

COMBATING RACISM, BIGOTRY, AND PREJUDICE: PRELIMINARY  
RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORAL HISTORY CD ON  
THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HMONG AMERICANS  
PLAN B PAPER

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Master of Science Degree  
With a Major in

Applied Psychology

Approved: (4) Semester Credits

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Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
December 2002

## Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Julie Keown-Bomar and Kaying Lo who were my two strong hands and great investigation team made this research happen. A million thanks to my very special mentor and best friend ever, Mrs. Mary Riordan, who always kept reminding, encouraging, and motivating me to pursue this project. And most importantly I want to thank my investigation advisor, graduate program director, and professor, Dr. Richard Tafalla, who helped me and directed me everything all the time upon completion of this thesis.

I could not give enough thanks to my funding sponsors, the Wisconsin Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Otto Bremer Foundation, the state and federal funds, and the University of Wisconsin-Stout Diversity Plan 2008. I also want to thank to other significant supporters including the University of Wisconsin-Stout Chancellor, the Provosts, the deans, Multicultural Student Services, Stout Solutions, College of Arts and Science, Department of Social Science, Speech Communication, Foreign Languages, Theatre and Music Department, University of Wisconsin-Stout staff/faculty, students, and friends.

Lastly, I want to express my deepest appreciation to my wife who supported me side-by-side throughout my entire educational career from high school to college. Without the strengths of all my beautiful children (Mai tao, Phim, Linda, Yensiv and Destinee) who are fun to be with and always be the foundation, energy, courage, and mirror that thrilled me to study hard and to work tireless everyday.

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**ABSTRACT**

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(Title)	COMBATING RACISM, BIGOTRY, AND PREJUDICE: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORAL HISTORY CD ON THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HMONG AMERICANS		
<b>Applied Psychology</b> (Graduate Major)	<b>Dr. Richard Tafalla</b> (Research Advisor)	<b>December/2002</b> (Month/Year)	<b>57</b> (No. of Pages)
<b>American Psychological Association</b> (Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)			

Research indicates that in the last half century, the population of minority immigrants has been growing rapidly in the United States. Despite its growth, research indicates that racial and ethnic discrimination is common in the United States (Duany, 1998).

The objective of this preliminary study is to determine the factors of prejudice and discrimination against new immigrants in general and specifically to look at the prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong Americans. The focal point of this study is to gather data and recommendations from the focus group informants. The data then will be used to develop a multi-media (CD-ROM based) oral history on the cultural heritage of Hmong Americans, which

will serve as an educational tool for individuals and the general public to be able to access to the Hmong culture, history, language, and arts.

A Focus Group Interview Guide was used to guide and engage conversations with each individual's interviews and the focus group interviews. The primary topics that will be explored and discussed during each interview session include Hmong culture and history.

As the results, the factors of prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong Americans were due to the lack of cultural awareness, misinterpretation, language barrier, misjudgment, fault of assumptions, and/or rumors. The Hmong have faced the following types of prejudice and discrimination: verbal harassment, poor services in organizational settings, physical harassment, avoidance in institutional settings, and police mistreatment.

When the CD project is completed, it would serve as an educational key to combat racism, bigotry, and prejudice and discrimination. The result of this study highly corresponded to the hypothesis of the development of a CD that based on the cultural heritage of the Hmong Americans. The following topics were cited by the focus group informants as very important to put into the content of the CD, which include the Hmong culture, history, language, and arts.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Every day, people travel to different countries around the world seeking adventure in a society with different people and cultures. Global tourists are unconcerned with racial conflict when they arrive at novel destinations because they do not plan to live in that particular place forever. Whatever they experience during their trips would help them gain knowledge about the people and culture that they are visiting. Even though the tourists may encounter prejudice and discrimination, there is no lasting effect on their lives because after they return home things become normal.

However, when people migrate from their own homeland to a different country for a permanent resettlement, they may not only experience a different niche or environment, but they may face a totally new social world, often marked by social stratification based on class, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and gender. New immigrants bring their own culture, language and conceptions of their identities; they often do not mesh well with the ideological constructs of the receiving society. For instance, race and color have played a crucial role in the formation of culture and language identity among most immigrants in the United States (Duany, 1998). Research indicates that in the last half century, the minority immigrant population has increased rapidly in this country. Instead the growth of cultural diversity research indicates that racial and ethnic discrimination is big issue in the United States (Duany, 1998).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

As noted above, the population of minority immigrants has increased quickly in the United States during the Cold War (Duany, 1998). Despite the growing prospect of different cultural diversity, studies and surveys of whites and non-whites indicate that racial and ethnic

discrimination is common in the United States, especially for the new immigrant communities (Sanchez, 1999). For instance, the Hmong American community who came to this country after 1975 has faced a lot of tragic problems including mental, physical, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and social problems due to prejudice and discrimination. However, there have been very few studies on the Hmong community.

### *Significance of the Study*

Most reports of prejudice and discrimination on the Hmong come from the news media or personal stories rather than from social science. Prejudice and discrimination is a relatively new experience for the Hmong. According to the “Crises, Continuity, and the Refugee Journal,” these incidents are due to the lack of knowledge, misinterpretation, poor communication, language barriers, cultural differences, and rumors (Hones, 1999). Host communities have limited knowledge and information about the Hmong. Most people don’t know who the Hmong are, where they are coming from, and what their culture or custom is (Koltyk, 1998).

Therefore, my hypothesis is that if the lack of awareness, knowledge, and information has caused prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong, developing a CD that contains the most important information about the Hmong people and their culture to be used by teachers and educators would help to combat prejudice and discrimination. I also hypothesize that if the limitation of Hmong resources has created a cultural deprivation for the Hmong community then developing this CD would help to preserve the Hmong cultural heritage.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to gather data about the factors of prejudice and discrimination against Hmong Americans and the tragic experiences they have faced. After the completion of the data analysis, the data then will use for the development of a multi-media (CD-

ROM based) oral history on the cultural heritage of Hmong Americans. The goal of this study is to gather the most important information and suggestions of what to put into the content of the CD. The end product of the CD is to be served as an educational tool for individuals, students, teachers, professions, schools, and the general public to access to the Hmong culture, history, language, and arts.

### *Focus Group Interview Guide*

This study focused on the following objectives that would lead to the potential development of the CD project. These objectives were arranged as the discussion topics for preservation of Hmong cultural heritage. A Focus Group Interview Guide of questionnaire was used to guide and engage discussion between the informants and the research investigators as followed:

1. What do you feel the young Hmong people need to learn today that is not currently being addressed in schools and possibly at home?
2. What information do you feel those outside of the Hmong community, need to learn about Hmong people, to create more tolerance and acceptance?
3. What information do you feel will transmit the values inherent in Hmong culture and stories that all people should be aware of in order to preserve and thrive the Hmong culture in a changing world?
4. Who are the knowledgeable community members that can help in making of this CD project?
5. Who do you think are the historians and spokesperson of the Hmong community?
6. What other primary resources (archival photographs, historic texts, maps, documents, etc.) are available and can be accessed?
7. What are the most important parts of the Hmong culture you want to put into the CD-ROM?

### *Definition of Terms*

**Hmong** is a group of people originally living in China and then spread through Southeast Asia.

**Hmong Americans** is a group of Southeast Asian refugees whom came from Laos to resettle in the United States after 1975.

**Non-Hmong** is the mainstream population.

**Immigrant** is a person who leaves his/her own country to settle permanently in another country.

**Prejudice** is the bias behavior or irrational hostility toward a particular person, race, religion, or group.

**Discrimination** is the action that a person or a group of people acts upon the basis of prejudice against the other person or a group of people.

**Phathet Lao** is the Lao communist government regime.

**Hmoob** is Hmong in Hmong spelling.

**Haiv Hmoob** is the Hmong nation or Hmong people.

**Kab lis kev cai** is culture.

**Neeb yaig** is traditional healing rituals or spiritually healing.

**Cov xeem neeg** is the clans.

**Kev sib txheeb** is kinship

**Coj** is to rule, to control, to guide, or to lead.

**Huab tais** is the king.

**Qauv** is structure(s).

**Nuj nqis** is value(s).

**Kab tshoob kev kos** is marriage traditional ceremony/wedding celebration.

**Kev noj tsiab peb caug** is New Year celebration.

**Keeb kwm** is history.

**Ncauj piav keeb kwm** is oral history.

**Tuam Tshoj teb** is China.

**Xov Tshoj teb** is Southeast Asia.

**Tsov Rog Nyab Laj** is the Vietnam War.

**Lub neej** is life or the way of living.

**Los Tsuas teb** is Laos.

**Thaib teb** is Thailand.

**Lus hais** is oral language.

**Ntaub ntawv** is written language.

**Lus Hmoob Dawb** is the White Hmong dialect.

**Lus Hmoob Ntsuab/Lees** is the Green Hmong dialect.

**Txuj ci** is talent or arts.

**Dab neeg** is folk tale(s).

**Kwv txhiaj** is traditional songs or poems.

**Paj huam** is poems.

**Paj ntaub** is embroideries or needle works.

**Tsoos tsho** is costumes or clothing

**Muaj** is to have

### *Organization of the Study*

This thesis paper is organized into five (5) main sections. Chapter I contains an introduction, which includes the statement of problem, significance of problem, purpose of the study, focus group interview guide, definition of terms, and organization of the study. Chapter II

provides a review of literature that includes the history of immigration in the United States; racial problems that immigrants have faced in general; theoretical bases of prejudice and discrimination; and prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong Americans, Hmong history, Hmong culture, prejudice and discrimination: tragic experience of Hmong Americans, the limitation of Hmong cultural practices in the United States, and a summary.

Chapter III will describe the methodology including informants (subjects), instruments, and procedures. Chapter IV presents the results section that include a major category, a subcategory, the responses to each interview question, all the tables, informant feedbacks, and direct quotes from the informants. Chapter V contains the discussions, which includes the limitation of the study, the implications for intervention, suggestions for developing the CD project, recommendations, and conclusions.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

#### *History of Immigration in the United States*

Before the name, “United States of America” was known to the world, this land belonged to the Native Americans. To the native people at that time, this country was a free land because each native nation only occupied remote territories that they claimed as their homeland. No one ruled and/or ran the whole land from the East Coast (Atlantic) to the West Coast (Pacific). If we look at the history of the United States, this nation was made and constructed by immigrants and refugees from all over the world (Loeb & Friendman, 1993). Early immigration to North America was set in motion by European explorers. First of all, the Spanish explorers founded St. Augustine, Florida in 1565, and the English settled in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 (Sanchez, 1999). The European and Canadian immigration movement in the 1820’s was significant until the 1950’s. From 1960’s to the present time, people from other parts of the world arrived in the United States as refugees or as voluntary immigrants (Gabaccia, 1999).

It is important to know that during the last thirty years, two transformations have led to major rethinking about the role of immigrants in American society. First, the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act and other global events have radically transformed the point of origin of most immigrants came to the United States, away from Europe and toward Latin American and Asia (Sanchez, 1999). Secondly, the emergence, growth, and maturity of scholarship focusing on African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans has changed the treatment of race and ethnicity from a peripheral concern to one of central importance in understanding justice and equality in American history (Sanchez, 1999).

According to a journal called "Society," it presented the following reasons that immigrants cited for choosing to come to the United States. About one quarter (26%) said they came here to seek a better job or business opportunity. Another quarter (26%) said their primary motivation was to be with their family member(s) who are living in this country already. Approximately one out of every five immigrants (19%) stated that they came to the United States primarily for educational purpose. About one in every eight (13%) sought political asylum and freedom, while only 2% said that religious freedom was the main reason that they chose to come (Society, 1995). The latest American immigrant groups to arrive in large numbers are Latinos and Asians (Sanchez, 1999).

A bizarre framework of federal racial and ethnic classification exists which divides all people into social categories: Native American, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and "other" whites. "Blond, blue-eyed, third-generation Argentinean-Americans who speak not a word of Spanish are categorized as minorities, yet dark-skinned Muslim immigrants from Egypt, speaking not a word of English, are labeled members of the white majority" (Loeb & Friedman, 1993). The confusion over racial and ethnic identity, and the nationalistic discourse over who is "American" and who is not, continues to divide this nation. Rhetoric is one thing, but racial conflict between minority groups and the majority have become the main sources of prejudice and discrimination in the United States and may continue to cause ethnic tension (Unz, 1999). In the 2000 United States census Hispanics outnumber African Americans. By the year 2050, non-Hispanic whites will account for only 54 percent of the population, down from the current 74 percent (deCourcy Hinds, 2000). The addition of immigrants to the United States population from many different backgrounds fosters many cultural conflicts and stereotypes. In fact, racial problems, such as prejudice and discrimination against minority groups, had increased significantly in the last three



decades (Sanchez, 1999). In order to understand this complex issue, we need to understand both sides of the issue, the immigrant communities and the host communities.

### *Racial Problems that Immigrants Have Faced in General*

The population of minority immigrants has been growing rapidly in the last half century. Despite the growing diversity in the United States, studies and surveys of whites and non-whites suggest that racial and ethnic discrimination is common (Sanchez, 1999).

Racial conflict is one of this nation's oldest social problems that happen from decades to decades (deCoury Hinds, 2000). Ideally, the constitution of the United States was created as the highest principle or the supreme law to guide and protect its citizens from all uncivil actions or unmoral behaviors. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, tried to promote tolerance and more equality for all of America's citizens. Despite the ideals of the Civil Rights and Human Rights Acts movements of the 1960s that guaranteed to protect every citizen from discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin; racial prejudice and discrimination still remain as one of the biggest issue in this country today.

### *Definition of Prejudice and Discrimination*

**Prejudice** refers to “a negative attitude toward members of some social group based solely on their membership in that group,” and **discrimination** refers to “negative behaviors directed toward members of social groups who are the object of prejudice” (Baron & Byrne, 2000). **Prejudice** also means a preconceived judgment, opinion or assumption about particular groups of people. These stereotypes are usually based on generalizations and a lack of close experiences with the issues, people, or behaviors. On the other hand, **discrimination** refers to the differential treatment of an issue, a person, or a behavior based on a prejudice (Esposito, 1999).

### *Theoretical Bases of Prejudice and Discrimination*

There are many theories that attempt to explain the cause of social and racial prejudice and discrimination, but none of them perfectly describe this phenomenon. The two seem particularly relevant to this study are Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory. The first theory, Social Identity Theory helps us to categorize people into social groups and locate ourselves within a category (Mummendey, Otten, Berger, & Kessler, 2000). Under this theory, we evaluate the value or worth of our social identities primarily by comparing our group with other groups. The premise of Social Identity Theory is that we are motivated to maintain a positive value of social identity, and we may do so by creating or taking advantage of favorable comparisons with other groups.

The second theory is the Self-Categorization Theory. This theory explains that increasing the salient category will support favoritism for the in-group rather than the out-group. Therefore, “in principle, a further increase of category salience need not result in a change of the level of self-categorization but could still be reflected in a certain increase in in-group biases” (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). This theory is similar to the Social Identity Theory in the way that we categorize people into groups. We evaluate the value or worth of each other primarily by comparing our group with other groups (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This creates the assumption(s) of prejudice and discrimination against the other groups.

### *Prejudice and Discrimination Against the Hmong Americans*

It would be difficult to look at all prejudicial and discriminatory issues that oppress every ethnic immigrant group in the United States. Therefore, this paper will focus on the Hmong Americans since their arrival in this country.

After 1975, Laos fell to the Phathet Lao (Communist) Regime that was supported by North Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and the Hmong living there were forced to resettle in various locations around the world. In order to better understand why the Hmong people are here in the United States, we need to know the historical background of the Hmong people. Therefore, before discussing discrimination against the Hmong community, I would like to present a short history of the Hmong people.

### *Hmong History*

Ignorance about Hmong people is due largely to the lack of information. The word “Hmong” is new to societies and the world. It never existed in any kind of documents (dictionaries, encyclopedias books, journals, or newspapers) until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the dispersion of the Hmong throughout the world. The Hmong did not have a written language until the early 1950’s when the Western missionaries came to Southeast Asia to preach Christianity to the Hmong people and other ethnic groups in Laos. Missionaries found it difficult to work with the Hmong people so they developed a written script for the Hmong people (Thao, 1999). According Thao, the Hmong people traditionally kept and taught their history, culture, custom, and religion orally from generation to generation.

A question that has been asked by people is “Who are the Hmong and where are they coming from?” Hmong are a group of people who believe themselves to be the original inhabitants of the “Big Land of China (Tuam Tshoj Teb).” As Hmong oral historians (great grandparents, grandparents, and parents) said, “Once upon a time the Hmong used to have their own kingdom in China where the Hmong nation (haiv Hmoob) was ruled by a king (muaj huab tais coj),” (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000).

When the Chinese conquered and destroyed the Hmong kingdom, the Chinese renamed the Hmong people by giving them a new name known as “Miao.” The Chinese mandated that the surrounding people and the Hmong community use the new name “Miao,” but the Hmong liked to call themselves Hmong (Thao, 1999). After the Chinese took over the Hmong homeland, the Chinese continued to torture and murder the Hmong people, and many Hmong were unable to stay in their country any longer. Some of them escaped southward to Indochina in the early 1800’s (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000). When they resettled in Southeast Asia, they re-established their lives in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma (Koltyk, 1998).

During the last 300 years, they occasionally encountered or were involved in rebellions or wars especially the Hmong in Laos (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000). For example, they were forced to join the Lao Civil War, World War II, the French Vietnam War, and the American Vietnam War (Koltyk, 1998), which is why the Hmong are here in the United States.

Hmong refugees living in the United States came from Laos due to their allegiance with the United States CIA during the Vietnam War. Under an agreement that if the Hmong were able to stop the movement of North Vietnam troops and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, then the United States would help the Hmong to build their economy, education, and healthcare systems. On the other hand, if we (the Hmong and U.S.) were defeated, then the U.S. would take the Hmong into a safe place (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000).

They came to this country because they had no choice after they fled to Thailand. Therefore, they came here as political refugees to seek freedom. When they had resettled in the United States, the majority of them did not know what to do or where to start their new lives,

especially the elders, because they came from an agrarian society to an advanced industrial society.

### *Hmong Culture*

According to the Hmong culture, family is the most important unit or the center in its whole society. It consists of all the people living in one family as well as the extended family, usually organized in a patrilineal fashion. More importantly, social structure is formed by 18 clan-names system that originated from a common ancestor (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000). Traditionally, they believe in animism, “a various primitive belief whereby natural phenomena and things animate and inanimate are held to possess an innate soul,” the *American Heritage College Dictionary* (1993). Basically they believe in everything including ancestors, God, supernatural phenomena, spirits, and shamanism (Thao, 1999).

### *Prejudice and Discrimination: The Tragic Experience of Hmong Americans*

The Hmong people had difficulty adjusting to their new lives after coming to this country for a variety of reasons. These factors (prejudice and discrimination, culture shock, and environment) had a significant impact in the community. Tragically, the Hmong encountered all kinds of discrimination against them, ranging from a personal level to a community level throughout the United States. This discrimination includes verbal harassment, poor services in organizational settings, physical harassment, avoidance in institutional settings, and police mistreatment (Hein, 2000).

The following incidents are a few cases that documented the types of prejudice and discrimination the Hmong refugees had encountered. For instance, the Hmong have been told that they came here to take the American jobs (Loeb & Friedman, 1993). The Hmong were labeled as lazy people who relied on welfare (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000).

Some other stereotypes are: “The Hmong are given cars by the government; they sell their daughters and buy their wives; they receive free money for school; and the Hmong eat dogs” (Fadiman & Kratochvil, 1997).

The most expedient mode of projection has always been rumors, and the Hmong attracted more than their share (Fadiman & Kratochvil, 1997).

Other significant cases of discrimination against the Hmong community has occurred in the Midwest, particularly in Minnesota and Wisconsin. In Wisconsin for example, there was incident in a school in Wausau. Due to the increasing number of Southeast Asian students, there had been a dramatic and tense transformation in the Wausau school district. Six or seven years ago, Lincoln Elementary School’s Hmong population rose to 70% of the student body (Cole, 1995). This situation prompted the school board to adopt a controversial busing plan in which six schools would swap about half of their children (Cole, 1995). The restructuring, supported by 87% of teachers, was to boost academic achievement and bring together a community that was becoming increasingly polarized by race. Unfortunately, the restructured busing plan was turned down because of a lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union (Cole, 1995).

Across Wisconsin, Hmong names stood out in the telephone books, making Hmong people readily identifiable. Hmong people have reported that they received hostile phone calls with angry voices yelling to them: “Go back to your country; you eat dog; I’m coming to kill you!” (Takaki,1989). In April 1990, a significant example of physical abuse occurred in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a Hmong man severely beat a white youth who had insulted his cousin with racial epithets (Leader-Telegram, 1990a). Another incident happened in La Crosse, where two Japanese exchange students were beaten by a group of white men because they believed the two students were Hmong (Hein, 2000). “In 1988, I was employed as a newspaper carrier for a paper

route. While I was carrying a bag of newspapers, three white American teenagers surrounded me, and they fought with me. I was hurt and bleeding. I was hospitalized for a day,” said a Hmong man describing an assault based on his ethnicity (Hein, 2000).

One of the most shocking cases of racial discrimination against the Hmong people happened in Minnesota. In 1989, two thirteen-year-old Hmong boys were shot and killed by a white officer in a suburb of Minneapolis because the officer believed that the two boys were carrying handguns. However, investigators found no weapon near the bodies although a screwdriver was found (Hein, 1994).

#### *Limitation of Hmong Cultural Practices in the United States*

The Hmong are not only experiencing prejudice and discrimination based on their appearance and language, but they are also facing spiritual problems because of the restriction of cultural practices. For example, when the Hmong arrived in the United States their sponsors or refugee agencies told them that they might not allow performing their traditional ceremonies at home, namely the shaman ritual, herbal ritual, funeral ritual, and marriage ceremony the way they used to do in their homeland. This has created a lot of psychological, mental, or physical problems for the Hmong community particularly the elders who led these ritual performances for years and years (Sherman, 1988). Another source of frustration is whenever the Hmong used their own native language; they were looked down, or not appreciated by some of the mainstream people (Cole, 1995).

In fact, there is almost no educational information or resources about the Hmong community in terms of books, articles, magazines, media, or any other programs that would be available for other people to utilize. Therefore, the Center for Preservation of Hmong Language and Culture (CPHLC) at the University of Wisconsin-Stout is conducting research to determine

the factors of prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong community and working to provide information about the Hmong to develop educational programs. Furthermore, such a program like this could have additional benefit for preventing the loss of Hmong culture and traditions. It would insure that the Hmong children born in this country would have the opportunity to learn about their own cultural heritage.

On November 2, 2000, CPHLC sponsored a preliminary informational meeting for Hmong elders and Hmong scholars representing a cross-section of the Hmong community in Wisconsin and Minnesota. These individuals were brought together to discuss and brainstorm a plan for the potential of developing a CD project on Hmong cultural heritage. The purpose of this meeting was to find out whether or not the Hmong elders and scholars would be willing to collaborate with CPHLC to make the CD project.

By the end of the meeting, the Hmong elders and scholars came to a consensus that the CD project would be the best approach to organize Hmong historical, cultural, and artistic concepts. They stated that such a product will provide a transfer medium that would accelerate acceptance by the general community, as well as provide a vehicle for Hmong people to preserve their language and culture. The target audiences for using this educational program include public and private institutions, organizations, agencies, teachers, students, and interested individuals.

The supporters of this project include the UW-Stout Multicultural Student Services, Stout Solutions, UW-Stout College of Arts and Science, the Department of Social Science, students, staff and faculty, the Hmong American Community Association in Menomonie, Hmong community (students, parents, and elders), and the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) of Wisconsin.



### *Summary*

As noted above, little research has been done on the Hmong community. Almost no research has done directly to measure the real problems that have faced the Hmong community since they arrived in the United States. According to the findings of this study the vast majority of discriminatory issues or incidents that the public came from the newspapers and news media.

The findings cited above about prejudice and discrimination against Hmong people in the United States demonstrates an acute lack of awareness in the mainstream community. Public ignorance and ethnocentrism create a situation whereby many false assumptions about the Hmong community prevail. The biggest issue regarding prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong community are ignorance and misunderstanding of Hmong people and their culture.

Thus, in this study, it is important to assess what is not known about Hmong culture and history and to gauge the prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong community.

In order to understand Hmong resettlement issues in the United States, this research focused on the following important topics, which will address the Hmong historical background, cultural practices, language, and arts and costumes.

## Chapter III

### Method

#### *Participants*

Thirty-one Hmong and non-Hmong students, intellectuals, parents, elders, community leaders, local agency representatives, school administrators, teachers, and staff/faculty (race: 55% Hmong Americans, 29% European Americans, 10% Hispanic Americans, 3% African Americans, and 3% Native Americans; age: 18-65 and older; gender: 52% male and 48% female) who lived in northwestern Wisconsin and Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota were selected for personal interviews and focus group interviews. Personal contact by the search investigators to invite representatives from the Hmong community, schools, hospitals, clinics, social service agencies, churches, and other local organizations, because they were identified as having unique knowledge about the Hmong experience.

To minimize communication problems and maximize intra-group discussion, the focus group samples were divided into four (4) sessions as follows:

Session 1: Mixed racial and mixed gender of Hmong and non-Hmong sample (8 participants; 90% Caucasians, 10% Hmong, 0% other races; and 0% Hmong male, 10% Hmong female, 40% non-Hmong male, and 50% non-Hmong female)

Session 2: Hmong female sample only (5 participants; 100% Hmong female)

Session 3: Hmong male sample only (8 participants; 75% Hmong male and 25% Hmong female. Due to a misunderstanding, 2 Hmong women accidentally appeared and participated in the discussion)

Session 4: Mixed racial and mixed gender of non-Hmong sample (6 participants, 50% female)

Prior to the focus group interviews, four personal interviews were conducted with Hmong and non-Hmong informants in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas. These informants are well known and are very essential to the Hmong community due to their expertise, knowledge, and education of the Hmong history, culture, language, and arts.

### *Instruments*

A Focus Group Interview Guide was developed to help guide the interview discussions by the research investigators and research advisor. The purpose of the Focus Group Interview Guide was to engage and encourage an open discussion from every informant during interview. There were seven leading questions that asked for information, description, input, and advice in terms of what legacies should be passed on to the Hmong children; what information the mainstream culture needs in order to be more tolerant of Hmong culture and people; who would be the Hmong historians, story tellers, and spokespersons to be contacted for the actual CD project; what other primary resources are available and can be accessed; and what are the most important issues to focus on (see Appendix A). To insure that the Focus Group Interview Guide has content validity, the project research advisor and several focus group research experts (psychology professors who designed and taught research courses) reviewed it.

### *Procedures*

During each focus group session, the principal investigator introduced the purpose of the study and the agenda procedure of the interview. The informants were asked to put down only their first names on the nametags, which they wore for the purpose of name recognition or for calling on for questions during the discussion. Tables and chairs were set up in square seminar

fashion so informants and research investigators could see each other's faces during conversation.

Before starting the questions, each informant was asked to briefly introduce themselves by first name, the region or town they came from, their role, and their perception on first hearing the word "Hmong." After the introduction, the informants were asked to sign an informed consent and an honorarium procedure for the payment of human subjects when involved in research. The informants were also reminded that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and they could choose to withdraw themselves from the study at any time. They were asked to give permission to allow audio tapping (tape recording) of their conversations for the entire interview session for later transcription purpose. The four focus group interviews sessions were held at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, located in northwestern Wisconsin. Below is the schedule of the four focus group interviews:

Session 1: Thursday, May 3, 2001; 4:30-6:30 P.M.

Focus group with selected samples of mixed racial and mixed gender included Hmong informants

Memorial Student Center, Northwood Room

University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wisconsin

Session 2: Friday, May 4, 2001; 4:30-6:30 P.M.

Focus group with selected samples of Hmong females only

Memorial Student Center, Northwood Room

University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wisconsin

Session 3: Thursday, May 10, 2001; 4:30-6:30 P.M.

Focus group with selected samples of Hmong males only

Memorial Student Center, Northwood Room

University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wisconsin

Session 4: Friday, June 1, 2001; 4:30-6:30 P.M.

Focus group with selected samples of mixed racial and mixed gender excluded Hmong informants

Memorial Student Center, Northwood Room

University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, Wisconsin

## Chapter IV

### Results

The focus group participation rate of response (show up at interview) was 90 percent; 27 out of 30 informants participated in the four focus group interview sessions. In addition, four personal interviews were conducted at the informants' residences by using the same interview criteria (Focus Group Interview Guide). During each focus group discussion and personal interview, there were positive suggestions, recommendations, recommended references, and support for the development of the CD project.

There were 80 transcription pages from 12 hours of tape-recording of the individual interviews and focus group discussions. Some interviewees declined to have their interview taped, therefore, the hand notes were included in the transcriptions. The information was organized into four (4) major categories: Hmong history, culture, language, and arts based on the seven Focus Group Interview Guide questionnaires (see Table 1). Under each major category, there are sub-categories listed to break down specific responses (See Table 2, 3, 4, and 5).

The following data was derived from the seven (7) Focus Group Interview Guide questions. As stated above, the data were organized into a major category and a subcategory, to determine the general consensus of the frequency of total responses and percentage of total responses from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The data then further analyzed as a specific frequency of total responses and percentage of total responses based on the seven Focus Group Interview Guide questions. The following tables will present the frequency of total responses and percent of total responses. The frequency of total responses is calculated based on the total number of responses out of the total number of the participants. The

percentage of total responses is the total number of responses divided by the total number of the participants.

*Major Category Results*

Table 1

**Frequency and Percentage Results of Major Category Responses**

<b>Major Categories</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Hmong culture	30	97%
Hmong language	24	77%
Hmong history	23	74%
Hmong arts	19	61%

Of the 31 responses to the four major categories, 30 mentioned Hmong culture, 24 mentioned Hmong language, 23 mentioned Hmong history, and 19 mentioned Hmong arts and costumes. Hmong culture came up with a total of 97% as the highest rate among other topics. During the focus group discussions most of the informants heavily emphasized the Hmong culture and some other traditions. Some of the informants indicated that culture is very crucial and plays a big role in the Hmong community because Hmong used their culture as the guiding principle or law to guide its people from generation to generation. They also used their culture to

determine their ways of living. Hmong language category was rated at a total of 77% as the second most important item to consider for the CD-ROM. Hmong history was rated at a total of 74% as to include in the CD-ROM. A total of response of the Hmong arts category was 61%, which also important to consider as well as other major categories. The informants cited that all four topics are important to put into the content of the actual CD project.

*Sub-Category Results*

Table 2

**Breakdown Frequency and Percentage Results of Hmong History to Include in CD-ROM**

<b>Hmong History</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Vietnam War	19	61%
Era in China	16	51%
Resettlements in a third country	16	51%
Era in Laos	12	39%
Personal stories	9	29%
French Colonialism	6	19%
Refugee Camps in Thailand	6	19%
Oral history	5	16%
Written history	4	13%



Of the 31 responses to the subcategory of Hmong history, 19 (61%) mentioned the Vietnam War, 16 (51%) the Hmong history era in China, 16 (51%) the Hmong resettlement in other countries around the world, 12 (39%) the Hmong history in Laos, 9 (29%) individual personal stories, 5 (16%) teaching Hmong oral history to Hmong children, 6 (19%) the French colonial era in Laos, 6 (19%) the life in the refugee camps in Thailand, and 4 (13%) respondents suggested teaching written history

The Vietnam War was rated higher than any other in the history category due to it being the most tragic event to happen in Hmong history. For instance, it caused thousands of Hmong people to lose their lives during the war and cause the Hmong diaspora throughout the world. During each focus group session the non-Hmong informants consistently said to include the Vietnam War in the CD. In fact, there are a lot of non-Hmong people who do not know that the Hmong people had been involved with the United States fighting North Vietnam secretly in Laos during the Vietnam War (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993).

Due to the confusion of where were the Hmong people came from, the CD should include the Hmong history era in China and elsewhere throughout the world. Even the Hmong history in Laos was not rated as high as Hmong history in China; it is still part of the Vietnam War that highly recommended. Some Hmong informants strongly suggested including Hmong life and experiences in the refugee camps in Thailand since 1975 until now.

Table 3

**Breakdown Frequency and Percentage Results the Parts of Hmong Culture to Be Preserved and Taught**

<b>Hmong Culture</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Clans	30	97%
Family values	29	94%
Kinship	25	80%
Traditional ceremonies	24	77%
Family structure/system	22	71%
Marriage principles	18	58%
Children respecting elders	18	58%
Funeral rituals	17	55%
Traditional beliefs	16	52%
Traditional religion	15	48%
Healing rituals (Neeb yaig)	15	48%
Wedding ceremonies	13	42%
Ruling principles	10	32%
Western religions	8	25%
Traditional child disciplines	6	19%

Of the 31 responses to the subcategory of Hmong culture, 30 (97%) recommended including the Hmong clans system, 29 (94%) Hmong family values, 25 (80%) Hmong kinship

system, 24 (77%) traditional ceremonies, 22 (71%) family structure, 18 (58%) marriage principles which included laws and rules, 18 (58%) children respecting elders, 17 (55%) funeral rituals, 16 (52%) traditional beliefs, 15 (48%) traditional religion, 15 (48%) traditional healing rituals, and wedding ceremonies was rated 13 (42%). Ten (32%) said to include traditional ruling principles, 8 (25%) the western religions (Christianity), and 6 (19%) said to include traditional child disciplines so the kids know how their parents were raised back in Laos.

In the cultural subcategory, Hmong clans, family values, family structure, kinship, traditional ceremonies (soul calling, New Year celebration, new crops ritual, and/or ancestor worship), marriage principles, and respecting elders are very crucial to include in the CD-ROM project.

The Hmong clan system was rated as the highest category because it is one of the most important things in the Hmong culture that everyone has to obey. According to the Hmong clan system, it is taboo to get married within the clan (same last name). For example, a person whose clan is Vang cannot marry to another person whose clan is Vang. That individual person must marry to other clans only, such as Lee, Lor, Xiong, Yang and so on of the 18 clans.

Some of the informants stated that these categories contained everything about the Hmong people. How the Hmong live, raise their children, rule their people, and maintain their culture was included in these categories. Hmong people do not have a standardization of social system or nationalism; therefore, what they do or practice is based on cultural permission. Hmong culture plays a major role in Hmong life by keeping its people together as a society.

Table 4

**Breakdown Frequency and Percentage Results of Hmong Language to Be Preserved and**

**Taught**

<b>Hmong Language</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Oral language	28	90%
To be taught at school	21	68%
To be taught at home	12	38%
Written language	9	29%
White Hmong dialect	9	29%
Green/Leng Hmong dialect	7	23%
Romanized version	3	10%
Pha Hawh version	3	10%

Oral language was noted in 90% of the responses (28 responses) but these responses could be interpreted several different ways, because in the English language, the phrase “to study the English language,” means to study both oral and written forms. However, in the Hmong language, the phrase “to study Hmong language (kawm ntawv Hmoob)” means to study the Hmong written language. On the other hand, the same phrase “to study Hmong language (kawm lus Hmoob)” means to study the Hmong oral language. In Hmong, the word “ntawv” means “paper” or “letter” and the word “lus” means “language,” in which Hmong people might refer to

oral language only, but intellectually these two words “ntawv” and “lus” mean have the same meaning.

Twenty-one (68%) indicated teaching Hmong language at local school setting, and 12 (38%) teaching Hmong language at home. In comparison to oral language, Hmong written language was rated 9 (29%); in terms of using and teaching Hmong dialects, 9 (29%) mentioned including White Hmong dialect and 7 (23%) mentioned including Green/Leng Hmong dialect. As far as preference of teaching Hmong scripts, 3 (10%) indicated teaching Hmong Romanized (Latin) script and equally 3 (10%) rated teaching Hmong Pha Hawh (original) script.

Hmong oral language was rated as the highest category among other categories for three reasons. The first reason is that the Hmong people didn't have a written language until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of this reason, all the instructions were taught orally from generation to generation until these days. The second reason is due to communication problems between parents and children. The informants stated that most of the Hmong parents do not speak English and vice versus that their children do not speak Hmong. Therefore, communication is a big issue for both the parents and their children. The third reason to teach Hmong oral language is to help the Hmong children know how to respect their elders. Presently, children who do not speak Hmong tend to disrespect the elders as well as their culture.

Where the Hmong language should be taught? Some informants mentioned to teach it in school as well as at home. Some informants mentioned that Hmong language should be taught as a foreign language. In terms of which Hmong dialects to use, the informants recommended to both the White and Green/Leng dialects.

Similar to Hmong dialects, Hmong scripts are also important for the CD. The focus group informants indicated that most of the Hmong people know and use the Romanized version while less Hmong know the Pha Hawh version. However, there are some advantages and disadvantages between the two scripts. For instance, the Romanized script is more complex to spell and it takes too many characters (consonants) to form a single word or there may be no characters to stand for a word. Pha Hawh on the other hand, is easier to spell and it has all characters to represent all of the words in the Hmong language.

Table 5

**Break down Frequency and Percentage Results of Hmong Arts and Costumes**

<b>Hmong Arts &amp; Costumes</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Folk tales	22	71%
Embroideries (Paj ntaub)	21	68%
Stories	12	39%
Poems	10	32%
Customs/clothing	10	32%
Mouth piece instrument (Qeej)	8	26%
Literature	7	23%
Games	4	13%
Flute (Raj)	2	6%
Jewish harp (Ncas)	0	0%
Tools	0	0%

Of the 31 responses to Hmong arts and costumes to put into the CD, Hmong folk tales was rated 71%, embroideries was rated 68%, personal stories was rated 39%, poems or traditional songs was rated 32%, costumes was rated 32%, the mouth piece instrument (Qeej) was rated 26%, literature was rated 23%, traditional games was rated 13%, flutes (Raj) was rate 6%, Jewish harp (Ncas) and other tools were rate 0%.

It is not a surprise that Hmong folk tales was rated higher than any other arts because throughout the Hmong life and culture, everything is orally taught and told in the form of folk tales from one generation to the next. The legacy of telling folk tales would consider as the most effective teaching method for all kinds of instructions, for example, songs, poems, ceremony rituals, marriage blessings, and farming techniques.

Language, level of education, cultural differences, and experience differences made the focus groups difficult to manage. To overcome these problems, the research team used the English and Hmong languages back and forth to keep the Hmong and non-Hmong informants on the topic.

***Interview Question One:*** What do you feel the young Hmong people need to learn today that is not currently being addressed in schools and possibly at home? This question addressed to both Hmong and non-Hmong informants about what legacies do the Hmong need to pass on to their children so they will not lose their culture in the next generations to come (see Table 6).

Table 6

**Frequency and Percentage Results of What Young Hmong People Need to Learn**

<b>What Hmong Youth Need to Learn</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Culture	21	68%
History	18	58%
Family values	14	45%
Language	13	42%
Arts	9	29%
Clans	8	26%
Kinship	7	23%
New Year celebration	7	23%
Marriage ceremony	6	19%
Folk tales	5	16%
Respecting the elders	3	10%

A total of 121 responses indicated that young Hmong people needed to learn their culture as followed:

- 68% of the responses noted that it is very important for Hmong children to learn their culture.
- 58% mentioned Hmong children should study Hmong stories in order to understand where the Hmong came from.
- 42% said that Hmong children should learn their language at home as well as at school.



- 45% said in order to avoid the generation gaps, Hmong children need to learn the Hmong family values, systems, and structures.
- 29% said Hmong arts should be passed on to Hmong children as part of the culture.
- 26% mentioned learning about Hmong 18 clans.
- 23% indicated that Hmong kinship should be taught to Hmong children so that they know how to call their relatives and their relative-in-laws properly.
- 23% said Hmong New Year celebration should be included in the cultural studies.
- 19% said the traditional marriage ceremony is a part of the culture that needed to be preserved.
- 16% said Hmong elders should tell folk tales to their children.
- 10% said that Hmong children should know how to respect their elders.

Hmong culture, language, history, and family values were rated higher for the young Hmong people to learn, because Hmong culture plays a major role in Hmong life. Some of the informants indicated that the CD cannot cover everything about the Hmong people, but it needs to contain Hmong culture, language, and history. Informants also said it would be a good idea to produce additional CD's for each of the four major categories, such as culture, language, history, and arts.

***Interview Question Two:*** What information do you feel those outside of the Hmong community, need to learn about Hmong people, to create more tolerance and acceptance? This question addresses to Hmong informants about what information needs to include so the non-Hmong community could understand the Hmong community better (see Table 7).

Table 7

**Frequency and Percentage Results of What Information Outsiders Need to Learn about**

**Hmong People in Order to Create more Tolerance and Acceptance**

<b>Information Outsiders Need to Learn about Hmong</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Hmong culture	26	83%
Hmong language	20	65%
Vietnam War	15	48%
Hmong history	14	45%
New Year celebration	12	39%
Hmong resettlements	11	35%
Hmong kinship	9	29%
Refugee camps in Thailand	7	23%
Hmong arts	6	19%
Hmong clans system	4	13%
Hmong family structures	3	10%

Of the 127 responses to this question, 26 (83%) stated that non-Hmong people should explore and learn about the Hmong culture; 20 (65%) stated that in order to understand the complexity of the Hmong culture, those outside of the community need to learn how to speak the Hmong language; 15 (48%) Hmong involvement with the United States CIA during the Vietnam War in Laos; 14 (45%) Hmong history; 12 (39%) the Hmong New Year celebration; 11 (35%) Hmong resettlements around the world so the general population would know the geographical

countries that Hmong resettled in; 9 (29%) Hmong kinship should be introduced to the mainstream culture; 6 (19%) Hmong clans; 7 (23%) Hmong life in the refugee camps in Thailand; 4 (13%) the Hmong clans system; and 3 (10%) mentioned that the Hmong community has good family structures in terms of strong extended family system.

The answers to this question is very similar to question one, which Hmong culture, language, history, and the Vietnam War categories were rated higher for the outsiders (non-Hmong people) to learn. Many informants suggested that it is important to include the Vietnam War in the CD, so the outsiders would have a better understand why the Hmong are here in the United States. For instance, “we came to this country as involuntary refugees because we had helped the United States CIA during Vietnam War; after we fled from Laos to Thailand, we have no choice,” said a Hmong informant. This would allow the other people to know the Hmong involvement with the United States during the Vietnam War that’s why they are here in this country.

***Interview Question Three:*** What information do you feel will transmit the values inherent in Hmong culture and stories that all people should be aware of in order to preserve and thrive the Hmong culture in a changing world? This question was targeted to the non-Hmong informants in terms of seeking support and recommendations to preserve the Hmong culture and language. This question also asked the Hmong informants to provide specific information about what parts of their culture that need to be preserved due to the rapid change of their lives style and cultural assimilation (see Table 8).

Table 8

**Frequency and Percentage Results of Information on Hmong Culture to be Preserved and Thrived in a Changing World**

<b>Hmong Culture to be Preserved and Thrived</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Language	26	84%
Folk tales	22	71%
Kinship	20	65%
Arts	19	61%
New Year celebration	19	61%
Embroideries (Paj ntaub)	18	58%
Literature	17	55%
Marriage practices	16	52%
Family values	14	45%
Poems	13	42%
Traditional ceremonies	12	39%
Entertainment instruments	10	32%
Traditional customs/clothing	10	32%
Traditional rituals	9	29%
Traditional religion	6	19%

Of the 231 responses to this question, 26 (84%) mentioned that Hmong language is the most important to preserve; 22 (71%) Hmong folk tales; 20 (65%) Hmong kinship system; 19

(61%) Hmong arts; 19 (61%) the New Year celebration is the biggest annual festival in Hmong culture that cannot disappear from the culture; 18 (58%) Hmong embroideries (paj ntaub Hmoob) are essential to keep as the visual symbol of Hmong; 17 (55%) Hmong literature should be passed on; 16 (52%) the Hmong marriage ceremony is very unique and should keep on being practiced; 14 (45%) promoting Hmong family values; 13 (42%) Hmong poems which included traditional songs (kwv txhiaj lus taum thiab paj huam) and new songs (nkauj/yas suab); 12 (39%) Hmong traditional ceremonies which include newborn soul calling, wedding ceremony, new crop ceremony, and New Year's ceremony; 10 (32%) preserving Hmong traditional entertainment instruments; 10 (32%) Hmong traditional costumes and clothing are important for Hmong children to wear for important events or occasions; 9 (29%) Hmong traditional rituals such as spiritual healing (ua neeb), funeral ritual, herbal healing ritual, massage therapy ritual, ancestor worship ceremony, etc.; and 6 (19%) said Hmong traditional religion is part of the Hmong culture that should be kept.

The results to this question are very similar to question number one and question number two, which Hmong language, folk tales, kinship, and arts were rated very high for preservation. Hmong kinship was rated high because the children need to know the importance of family and clan relationships.

***Interview Question Four:*** Who are the knowledgeable community members that can help in making of this CD project? This question was focused on the Hmong informants to look for some potential community members or leaders that can help guide or advise the CD project (see Table 9).

Table 9

**Frequency and Percentage Results of Knowledgeable Community Members to Help in Making the CD Project**

<b>Knowledgeable Community members</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Hmong elders	27	87%
Parents	20	65%
Non-Hmong historians	18	58%
Community leaders	15	48%
Hmong oral historians	13	42%
Students	11	35%
Vietnam War Veterans	10	32%

A total of 114 responses to this question, they indicated the following community members should be helpful to guide the actual CD project:

- Hmong elders were noted 87% of the time. This included folk tale tellers, spirit ritual practitioners, ceremony performers, and personal storytellers.
- Parents were noted 65% of the time. This included parents who have struggled and brought their children from Laos to cross the Mekong River into Thailand and then to the United States.
- Non-Hmong historians were noted 58% of the time. This included those people whom have associated with the Hmong community, researched the Hmong community, or written about Hmong people.

- Community leaders were noted 48% of the time. This included clan leaders, organizational leaders, and former military leaders.
- Hmong oral historians were noted 42% of the time. This included people who at least know the Hmong contemporary history.
- Students were noted 35% of the time. It is important to include the perceptions of the students and their input in the CD project.
- Vietnam Veterans were noted 32% of the time. This included both Hmong and non-Hmong veterans who served during the Vietnam War.

***Interview Question Five:*** Who do you think are the historians and spokesperson of the Hmong community? From the both personal interviews and focus groups, 14 out of 17 (82%) Hmong informants who responded to this question have stated that technically, Hmong people do not have historians and spokespersons on behalf of the Hmong community due to Hmong did not have a written language until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some Hmong informants said, “Our grandparents and parents orally taught us our history, culture, ceremonies, poems, arts, and songs.” The non-Hmong informants have no comments to this question because they do not have knowledge about Hmong historians and spokespersons.

***Interview Question Six:*** What other primary resources (archival photographs, historic texts, maps, documents, etc.) are available and can be accessed? This question addressed to both Hmong and non-Hmong informants as to look for resources that they may have or they could refer the CD project staff to other information or resources (see Table 10).

Table 10

**Frequency and Percentage Results of Resources to Access for Developing the CD Project**

<b>Resources to Access</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Hmong elders	28	90%
Libraries	12	39%
Hmong/Lao organizations	11	35%
Photograph collections	11	35%
Educators/intellectuals	10	32%
US CIA documents	8	26%
Historic texts	7	23%
Videos on Hmong community	6	19%
Archives	5	16%
Church organizations	4	13%

Of the 102 responses to this question, 28 (90%) suggested consulting with the Hmong elders; 12 (39%) suggested doing more research at local and national libraries in the United States as well as other countries, such as France, Canada, China, Laos, and Thailand; 11 (35%) suggested asking Hmong and Lao local organizations for further references in terms of connection with the community leaders; 11 (35%) mentioned talking to the Hmong community to gather personal photograph collections; 10 (32%) suggested talking to those educators and intellectuals who have knowledge about the Hmong people; 8 (26%) suggested finding information about the Hmong involvement with the United State CIA during the Vietnam War; 7



(23%) recommended using those existing historical textbooks that were written by many westerners and Chinese authors; 6 (19%) recommended using those videos that are home made about Hmong culture; 5 (16%) suggested getting Hmong photographs and other documents from local archives; and 4 (13%) suggested seeing information about Hmong people from church organizations.

*Interview Question Seven:* What is the most important parts of the Hmong culture you want to put into the CD-ROM? This question is to summarize all the major categories that need to be included in the CD.

Table 11

**Frequency and Percentage Results of the most Important Parts of the Hmong Culture to Put into the CD-ROM**

<b>Most Important Parts of the Hmong Culture</b>	<b>Frequency of Total Responses</b>	<b>Percent of Total Responses</b>
Language	18	58%
Wedding ceremony	16	52%
History	15	48%
Kinship	13	42%
Family systems	12	39%
Spiritual healing	7	23%
Traditional costumes	6	19%
Vietnam War vets dignity	6	19%

A total of 100 responses were noted the most important parts of the Hmong culture that needed to put into the CD-ROM

- 18 (58%) mentioned putting Hmong language in the CD-ROM. This included both oral and written language.
- 16 (52%) indicated that the traditional wedding ceremony should be put in the CD.
- 15 (48%) mentioned that the CD-ROM should definitely include Hmong history.
- 13 (42%) mentioned that the CD-ROM should include Hmong kinship.
- 12 (39%) mentioned that the Hmong family system is important to include in the CD.
- 7 (23%) indicated that the CD-ROM should include content about the traditional spiritual healing.
- 6 (19%) mentioned including traditional costumes in the CD-ROM.
- 6 (19%) mentioned including the dignity of the Vietnam veterans as they have served the United States during the Vietnam War.

This project adds to a growing body of literature about immigration in the United States. The underlying goal of this project is to find effective ways to combat racism, bigotry, and prejudice towards Hmong immigrants in this country through the development oral history CD-ROM on the cultural heritage of Hmong Americans. The CD will not only serve as a resource for people to access, but it will help to preserve the Hmong cultural heritage.

### *Informant Feedbacks*

Overall, the feedback from the informants was positive for the development of an oral history CD project on the cultural heritage of Hmong Americans. About 85% of the respondents

strongly supported the idea of developing this CD project. The findings indicated that the more Hmong culture, history, language, and arts display to the outside world, the more others people will aware of the Hmong community. However, about 15% of the respondents had reservations about the development of the CD project due to the sensitive issues of the two Hmong dialects (Green/Leng Hmong and White Hmong), the lack of resources, the lack of funding, and the enormity of the project.

Through observation, the non-verbal reactions of the informants were enthusiastic, eager, thrilled, and supportive the development of the CD project. The informants not only supported this project, but were also willing to participate and assist this project no matter what it takes. Especially those informants that deal with the Hmong issues want this project to happen as soon as possible due to the demand for educational resources that relate to the Hmong people and its culture. Some of the Hmong informants are thrilled and want to be part of the CD development crews.

#### *Direct Quotes from Informants*

- “I think the first thing that we need to teach our young people is to teach them, who are they? What does it mean to be a Hmong?” said a Hmong informant in Minneapolis, Minnesota, who works at the St. Paul Public School.
- “I think our Hmong children in the United States are educated in other culture, but they do not know anything about their own culture. So the first thing we need to teach them is the Hmong culture,” said a Hmong elder in St. Paul, Minnesota, who is an expert in Hmong marriage traditions Hmong called “Kab tshoob kev kos.”

- “The best way to teach our kids is to make sure that they know how to respect their family and their community before respecting other people,” said a Hmong elder in St. Paul, Minnesota, whose expertise in Hmong funeral rituals.
- “Our young Hmong people need to learn the history of the Hmong people and their parents’ personal stories of how difficult their parents brought them across the Mekong River into Thailand and then to the United States. I also want them to learn the Hmong arts and costumes,” said a young informant in St. Paul, Minnesota, who works at the Center for Hmong Arts & Talent.
- “I want the young Hmong people to know how fortunate they are to have a culture that is so rich in tradition,” said a teacher at the Menomonie Head Start Program.
- “Many Hmong students caught up in trying to be such a part of the mainstream culture and they forget their own culture and history. I think they definitely need to know the significant roles that their parents have played during the Vietnam War in terms of assisting the United States, and to the end they lost their homeland and loved ones,” said a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- “The very first thing that young Hmong people need to learn is their own language in both oral and written,” said an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- “There are common stereotype myths and questions about Hmong people, such as how come they always drive Toyota, why they always have 12 children, the men have two or three wives, do not let them hunt on your land because they will kill everything (birds, squirrels, cats, and dogs). We need to teach each other about our cultural differences so

we can eliminate these myths and stereotypes,” said a representative of the Dunn County Human Services agency.

- “I think teaching each other is very important. For example, some young Hmong people don’t know much about our history and culture. What they learn and know is that the Hmong people are poor, ugly, and uneducated people. Sometimes they are ashamed of their own people and culture in which they don’t want to admit that they are Hmong,” said a Ph. D. candidate in St. Paul, Minnesota.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

#### *Limitations of the Study*

This analysis is based on literature reviewed from existing research and data collected from individual and focus group interviews. The sample size of the focus group interview was small, however, the rate of response was very high. Thus, the generalizations were interpreted based on the qualitative method of both Hmong and non-Hmong informants living in northwestern Wisconsin and Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota.

Based on these parameters, this investigation is organized into major categories and sub-categories of Hmong History, Culture, Language, and Arts. These categories appear to be the most consistency topics suggested from the findings to consider as the content in the CD.

Once again, this study was conducted to gather information for the development of a multi-media (CD-ROM based) project on the cultural heritage of the Hmong Americans. The end product of the CD is to be used as an educational tool to combat racism, bigotry, prejudice and discrimination against Hmong Americans. The ultimate goal of the CD is to preserve the Hmong culture, language, and arts.

### *Implications for Intervention*

The findings clearly suggest that a CD would be an excellent way to start to developing educational materials on Hmong. In addition, the CD would be an important archive for the preservation of the Hmong culture. Most of the informants stated that this kind of work should have been done earlier to help prevent prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong. The informants also suggested that the CD be in both Hmong and English. With the complexity of the Hmong culture this first CD might not be able to cover in depth all the categories, but it will be a general introduction to the Hmong culture, history, language, and arts. After this first CD is completed, it would be a good idea to keep in mind that additional CD's can be created on each major category. In each major category, there are many subcategories; therefore a single CD cannot contain all of the information. The informants gave the following suggestions and support for the development of the CD project.

### *Suggestions for Developing the CD project*

- Information to put into the CD-ROM
  - Hmong culture (Kab lis kev cai Hmoob)
    - Clans (Cov xeeb neeg)
    - Kinship system (Kev sib txheeb)
    - Family structures/values (Qauv/nuj qnis ntawv tsev neeg)
    - Marriage ceremonies (Kab tshoob kev kos)
    - New Year celebration (Kev noj tsiab peb caug)

- Hmong history (Keeb kwm Hmoob)
  - Oral history (Keeb kwm qhov ncauj piav)
  - History in China (Keeb kwm nyob Tuam Tshoj teb)
  - History in Laos (Keeb kwm nyob Los Tsuas teb)
  - Vietnam War (Tsov rog Nyab Laj)
  - Hmong life in the refugee camps in Thailand (Hmong lub neej nyob rau yeej thoj nam tawg rog nyob Thaib teb)
  
- Hmong language
  - Oral language (Lus hais)
  - Written language (Ntaub ntawv)
  - White Hmong dialect (Lus Hmoob Dawb)
  - Green Hmong dialect (Lus Hmoob Ntsuab)
  
- Hmong arts
  - Folk tales (Dab neeg)
  - Poems (Kwv txhiaj paj ntsha lus taum/nkauj/paj huam)
  - Embroideries (Paj ntaub)
  - Costumes/clothing (Tsoos tsho)
  
- Resources accessibility for gathering information
  - Hmong elders
  - Community leaders



- Hmong/Lao organizations
  - Historical textbook
  - Vietnam War veterans
  - Students
- Locations for collecting information
- United States of America
  - Canada
  - China
  - France
  - Laos
  - Thailand
  - Australia

### *Recommendations*

This investigation should be reported directly to the funding agencies, namely the Wisconsin Humanities Council in Madison, Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Stout Diversity Plan 2008 in Menomonie, Wisconsin. In addition, an acknowledgement should be submitted to other support funds, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, Otto Bremer Foundation, state and federal funds as well. The staff of the Center for Preservation of Hmong Language and Culture (CPHLC) should inform other supporters, such as UW-Stout Chancellor, the Provost, Multicultural Student Services, Stout Solutions, College of Arts and Science, Department of Social Sciences, Speech Communication Department, and the public

about the completion of this investigation. Without the funding sources, and many other supporters, this research project would not have been possible.

The intention of this report is to stimulate discussion, awareness, preparation, and action to improve the issues of combating racism, bigotry, and prejudice against immigrants in the United States. An action plan is to develop a multimedia (CD-ROM based) oral history on the cultural heritage of Hmong Americans as an educational tool for general public, local and state agencies administrators, teachers, students, parents, and individuals.

This study may not be able to identify specific cause of prejudice and discrimination against the Hmong, but it is the first step in helping combat the problem. The findings in this investigation should be used by the research investigators, Center for Preservation of Hmong Language and Culture (CPHLC) staff, UW-Stout Multicultural Student Services (MSS), UW-Stout staff and faculty, UW-Stout students, or any individual interested in this issue to write a major grant proposal for the actual CD project. It is recommended that the CPHLC staff and MSS staff should have a meeting to discuss whether or not to pursue the CD project. The funding sponsors and CPHLC supporters of this investigation should be informed about the further decision after the meeting.

### *Conclusions*

According to literature reviews, prejudice and discrimination has been a controversial issue ever since the United States was founded. Despite the growth of cultural diversity, studies indicate that racial and ethnic discrimination is still common in this country (Sanchez, 1999). New immigrant communities that arrived in the last half century had faced a lot of challenges in

terms of racial bigotry, prejudice and discrimination (Sanchez, 1999). The Hmong American community came to this country after 1975 and they have encountered a lot of tragic experiences of prejudice and discrimination, such as social, cultural, spiritual, psychological, mental, and physical harassment by the mainstream community (Hein, 1994). Not only prejudice and discrimination was a difficult challenge to the Hmong community, but the deprivation of practicing their culture and language had caused them to struggle between the two worlds. Many Hmong parents and especially the elders are worried that they might lose their culture and language in the future because their children are too Americanized (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000).

The results of this study suggested that prejudices and discrimination happened to the Hmong community was due to cultural misunderstanding, lack of information, and poor communication between the two communities. These findings also stated that prejudice and discrimination is not the only tragic issue the Hmong community have faced, instead there are other dramatic problems within their own community that struggled them too. For example, cultural assimilation, communication barrier (English versus Hmong), traditional rituals and ceremonies, religions, and family values have created a big gap between parents and children, young and elders, and community members and community leaders. So often Hmong parents feel hopeless because they see that their children assimilated to the mainstream culture too quick and at the same time the children feel that their parents are too slow to keep up (C. Lee, personal interview, February 9, 2000). A respected Hmong elder informant in St. Paul, Minnesota emotionally stated that Hmong culture will be lost if there were nothing to fix this problem. He further said, "I have two sons, one had already completed his Ph. D. and the other is currently

pursuing his Ph. D. but none of them know anything about the Hmong culture neither nor interest to follow my path as a cultural ritual master and a community leader.”

The development of the CD project must be pursued as soon as possible so it can be utilized for educational purpose as well as an informational resource. When the CD project is completed, it can serve as a tool to build the bridge between the Hmong community and the mainstream community. At the same token, it can help to preserve the Hmong cultural heritage for the generations to come in the United States.

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## Appendix A

### Focus Group Interview Guide

1. What do you feel the young Hmong people need to learn today which is not currently being addressed in schools and possibly at home?
2. What information do you feel those outside of the Hmong community, need to learn about Hmong people, to create more tolerance and acceptance?
3. What information do you feel will transmit the values inherent in Hmong culture and stories that all people should be aware of in order to preserve and thrive the Hmong culture in a changing world?
4. Who are the knowledgeable community members that can help in making of this CD project?
5. Who do you think are the historians and spokesperson of the Hmong community?
6. What other primary resources (archival photographs, historic texts, maps, documents, etc.) are available and can be accessed?
7. What is the most important parts of the Hmong culture you want to put into the CD-ROM?