519-884-7000

Email: info@kwcounselling.com

Hours: Mon-Thu 8:30-8, Fri 8:30-5

To Apply: By referral * By individual request * appointment required

St. Mary's Counselling

Address: 30 Duke Street West, Suite 600, Kitchener N2H 3W5

Phone: 519-745-2585

Fax: 519-745-5808

Email: smcs@smgh.ca

Hours: Mon-Thu 9-5

Lutherwood Family Counselling Centre

Address: 35 Dixon Street, Cambridge N1R 7A6

Phone: 519- 622-1670

Email: lfcs@lutherwood.ca

Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30-8

To Apply: By referral * By individual request * appointment required

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