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Use of Self Online

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We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

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responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (p.47).

ABSTRACT

This study explores and documents the experiences and life changes of women who belong to the fastest-growing racial-ethnic group. Between 2000 and 2019, the Asian population in America grew by 81 percent (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Asian American women account for 19 percent of all immigrants between 2010 and 2015 (Neilsen, 2017). Just under 40 percent of Asian-American women identify themselves as entrepreneurs, which is more than any other group of women in the United States (Neilsen, 2017).

This study presents the results of qualitative research that examines whether, and if so, *how* Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs embody the use of self (UoS) in their work. In-depth narrative inquiry is selected as the research methodology to explore Hmong women digital entrepreneurs' stories of self-inquiry and personal growth. To elicit conversation, semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with five study participants. Participant story elements were compiled into fuller narratives coded for select elements within the stories and analyzed for themes across all of the stories.

The research draws on two theoretical foundations to examine both data collection and data analysis. The theories include the over-arching constructivist perspective known as symbolic interactionism and feminist standpoint theory. The philosophy that one's comprehension of reality occurs with reflexive engagement upon life experience through interaction with others is used to guide this research study (Bazeley, 2021). C. Wright Mills (1959) refers to this as "the sociological imagination" (p. 5), which is the ability to comprehend one's own lived experience and situate it temporally and contextually. Standpoint theory, says

that knowledge develops from and is determined by social position, addresses the underlying epistemological issues with normative models and structures that do not describe the experiences of women (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). This perspective sheds light on larger issues such as voice, belonging, discourse, power, and issues central to female development.

The findings of this research reveal four broad themes that provide insight into similarities and differences in participant stories. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis include passion, connection, authenticity, and creative process. The participants in this study support previous findings that suggest there is an interconnectedness between participants' identities, behavior, and stories. The construction of self online for these five women is not only an expression of their identity but also the embodiment of the best version of themselves. Furthermore, three main themes emerged as participants discussed how they engaged in self-inquiry and personal growth including critical self-reflection, outsider and well-being. As such, this study expands the research on use of self by studying Hmong American women, which is an understudied population and taking the research into the understudied context of digital media.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2045, the United States will reach the milestone in which the white population will be less than half of the country's total population. From 2000 to 2019, the Asian population in America grew by 81 percent, which was the fastest-growing major racial-ethnic group in America, comprising ~18.9 million individuals (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Asian American women are the largest group of recent immigrants accounting for 19 percent of all immigrants between 2010 and 2015 (Neilsen, 2017).

The terms Asians and Asian Americans are used interchangeably across multiple ethnic and national identities. The term *Asian American* masks differences among people of Asian descent based on national origin and region, religion, class, national identity, generation, etc. (Duncan, 2004). The larger groups of Asian immigrants who came to America, many of whom made the choice to seek better economic opportunities, include Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Asian Indians. There are also underrepresented newer and smaller groups such as the Burmese, Hmong, Laotians, Indonesians, Kashmiri, and Tibetans who have remained underrepresented and under-researched in both popular and academic literature (Ling, 2008). Often, these smaller groups that came to America were forced to make drastic changes that resulted in a transition to the United States. For example, shortly after the United States pulled out of the Vietnam war, more than 100,000 Hmong were forced to flee Laos into Thailand to escape Lao government persecution. Most Hmong came to the United States directly from the Thai refugee camps (Austin & Ling, 2010).

Today, more and more Asian American women are engaging in politics, advocacy, entertainment, sports, business, and social media. On January 20, 2021, Kamala Harris became

the first woman vice president and in turn, the first mixed-race African American and South Asian American vice president of the United States. Asian American women are growing into organizational leadership roles. They work in public spheres to address problems faced by their ethnic communities, problems such as child labor, domestic violence, and misogyny (Louie, 2000). Asian women also are gaining influence in entertainment, sports, and entrepreneurship in online businesses and social media.

Several firsts were accomplished by Asian American and Hmong American women in 2020, including:

- Nora Lum, known as Awkwafina, became the first Asian American woman to win a Golden Globe for best actress.
- Kim Ng of Chinese American descent was named the first female major league baseball general manager of the Miami Marlins.
- Hmong American Sunisa Lee won the Olympic gold medal in the all-around gymnastics competition. She is the first Asian American and Hmong American to win this competition.

A substantial portion of Asian women have jobs and careers in business. Just under 40 percent of Asian American women identify themselves as entrepreneurs, which is more than any other group of women in the United States (Neilsen, 2017). Digital influencers have become part of our daily lives. According to a Neilsen (2017) study, more than half of Asian American women are on YouTube and 86 percent use Instagram:

The democratized platform of YouTube… with an active reach of 55 percent among Asian American females, is where a young generation of Asian Americans have bypassed

studio execs and casting agents to create their content for millions of loyal fans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. (p.20)

Top Asian American women YouTube stars include Michelle Phan, a Vietnamese American beauty and makeup artist, Korean American fashion blogger Jenn Im, and comedians Nora Lum and Southern Asian Lilly Singh. Asian women also lead the pack with Instagram; they have accumulated millions of followers by sharing their tastes, beauty finds, travel recommendations, and personal stories. Followers can get a glimpse into their daily lives.

Despite recent gains in Asian American women's participation in business and many other fields, Asian Americans continue to report increased discrimination that began in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. Most Asian adults (58 percent) say it is more common for people to express racist or racially insensitive views about people who are Asian than it was before the coronavirus outbreak (Ruiz et al., 2020). As reported by a CNBC news outlet in 2021, one of the most tragic events of that year was the moment a white gunman in Atlanta, Georgia walked into three massage parlors and executed eight people. Six Asian women were murdered. There is an ongoing national debate on whether the incident was racially motivated and therefore, classified as a hate crime. For many Asian Americans, this event illustrates and underscores the discrimination, misogyny, and racist violence they are experiencing.

While the 2000 US Census data suggests that Asian American immigrants have gained impressive socioeconomic success, closer analysis highlights broad diversity in the Asian American experience. In recent decades, refugees such as the Hmong have struggled with advancements socioeconomically (Austin & Ling, 2010). The Hmong lived peacefully in Laos for many years before the Vietnam War. After being recruited by the Central Intelligence

Agency to fight alongside the Americans during the Vietnam War, the Hmong fled Laos for fear of genocide by the Pathet Lao (Hamilton-Merritt, 1999). Today, the United States is home to the second-largest Hmong population outside of China.

According to the Pew Research Center (Budiman, 2022), the US Census Bureau reports that in 2019, over 327,000 Hmong people live in the United States. Hmong families face common acculturation challenges such as language barriers, limited employment opportunities, lack of health care access, economic hardship, youth delinquency, and mental health issues. Unlike European immigrants, post-1965 Asian immigrants such as the Hmong were least prepared to adjust to American life. Their traditional agriculture-based economy and limited formal education background as an uneducated and poor oppressed minority group contributed to the large cultural gap between the Hmong and mainstream American society. This has led to high unemployment, poverty, significant generation gap, and low educational attainment (Yang, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

When Hmong people arrived in the United States following the Vietnam war, they left behind an agriculture-based rural economy. The traditional, agriculture-based economy also featured gender-specific, clearly defined roles. Traditionally, Hmong men are the leaders in social spheres such as governance, education, and the economy. Hmong women in America continue to be in subservient roles within their families and local communities (Austin & Ling, 2010).

In recent years, exposure to American culture and opportunities have begun to close the education gap. As a result, Hmong women are stepping away from traditional gender roles and

into positions of community leadership. The shift is illustrated by the election of Choua Lee to the Saint Paul Board of Education in 1992 and the election of Mee Moua to the Minnesota State Senate in 2002. Hmong American women are leaders in growing numbers of community-based organizations (Austin & Ling, 2010).

Hmong women have made progress in digital entrepreneurship. They have grown in visibility online in connection with the rise of other Asian American women. Their influence on mainstream audiences has grown by using social media. Influencers with the largest following capture audience interests and engagement in areas that are traditionally dominated by women such as make-up, fashion, cooking, and home decor.

There is a subset of Asian American women who use social media to make visible autobiographical content that allows for their life experiences to be expressed in their own words, through content with a slant towards advocacy and social justice. As an influencer, the potential to reach large audiences is vast and social media allows for creating new content to be displayed in public. However, I did not find any existing research on the topic of self-inquiry, personal growth, and how these women embody the UoS individually and collectively to create change remains largely unexplored.

Purpose and Research Questions

Research for this paper explores whether, and if so, *how* Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs embody the use of self in their work. In-depth narrative inquiry is selected as the research methodology to explore five Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories of self-inquiry and personal growth. To provide insight into the stories of these women, I identify

themes in their narratives and assess how they embody the use of self in creating change in their lives and community.

The objective of this study is designed to expand understanding of the use of self in Hmong American women within the digital environment and is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories?

- To create the desired change in their lives and communities, how do Hmong women entrepreneurs embody the use of self in the digital environment?

- How do Hmong women digital entrepreneurs engage in self-inquiry and personal growth?

Personal Significance

When I was 16 years old, I received my first self-help book, *Reviving Ophelia* by Dr. Mary Pipher. As I turned the pages of the book, the words I read spoke to me like no other. It helped guide my understanding of what was happening in my adolescent world. I had many questions and beliefs about life that clashed with the Hmong culture and very few answers. There were no role models that reflected how I desired to live my life. At 16, I turned my interest to self-help books, novels, and autobiographies into lifelong learning. I majored in sociology as an undergraduate student, received a master's degree in public health, and later I initiated steps to earn a doctorate in organizational development and change management. These areas of study helped me understand what was happening in the external world and to create positive change.

Initially, the pursuit of personal growth addressed a desire to fit into my external environment. My curiosity gradually turned inward, and I began to explore my inner self. I first

learned about use of self during my doctoral education. The transformation began with owning my own story through reflection, engaging all my senses in the world around me, drawing meaning from my own lived experience, making the choice to live consciously, and taking action. Engaging in my practice from this deep understanding is where I began to honor my uncommon perspective as a Hmong woman. Despite internal and external barriers, I found a way to live life on my terms. In this research study, I explore the life stories of Hmong women digital entrepreneurs and their journey into self-inquiry and personal growth as told by them.

Today, as I move toward earning a doctorate, I feel the weight of the Hmong woman's legacy on my shoulders. Pursuit of the doctorate is not for those who look like me, a first-generation Hmong American woman. It is meant for the others. The title of "doctor" and positions of power are reserved for true heirs of American leadership to which I do not belong. As a child and young woman, I internalized messages that taught me to limit expectations for myself, play small and follow the footsteps of women who came before me. Yet, in the quiet moments when I am still, I feel an internal nudge to strive upward.

I also grew up in a community where women did not have a voice: Their experiences were not documented or shared. In recent years, I've discovered online content created by Asian American women that reflected my experience as a Hmong American woman. First, I discovered Asian American women digital entrepreneurs[1] (Davidson & Vaast, 2010) sharing their experiences in videos, blog posts, Facebook postings, songs, podcasts, and mimes. Also, I noticed a small but growing number of Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs produced content on the same experiences and challenges I was navigating that few people in my

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[1] *Digital entrepreneurship* refers to the pursuit of opportunities based on the use of digital media and other information and communication technologies.

community acknowledged or discussed. Digital entrepreneurship through social media gives Hmong American women influencers a platform to create content on topics that reflect their life experiences. Topics such as body image, identity, self-development, domestic violence, oppression, immigration, assimilation, mental health, personal growth, and self-reflection are addressed. The content brings marginalized voices and perspectives that engage the community in dialogue to the forefront.

The content produced by Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs contrasts with what our native, traditional Hmong culture allows and supports. My ambitions and aspirations to become an educated and independent woman were blocked. My culture did not support the vision I had for myself. Ingrained doubts in my head reminded me I was not good enough. My transformation reveals what is possible.

Today, my self-awareness and personal growth enable me to face many challenges. The journey to develop a deeper understanding of myself generated curiosity. I wanted to explore the experiences of other Hmong American women who have used digital media to create autobiographical experiences. My objective is to share their stories of self-inquiry and personal growth and in particular, the embodiment of the use of self (UoS) online in creating change in their lives and community. The UoS refers to the ability to align our experiences, values, and beliefs with our intentions and what is executed (Jamieson et al., 2010).

Practical and Academic Significance

I have not seen historical narratives that document the experiences of Hmong women until recently. As a Hmong woman, it touches my heart deeply that our lived experiences largely

remain invisible. Our voices are muted. I have noticed that our contributions are not recognized in the records of our people or history books.

Little scholarship exists on the experiences of Asian American women compared to that of Euro American women. Research on Asian American women have focused on topics such as cultural values and familial roles; research tends to perpetuate stereotypes of Asian American women as exotic, passive, or victims of traditional (*patriarchal*) Asian cultures (Chin et al., 2008).

A simple Google search for "research on Asian American women leadership" produced 151 million results while "research on Hmong women leadership" produced 5 million results. Despite the continued growth of the Asian American population, its diversity, and the increasing visibility of Asian American women leaders, Asian American stories are missing in American mainstream culture (Duncan, 2004).

Within the field of Organization Development and Change (OD&C), use of self has been used for decades. Cheung-Judge and Jaimeson (2018) observe that use of self has been "core in the practice of OD since its early founding" (p.22). However, little research has been done on the use of self. Current UoS literature focuses on the OD&C field and the helping professions such as nursing, counseling psychology, and social work (Jaimeson & Davidson, 2019). Addressing the lack of research is important: lack of research restricts the construct.

My research broadens the understanding and relevance of the use of self beyond helping professions. In this study, I will apply the concept of the UoS to the online environment. Therefore, this study expands research to an underrepresented population in an under-researched context. Sharing experiences of Hmong American women as digital entrepreneurs can help

Asian American women – indeed, all women – create paths to positive change in their lives and those of their families and communities. I hope that this research inspires and motivates others to dive deeper into how they can apply the UoS in their journeys to becoming their most effective selves.

Terms and Definitions

The following are operational and technical terms used in this study:

Digital entrepreneurship – The pursuit of opportunities based on the use of digital media and other information and communication technologies (Davidson & Vaast, 2010).

Hmong American – Individuals who classify themselves as Hmong Americans have ancestors who originated from southwest China (in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Hunan) and settled in the United States as refugees from Laos after the Vietnam War (Chan, 1994).

Identity – The behaviors we perform in a setting that is related to the self. The many identities (e.g., student, sibling, child, friend, worker, partner) one has combined to make up his or her self (Rohlinger, 2019).

Self – The relatively stable set of perceptions we have about who we are relative to others. The self is shaped through interactions with others in a variety of settings (Rohlinger, 2019).

Use of self – The conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for effectiveness in whatever the situation is presenting (Jamieson et al., 2010).

Summary

      Use of self applies to everyone, yet there is virtually no research on its application in the digital environment, an environment in which most people communicate today. This dissertation responds to the opportunity and need to expand research on use of self and provides insight into the experiences of Hmong American women specifically. In this research paper, Hmong American women share their journeys of growth and change. In the second chapter, I provide a literature review on the roles of Hmong women, use of self, and the presentation of self in the digital environment.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces topics that informed the research completed for this dissertation:

- The roles of Hmong women

- Use of self

- Presentation of self [2] online

As noted previously, literature on Hmong women's lived experiences is limited. In this section, I summarize Hmong history and the traditional roles of Hmong women. I did not find research on Hmong women entrepreneurs. My intent is to enable readers to understand the context in which Hmong women digital entrepreneurs break the traditional mold. This chapter introduces the elements of UoS and summarizes associated concepts and models. As described by Jaimeson and Davidson (2019), the UoS refers to "using what we know about ourselves to intentionally draw on aspects of our whole selves to positively impact the current situation" (p.6). I found that most literature addressing UoS relates to professions such as the therapy and OD&C fields. Little empirical research has been conducted on UoS. I found no research on how professionals outside of helping disciplines employ UoS. Research on Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs will help us understand whether and how UoS is used beyond the helping professional and social workspaces. This research helps us to understand the UoS application in a broader context.

Using a multi-disciplinary approach, I draw from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and communication studies to help us understand the presentation of self. When individuals spend more time online, their perceptions, interactions, and behaviors – even their

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[2] *Self* refers to the relatively stable set of perceptions we have about who we are relative to others. The self is shaped through interactions with others in a variety of settings (Rohlinger, 2019).

sense of self is shaped by the technologies and social contexts of the digital environment. Despite a growing body of literature that examines the individual within today's digital environment, there is much to be learned about how technology impacts our very selfhood.

The Roles of Hmong Women

More than 40 years ago after the Vietnam war, the first Hmong arrived in the United States as refugees of the Secret War in Laos. The Hmong population in the United States has grown significantly since 1980 (Hmong National Development, 2003). According to the Pew Research Center (Budiman, 2022), the US Census Bureau reports that in 2019, over 327,000 Hmong people live in the United States. **Table 1** identifies Hmong American employment status.

Table 1

Employment Status of Hmong Americans (18 Years of Age and Older)

Employed Population	2000	2010	2019
Hmong Entire Population	52.4%	57.5%	74.5%
Hmong Male	58.8%	59.2%	77.4%
Hmong Female	46.0%	55.8%	71.0%
US Female	69.0%	64.7%	68.2%
US Entire Population	62.6%	60.4%	63.5%

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The Hmong have been and continue to be strong contributors to the American economy. In 2019:

- Three quarters (74.5 percent) of Hmong Americans 18 years of age and older were in the labor force, compared to 63.5 percent of the national population of the same cohort.

- Seventy-one (71) percent of Hmong females 18 years of age and older were in the labor force compared to 63.5 percent in the entire US population of the same cohort.

The Hmong refugee adjustment experience has been explored extensively by journalists and scholars. Many focus on the differences between the Hmong and mainstream American cultures (Lee, 1997). Scholars note stark differences in the roles of women in America and traditional Hmong culture (Donnelly, 1997). Hmong traditions are deeply rooted in patriarchal customs. There are 18 Hmong clans; each clan represents a different last name. The clan system also functions as economic and social support, providing a strong connection to individual identity. Hmong sons are valued for the role they play in continuing the traditions of the Hmong culture (Lee, 1986).

A quick search on Google reveals a handful of books written by Hmong authors. Kao Kalia Yang's (2008) memoir, *The Latehomecomer*, provides context for understanding the difficulties her parents endured in trying to conceive and give birth to a son. Her parents' experience illustrates the pressure put on Hmong couples to have sons to carry the family's legacy:

> My mother and father had been married for nearly a decade, but there were no boys yet. The pressure for him to marry another wife was mounting from all his brothers and his mother, too. They all said that my mother could not give him sons; he was still handsome; he could marry another and love my mother just the same. We were only girls, Dawb and I. What would happen to him when he died? What would happen to my mother? As girls, we could not perform the ceremonial rituals to carry my mother and father's spirits back to the land of the ancestors. (p.80)

Hmong history and culture exclude the contributions and voices of Hmong women. Symonds (2014) states that "In the Hmong community, there is no compensatory power for women. Women contribute to the continuance of the male hegemonic structure…." (p.9). To understand Hmong women's role within its cultural context, one must look at how women's roles as wives, daughters, mothers, and grandmothers are reflected in men's roles as husbands, sons, fathers, and grandfathers. Symonds (2014) explains that:

> Women living in a given household are either wives who have married in or daughters who will marry out. Women are defined and indeed define themselves in relation to the males in whose household they reside…. A Hmong man, Doua Hang, tells us that "the important part of a Hmong family from one generation to the next is the men…. Women are important, but women change….Wives and daughters are like leaves and flowers, but men are the branches and trunk of the tree, always strong and never changing." (p. 9)

Coming from a rural agricultural economy and a traditional culture where men and boys were expected to be future leaders and socially more prominent than women, Hmong women in America continue to serve in subservient roles within their families and local communities (Austin & Ling, 2010). A Hmong woman's role is to assist her husband in preserving his clan's customs by carrying out her duties as a wife and mother. From a young age, Hmong girls are raised to help with domestic chores (Donnelly, 1997). Hmong women also are expected to contribute economically to the family.

The Hmong society's patriarchal structure has been remarked upon by most researchers who have observed it. As Donnelly (1997) describes it, "the most immediate striking aspect of gender roles in Hmong society, described time and again by researchers, is the apparent hierarchical relation between men and women" (p.29). Symonds (2014) notes that within the

Hmong culture, women occupy a structurally subordinate position with no public voice through the political, economic, and ritual spheres which are restricted to men. Gender roles are reinforced for Hmong children daily and involves the recounting of stories and traditional folklore.

An educated Hmong woman does not command the same level of respect in the community as a Hmong man. In the Hmong community, independence and education reflect negatively on Hmong women. According to Hune (1998), some in the Hmong community believe that these experiences can "lead her away from traditional roles, delay or forgo marriage" and "restrict her marriage opportunities" (p.7). In a study exploring Hmong women's barriers to education, Yang (1990) found that "traditional Hmong women are brought up to have a low self-image. One of the major reasons why Hmong women are not furthering their education seems to be due to 'culture'" (p. 75). The women in the study say they do not continue their education because:

- They were expected to get married between the ages of 16 years and 18 years old.
- They feared being called old maids if they were more than 18 years old and not married.
- Traditionally, a woman's place is in the home serving the men and family.

Yang (1990) argues that the traditional cultural belief system perpetuates the mindset of inferiority that these women experience in their daily lives.

As Hmong women make gains in education and employment, the changes challenge the traditional roles of Hmong women. After 40 years in America, Hmong women have found new opportunities for growth and development. Currently, there is no research exploring Hmong women's self-inquiry and personal growth. There are far fewer scholarly articles on Hmong

women and in particular, Hmong American women entrepreneurs. One article in the *Annals of Tourism Research* journal focuses on women producers of ethnic arts specific to gender dynamics of indigenous ethnic arts production such as the Hmong needlework of among other indigenous populations of Latin America and Southeast Asia (Swain, 1993).

Use of Self

Though many organization development (OD) practitioners have written about the use of self concept, its origin is unknown. In an in-depth literature review by Cheng-Judge and Jamieson (2018), more than 60 definitions, descriptions, and discussions were identified. Cheng-Judge and Jamieson (2018) write, "For those disciplines like OD, psychotherapy, coaching, and social work, the emphasis of the concept is more focused on how the professional helpers can use themselves effectively to effect changes among those with whom they work" (p. 23).

One of the earliest concepts of use of self came from Fredrick Alexander in the 1980s. He developed the Alexander Technique focused on the integration of the mind/body system and the relationship between the physical and psychological functions that have been adopted across many disciplines. Although educational programs have created course work, literature and conceptual grounding have been sparse (Jamieson et al., 2010).

Jamieson et al. (2010) define UoS as "the conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for effectiveness in whatever the situation is presenting" (p. 5). According to Cheung-Judge and Jamieson (2018), "The concept of UoS has been core to the practice of OD since its early founding" (p.22). UoS determines how effectively scholars-practitioners execution aligns with their intentions; it is built on self-awareness, intentions, consciousness of the situation, choices, and effective behavior management. UoS is a lifelong

journey that requires constant practice, experimentation, reflection, and feedback (Jamieson et al., 2010).

In preparation for counseling and consulting engagements, for decades the UoS has been a tool that therapists, counselors, nursing, social workers, and other helping roles such as organization development have used (Baldwin & Satir, 1987). The early literature stemming from therapy focuses on the therapists intentionally bringing themselves into the therapeutic relationship. For example, in an interview with Baldwin (1987), Carl Rogers, a leading advocate of the "client-centered approach" offers that, "the most important element of therapy - when my self is very clearly, obviously present" (p. 30). Baldwin and Satir (1987) emphasizes the importance of UoS in family therapy, which transforms the patient into partner. Early pioneers of OD&C were therapists: Kurt Lewin (social psychologist and social scientist), Abraham Maslow (hierarchy of needs), and Carl Rogers (unconditional positive regard). They contributed to the emerging field of OD by exploring and teaching the underlying humanistic philosophy inherent in OD. UoS and self-as-instrument were established around the same time as those doing this work in therapy began working in organizations (Hinckley, 2014).

At the core of use of self is increasing one's self-awareness through paying attention to the whole self, including one's hidden shadow sides (Jung & Storr, 1983). Experiences shape us and the conscious and unconscious beliefs that drive behavior. A heightened level of self-understanding increases awareness of day-to-day choices in decision-making, which allows for effective behavior management. Strozzi-Heckler (2014) states that others' perceptions are formed based on the experiences of interaction and may not be in alignment with true intentions. This is critical for individuals to understand as they develop a sense of self-awareness through reflection and feedback.

A framework to increase understanding of the UoS concept was developed by Jamieson et al. (2010) establishing three competencies, including seeing, knowing, and doing. The three levels of effectiveness are functionality, efficacy, and mastery. **Tables 2** and **3** outline competencies and development levels. The competency and level of development framework are based on the idea that individuals seek to move progressively through each competency to the highest level of development, mastery. For greatest impact, one's presence must be integrated with what one sees, knows, and does (Jaimeson et al., 2010).

Table 2

Use of Self Competencies

Competency		
Seeing	**Knowing**	**Doing**
Involves using the 6 senses to become aware of how individuals see themselves, see others, and see the context. Awareness of internal and external data gathering that is free from personal bias, filters, or habitual assumptions.	Making sense of what is present through organizing information and drawing inferences, hunches, conclusions, and interpretations from knowledge and experience actualized as intuition.	Capability to identify and execute a full range of behavioral and action choices that support what is most helpful for a given situation.

Note. Competency definitions are adapted from "Managing Use of Self for Masterful Professional Practice" by D. Jamieson, D. Shechtman, and M. Auron, 2010. *Organization Development Practitioner*, 42(3), p. 6. Copyright 2009 by Jamieson, Shichtman, & Auron.

Table 3

Use of Self Levels of Development

Levels of Development		
Functional	**Efficacy**	**Mastery**
Knowing "how to do it." One must concentrate and pay attention to doing it right, following appropriate steps, or "doing it by the book" (applying theory to practice step-by-step). Similar to the phrase "conscious incompetence" or knowing what we are not sure of.	Seeing, knowing, and doing becomes less challenging with increased ease and flow. The range of data available to work with, the knowledge available for sense-making, and the behavioral flexibility of options and skills for taking action are expanded. Higher levels of confidence and agency in execution.	Fully integrated and seamless work. One's presence has a greater impact. Seeing, knowing, and doing have become simultaneous, back and forth activities with little conscious decision-making.

Note. Competency definitions are adapted from "Managing Use of Self for Masterful

Professional Practice" by D. Jamieson, D. Shechtman, and M. Auron, 2010. *Organization*

Development Practitioner, 42(3), p. 6. Copyright 2009 by Jamieson, Shichtman, & Auron.

Jamieson et al. (2010) postulate that each person is unique and must be mindful of how she shows up, is perceived, and behaves in alignment with her desired intentions. This requires a deeper understanding of:

- What a situation is presenting

- Clarity of intentions

- Consideration of available choices

- Taking aligned action

Individuals reflect a combination of characteristics such as values, culture, ethnicity, family system influences, and learned behaviors through life experiences (Sostrin, 2017).

Therefore, it is essential to explore individuals' histories to uncover who and what shaped them and who they are becoming. The environmental, institutional, and social influences alongside life experiences and conditioned tendencies offer a holistic view and understanding of each individual (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014).

Jamieson and Davidson (2019) explain that the *self* consists of identities such as gender, race, culture, and profession that contribute to the understanding of who we are. The forms of identity become more or less prominent aspects of people's behaviors in how they present or show. They further suggest that the *self* contains *personas* and *shadows*. Personas are the ways we choose to show up and may change depending on whether we present the real or inauthentic selves. Goffman (1959) refers to personas as masks. For example, it is common to have a persona with friends and family and a different professional persona. Where this becomes an issue is when one cannot distinguish or becomes unaware of the difference between the persona and the core self (Cheung-Judge & Jamieson, 2018). The shadow parts are not as evident and exist on a subconscious level. Perhaps consisting of things that happened early in life and are possibly parts that an individual my simply deny or never have discovered or developed. Shadow can be perceived as negative (Jaimeson & Davidson, 2019).

Successful use of self requires ongoing self-inquiry and personal growth. In addition to three competencies (seeing, knowing, doing) and upward movement to a mastery level (Jamieson et al., 2010), individual self-development is incorporated into the Situational Action Learning Cycle illustrated in **Figure 1** on **Page 26**. Jamieson and Davidson (2019) described Situational Action Learning as:

> We are using ourselves in each situation we enter or engage. It is key that we be
> conscious and disciplined to use ourselves as best we can. Our roles and intentions are

generally for service to others or a system, so we wish to understand, take action, and have positive impact in each situation. The Situational Action Learning Cycle can be helpful in all our endeavors and helps to guide our way through each situation. (p. 6)

By establishing avenues to self-inquiry and personal growth, self-awareness is strengthened. As a result, consciousness and the ability to set clear intentions are strengthened. In use of self, individuals can fall back into old habits and limit effectiveness unless they are diligent about presenting their best selves.

Figure 1

Situational Action Learning Cycle
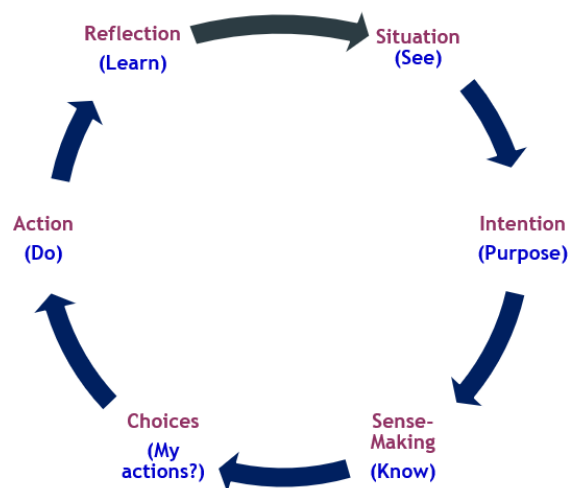
Note. Figure 1 illustrates how both competencies and levels of development align in every situation. From "Advancing Thinking and Practice on Use of Self," by D. Jamieson and J. Davidson, 2019, *Organization Development Journal*, 37(1), p. 44. Copyright 2018 by Dave Jamieson.

However, Jamieson et al. (2010) conclude that "the idea of use of self has often been ambiguous, vague, and difficult to convert into action; and has mostly been a mentored skill or shared tips and techniques to aid understanding and behavior" (p. 4). As most empirical research

on use of self focuses on the work of OD practitioners and therapists, there is a gap in the

research and applicability of use of self beyond the helping disciplines. Minahan and Forrester

(2020) state that:

> In addition to the lack of coherence in our field, there is no common guidance about
>
> exactly what or how use of self might occur in a given setting or period of life, or what
>
> use of self means in practice, and none have ways to determine how well you are using
>
> yourself as an instrument. (p. 9)

Cheung-Judge and Jamieson (2018) argue that "Most of the learning and sharing about

use of self within OD was derived through practice and experience. Little clarifying work has

been published and almost no research has been done" (p. 23).

Publications on the use of self-concept mostly relate to the professions of therapy and

OD&C fields. I uncovered less than 12 articles in both peer-reviewed and journal articles on use

of self. Three books have been published explicitly on use of self and several books have

chapters, including:

- *The use of self* by Alexander (1985), *Organizational consulting: A gestalt approach* by

  Nevis (1987), and *The use of self in therapy* by Baldwin and Satir (1987)

- *Organization development: A practitioner's guide for OD and HR* by Cheung-Judge and

  Holbech (2021) and *The NTL handbook of organization development and change principles,*

  practices, and perspectives (2014) include chapters on UoS.

Minahan and Forrester (2020) note that "the evidence points to a body of knowledge and

thought around the use of self still in its infancy. There are a few shared concepts….Most of the

writing on the topic has been focused on the counseling and therapeutic worlds" (p. 8). Jamieson

and Davidson (2019) postulate that the opportunity lies in the ability to transfer UoS thinking and practices into organizations, management, and leadership – attempts to transfer UoS thinking have been limited. That there is a need to expand understanding and clarify UoS across wider audiences with ways to think about and take action on certain elements related to personal work impacting how effective people are in their roles and how it can affect performance and outcomes every day.

Literature on the use of self pertains to social work, therapy, and OD&C fields. OD&C literature tends to address professional workplace settings and workplace organization. UoS is not familiar to professionals in other fields or people in the general population. This study expands use of self research by:

- Studying the use of self by individuals in an understudied population, Hmong American women.
- Exploring whether and how use of self is used by individuals in digital media.

The following section introduces different perspectives on the concept of self through the lens of three disciplines and explores the presentation of self online.

Presentation of Self Online

At the core of UoS is increasing one's self-awareness by paying attention to the whole self (Jung & Storr, 1983). This requires an understanding of how one's experiences shape conscious and unconscious beliefs that drive behaviors (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014). It seems necessary to offer some definitional context for terms such as *self* and *identity*. This section of the literature review draws from three disciplines that help to understand the construction of self and identity including psychology, sociology, and communication studies. A review of literature

from the three disciplines provides perspectives on how selves and identities manifest and are present in a digital society. Despite a growing body of literature that examines the individual within today's digital environment, there is much to learn about how technology impacts our very selfhood.

The US Census Bureau (2021) reports that nearly 85 percent of households have broadband internet subscriptions and 92 percent own a computer. According to a Pew Research Center survey, nearly 72 percent of American adults use social media (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). YouTube continues to be the most used online platform with 81 percent of Americans saying they use the video-sharing site up from 73 percent in 2019. Furthermore, 69 percent of adults in the United States report that they use Facebook. During the fourth quarter of 2021, the number of daily active users on Facebook reached 1.93 billion (Dixon, 2022). Seven in ten Facebook users say that they use the site daily with 49 percent reporting that they use the site several times a day (Auxier & Anderson, 2022). There is a gap in knowledge as scholars construct new meanings about how technology impacts behavior, consumption, collaboration, and representation.

Psychology

Questions about the nature of the self have captured the attention of scholarly researchers for more than 70 years. From 1950 to the 1970s, new constructs in psychology were introduced through researching topics such as self-awareness, self-perception, self-concept, self-presentation, self-monitoring, and self-control. In the 1980s, social psychology researchers began to explore self-related constructs such as social cognition, attitudes, group processes, social influence, and interpersonal relationships within the context of self-processes (Leary & Tangney, 2012).

Psychologists assert that the individual comes first and then society. That there is a single identity manifested as a result of one's cognitions (Jones & Abes, 2013). Much of the work in humanistic psychology is exemplified by Carl Rogers (1951) and Abraham Maslow (1954) (Leary & Tangney, 2012). Roger's (1951) framework of self-concept refers to the image we have of ourselves and includes three parts: the ideal self, self-image, and self-esteem. The self-actualization theory of Abraham Maslow (1954) points to an individual's aspirations to move up in a hierarchy of needs toward increasing states of self-fulfillment. Others such as psychologist Erikson (1994) conclude that the creation of selfhood happens in stages of psychological development. Each life stage is marked by the characteristic of a crisis that must be resolved to move to the next stage of development.

In the *Handbook of Self and Identity* (2012), psychologists Leary and Tangney (2012) analyze the constructs explored by self-researchers. They determine more than 60 such constructs (e.g., ego, ideal self, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-schema) deal explicitly with the self. Leary & Tangney (2012) analyze the most common use of the word *self* in academic research and conclude that:

> If we dig down to the fundamental, essential quality that underlies all three of these uses of the term self, we arrive at the human capacity for reflective thinking – the ability to take oneself as the object of one's attention and thought. Virtually all scholarly interest in the self involves, in some way or another, phenomena that involve that capacity for reflexive consciousness. (p. 6)

Self-esteem refers to the evaluation of self by the self; it plays a central role in the development of selfhood. Self-esteem is an attitude one holds about oneself (Burke & Stets,

2009). As cited in Hoyle et al., (1999), William James offers that self-esteem is reflective of the fixed ratio of one's successes as juxtaposed against one's aspirations, or that it may exist as a kind of self-feeling one has about oneself, regardless of external objective facts or reasons to the contrary. Self-esteem encompasses the beliefs one holds about oneself (Leary, 1995). Burke and Stets (2009) note that self-esteem has three bases:

- Self-efficacy, which refers to a general sense of one's competency.

- Self-worth, which refers to the sense of value one feels one has.

- Self-authenticity, which is a state of being where one feels she is being true to herself.

Psychologists Leary and Tangney (2012) further state that the field of self research has yet to be adequately integrated, "Although the philosophers have contributed many useful ideas and theoretical perspectives on the self, they have generally not tied those ideas to the extensive empirical literature in psychology and sociology" (p.15).

Sociology

To understand the construction of self, it is useful to draw from frameworks used in sociology. Broadly, the sociological perspective argues that the construction of self arises situationally and in social interactions with others. The self is situated within the context of social relations constructed in response to the larger society (Burke & Stets, 2009). Sociologists tend to find that self-identities occur as part of interaction with the world, influenced by context and is negotiable, fluid, partial, or multiple (Jones & Abes, 2013). Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) stresses the importance of reflexivity when examining the concepts of self. Giddens (1991) believes that self-identity is about a self that is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography" (p. 53). He points to the notion that self-identity is a compilation

of cognitive schemas about the self which is similar to a biography. The self is created through acknowledging the interchange and importance of inputs from others as well as one's own behaviors, including continuous self-monitoring and awareness which produce reflexiveness and the concept of a person (Giddens, 1991).

American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley wrote extensively about the self and is credited for introducing the "looking-glass," which describes how one's social identity is dependent on one's appearance to others (Burke & Stets, 2009). Cooley and Schuber (1998) note the looking glass metaphor was developed in the early 1900s:

> Looking glass self seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification….The thing that moves us to feel pride or shame is the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind. (p. 22)

Structural symbolic interaction offers an approach to understanding the human relationship with society as theorized by Stryker (Burke, 2006). He notes that the self comprises of distinct identities. The identities are referred to as roles. Roles are the result of shared societal expectations such as the roles of teacher and student. Roles manifest through reflexivity toward the self in terms of self-labeling and self-identification with them (Burke & Stets, 2009). The sociological school of symbolic interactionism defines reflexivity as the ability to turn around and view the self as an object. Leary and Tangney (2012) note that the self has two parts: the knower, who is focused on the "process," and the known aspect of the self, which is the "content" (p.50). These ideas are not new. Identity theorists have long asserted that human beings are closely connected with our social environments that impact who we are and become.

In the digital world of today, what is new is the sophisticated and easily accessible technologies that serve as expressions of our being that often shape identity.

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) argue that we can understand how we craft our sense of self by studying how we "perform" in different "settings" or different social situations while interacting with others. Goffman (1959) explains this by using a metaphor for theatrical performance. A stage is the setting, and the performance is the identity or a particular version of one's self in front of an audience. He notes that the observer can study the use of language, gestures, and actions of an individual as the behavior is consistent with the situation and audience expectations. Goffman (1959) calls this "impression management." In our daily lives, there is more than one stage, and we give more than one performance over the course of a day (Rohlinger, 2019). For example, student, sibling or daughter, and friend are identities that correspond with different behaviors in multiple settings.

For example, how one interacts with teachers at school is likely different than how the same person interacts with siblings at home. Goffman (1959) explains that this does not mean that individuals lack authenticity. However, individuals perform for whomever they are interacting with and are enabled to navigate socially because our different identities fit together "backstage," which is where various identities make sense in our lives. In a theatrical performance, the backstage is the place where the audience cannot see behind the curtain and is where we can be ourselves and drop the multiple identities (Rohlinger, 2019).

While Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor is used frequently for research on presentation of self, scholar Bernie Hogan (2010) offers a different perspective in considering online performances or online exhibitions. Hogan (2010) argue that "the world, then, is not

merely a stage but also a participatory exhibit" (p. 377). He distinguishes between performance spaces, whereby actors act for live audiences who watch, and exhibition spaces, where artifacts are displayed to be viewed by others on demand. Hogan (2010) asserts that Goffman's thesis about performance seems incomplete as online content is recorded. He further explains that the "distinction between ephemeral act and recorded has an instructive parallel in the domain of art" (p. 380). Content via performance is like original art that contains an aura. Benjamin et al., (2008) writes that original art compared to art that is reproduced and later consumed, is different from the content that is recorded, stored in a database, and later consumed. Hogan (2010) notes that within the online environment, the content produced and consumed is less performance and more a form of an exhibition. Hogan's (2010) definition of exhibition spaces require that the information on an individual is produced for the audience on-demand. The fact that the individual creating the content "does not continually monitor these data as an audience is receiving it and may possibly never fully know the audience" (p. 381).

In summary, psychologists assert that the individual comes first and then society. Sociologists, on the other hand, view that the construction of self arises situationally and as part of social interactions with others. Sociologist Paul Hodkinson (2011) wonders whether these virtual representations become "more important or more real than their identity off screen" (p. 277). In the digital age, it is more critical than ever to understand how individuals become the most effective versions of themselves in the online environment as social media expands all the stages available on a daily basis. In the next section, I explore how the construction of self continues to become increasingly more complex in the 21st century as communication technology advances impact everyday life. Hmong American women in connection with the rise

of Asian women have accumulated millions of followers through social media and are engaged

in the process of UoS through the presentation of self online, which merits research.

Communication Studies[3]

In a Digital Futures Survey, 98 percent of respondents say they are part of online

communities and believe that these communities are of importance to them (Kozinets, 2012).

Social networking platforms such as Facebook and Instagram offer opportunities for people who

may know each other offline to interact virtually (Kozinets, 2012). Communication studies can

improve understanding of the representation of self in the online environment. In this section, I

explore the reciprocal and participatory natures of digital media culture and discuss the

commodification[4] and monetization of the presentation of self online.

Communication studies refer to an academic field that examines human communication

processes such as the delivery and receiving of both verbal and non-verbal messages (Kozinets,

2012). Communication studies explore how meaning is generated in private, public, and mass

communication settings. From a communication studies perspective, there is no shortage of

scholarship on the impact of digital media on the larger culture. Kozinets (2012) notes that some

views are technologically deterministic, meaning technology is at the core of changes in social

behavior. Others take a constructivist approach, saying technology is an effect rather than a cause

of ongoing social changes among and across peoples and cultures (Kember & Zylinska, 2015).

Scholars characterize digital media culture as reciprocal and participatory. The social exchange

theory (Homans, 1958) proposes social behavior is the result of an exchange process. The

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[3]*Communication studies* refers to an academic field that explores how humans communicate, including the creation, delivery and receiving of verbal and non-verbal messages (Kozinets, 2012).
[4] *Commodification* is socially constructed and involves businesses taking things such as identity and language and turning aspects of them into a service or good (Bhasin, 2017).

purpose of the exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize cost. Researchers have applied the social exchange theory to the online environment and have found that participation online in the form of reciprocity is a key factor in online social environments (Faraj & Johnson, 2011).

Henry Jenkins coined the term *participatory culture*, referring to the notion of participation online (Jenkins et al., 2016). He studied the fan communities in which he notes that individuals have always found ways to interact and participate with each other which has been greatly expanded due to the presence of the Internet. In a blog entry, Jenkins (2006) discusses sharable culture and explains how his grandmother's quilting circles are an example of sharable culture. Lifelogging presents a digital media example of sharable culture. In 2000, Microsoft researcher Gordon Bell began wearing a camera around his neck to record data that would remove the need for memory in the future (Elgan, 2016). Since then, lifelogging has had newfound popularity with the entry of technological wearables and the smartphone. Scholars note society's current fascination with data collection in the constructivist paradigm associated with a self in becoming. Researcher Banner (2014) notes that the collection of biodata through digital technologies results in a dynamic that enables (many would argue empowers) individuals to reshape their self-narratives through graphic presentations. Banner's (2014) research asserts that this presentation represents a mode (a form of biomediation), of "turning the self into data" (p. 201).

Scholar Leah Lievrouw and her colleague Sonia Livingstone (2012) define new media as "the artifacts or devices that enable and extend our abilities to communicate; the communication activities or practices we engage in to develop and use these devices; and the social arrangements or organizations that form around the devices and practices" (p. 23). This framework integrates information, technology, and social behaviors. The holistic approach to describing the new

media environment encompasses human activity and social structures alongside the technologies, which is a useful starting point for understanding the digital environment. Hine (2015) acknowledges that the digital environment does not stand outside our real-life but rather is embedded within everyday life.

Commodification

In addition to characterizing digital media culture as reciprocal and participatory, there are other dimensions, such as commodification, to consider. Commodification is socially constructed and involves businesses taking things such as identity and language and turning aspects of them into a service or good (Bhasin, 2017). In this section, I discuss:

- The values inherent in social media

- Advanced technological capabilities introduce a new business model that promotes individual self-branding

- The role of self-disclosure in relation to the construction of the authentic self online

Researcher Alice Marwick (2013) conducted a 4-year ethnographic study of Silicon Valley and found that social media technologies tend to reflect the values of the people who create the software. She notes that these technologies "illuminate and reward status-seeking practices that reflect the values of the technology scene: idealism, privilege, business acumen, and geek masculinity" (p. 77). Marwick (2013) explains that in a competitive environment like Silicon Valley, using social media is a way to display one's status. By posting one's activities and attending high-profile events, she creates a narrative that proves her value. Marwick (2013) notes that "If you only have 150 followers while your peers have 150,000 followers, you are considered, by those in the tech scene, to be less important" (p. 97). In another example, the

ability to have one's posts retweeted is seen as a status marker of influence indicating that one's

content is important enough to be distributed by others (Marwick, 2013).

On the YouTube Partner's Program website, YouTube's monetization strategist explains

how to start earning money from posting personal videos. The strategist's video showcases fresh

and upbeat music that characterizes the possibility of monetizing videos on YouTube as an

exciting opportunity. The monetization strategist explains that to qualify for the program,

individuals have to be in good standing with YouTube, have at least 1,000 subscribers, and have

4,000 public watch hours in the last 12 months. When individuals hit the minimum threshold,

YouTube reviews the channel and enrolls the creator into the YouTube Partner's Program along

with exclusive content creator club access to other resources (Google, 2022).

Other social media platforms such as Instagram offer both private and public accounts,

allowing an individual to broadcast images as its core functionality. Users can share content with

a wide audience, some of whom the author may know personally, or they can choose to create

private accounts viewable only by those that have been granted access. A simple Google search

using the words "how to make money on Instagram" reveals over 3 million results. Among the

search results are numerous videos that instruct users on the best ways to make money on

Instagram. There are also articles on tips for making money on Instagram and ideas for "side

hustles."

Technological advances offer a business model where numerous bloggers and YouTubers

make money creating content featuring themselves. Castells (2009) notes that digital social

media such as blogs, social networks, wikis, and email enable individuals to create what he calls

"mass self-communication" (p.97). YouTube serves as a platform for mass self-communication

(Castells, 2009). Couldry (2012) coins the term "presencing," which describes how individuals and groups use digital media to manage "a continuous presence-to-others across space" (p.49). He observes that presencing occurs because of an "emerging requirement in everyday life to have a public presence beyond one's bodily presence, to construct an objectification of oneself" (p. 50).

This type of commodification points to the transposition from brands that are products to brands that are people in digital culture today. Researcher Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) explored the culture of self-branding among women and found that individual commodification through self-branding, is "a new social arrangement that relies on different strategies for identity construction" (p. 69). As part of her exploration of the culture of self-branding as it relates to women, Banet-Weiser (2012) points to the increasingly viable construct of "self-as commodity," one that "involves a social relationship with oneself, one of innovation, production, and consumption, charged with ideally producing a unique 'authentic' self" (p. 73). In addition, the definition of consumer has evolved as consumption today involves a form of co-production that has changed traditional branding concepts where the consumer becomes the producer. The rise of online entrepreneurship appears to have reached a new form of social contract where activism and consumerism cohabitate. This creates an environment where brands and consumers now engage in reciprocity previously unimagined.

Among the variant forms of self-branding occurring online, autobiographical narration seems to be the most prevalent. Distinct from non-digital kinds of autobiography, the presentation of self online is constructed not in isolation from others, but in communication with others. According to Cheung et al., (2015), there are four primary benefits or value drivers associated with self-disclosure on social networking sites including "convenience of maintaining

existing relationships; new relationships building; self-presentation; and enjoyment" (p. 282). Increasing self-disclosure also plays a substantial role in constructing an online narrative of oneself. Such self-disclosure is part of a social exchange that creates value. The advantages of social exchange via self-disclosure also may be useful in promoting one's self-brand for recognition and/or profit (Cheung et al., 2015).

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the literature regarding the traditional roles of Hmong women, UoS framework, and presentation of self online from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The study expands the research on use of self by studying Hmong American women, which is an understudied population and taking the research into the understudied context of digital media.

Little empirical research has been conducted on UoS and there is no research on professionals outside of the helping disciplines, specifically Hmong women digital entrepreneurs. Addressing limitations in marginalized populations and the new online context is important: such research examines UoS relevance and application in a broader context. In this study, I examine the stories of self-inquiry and personal growth shared by Hmong women and how these individuals embody the use of self in the digital environment to create change in their lives and communities. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of this research and provide an overview of the methodology to conduct the research as well as how the data will be analyzed, reviewed, and summarized.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs the collaborative nature of learning, a constructivist philosophical framework, versus a positivistic epistemological framework. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism "is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42).

This study describes the self-inquiry and personal growth journeys of Hmong women digital entrepreneurs and how they embody the UoS in online social networks. Because the study proposal is social constructivist in orientation, I deployed a qualitative, narrative approach and used open-ended questions within semi-structured interviews. The study's methodology was designed to enable participants to share their stories of self-inquiry and personal growth in their own words. The interviews allowed contextualization that reflected online and offline instances of daily life as understood by the study's participants and as interpreted by me.

Freedman and Combs (1996) outline four attributes of social constructivism that shape the understanding and study of narratives:

- Realities are socially constructed.

- Realities are constituted through language.

- Realities are organized and maintained through narrative.

- There are no essential truths.

Crotty (1998) explains there are several assumptions of constructivism; meaning is constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting; qualitative researchers use open-ended questions so participants can share their views. This chapter explains the value of qualitative research and narrative inquiry. They are the primary data collection methods used for this study. In addition, participants, data collection, data analysis process, confidentiality, the role of the researcher, and limitations are discussed.

Research Framework

Narrative inquiry is an effective framework choice given participants in this study are Hmong women. As Josselson (1987, 1988, 1994) and others have asserted, narratives are well-suited for the study of women because they provide more opportunities to break out of the dominant research and discourse paradigms and make room to participate authentically. In addition, narratives (stories) are familiar and fit with the participants' culture. The Hmong people have an oral history tradition of passing culture and wisdom down from generation to generation through music, dance, and stories (Faderman & Xiong, 1998).

Hmong folklore explains how the Hmong lost the written language. One story recounts a time when the Hmong lived in China and were a prosperous ethnic minority group with their own written language. During a civil war in China, when the Hmong lost to the Chinese, officials banned the use of the written Hmong language. Throughout the years, Hmong women hid some form of the Hmong language in the design of their story cloths (Faderman & Xiong, 1998; Yang, 2011). It was not until the early 1950s that French missionaries created another written language for the Hmong (Faderman & Xiong, 1998) known as the Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) system. This is the widely accepted Hmong writing system used today. The Hmong people

continue to pass down knowledge about the Hmong culture and tradition orally. Many Hmong are illiterate in their own written language (Austin & Ling, 2010).

Czarniawska (1997) asserts that narrative stories are culturally embedded within a broader, culturally defined pattern that determines the way stories are told and the position an individual holds within them. Therefore, accounts or stories cannot just exist as they are and must be interpreted within a wider context (Czarniawska, 2004). Since the study is about the self-inquiry and personal growth experiences of Hmong women, I draw not only from an over-arching constructivist perspective but also from the branch of pragmatism known as symbolic interactionism. The philosophy that one's comprehension of reality occurs with reflexive engagement upon life experience through interaction with others is used to guide this research study (Bazeley, 2021). C. Wright Mills (1959) refers to this as "the sociological imagination" (p. 5), which is the ability to comprehend one's own lived experience and situate it temporally and contextually. Sociological imagination is representative of a cultivation of mind. Mills (1959) states it is necessary to recognize that individual lives contribute, even minutely, to "the shaping of this society and to the course of its history" (p. 6).

The sociological imagination is core to this study. It enables the participants and the researcher to understand their inner lives within the broader historical context. Mills (1959) asserts that the sociological imagination "enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (p.6). He argues that the sociological imagination is "the most fruitful form of self-consciousness" (p. 8). Mills (1959) distinguishes between personal troubles and societal issues. Noting that:

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statements resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual and a biographical entity and within the scope of his immediate milieu – the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter; values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened. (p. 8)

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter; some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. (p. 8)

As noted in the literature review, psychologists assert the individual comes first and then society. Sociologists observe that the construction of self arises situationally, as part of social interactions with others. One way to address this seeming paradox of individual and society is to review it through the lens of sociological imagination. The framework lives at the intersection of individual and society. As Mill (1959) states, "this quality of mind is found in the social and psychological sciences" (p. 14) and provides a holistic understanding. Using sociological imagination is particularly useful in constructing research questions for this study and understanding the autobiographical information participants share online.

Understanding participant stories from a feminist standpoint is also useful. Sorell and Montgomery (2001) describe the feminist perspective as a "method of analysis based on the assumption that groups (and members of groups) differing in social position also differ in material interests and their social understandings…. A standpoint is a local, lived reality" (p. 99). Educator, researcher, and psychologist Carol Gilligan's (1982) analyzes the influences of patriarchy on women, girls, and boys. The influences noted some 40 years ago continue to impact how women and men are heard and valued. Her seminal work, *In A Different Voice* (1982), brought attention to moral and personal development and how they vary between men and women, with female development focused on relationships, attachment, and communication. Research and communication about these topics have been hampered in part because society lacks a vocabulary that conceptualizes and articulates the complexities of connections and relationships. Even the word *identity*, as opposed to *intimacy,* is the umbrella word and source for the primary vocabulary (Gillian, 1982).

Feminist thought is an important consideration when examining the participants' stories. Standpoint theory, which says knowledge develops from and is determined by social position, addresses the underlying epistemological issues with normative models and structures that do not describe the experiences of women (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). This perspective is valuable for a study because it sheds light on larger issues such as voice, belonging, discourse, power, and issues central to female development. Standpoint theory emphasizes stances taken by those outside the "norm." Taking a feminist standpoint offers an advantage for the participant stories and my research to honor their lived experience as recounted in their stories without the intrusion of androcentric norms and frameworks (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001).

Methodology

  The storytelling process of narrative inquiry was facilitated through interviews (Chase, 2003). I used interview-based qualitative research to give participants a voice on important social issues. Social constructionism is useful in understanding the implications of narratives. As Gergen and Kaye (1992) write, "[A] story is not simply a story. It is also a situated action in itself, a performance with illocutionary effects. It acts so as to create, sustain, or alter worlds of social relationship" (p. 253). As Boje (2001) observes, "Every story excludes. Every story legitimates a world view" (p. 18). Narratives serve as a lens into the world in which they are told. Stories illuminate that world (and what is not in that world). As a result, they become powerful sources of data in research.

  Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe narratives as a way to reveal the participant's background and restore her experience. As a result, readers improve their understanding of the participant's lived experiences. Chase (2003) adds that narratives are structured to have a beginning, middle, and end with the purpose of answering questions. Creswell (2013) defines narrative research as a collection of stories, sharing the lived experiences of individuals, and providing meaning for those experiences in a chronological manner. Narrative inquiry is not limited to the spoken word and takes into consideration many forms of input. Narratives are developed and collected through interviews, observations, document analysis, archives, and photos (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry applied to this study due to its focus on the personal and professional lived experiences of Hmong women participants.

  The research method I designed for this study combined narrative inquiry and content analysis. Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) asserts that "there are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of

constructing reality" (p. 11), which are described as *paradigmatic knowledge* and *narrative knowledge*. Bruner (1986) notes that paradigmatic knowledge is "focused on what is common among actions," and narrative knowledge is "focused on the particular and special characteristics of each action" (p. 11). The distinction can be seen in this study's blended method that incorporates narrative analysis (narrative knowledge) and content analysis (paradigmatic knowledge). Using the blended approach, I compiled participant story elements into fuller narratives, coded for select elements within the stories, and analyzed for themes across all the stories. Findings were connected to the literature review about use of self. The approach followed the footsteps of other narrative inquirers such as Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who "make themselves as aware as possible of the many, layered narratives at work in their inquiry space. They assert that they imagine narrative intersections, and they anticipate possible narrative threads emerging" (p. 70).

Marin and Marin (1991) suggest that researchers of the same ethnicity as the participants have an increased ability to build rapport personally and culturally. They stress that same-ethnicity data collectors should be employed in research projects where personal contact is involved. Researchers of the same ethnicity as participants can enhance rapport, willingness to disclose, and the validity and reliability of the research (Marin & Marin, 1991). Being of the same ethnicity as the interviewer can help the participants feel that they can share experiences. This can be of particular importance in methodologies that are dependent on establishing good rapport between researcher and participants, such as in case studies that use participant observations or open-ended questions.

Research Design

A qualitative narrative inquiry was the best approach for this study. It gave participants space to tell their stories of becoming and being Hmong women digital entrepreneurs. For each story, I identified the self-inquiry and personal growth experience and how each woman embodied use of self online. Narrative analysis favored the presentation of complete accounts by showing the underlying meaning and uncovering complexities with the richness that make up people's experiences (Riessman, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) say that qualitative research enables researchers to understand how individuals construct meaning in the course of their lived and interpreted realities. As Seidman (2006) notes, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9).

A qualitative design supported examination of the lived experience of Hmong women because it studies and documents a historically marginalized and understudied group. Duncan (2004) observes that for Asian American women in particular, the price of assimilation into and acceptance within the United States culture has been enforced silence. Examining Hmong women's stories addresses a research gap by giving voice to previously silenced voices. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research includes the voices of the participants, reflexivity of the researcher, description, and interpretation of the problem and how it can contribute to the overall literature. This study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories?

- To create the desired change in their lives and communities, how do Hmong women entrepreneurs embody the use of self in the digital environment?

- How do Hmong women digital entrepreneurs engage in self-inquiry and personal growth?

Educators Paulo Freire (2014) and bell hooks (1994) state that the power to think critically and deeply about who we are or want to be (whether online or offline) is vital, not just to liberate, but also to dignify, enhance, and perpetuate the state of our humanity. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) believe that qualitative narrative inquiry empowers participants to share their stories and provides a platform to be heard. Maxwell (2013) expresses that the intellectual goal of qualitative research is that individuals themselves "make sense" of their behaviors; influences upon their behaviors is where coherence emerges (p. 30). He states the focus on meaning is a hallmark of qualitative analysis. By participating in this study, Hmong women entrepreneurs were encouraged to share what has shaped their personal growth. This approach acknowledges that critical information lies within the data collected. Through interaction, discussion, and interpretation with participants, the researcher can identify themes and patterns to better understand human behavior (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research is helpful when scholars wish to investigate phenomena and experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives can offer compelling stories that resonate with others. The available research on Asian American women focuses on topics such as cultural values and familial roles and has often perpetuated stereotypes of Asian American women as exotic, passive, or victims of a patriarchal "traditional" Asian culture (Chin et al., 2008). A qualitative perspective was most appropriate for this study as it amplified the voices of Asian American women and told their stories, focused on what they believe was important, rather than what the researcher believed was important.

Participants

Maxwell (2013) notes a sample that seeks to provide information specific to one's research questions and objectives should be defined as "purposeful selection" (p. 97). This study incorporated purposeful selection using criterion sampling. Patton (1990) describes criterion sampling as a type of "purposeful sampling" for "information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 169). This method was appropriate because individuals needed to meet a specific set of criteria to participate (Patton, 1990). Participant criteria included:

- Self-identified as a Hmong woman.

- Authored and posted autobiographical content online.

- Had more than 1,000 followers on any social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram, or blog.

To achieve the sample, I used social media platforms to follow Hmong women that fit the study participant profile. As part of the recruitment phase, my initial communication with prospective participants was via Facebook messenger. I then used snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), thus procuring participants who met the initial criteria for the study. Internet researchers such as Hine (2015), note that allowing those under examination to provide their understandings of their situations is even more important when that study occurs within the context of the Internet. Hine (2015) further asserts that Internet-focused research must be viewed as highly interpretive "as its users weave together highly individualized and complex patterns of meaning out of these publicly observable threads of interaction" (p. 4). As such, researchers must be open to those spaces where the participants themselves frequent.

For example, when study participants revealed their presentation of self across multiple social networking sites, it was important to follow them on the platforms they most frequent. This study was multi-sited in that the researcher asked participants about three social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and blog. While Facebook offered a variety of features that enabled users to post text, photos, and videos, go "live" as well as interact with known and unknown persons, Instagram is a social networking platform built upon imagery. Instagram also enabled users to interact and comment on photographs and videos. Blogging online allowed short content to be consumed quickly and offered another venue to build relationships with followers. The platforms facilitated expansion of one's circle of influence and connections.

Data Collection

Data for this study was generated via in-person interviews or through zoom. To elicit conversation in a casual, purposeful manner, semi structured interviews were scheduled and conducted with five study participants. **Appendix B** on **Page 173** provides the participant invitation. Before the interviews, participants received a short email introducing the research project and request to complete the consent form (see **Appendix C** on **Page 175**) stating agreement to participate in the research. I engaged with the participants via interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted at an agreed-upon location or via audio conference. Interviews occurred in a privately situated space outdoors or in a private room reserved by me. All interviews were audiotaped with permission.

Saldana (2011) recommends that researchers keep a journal in the form of analytic memos also referred to as "think pieces" (p. 98). I kept a separate journal that included short analytic memos written immediately after each interview to record my impressions. Reflexive freewriting allowed me to record my immediate interpretations of the data. I reviewed patterns

that I identified along with significant details and insights about meaning. At times, I wrote about how my own story related to the experiences of these women.

Each participant was interviewed once. The interview was divided into two parts. In the first part, I asked the participant to describe one online representation she had authored and that she perceived to be meaningful in some manner. I designed the first set of semi-structured interview questions using the Situational Action Learning Cycle framework (situation, intention, sense-making, choices, action, and reflection) alongside the three UoS competencies (seeing, knowing, and doing) as described in **Figure 1** on **Page 26**. Then, I transitioned to the second part of the interview, which was designed to be a conversation on the participant's self-inquiry and personal growth journey. It was important that participants had a chance to review their transcripts to make sure I captured what the respondent intended. The interview transcript review provided a way to increase reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

After data were collected, the interviews were transcribed and coded manually. I used narrative coding guided by Saldana's (2009) coding taxonomies to design the data analysis process: the coding taxonomies incorporated terms as codes to enable the researcher to identify and track the structural properties of participants' stories. To a lesser degree, I used vivo coding to draw out themes from the language used by participants. For example, repeated use of specific words were noted as part of vivo coding whenever participants said the specific words unaided by me in the conversation. As I interacted with the data, I became more familiar with the themes that emerged inductively.

To identify themes in the participants' experiences and stories, I began by developing a list of categories, which became overarching themes from the participants' stories. Creswell (2013) calls this the making of "meaning units," which was an iterative process. The meaning units were shared by many or most participants and were identified as themes. Several prominent meaning units emerged. Codes were generated from the data during the initial coding rounds. The codes were categorized as part of a winnowing process from which ultimately broad themes emerged from the detailed findings. Each theme was given an initial code. Next, the responses were sorted and grouped by research question. I read through all the responses to each research question and highlighted relevant information. I then assessed patterns between their stories. I connected the themes to the literature that I analyzed.

I created a series of tables to demonstrate how coding assisted with the generation of themes or similarities at each point in the data review. Initial themes were identified in a list after the first review of participant interview transcripts. Last, I reviewed each transcript a final time to verify the findings and main themes as well as the patterns were consistent with the data. Through an in-depth interview process, I gained insight into each participant's self-inquiry and personal growth, their experiences creating the best versions of themselves and how they embodied the use of self online to create the change they sought.

Confidentiality

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation was voluntary. The objectives of the study were explained to all participants and written consent was obtained from them. To protect the confidentiality of each participant, a pseudonym was assigned to each, and real names were not used in transcripts and results reporting. Though attempts to portray participants' online representations were made,

it was problematic to ensure participant confidentiality without also demonstrating visually those representations. Therefore, I opted for a summative textual sketch when referencing visual representations of participants' online pages. In compliance with IRB guidelines, all data collected will be retained for at least three years. Digital audio files, demographic questionnaires, transcripts, and interview notes will be destroyed when the files are no longer needed for analysis.

Considerations for Credibility

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explain that according to constructivists:

What is being investigated are people's constructions of reality—how they understand the world. In qualitative methods, there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning of their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes. As such, "are the findings credible given the data presented?" (p. 213)

What is being studied are individuals and thus the constructions of their realities, qualitative work may have indeed rendered findings that are "closer" to reality than what might be presumed by those favoring purely quantitative methods.

In addition to using a coding method that supported confidentiality, I sent the transcripts to the participants via email after all interviews were completed. The purpose of this was to verify the accuracy of the interviews with participants to ensure their stories and experiences were properly represented. This supported a comprehensive check to be conducted by participants. As mentioned earlier, I kept a separate journal with short analytic memos written immediately after each interview to record my impressions. This reflexive freewriting allowed

me to record my interpretations of the data. I identified and noted patterns and insights shortly after each interview. This helped check biases I may have about gender, race, and social status.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is recognized as a co-producer of the story that is being told; what becomes important is framed by what the interviewee wants to tell and by what the researcher wants to know (Czarniaswska, 2004). Therefore, the researcher becomes the primary tool to collect, analyze, interpret and present the data (Creswell, 2013). Grbich (2013) explains that every researcher is "subject to the influences of their own life experiences" and this influenced both the design and interpretation of the data collected in the study. As the researcher, I was conscious that the participants and I shared the same ethnicity. I realized that traditional Hmong values have shaped my upbringing as a Hmong woman. Therefore, I was mindful of managing my individual bias and beliefs where I might stop probes too early because I consciously or unconsciously thought I knew what they were saying. In response, I tried to enter the interview sessions with what Zen practitioners call a "beginner's mind" to remain open to the stories as told. Also, I used my race, ethnicity, and gender to build rapport with participants and gain their trust.

Limitations

I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. I acknowledge that research bias can be a limitation for this qualitative narrative study. As Maxwell (2013) states, it is "impossible to deal with these issues by eliminating the researcher's theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens" (p. 124). Instead, he suggests, it is important to consider how these aspects may have influenced the study at hand. In that regard, it would be disingenuous to not acknowledge that the observations and interactions I have had with social media over the past several years

have not influenced my understanding of what is occurring with respect to presentation of self online. Being mindful of my own inclinations, I provided findings directly using the data at hand. Because any individual interpretation may contain bias, this study reflects and is influenced by my beliefs, attitudes, and the theoretical dispositions I hold that impact my assessments of what is occurring.

Another limitation is the small sample size and the homogeneity of the Hmong women participants who were interviewed. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population. For the scope of this study, the personal growth experiences and how these women embody the use of self online are unique to the participants themselves and the reality presented is their stated and enacted reality accompanied by my interpretations.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework, the qualitative research methodology, and the use of semi structured interviews to obtain rich and descriptive stories from the participants. In addition, participants, data collection, data analysis process, confidentiality, the role of the researcher, and limitations were also discussed. This study examines the stories of self-inquiry and personal growth shared by Hmong women and how these individuals embody the UoS in the digital environment to create change in their lives and communities. Choosing narrative inquiry as my methodology and research process supported the core purpose of this study. It was important to provide a well-rounded and in-depth approach to explore how Hmong women apply UoS online that gave voice to an understudied group. The stories that emerged through this research process served as portals into these worlds as lived, constructed, and communicated by the participants.

CHAPTER IV: DATA FINDINGS

Research for this paper explores how Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs embody the use of self in their work. In-depth narrative inquiry was selected as the research methodology to tell the stories of five Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' experience of self-inquiry and personal growth. In this chapter, I provide insight into the stories of these women through individual portraits. Participants spoke about their life experiences and described the significance of the positive changes they were seeking in their lives and community.

Each participant was interviewed once. I began the interview by asking each person to describe themselves followed by a few demographic questions to build rapport. The full interview was divided into two parts. In the first part, I asked the participant to describe an example of one online representation she has authored and that she perceived to be meaningful. I designed the first set of semi-structured interview questions using the Situational Action Learning Cycle framework (situation, intention, sense-making, choices, action, and reflection) alongside the three use of self competencies (seeing, knowing, and doing) as described in **Figure 1** on **Page 26**.

The second part of the interview was designed to be facilitate conversation on the participant's self-inquiry and personal growth journey. Participants were asked for permission to audio record the interview. The audio recordings were then transcribed. I listened to the zoom audio recordings of each interview multiple times comparing it to the transcription. The interview transcripts were e-mailed to each respective participant to be reviewed for member-checking (Candela, 2019). Participants were asked to review and validate that the transcript

captured what the respondent intended. All participants replied that the transcript was a realistic representation of the interviews.

Individual Portraits

This chapter presents the life stories of five Hmong women digital entrepreneurs. I gathered data during one-on-one interviews to develop a portrait of each participant. Each portrait presents the complex stories of these Hmong women in their own words. The interviews enabled the women to describe their experiences, roles, and identities over time.[5] Hearing these women tell their stories in their own voice captured the essence of their self-development, roles as students, wives, daughters, sisters and digital entrepreneurs. **Table 4** provides a demographic summary of the participants.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Completed Education Level	Age	Occupation	Marital Status
Blia	BA	30	Nurse	Married
Chia	BA	30	Financial Services Operations	Single
Lucy	BA	28	Content Creator	Single
Mai Kia	BA	30	Social Worker	Single
Sonya	High School	33	Banking Management	Single

Note. Demographic information collected from participants during interviews in October 2022.

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[5] Participant quotations have been edited lightly to support readability. For example, conversational pauses such as "like" were removed.

I kept a separate journal that included short analytic memos written immediately after each interview that recorded my impressions. Reflexive freewriting enabled me to record my interpretations of the data immediately after the interviews. I explored patterns in the narratives that I detected, along with significant details or insights about their meaning. At times, I wrote about how my own story related to the experiences of these women. Another useful strategy for me was to practice what Zen masters call *beginner's mind*. I listened to their stories without immediately making interpretations, leaping to my own experiences and dominant discourses. I immersed myself in each person's interview, to try to understand her story from her vantage point.

I was actively engaged in supporting each participant's storytelling while still honoring them as the keepers and narrators of their own stories. These were semi-structured interview sessions, so I did not use all of the interview questions in any one interview. The questions were often as much about facilitating the storytelling as they were directing the stories to answer my research questions. Instead of using a traditional question and answer format, I used the research questions to launch participants into story telling. I selected follow up questions based on where the participant was going rather than use a traditional question-and-answer format.

I created the individual portraits by summarizing the interviews and activating my senses to draw out deeper and more complete versions of the stories. Before each interview, I paused for 10 to 15 minutes and brought myself to the present moment. I took deep breaths for 30 seconds and stretched my body so I could feel fully aware and engaged. During the interviews, I listened intently to what they were saying verbally and took notice of their non-verbal communication including shifts in tone of voice, where they took deep breaths, and energy fluctuations.

Blia

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you

courage." - Lao Tzu

Blia's young life changed forever when both of her parents passed away and left seven young children behind as orphans. She was the fourth child (second daughter) with four brothers and three sisters. After her parents' deaths, Blia's life changed quickly. At the age of five, she and her seven siblings were separated: "I became the oldest sister to my younger brother because we went to live with a different uncle than my other siblings." Despite a difficult childhood, Blia explained that she had fond memories of her siblings that centered around social media. She said, "We made funny videos of us just playing outside or being funny. Then we uploaded it onto YouTube and rewatch it because we thought it was so funny." Later in high school, Blia used social media for entertainment, listened to her favorite songs by the Backstreet Boys and watched Michelle Phan's make up tutorials on YouTube. These early life experiences shaped who she has become.

Today at age 30, Blia lived with her husband and two young children. She described herself as positive, funny, bubbly, assertive, and compassionate. One of the biggest influences on Blia's life was her maternal grandmother. She explained that after her parents passed away, "My grandma was the only one that's left. She lost her own daughter. She was patient with us and kind. She filled that mother role for us." Blia added that "My siblings are my life. They're my backbone. They're like my funny bone too. We are each other's best friends…we keep each other strong, safe, and happy with all the memories that we have." In addition, she added:

I feel like motherhood is life changing. They [husband and children] changed me for the better. Made me such is strong person and the ones that help me to initiate my own healing journey. I tell my husband [that] "If you guys weren't in my life, I would be lost."

Blia earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and worked full-time as a nurse technician and social media content creator. She shared that she loved what she was doing and hoped to become a Hmong author one day. She said, "My biggest thing now is just being a full-time content creator, creating things and doing what I love, and also being home full-time with my kids." Initially, she wanted to become a therapist; "I was in a transition where I was also going to therapy for myself. It opened my eyes…maybe I don't want to be a therapist because I'm the one that needs therapy." Eventually, Blia wanted to go back to graduate school and pursue a master's in nursing once her children were older.

She described herself a natural skeptic. When she first heard that people could make a living or get paid to create and post content online, she brushed it off as a scam. Blia eventually moved from using social media for personal reasons to monetization in 2018. She explained that "I started blogging on my website and I just did it for fun…I wasn't expecting anything [to make money]." She blogged consistently for about a year before she saw any passive income. She laughed and said, "I was like, is this for real? Is the IRS messing with me? Will I go to jail if I take this money?" A few of Blia's friends who were also content creators encouraged her to open a Facebook page and she started promoting her blog posts on multiple platforms.

When asked about the role of social media in her life, Blia paused and selected her words carefully; "I feel like social media is so big and it's such a creative platform for people to make passive income to network and build a legacy." In addition, she viewed social media as life

changing and said, "These TikTokers are 15 years old and they're making a bunch of money. When we were 15…we were just playing outside, tag, or doing sleepovers with our cousins." Being a full-time content creator allowed Blia to work from home and creatively express herself. She explained:

> It [social media] allows me to be myself. At work we have to be very professional. We have to talk and act in a certain way. When you are your own boss or you create your own content, you can be funny. You can be ridiculous, swear and cuss and can dress however you want or wear the makeup you want. I think it has allowed me to continue to be myself and be creative.

Today, Blia has over ten thousand followers and her fan base continues to grow. She explained that her social media platform was centered around three of her life passions. "My content is usually the three words: motherhood, mental health, or muck bang, so food. I rotate between those three. It depends on how I'm feeling during the day of the week." Social media served a special role in her life, she called it "my little bubble" and further shared that she tends to work quickly when she had a burst of energy and posted content when she felt energetic.

She explained that there was a difference between her "real life" relationships and her "online relationships." She said, "When I meet people face-to-face, it's a definite challenge because my energy on social media does not match when I'm talking to people face-to-face. I'm introverted, shy and reserved. Once, I get comfortable, then my energy will slowly open up." Blia added that when meeting people for the first time, she exercised caution:

> Well, what's their intentions? Most of the time, the people I [have] met, they've been super friendly. It's just the one person I met where they were rude or "oh, you're that girl

that hates Hmong men…". And I'm like, "well, if you don't like it, you can unfollow [me]" but you know, they follow you because they like what you post.

She explained that the online relationships were also meaningful and deep. She said:

[An online relationship is] a very deep connection in a different way even if it's not face-to-face. Like dating online …you have such deep conversations, but you've never met each other and you're constantly talking to each other every day. You automatically build this relationship with connection over social media which is just insane."

When asked to describe life without social media, Blia paused for a moment and exhaled, "I'll be really sad, and I will feel I don't have a family." She provided this example:

Now I can understand how celebrities feel. Singers like Selena Gomez or Justin Bieber who are so committed to their fans…even when they're really sick, they will go out there to perform for their fans because they know how much that means to their fans…having this platform help me understand …these people [followers] look forward to my posts or they look forward to my videos.

As part of her content creation process, she first identified topics through her own lived experiences. She said, "A lot of confidence is established…obviously from my own experience that others can relate to. Making them feel like they're not alone, making them feel heard." She wanted to inspire others by helping followers feel that they were not alone:

Our traumas may be different. I want people to be able to read or see the post that I'm creating and [think to themselves], "Hey, I went through that too. I understand the feeling and that I'm not alone even if life is hard right now. Whatever experience or traumas that

I'm going through, I'm not alone in this because Blia talks about this on her page…I can

do that [talk about it], too."

She added that there were multiple reactions she hoped to get from her viewers. Most

importantly, she wanted to appear genuine. She also wanted her followers to feel engaged in

conversation and to feel good. She said, "I want them to feel happy. I want them to feel good

about themselves. I want them to…laugh [and think to themselves], 'wow, that made me feel

better about my crappy situation….'" For serious topics, Blia felt a sense of responsibility to be a

resource to those who sought her help because she posted about mental health and followers

reached out to her. She explained that "I talk a lot about mental health but…I am not a health

professional. Especially if they're suicidal, I refer them to therapists or psychologist or the

suicide hotline." She has strengthened her ability to establish healthy boundaries and

acknowledged when she could help or if it was time to seek professional assistance. This led her

to grow professionally: "To always be careful on social media with what I post. I try to post

inspirational, positive, funny things because after a long day, we don't want to look at serious

stuff."

Once she identified her topic area, she sat down and wrote what she wanted to convey in

a post and then identified an image. Blia shared that the image was an important component of

her posts. She said, "My posts are through writing. I usually post a picture because people

gravitate towards pictures compared to writing a post with no visual." She laughed and explained

that capturing photos to convey her message had been one of the most challenging aspects of

being a content creator. She provided this example:

When I post my own photos, I have more engagement compared to stock photos…Mainly people follow you because they like to look at you, they like to look at what you post. I try to take pictures every single day and it's a lot of work. I don't do my makeup every day but sometimes I have to force myself to put on makeup so I can take new selfies or take new pictures and be able to post them.

Blia added that it took her two hours to get ready for photos and then she worked on her lighting and backdrop. Sometimes she walked to the park to take a few photos. She laughed and said, "The funniest thing too, is when you post and it doesn't get that much engagement." On the other hand, there were instances in which Blia's posted without investing much time to create the post but went viral instantly. She explained:

It basically took me six hours for pictures, and I post it, wrote it and then there's only a hundred "likes." Then, there's a flip side where I wrote something really quick and I use an old photo of my kids…boom it explodes! It [the post] gets over a thousand likes…you don't know what will blow up on your platform.

She further elaborated that the intent of her platform was to create positive change. "I try to bring change through positive affirmations or positive encouragement." Blia was creating a platform that helped people feel heard, loved, and understood. When followers shared their stories and experiences, she explained how she responded to them:

I try to reply back or validate their feelings and their experience. Especially as a Hmong woman in the Hmong community, you don't get that validation from parents or family. I feel [that] being able to validate other people's lived experience and hold that space for them to tell their story…is what's making the change.

When Blia anticipated that the topic she chose to write about would be controversial, her mind immediately jumped to what the haters would say; "They're always waiting for you to make a mistake." The voice of haters spoke loudly to her. She provided this example:

[Haters are] always in the back of my mind. I try not to let it bother me because I'm gonna focus more on the good and the positive things over what the haters have to say. The majority of people who don't like my platform are usually Hmong men…As long as my husband and brother like me, then that's all that matters.

Topics such as murder-suicide, marriage, divorce, relationships tend to get positive and negative feedback. Blia tried her best to establish a platform that did not allow the silencing or bullying of women's voices. She observed:

I am a divorcee. I have been through domestic abuse as well. I've been really good at blocking them [haters], putting them on mute or hiding their comments so they know that they're not gonna get the attention that they're seeking.

Despite the confidence and skills that Blia acquired in blocking negative messages on her platform, she acknowledged that she felt anxious once she hits that post button. She said, "I have a lot of anxiety. How [will] people react? Even if it's a good reaction. I have been a people pleaser all my life. That's something I am working through and healing from." Then the doubts started to settle in. Blia shared:

I feel like I'm a melting ice cream. I feel like I'm having anxiety because I shouldn't have written that. Look at how these people are criticizing me, or I didn't do enough research,

or I said something wrong, or my tone wasn't as good as I thought it should have been. I started to feel anxious and then sometimes I feel regret.

However, it was the positive encouragement and feedback from her followers that kept Blia going. The deep conversations and positive comments made her feel happy and excited. Sometimes she even found herself giggling as she responded to followers who had commented on her photos or posts positively. This made her feel like her hard work was worth it.

The main message that Blia tried to convey on her platform was to stay true to yourself and have self-love. "We've all gone through our own childhood traumas. The biggest part of healing is when you choose to heal, and you choose to continue to stay true to who you are. Don't let anybody or any of your experiences define who you are." Blia shared that she learned this life lesson through personal challenges. She affirmed:

> I went through my divorce back and 2014. Being an orphan [and] being a Hmong woman divorcee as well. I feel like those experiences built me to reflect, to be bold and [become] who I am today. People can point fingers "she's an orphan and she's a divorcee". Just because those [things] happened to me, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person…it doesn't make you bad, it makes you badass.

Part of her mindset to question the negative and turn it into a positive was based on Blia's natural curiosity. She recalled that as a young child, she questioned everything. She said that "At church, the pastor would say 'don't do this…', 'this is bad…'. And I'll be like, why do they say that's bad? Like, how is that bad if they're not hurting nobody?" As an adult, she experienced a period in her life when she questioned her spiritual beliefs including Christianity and shamanism.

I went through this spiritual awakening, where I question everything for myself. I'm not gonna believe in this just because my pastor told me or because aunts and my uncles told me so. I want to seek my own truth and see what aligns with my beliefs. I want to live in my truth and also allow others to live their truth. I think that's a beautiful thing.

Blia believed that spiritualty played a large part in how she made decisions. Her life experiences and the trauma that she endured had inspired her to live a life of kindness and understanding. She respected each person's way of life as an individual journey. She shared that her personal growth and development had been a painful process. Recently she started meditating to bring light and positivity into her life. This included practicing positive affirmations, reflecting on life questions and generating more self-awareness. Blia described how she worked on turning around her negative self-talk into positive affirmations. When she caught herself in negative self-talk, she described the process of how she challenged her negative assumptions. She shared:

I will ask myself "Who is telling you this?" [For example,] if I tell myself "You can't do that because you are too weak…or you're not good at that." Now [I ask myself,] "Why do I think that? Why do I think I might not be good at that? I've never done that before. What if I did that and I was good at it?" I have to constantly try to reaffirm myself and have positive talk. Think positive energy and positive thoughts…I'm a big believer in manifestation. Whatever I think and whatever I believe that's what's gonna happen.

Throughout the week, Blia processed her emotions by reflecting on her feelings and trying to understand why she was triggered by something or someone. Part of connecting with herself was to bring about self-awareness through naming her feelings because that helped her

uncover the root cause and eventually she understood why she was triggered. Blia engaged in physical activity and surrounded herself with friends to destress. She either went on walks or runs and spent her free time with her girlfriends.

Blia added that her authentic self was emotional and at times, she struggled with showing emotions and vulnerability in front of others. However, when she was alone, she cried to herself. She tried to make time each day for reflection. She explained that there were occasions in which she chose not to share her authentic self. She said:

> I wouldn't talk about anything that I haven't healed from. Being a survivor of sexual assault is one thing that I mention every now and then, but I haven't fully talked about it because that's something that I'm still working through with my therapist. I do hope to talk about and heal from because I feel that it is one of the biggest topics that I really want to bring up in the Hmong community.

When asked to describe the best version of herself, Blia did not hesitate. She said, "When I'm with my kids. I'm playful with them or rowdy. We go outside and are outdoor kids. We hike, we talk about life." It was these simple things in life which helped her to be present and made her happy. She added that "I'm becoming my highest self where I am most in touch with who I am…My needs, my wants, my emotions and being able to extend the love and positivity to others." Blia shared that, "My long-term legacy…is to create a non-profit organization to help specifically Hmong orphans like me [with] financial or scholarship funds to further their education or business that they want to create."

Chia

> *"Pain is inevitable. Suffering is a choice." - His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

Chia appeared on the zoom screen with a somber stillness. She seemed pensive and present. She was careful and thoughtful as she slowly stated each word in search of how to articulate the next thought. She described herself as a Hmong woman who was passionate about helping people. She was a single mom who was learning how to live life confidently and unapologetically. Chia described herself as "an ambivert who is enthusiastic about life, learning about people, hearing people's stories, and curious about the world."

Chia's parents came to the United States as Hmong refugees after the Vietnam war. She was born in Texas and was the ninth child out of ten in her family. She moved to the Twin Cities when she was five years old. After she was engaged to her son's father, she moved back to Texas for a short period of time to be with him. However, when the relationship did not work out, she moved back to Minnesota where her friend and family base provided support for her. Today, she is 30 years old and worked full time on the operations team of a financial services company and part-time as a social media content creator.

Chia participated in fitness competitions and described this part of her life as a challenge that kept her physically fit and helped to build her mental capacity. She said, "fitness can be physically strenuous…but it is a mental game where I am practicing positive self-talk affirmations, build confidence, sense of self-worth and my self-esteem." During her last fitness competition, she found herself reflecting on her youth and the perceived lack of support she received from her parents. She explained:

> I told myself that they [my parents] were farmers when I was growing up that they're always busy trying to put food in the table. A common experience with immigrant refugee parents. I always compared myself with my white peers whose family and parents would always show up.

It was not until later in life that she realized some of her initial experiences in her youth carried over into her adult life and had become part of her limiting beliefs that was engrained in her mentality. She explained the impact of how reflection prompted action in her life as an adult. During the last fitness competition, her parents were not present, and she decided to challenge her assumption:

> I called my parents because they were at home or running errands and I invited them. I think that I didn't realize that was a narrative that I told myself…that I couldn't have the support. I created these limiting beliefs or narratives, and it was only through reflection that I realized this.

Chia added that she was no longer a victim. She said, "I had the power to invite my parents and ask them to show up for me in that way. If I had not done the work to reflect, I wouldn't have known that it was a narrative that I created for myself…." Recently, Chia found that her family remained somewhat distant. She observed:

> My family, we aren't super close but I think that we value family to the extent that we are there for each other when times are hard and when it's needed. As we get older, we are trying to be more intentional about staying connected and spending more time with each other.

When asked about what experiences shaped her life, Chia took a deep breath and emotionally explained that "my experiences as a survivor of sexual assault, domestic violence and suicide have definitely shaped me [into becoming] who I am today." She also believed that each person that came into her life was here to teach her a lesson both good and bad. Those that have made the biggest impact on her life included her son, close friends, and therapist. She expressed:

> When I'm really doing the inner healing work, I think about my inner child and how she has endured so much. I also think about my highest self…I journal in third person…kind of like giving myself [a] pep talk. I think especially for Hmong women, we're not taught to or we weren't really given the tools to talk to ourselves positively. Learning to do that for myself has been one of the greatest tools.

Chia recalled that she first became aware of social media in middle school. She started using social media because it was the trendy thing to do. In her early 20s she attended college out of state. That was when she began to view social media as an important tool. She said, "I realized how important the social media world was to stay connected with people especially folks back home in the Twin Cities. I really valued staying connected and maintaining my relationships."

Chia remembered vividly when she transitioned from being a social media user to a content creator. Once she intentionally decided to use social media as a platform, she took action to fully understand and practiced being a content creator. She provided this example:

> I do remember deciding to post about who I am and understanding the implications. Learning how to pose so that photos look aesthetically pleasing. First, it was that decision

and …then choosing [to] practice. Continuing to take photos and going out in public posing in front of other people.

Chia explained the purpose of her social media platform:

I think ultimately, the primary intent is for me to learn to move past the trauma. It's my way of taking ownership and reclaiming my life again. I think that the secondary intent is to share my story and then after that it becomes hoping that people will understand me better. And for those that may share a similar experience, to know that they're not alone.

Chia noticed a change within herself as she became more vocal and public about her life experiences. She explained:

When I first started, it was very painful but also liberating to share my experiences. I have noticed how much I've grown. Being able to creatively express myself has allowed me to be more confident [about] who I am as a person in my own skin and be unapologetic about my life choices.

Before she began posting autobiographical content about her life, Chia imagined that people would judge her and the life decisions she had made. Especially the decisions she made leading up to her breakup with her ex-fiancé. She said:

It was an unhealthy and toxic relationship and what kept me in that relationship as long as it did was fear that others in the community, the Hmong community specifically, would judge me. Would judge my parents. Would judge my family.

Initially, the fear of being judged negatively made Chia nervous about how others would view her. However, she found that people expressed how the content had inspired them. She felt that she had more supporters than haters. She explained, "Even if I have folks who judge me, I think that I have done enough inner work to not let it affect me anymore." Chia learned to let go of the fear of judgement and she's determined to not let fear stop her from being the best version of herself.

Furthermore, she felt that she had created change in the broader community. She said:

There have been people who have reached out to me to ask me for advice and so I think that people are listening. People are seeing [my content] and it's resonating with people. I hope that I can continue to have a positive impact on people's lives.

Chia described that her creative process as a content creator unfolded in various ways. There was no set checklist she used to identify and create posts. If she felt enthusiastic about a topic, she followed her energy and created the post on the spot. She also quickly considered other components that came with creating a post such as what visuals and captions would catch the reader's attention. Chia shared that she asked herself the following questions throughout the process of content creation:

What is my intention for this post? How does this relate to my brand? What impact could this have? Is it representative of who I am as a person? Is it true to who I am? What aspect of who I am is this showing to others?

Ultimately, her posts have one thing in common. She explained that "the content I create that are the most important to me stem from personal experience." She shared the following:

I find it challenging to determine what to write about because I'm trying to balance topics that people will engage with. At the end of the day, what I always go back to is what I know this true for me and what I'm passionate about.

Chia added that "It came from a place of experience. Not facts that people can fact-check online. For me, that deciding factor was [that] I want to help people. That can look like giving tips or providing inspiration or education." She provided the following example:

This past weekend I went to a music festival. I didn't write a lot [on] a post…something, as simple as "living my life." The average person scrolling on social media may not think anything, but to the right person, they will say, "Wow, she looks like she's having a lot of fun. She's really living her life. I want to live my life too." For each individual, they will find ways within themselves and within their lives to live their life and to live confidently and not be ashamed of the decisions that they have made.

She felt that there was not much of a difference in how she came across online and offline. She strived to be the same person consistently and described how she showed up as an "open" person who sought meaning behind her life experiences. She felt that sharing information online was a different method of communication which allowed her to express herself in written form to a particular audience. However, she affirmed that she shared the same life stories in online and in-person relationships and that she felt people experienced her in the same way.

It was important for her to appear as authentic and genuine to followers. She explained that "I don't even think that I try to be genuine or authentic, I just show up as I am." When she created content that was meaningful to her, she experienced many emotions. She said, "Often when I write my meaningful posts, I get emotional. I'll cry as I write it." She has learned that she

would go back to the post at different points in her life and re-read the message and it still had an emotional impact. She explained that "it's [the post] universal. There's no time constraint on it. It will still ring true for me."

Chia reflected on being her highest self and described the following:

My highest self is someone who is kind, forgiving, gracious and compassionate. Someone who's very understanding. She's like the bigger older sister who hugs you when you are talking down on yourself instead of saying "I told you so" she hugs me and says, "everything's gonna be okay." She's wise and she doesn't say things that will make me feel bad. She's the validating voice.

Chia believed that her highest self showed through during the times she journaled. Especially when she was feeling contemplative, in a moment of reflection or experiencing the feelings of sorrow. Sometimes her highest self was revealed through a "pep talk" when she told herself "I'm so proud of you."

Chia wanted to continue using her platform to recruit coaching clients and make an impact on the broader community. However, her goal was to create a platform that did not need to be advertised because her message spoke for itself. She said, "I can remain someone who can provide or be a source of empowerment and inspiration even if they don't become a coaching client." She was becoming someone that she is proud of. She said, "I can look back and know that every step of the way, I did my best and everything that I'm doing. I am proud of me." She ended her story by confidently stating that, "My legacy is someone who has helped people through inspiration and empowerment. I helped women see that they have it within themselves to live a life that they want."

Lucy

"Only in darkness can you see the stars." -Martin Luther King Jr.

Lucy carried herself with a carefree and charismatic energy. Her words flowed confidently as she described her personality: bubbly, genuine, and multi-passionate. She explained that her parents encouraged her to explore her many interests as a young child. "My parents from a young age supported my sister, my brother and I in everything that we wanted to do. No limitations at all." Her mom was a dancer, and her dad was a musician. She learned from an early age that to find out if you like something, you had to give it a try. Lucy explained that her parents and family had been her biggest influences. She said:

> Especially my sister, too. I think that they allowed me from an early age to just be everything that I am. They always validated who I am and that I am gifted…I should use my gifts. They also always encouraged me to just try things. They've never discouraged me from anything.

Lucy is the oldest of three children born in America. Being the oldest positioned her to witness the life challenges her parents endured. Lucy explained that she was attuned to understanding her parents' struggles. She said, "Seeing my parents go from poverty to where they are now gives me the molding, the role modeling, and the vision that I can do that too. I shouldn't be less than what my parents have reached." In her teen years, she felt different from her Hmong peers. Lucy articulated how her parent's higher education impacted her life:

> Mom and dad both have bachelor's and master's [degrees]. It shaped my Hmong American experience [to be] different from my friends who were the first to attend

college and did not have parents that could speak English. I feel like I fell into a different margin in the Hmong experience.

Her mom had a master's degree and was the breadwinner. At home, her parents did not take on traditional gender roles. Her dad took on domestic chores around the home and helped with the housework. She said, "At home, everybody knew mom was the quiet breadwinner, quiet decision maker, and actually knew more about mechanics and electricity." Lucy expressed how this impacted her, "It made me a self-sufficient and driven woman. Probably very opinionated, and ambitious compared to my shy, quiet peers. I was a lot louder." Lucy's family continued to maintain good relationships throughout adulthood.

Lucy recalled being impacted by an experience in high school that helped her develop insights about herself. She explained:

I organized this large benefit concert and I had donated a couple grand to CHAT [The Center for Hmong Arts and Talent] and it was because I had noticed that my parents were so much more supportive of me and my hobbies. My Hmong friends were not supported by their parents. We were in our junior year, they were all already getting ready to let go of all their hobbies because they knew that once we stepped foot out of high school, those things would not exist for them anymore and that made me incredibly sad because I felt like my peers were so talented.

She realized two things about herself through this experience. She was a visionary and she was interested in the human experience. Lucy said that those early learning experiences continued to impact her. "I think I still carry those principles with me in everything that I do. I think about what problem or pain point needs to be solved and what can I do about it."

Reflecting back on her life, being the oldest in my family with such capable parents shaped her to become a responsible person.

Lucy first became aware of social media through her friends and older cousins. She began with using Myspace and Facebook. Initially, she posted pictures and made friends online. Later in college, she became aware of jobs and careers through social media. She was self-employed for three years as a social media manager and content creator for local businesses. As a hobby, she created content on fashion, poetry, and videos of herself online. At first, the autobiographical videos Lucy posted online were just for fun. She received positive feedback from people that the videos were good.

Today, Lucy intentionally created content with confidence and understanding behind what she was doing and why. The purpose of her social media platform has evolved over time. She explained that she initially created content for her younger self:

> I think we talk about the happy stuff more than we talk about the real things that we're all struggling with…especially as Hmong women. We don't talk about certain things because it's taboo to talk about hardships in our life. It's not good for people to know your weaknesses.

She believed that human experience, personal struggles and being vulnerable strengthened human connections. In 2016, Lucy began to post on social media: she was not seeing content that reflected her life experiences. She explored autobiographical content on topics such as vulnerability and heartbreak. Her social medial platform featured difficult topics that many were uncomfortable discussing. She said that "My overlying message is about embracing and accepting everything that you are and being yourself at your fullest capacity."

Early on, Lucy faced one challenge that social media presented. She said, "People have this conception of social media being your fake self." She explained that she did not necessarily agree with that perspective. Her experiences and observations were different. She affirmed:

> I struggle with social anxiety. Social media is one of the most real versions you'll get of me because it's totally me free of anxiety. It's me telling you how I really think, how I really feel without all the anxiety, clouding me up and me becoming a smaller version of myself. I am my fullest self on social media.

Lucy experienced changes within herself as a result of posting on social media. Sharing her life experiences creatively and publicly helped her build confidence. She became clearer about who she was and more in tune with herself.

> I think I've had massive changes within myself as I started becoming more creative and being more intentional about what I'm sharing [on social media], I can see that I've gotten a lot more clear [about] who I am. I have become more confident, I'm a lot more in touch and in tune with myself.

When asked about what changes she has initiated in the broader community through social media, Lucy observed she had encouraged people to be vulnerable and to acknowledge vulnerability within themselves and others. She inspired followers to begin their own healing journey and to live more fulfilling lives. She continued, "I've also encouraged people to have difficult conversations about Hmong women and their timeline…unlearning that. Challenging themselves, challenging what they've always heard, and challenging tradition."

Lucy's creative process of content development took many forms. She selected topics based on her passions. She said, "Usually, when something weighs on my heart a lot, I get super passionate about it. I think about it, and I usually write about it first." She found that she had a natural talent for writing blogs. She explained, "I realized how much I loved it. I realized that sometimes it takes people hours, days, and weeks to write essays. It took me like 10 or 30 minutes to write and publish." She continued:

> I love curating. It's…an art form for me. Writing itself is… an art form for me. I also discovered that I love doing videography through social media. I don't know what I would have done if I had never figured that out. I think I would be so sad because it is such a big part of me.

When the writing had been completed, she decided whether the content was to be a blog or a video. She explained:

> If it's a blog, I find the photo or I take a photo that I feel matches my blog, [and] I publish it. But if it's a video, that's when I really go through tons of song tracks online and [find] music I feel would fit this piece. I put the words together, I start thinking about what scenes and shots I would like. How do I imagine this video to play out? Where do I imagine it? Am I in it? What do I look like? How am I moving? How am I speaking?

Lucy affirmed that sometimes when her vision was clear, the shoot was the same day. Other times, it was scheduled for a later date and her siblings helped her to shoot the video. She edited her videos and then posted. She shared one of her best performing videos and described how she came up with the topic. She said, "I choose the thing that weighs on my heart the most. If I experience it, there's no way that nobody else is experiencing it." She further explained:

I was going through this phase of unlearning the Hmong woman timeline for myself. I was 26 and I was single. The voices you hear in your ears from family functions and community events about where you should be at 26…my American counterparts did not understand much about what I'm talking about. I lived in two different worlds. I existed in this little space that nobody can see. I walked here in Minnesota alongside other like other *meka* [white people] people, right? They didn't understand that while we're walking in the same space, I felt like I'm in my own little bubble.

Lucy was inspired to show her invisible world visually to her audience. Towards the end of the video, she decided for herself that she was enough. She was both Hmong and American. She no longer needed validation from anyone that she was enough. Lucy shared this message because she wanted viewers who were going through similar experiences to understand that this was the Hmong American experience. She said, "We don't have a country. We constantly moved around trying to survive and this is what happens when you have that kind of narrative. That was my message that I wanted to share."

This was her way of talking about the "hard stuff" and "normalizing" it. She explained:

Putting out blogs and intentional content on social media is my way to make even the smallest difference. It's my way to speak things into the world and community that I want to be talked about. Before that, I was searching for the things that I wanted, the topics that I wanted to hear about and the messages I want to see.

Lucy added, "I think it's really cool that I get to share those messages myself and reach different people and connect with them in different ways." When asked about what was most important about how she appeared to others, she answered "Authentic. I think that's one of the

most important things to me is that I never want my pieces to be done just because I'm trying to put something out." She only posted when she felt strongly compelled and passionate to speak about a topic. Throughout the process, she felt completely driven and could not wait to see the project come together.

In the area of personal growth and development, Lucy spoke clearly about the importance it played in her life. She said:

I live and breathe personal growth. I think I've done it in so many ways since I was a kid. We don't have that concept of personal growth, especially as a kid in a Hmong family. I think I've always been somebody to challenge myself.

She also credited therapy and reading books as a form of personal growth and development. When asked about self-inquiry and reflection, Lucy noted that she reflected daily. She continually engaged in conversations with herself and journaled. Lucy further added that self-inquiry and reflection had impacted her short-term and long-term goals. She explained that "I do not say yes to long-term opportunities, or long-term commitments without questioning whether it aligns well with me and if it will enable the best version of me to exist."

She believed that self-inquiry and reflection led to greater self-awareness. Lucy provided the following example of how her goals have been modified:

I thought that I needed to reach x amount of money, I need to reach a certain title or a certain milestone to feel good about success and happiness. [Through] my self-awareness journey, I realized that that I'm the happiest when I can make memories and be with people I love. [When] I was making more money, I was miserable because I was busy

making the money and not really being with people that I actually loved and that loved me.

Lucy described the best version of herself as being authentic to who she is. She said:

I am the best version of myself when I am in tune with myself and I'm just being completely authentically wholesomely myself. That doesn't always mean that I'm winning or I'm celebrating. If I am going through something and I am hurting, I want to be able to say, "this is hard, this is really hard. I don't know how I'm gonna get through this, but I'm gonna try."

She also described the role the community played in encouraging her to become her best self. Positive feedback from people she worked with and online followers kept her motivated to carry on being the better version of herself. She offered the following insight:

I realized that people are watching. Not [that] I need to be perfect because people are watching but people are watching and that means that how I heal, how I hurt, how I celebrate, how I win, how I lose, they're gonna see all those moments…. A lot of young people are watching me and I want them to know that all of those parts are okay in your life and that your life isn't gonna always be high.

Lucy described the reciprocal relationship with her audience:

Every age and gender have taken something away from my life experiences from the ways that I've shared myself publicly, or I carry myself publicly, they've always taken something away. I want people to be able to have a part of me that will help them. I feel like, that's exactly what we're here to do. We learn from each other and so I want you to

be able to [learn] while I'm here. I might as well make my life useful and I hope that you'll take something away, whether it's from my highs or my lows.

When asked about her future and legacy, Lucy was very honest. Her legacy was to live a fearless life. She said, "Everyone who knows me knows that I'm just always myself. When they see me, they're always like, 'Oh, that's very Lucy. Lucy would do that.'" She was not sure about her future as a content creator. However, she was certain that she would remain creative. She added:

> Life is too short and it's too long…I truly do not like to live with any of regrets. So I make all my decisions based off of will I regret this? I rather have lived trying then not trying at all. I cannot sit here and not turn over all the different rocks that come in my way. I have to leave every rock unturned.

Mai Kia

"Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love." - Brene Brown

Mai Kia recounted her childhood with humor and a warm laugh as she began to describe the environment in which she grew up. She was the fourth of five children in her family. She was born after her parents arrived in the United States as refugees of the Vietnam war. Mai Kia explained, "My three older siblings were born in the camps. I was the first child born here in America." She was raised in a predominantly white small town in the upper Midwest. Mai Kia attended a Catholic school and learned how to navigate the strict structure of that world.

While at home, she faced the challenge of pleasing traditional Hmong parents who expected her to fit into the Hmong culture. Rules and expectations imposed on her at school and by Hmong culture kept her sheltered from the real world. Mai Kia explained:

> We went to Catholic school, so I don't really have exposure to a lot of other Hmong children. All my friends are wealthy white kids and that's kind of what I identified as success. I associated poverty and Hmong together, which wasn't accurate.

The sheltered life that her parents provided fueled her natural curiosity. She sought ways to connect with others. In middle school, she discovered social media. Mai Kia determined that social media was a path she wanted to explore. She said, "My parents were strict. I couldn't go anywhere or do anything. So social media was my way to communicate with the outside world."

At age 33, Mai Kia spoke confidently about who she was and described herself as a "people person" and a "huge extrovert" who loved being with others. Expressing her appreciation for people, she explained that "I get high off of people because I get to learn through their lens. Everyone has their own story, everyone's so unique in their way. I genuinely feel I learned the best by having conversations with people."

Mai Kia has a bachelor's degree in psychology human services and sociology. She was a full-time social worker who focused on behavioral health. A few years ago, she and her husband found themselves at crossroads in their relationship and careers. She explained:

> We were hitting a stagnant part of our individual careers and our individual lives because we'd ever only known each other since 18 [years of age]. And we really lived this life where we sacrificed a lot for each other, and it was such a beautiful life. I have no regrets,

but we never really got to learn more about ourselves as individuals, so we wanted to do that.

Mai Kia's husband spent ten months away doing self-exploration work and hiking the Appalachian Trail. When he returned, it was Mai Kia's turn to explore what she wanted to do. She had two opportunities: expand her education or pursue a career in which she had long been interested. Mai Kia explained that when her husband returned:

It was my turn to think about what I wanted to do, which was influencing change. So, it was either going back to school and pursuing a career that I've always wanted to pursue, which was in human services or counseling or doing something else.

Mai Kia decided to launch a video podcast that interviewed and collaborated with people across the country. She chose not to pursue graduate school. Instead, she embarked on a passion project. She added, "I had the means. I had the networks to get started with the podcast, so I did that. I chose to do the podcast versus going to graduate school. It was the best decision I ever made." Mai Kia's approach to life and to video podcasting was to do no harm. She said:

I think the message that I tried to convey in my intentions is positive change. Zero harm is to do as little harm as possible, building communities and strengthening community that is already in existence and then connecting with people and connecting them to one another. That is my purpose.

Mai Kia reflected on the role of social media in her life and paused, choosing her words carefully: "Social media is a huge part of my life." When asked to describe the impact of the video podcast on her life, she said, "I see it as a passion project and my lifestyle." She continued:

I have a very full life outside of my work because my job…only activates certain notes. And then this part of me [video podcast] is very fulfilling in its own way. I still have things that I'm doing outside of work that rejuvenate me and keep me excited about life.

Making connections was fascinating to Mai Kia. She said:

[The] whole purpose of my platform is connecting with people and then connecting them with one another. I just get so excited about it. And when I think about connection, I think about identifying mainly things that we have in common even though we're so different and then reversely finding things that are unique about us even though we seem so similar. Connection to me is "tell me your story."

Mai Kia continued, "My podcasts platform focuses on arts, education, and social impact." *How* she connected with others defined a successful podcast session. First, her values and the values of her collaborators must align. She added:

I've made mistakes before when I was starting out. I've had people that I've worked with and [there] have been projects that I haven't published because I found out later that we don't have a lot in common or we don't have a lot of [the] same values that align with one another.

She intentionally built connections with others by creating a space where they could build genuine relationships. She explained how space was intentionally created:

If [the collaborator] usually goes to a bar that they like open mic spaces, I'll go see how they work in their environment, and then they'll come to mine. I developed a lot of

rapport and genuine relationship building through sharing space and then we figure out what makes sense for the both of us.

Mai Kia continued:

The last few artists I've had on my show have been friends that I've had for a year or two, so I've developed and done that work before I even collaborate with them. People think that's crazy. But I needed it to be an extension of who I am, and I need to believe in them. Then we collaborate. I'm most inspired by getting to build a relationship with the person so I stand by them and their art and then we collaborate.

Mai Kia intentionally created connections that turned into long-term relationships. She provided this example:

They're teaching me more about their life and their perspective. It's a deep meaningful journey. There's really no end to this process. The end isn't when we shoot [the podcast] and we're done. Him [the podcast collaborator] and I are still friends. We talk every day. He's still showing me a lot of new things and introducing me to people. It's just a continual way of offering each other opportunities.

Second, a key element in creating content was to follow her energy. The process of collaborating was different each time because each collaborator was different. Mai Kia believed in people and their potential to create change, which motivated her even when things get tough. She explained:

If I'm excited about [the topic], then it's worth it. It's worth doing it all the way. Even when it's the toughest, even when we're filming on a day where I've already had a 12-

hour day, even when we're filming impromptu stuff. Just to make sure that we're connecting the dots. I will always weather the storm because it's something that I truly believe in. So, what makes it worth it? It is if I find meaning in it and I feel there's meaning in it for the guest because they deserve to have unique content that's authentic to them. And then, if it's going to bring about change within my social group, or community, that is worth it.

As a social worker, Mai Kia worked one-on-one with people to create change at an individual level. She leveraged her work in the community through the video podcast to create change on a macro level. She provided this example:

I am helping families and individuals who are in need of mental health services, child protection, or crisis intervention…How this [video podcasting] helps me is I'm seeing everything on a macro community level. If I am helping Hmong people vote or helping younger people vote, they're voting for people that I identify with and that I know will directly impact my job.

Mai Kia provided an example and explained why she engaged in local politics:

I am very focused right now on local elections. Whether it be sheriff, city council, or school board. I got heavily involved through my platform learning about what they do. Then identify the right people in those spaces and highlight them and talk nonstop about the things that matter to me and I know in turn when they get voted in [to office] which was what happened. They are making huge changes to the school system to the community system and that helps me in my job as a social worker.

So, if I care about mental health, I'm gonna vote for somebody who cares about mental health because they're gonna put money towards that. If I care about youth justice or families, I'm gonna vote for people who care about the same thing because that's gonna have a direct impact on my job.

When asked how she hoped to be perceived by others, Mai Kia wanted to be "accessible" to others as a "real person." She wanted to be a resource who enabled individuals to make a positive change. She said, "When I first asked people to help me because I don't know what I was doing, people didn't care. [A] guest that had denied me now asks to be on the show. I just want to help if I can."

Mai Kia articulated that being the best version of herself could be expressed in many ways. She provided these examples:

There are different ways that define the best version. If I'm thinking about healing from trauma, the best version of myself is that I have been able to face it head-on and carefully dissect it and have done the work to move forward from it and be better because of it.

Another best self is just being completely present with somebody whether it's my nieces or nephews. I'm the happiest sometimes when I'm with them and really not thinking about all the 50 things that I have to do.

Then another version of my best self is when I push myself to the ultimate limit. I personally did not think I would do well in school which I struggled with, but I got an A because I stayed out late and studied till 3 a.m. That's another version of my best self.

Mai Kia engaged in personal growth with the assistance of a therapist and life coach. The ability to carve out time to engage in self-reflection was something that she did on a daily basis. She explained:

> One of the things I learned after my trauma is investing in myself healthily. It's mental, emotional, and spiritual health. So, I got a life coach. I had to work on my toxic traits, not on the other people who hurt me. Learning what I did to contribute because I'm not just a victim.

In the area of self-awareness, Mai Kia said that self-reflection did not come naturally. However, with a life coach she was able to work on retraining her automatic responses and build intentional awareness. She said:

> Now I think it's a little bit more natural because it shows up in energy. If somebody's draining me, my job is draining me, and situations are draining me…well, then I ask - myself, is this worth it? I think it [self-awareness] happens a lot more naturally now.

Mai Kia talked about her current goals passionately and connected them to the future as she hoped to do more. She noted:

> One of my biggest initiatives in the last several months has been elevating the voices of people who are BIPOC[6] and being able to put them in spaces that are non-traditional to them. In our Hmong community unfortunately, a lot of *meka* [white people] don't really know their music and they deserve to have that space too.

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[6] BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

In the future, Mai Kia would like to continue making connections through social media and align with those who are interested in building community. In the area of personal growth, Mai Kia described who she was becoming:

> I operated in multiple lives in a lot of ways. I had the most fun with my friends and I felt like I could be my most authentic self. Then with my family I always felt like I had to not be that *pob laib* [bad woman] and that I had to be this perfect Hmong daughter.

> I told my mom and dad exactly what they wanted to hear so that I didn't get lectured and that they were proud of me. Then go home to my husband and wanted to be the perfect wife. There were all these different roles…. I was stressed and trying to be the most perfect version of myself for each of them. I am all these things, I'm not just one of these things.

Through self-reflection, Mai Kia learned that no, she is not perfect. She felt that she was becoming more grounded and had developed a well-rounded single identity that enabled her to be her authentic self. She shared:

> Now I am all those things but [they are] more cohesive. I'm more open and honest about who I am in all these spaces, and I found that even though there are times of challenge, they don't need to be [as] segmented.

Mai Kia believed that life was short, fragile, and beautiful. She laughed and said, "My funeral should just be a big party where people come together from all walks of life and just drink and eat and have the best time ever."

She ended her story by sharing that she believed in living her best life with few parameters while causing as little harm as possible. Mai Kia's overarching message was that "Your legacy is within all the relationships that you have built. These people were impacted, they were changed. They can now pass that along to other people and that would be my legacy."

Sonya

"The most powerful spell is in a name." -Unknown

Sonya's laughter was contagious. Her presence was strong and commanding. She said her childhood was filled with unconventional experiences. Her parents divorced at a time when divorce was not acceptable in the Hmong community. The decision put a strain on her mother's relationship with her uncles. She said that "In the early 1990s, Hmong people did not get divorced, but my mom went through the American system to get a divorce. She ended up taking us away because there was a lot of negativity."

Sonya was the youngest of five children. She had three sisters and one brother. Later in life, her parents remarried, and she had a total of fifteen siblings. Due to her mom's decision to get divorced, she explained that "We became really secluded and when I would meet our uncles [mom's brothers], they always whisper… 'don't be different' or 'don't tell people [about] your life.'"

Sonya described that her mom was her role model:

My mom is a big influence. She came to America, she married my father, and then they divorced young. She got her college degree, opened businesses and we never saw her because she was always working. That really gave me the inspiration and the drive. As a

woman, you can be successful regardless of what your peers might say about you or how your family might view you.

It was also during childhood that Sonya began to develop self-awareness. She talked openly about her ability to speak with spirits and attributed her keen self-awareness to her spiritual experiences. She explained:

> I've always been self-aware…probably because of talking to spirits and ghosts. They tell you things that other people wouldn't have told you and then you feel like you know a secret and you can't tell anybody. You have this strong sense of self-awareness when you're talking to spirits.

Despite her ability to see and speak with spirits at a young age, she struggled with her spiritual skills. Sonya shared that she and her siblings tried to normalize their childhoods and found ways of coping with what they were experiencing. When experiences with spirits were sometimes frightening, they used humor to soften the mood. She said, "We were haunted a lot and the only way to cope with it was to crack jokes. [Humor] allows you to be able to live with it." Sonya eventually began to accept her ability to speak with spirit and ghosts as a gift and became a shaman.

As a teen in middle school, Sonya was introduced to social media when she began using Myspace to stay connected with others. Sonya recalled that "We would make connections and lose them because we moved every two years. I saw that [social media] as an outlet so that people can see into my life and what I've been up to and vice versa."

At the age of 29 years old, Sonya was a manager at a national bank. In her early twenties, Sonya faced cultural pressure to get married and have children in the Hmong community. She explained that "I never aspired to be married and have children. That wasn't a goal of mine. I needed to start focusing on myself." She recalled:

> I saw a lot of people having children. They didn't have babysitters. I would have to help watch their kids. I saw it as chaining you down from achieving your dreams and goals and it made me a selfish person. Why do I have to watch other people's children? I didn't choose to have these children, right? Why is this my responsibility?

Instead of settling down with a family, Sonya focused on determining what she wanted to do in addition to her professional career. First, she arranged time for reflection. She said, "I sat down and thought about what my strengths were and what could I offer to people that [they] would be interested in watching me on YouTube and it was the most basic human function, which was eating." Gathering the insights, she made through reflection; Sonya created a YouTube channel as a muck banger. "When I heard about people who get paid to eat, I thought it was the weirdest thing. It is so entertaining and mind-boggling." Muck bangers broadcast while they were eating and interacting with the audience. When Sonya decided to create a YouTube channel, she had a conversation with her family and announced her intention to be a muck banger. She said, "They were my biggest supporters. We talked about my business plan, my ideas, and the equipment I was getting to set up." In the initial phase of production, she had low expectations and noted that "I didn't expect to have a lot of subscribers."

Sonya did not anticipate how much positive support she would get from the Hmong community. She added:

I was really shocked because so many of my friends wanted to be on my show. I did not

think that anybody would want to be involved because it's personal putting yourself out

on social media and some people can't handle the criticism that may come with it.

Eventually, Sonya also started to blog about her experiences as a shaman. When Sonya

created the YouTube channel about her experience as a shaman, she received resistance from the

shaman community. She explained that "The shaman community back then was not something

you talked about. Especially on social media. I would ask people [in the shaman community],

how come you guys don't talk about [shamanism] to other people?" The answer Sonya would

get from others in the shaman community was that "these [things] were secrets."

However, Sonya could not accept these answers. She felt a strong sense of obligation to

the younger generation, Sonya described the purpose of her shaman YouTube channel. "I try to

connect the mysteries in our culture for the Hmong people. When it comes to shamanism, there's

a lot of secrecy involved and then there's mistrust and animosity." Sonya said:

> It does not have to be this way. I put myself out there knowing that there's probably
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> people who don't agree with me telling "secret" information that our younger generation
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> is not going to have. This isn't an issue that's going to go away. I was Americanized. I
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> never thought I was a shaman. If I could help other people in any small way and this is all
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> I have to do, I will do it.

When asked how she created change through her social media platform, Sonya answered

without hesitation: "A positive change. Especially as our younger generation are getting older

and they're not able to speak Hmong." She continued:

I have the privilege of having our elders around and they taught me so many things. I was really close to my teacher. I think of my nieces and nephews when they get older. What if I'm not around and they are going through spiritual things? I think it's important to convey to people that they're not alone or crazy. That these are real issues and real things you can face on your journey to be a shaman or as a shaman. I find that the shaman journey is lonely…because nobody knows what it's like.

Sonya explained how she viewed the two YouTube channels: "The muck bang [channel] became more of a second job but for the shaman channel, that's more of a passion of mine." As a shaman, Sonya served as an intermediator between the spiritual world and the Hmong community. The work that she put into the shaman YouTube channel did not feel like a second job. She said, "Because people in my life ask me a lot of these very same questions. I feel I'm just sharing the information and I'm talking to people I [already] know."

Sonya observed that she has changed since she became a social media influencer. Most of the changes were attributed to the heightened awareness and conscious intent in which she communicated. She shared:

Since I became a social media influencer, I'm conscious of the content that I put out. I want to make sure that I'm PC [politically correct]. This comes from my background in management. I started [working] when I was 18 years old and because of that professional setting, I was aware of how you are portrayed.

Sonya kept her life as a social media influencer separate from her career in management and said "I don't want social media to impact my career and vice versa. It was easier for me to keep them separate." She continued:

At work, people come up to me because they are viewers. They're always hugging me and telling me they watch my videos. They want to talk to me about [my YouTube channels] but when I'm at work, I separate that.

Sonya tried to keep personal relationships, her corporate job and social media lives separate. People have tried to build personal relationships with her after getting to know her via social media. She observed:

Being on social media, I have met people who have tried to come to the other side of [my] personal life. However, I find that sometimes it's better for me to separate those relationships because it's not organic. It's harder to bring them into my personal life. It's a trust thing.

Sonya identified content areas and topics from followers who left comments and questions on her social media platforms. After a topic was identified, Sonya described the process: "I take my laptop and I start writing down the main topic and key points for every video." To keep herself on track, she started writing her thoughts down, and then if there were updates that happened in her life, she started the video with that.

On filming day, Sonya sets aside time for hair and makeup and then reviewed the key points that she created before she proceeded. She explained that actual filming took about an hour and then she began the post-production work. After the video was edited, it was ready to be posted and Sonya shifted to promoting her content. Then she decided whether to post on multiple social media platforms. Once the content is posted, she followed up with viewers and answered questions and responded to comments. When Sonya anticipated that the topic would be difficult to discuss, she described how she worked through it. She said:

If it's gonna be a tough subject [that's] taboo in the Hmong community, I go through

what I plan to say. I am always very careful about what I'm gonna say because I don't

want to offend people. For example, in this past video, I was trying to explain who I was

before I became a shaman and I talk about how my dreams and goals were never to be

married with a white picket fence, have cars, a boat, and kids.

I don't want to offend those who have that dream. You have to be careful about how

you're portraying and how you're saying it. I always do disclaimers that this is *my* goal

and *my* dream. For most people in my life, that's how they live right now but for me,

that's not enough.

Sonya felt relieved after the video was done. She explained that "Now we can move on to

the next video because when you're doing content, everybody burns out eventually. I have to

keep running because I need to provide more content for viewers."

She noted it was important for her to be perceived as someone that people could believe.

Sonya said that she felt viewers wanted "Somebody who has gone through these experiences and

they're ready to talk about their experiences. It [the content] could help me, I can trust [them] and

I would go to [them] for advice or expertise on certain things." In the beginning, she had

anticipated push-back from the community and did not feel that she could be herself in the

YouTube videos. She recalled:

When I first started, nobody talked about shaman[ism]. I was preparing myself for

naysayers or people who did not believe in it. I was not prepared for the support I ended

up receiving over this and that's just something that I think about when I'm doing my

content now.

Through trial and error, Sonya gained confidence in creating content she felt was relevant to her viewers. She felt she could show more of her true self now and it came across in the content she produced. She encouraged others to create content on social media and offered the following tips:

> There's so much more that goes into social media that if people knew how to run it and do it, they could be so successful. Persistency is key. Every time you film act like you have thousands of viewers even if the only reviewers are your family member[s]. Every time I filmed, I filmed like there was thousands of people watching me and so that is definitely my trick.

Regarding personal growth and development, Sonya credited her mom and shaman teacher for serving as her role models. As a divorcee, her mom persisted in the face of cultural backlash. Her mom earned a college degree and owned several businesses. Her shaman teacher taught Sonya how to balance the roles of a wife and leader. Sonya said:

> She has helped so many people in the community and then at home, she will still listen and be very meek when it came to the men in the family. That was just mind-boggling for me. I saw that you can be very strong but also know when to pull back and listen to others.

Sonya also developed herself through her experiences in building relationships with her significant other. In the Hmong culture, women who get married will eventually follow the religious beliefs of their husband's family. She described how she was advised:

Everybody tells you it's better to be a shaman when you're married. What if your future husband is not practicing shamanism and they go to church? They're not gonna be okay with it [shamanism]. When I stopped being a shaman and I started going into the dating world, I tried to be normal.

Though she initially struggled with finding a significant other, she now lives with her boyfriend. She said, "Nobody was ever good enough. Even if they were what everybody thought was perfect, it was not good enough for me and what I wanted." It took her time to realize that she was searching for her own idea of happiness and not follow what others had prescribed for her.

Sonya described the best version of herself as an older, wiser person. She explained that "It's kind of weird but I see an older version of me come to me and talk to me. This has happened [since] I was a kid. Especially during times where I'm uncertain or I'm not sure if this is what I should be doing with my life. The older version [of me] will come and tell me, 'You're gonna be okay and this is how it's gonna happen.'"

When it came to self-inquiry and future planning, Sonya made time to reflect quarterly. She described what she felt as a sense of restlessness:

Well, what's next? I'm kind of bored now and I need something else to challenge me. That's what I tend to reflect. I think about my goals every year. I'm busy moving, running, and going. People don't always associate me with being that deep of a thinker because I'm always cracking jokes.

Sonya was currently in the process of writing a book about her life journey as a shaman and the importance of mental health. When asked about who she is becoming, Sonya said "I hope to be somebody I'm proud of." At the end of the day, she wanted to have peace of mind. She added that "I was true to myself, and I didn't have to compromise." Sonya noted that "My legacy is being able to bridge the youth with shamanism. I understand every community is going to have good and bad, but the youth is the future and can change it."

Summary

This chapter provided a brief demographic summary of the participants and captures their individual stories. Individuals reflect a combination of characteristics such as values, culture, ethnicity, family system influences, and learned behaviors through life experiences (Sostrin, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to explore individuals' histories to uncover who and what shaped them and who they are becoming. The environmental, institutional, and social influences alongside life experiences and conditioned tendencies offer a holistic view and understanding of each individual (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014).

The individual portraits of these five participants provided a glimpse into their life experiences. Through an in-depth interview process, I gained insight into each participant's self-inquiry and personal growth, their experiences creating the best versions of themselves and how they embodied the use of self online to create the change they sought. Participants described the significance of the positive changes they are seeking in their lives and community. The next chapter provides the summary of findings, practical implications for Hmong women leadership development, further research, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER V: DATA FINDINGS

This study's objective was to expand understanding of the use of self (UoS) in Hmong American women within the digital environment. The study used an in-depth narrative inquiry methodology to analyze the use of self by five Hmong women. In listening to their stories to collect data for my research, I was able to explore their self-inquiry and personal growth experiences. In this chapter, I look at what the findings mean relative to the literature upon which this study was based. My overall interpretation of the data yielded distinct themes guided by the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories?

- To create the desired change in their lives and communities, how do Hmong women entrepreneurs embody the use of self in the digital environment?

- How do Hmong women digital entrepreneurs engage in self-inquiry and personal growth?

Data Findings

This chapter is arranged thematically. I summarize the findings and offer carefully selected verbatim excerpts from the interviews to support my analyses. Content for this chapter was developed using the following steps:

1. I segmented the overall findings into four themes that represented what I interpreted to be shared elements that highlighted the commonalities and differences in the Hmong women's stories.

2. I used the women's narratives to develop insight into how they embody the use of self online and engage in self-inquiry and personal growth.

3. I created a visual that connects the themes uncovered in this research study and discuss implications for practice and further research. Overall, conclusions and implications were derived from findings related to the research questions.

Research Question: What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories?

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: passion, connection, authenticity, and creative process. **Table 5** provides example statements made by participants related to each theme.

Table 5

Themes and Sample Statements that Support Each Theme

Theme	Sample Statements
Authenticity	• "Authentic. That's one of the most important things to me." • "I want to be accessible to others as a real person." • "I want to appear genuine." • "This is somebody who has gone through these experiences and they're ready to talk about their experiences." • "I don't even think that I try to be genuine or authentic, I just show up as I am."
Passion	• "I see it [video podcast] as a passion project and my lifestyle." • "The shaman channel, that's more of a passion of mine." • "My biggest thing now is just being a full-time content creator, creating things and doing what I love…" • "At the end of the day, what I always go back to is what I know this true for me and what I'm passionate about." • Usually, when something weighs on my heart a lot, I get super passionate about it."

Table 5, continued

Themes and Sample Statements that Support Each Theme

Theme	Sample Statements
Social Connection	• "My whole purpose of my platform is connecting with people and then connecting them with one another." • "I saw that [social media] as an outlet so that people can see into my life and what I've been up to and vice versa." • "It's [online relationship] a very deep connection in a different way even if it's not face-to-face." • "I realized how important the social media world was to stay connected with people…" • "I think it's really cool that I get to share those messages myself and reach different people and connect with them in different ways."
Creative Process	• "The process of collaborating is different each time because each collaborator is different." • "I take my laptop and I start writing down the main topic and key points for every video." • "I write all of my blogs and everything on my blue host platform." • "The way that I formulate my idea is I think about all the components that come into creating a post." • "Usually, when something weighs on my heart a lot, I get super passionate about it. I think about it, and I usually write about it first."

Note. Statements made during interviews with the five study participants in October 2022.

Authenticity

The five participants wanted to be perceived as authentic. As established in the literature review, researcher Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) explored the culture of self-branding among women and found that to be considered a successful self-brand, one must construct her persona as authentic and be authentic as well. In the past, authenticity referred to an inward exploration. Today, authenticity requires others who are externally facing to determine the veracity of such representations. Researcher, Banet-Weiser (2012) says that "to be authentic to yourself, one must first be authentic to others; it's about external gratification" (p. 80). In this section, I explore authenticity as a brand and within the context of post-feminism.

Participants expressed that acquiring the status of appearing real or authentic online is a sought-after achievement. For example, Chia expressed that it was important for her to appear as authentic and genuine to followers. She explained that "I don't even think that I try to be genuine or authentic, I just show up as I am." Lucy noted what was most important about how she appeared to others was to be authentic. "I think that's one of the most important things to me is that I never want my pieces to be done just because I'm trying to put something out." When asked how Mai Kia hoped to be perceived by others, she said she wanted to be "accessible" to others as a "real person." Sonya noted it was important for her to be perceived as someone that people believed. Blia observed there were multiple reactions she hoped to get from her viewers. Most importantly, she wanted to appear genuine.

Marwick & boyd (2011) notes that self-presentation tactics are based on what one perceives as what the imagined audience expects. The ability to self-reveal is a skill, particularly if one is attempting to be strategic about constructing a self-narrative online. They argue that "Revealing personal information is seen as a marker of authenticity but is strategically managed and limited" (p. 127). Sonya offers this example as a tip to those who want to become digital entrepreneurs. She said "Persistency is key. Every time you film act like you have thousands of viewers even if the only reviewers are your family member[s]. Every time I filmed; I filmed like there were thousands of people watching me."

As participants transitioned from social media users to content creators, they articulated a conscious awareness of their perceived audiences. Academics suggest that video-sharing platforms such as YouTube require that one can imagine the contours of an unseen audience. Of course, this can be said of other social media platforms as self-representations and social relations are visible to everyone. This may be why individuals find it necessary to ensure their

posts receive a certain amount of "likes." Participants in this study expressed the importance of the personal benefits they received from direct, positive appraisals and validations. For example, Blia noted that it took her two hours to get ready for photos and then she worked on her lighting and backdrop. Sometimes she walked to the park to take a few photos. She laughed and said, "The funniest thing, too, is when you post and it doesn't get that much engagement." On the other hand, there were instances in which Blia's posted without investing much time to create the post but went viral instantly. She explained:

> It basically took me six hours for pictures, and I post it, wrote it and then there's only a hundred "likes." Then, there's a flip side where I wrote something really quick and I use an old photo of my kids…boom it explodes! It [the post] gets over a thousand likes…you don't know what will blow up on your platform.

In her book *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) argues that the transformation of the culture of everyday living into brand culture signals a broader shift, from authentic culture to the branding of authenticity. More specifically, Banet-Weiser (2012) argues that building a brand is about building an effective, authentic relationship with a consumer, one based – like a relationship between two people – on the accumulation of memories, emotions, personal narratives, and expectations. Contemporary brand cultures are thoroughly embedded with the culture at large that they become indistinguishable from it (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

During interviews with brand managers, Banet-Weiser (2012) was struck by the argument one of the participants made. She noted:

My cynicism around consumer culture and marketers stemmed from my assumption that commercial culture is about selling lived experience, not actually being lived experience. To this, Stone responded that in the contemporary moment one could have authentic lived experience and sell it at the same time, but nontraditional methods are needed." (p. 213)

Findings in this study revealed that the five participants described a content creation process that included awareness of their own lived experience. Blia explained this process in action. As part of her content creation process, she first identified topics through her own lived experiences. She said, "A lot of confidence is established…obviously from my own experience that others can relate to. Making them feel like they're not alone, making them feel heard." There were multiple reactions she hoped to get from her viewers. Most importantly, she wanted to appear genuine. She also wanted her followers to feel engaged in conversation and to feel good. Chia explained the most important content she created was from personal experience. She added that "It [content] came from a place of experience. Not facts that people can fact-check online. For me, that deciding factor was I want to help people. That can look like giving tips or providing inspiration or education."

In addition, Banet-Weiser (2012) also notes that "It is becoming more and more clear that brand culture shapes not only consumer habits but also political, cultural, and civic practices. This impacts what it means that authenticity itself is a brand and that 'authentic' spaces are branded" (p. 11). We must consider what the emergence of brand culture means for individual identity, the creation of culture, and the formation of power. Within brand culture, consumers produce identity, community, emotional attachments, effective practices, and relationships both with the brand and with each other; in turn, brand culture provides an infrastructure for this kind of social and political behavior (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

The definition of the consumer has evolved as consumption today involves a form of co-production that has changed traditional branding concepts where the consumer becomes the producer. The rise of online entrepreneurship has reached a new form of social contract wherein activism and consumerism cohabitate. This creates an environment where brands and consumers now engage in reciprocity previously unimagined. Consumers are afforded more freedom than ever before to produce individually meaningful material. This also represents the freedom to engage in immaterial labor resulting in the creation of a space that is individual empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Participants expressed that using social media was a way to advocate for what they believed was meaningful. Lucy explained:

> Putting out blogs and intentional content on social media is my way to make even the smallest difference. It's my way to speak things into the world and community that I want to be talked about. Before that, I was searching for the things that I wanted, the topics that I wanted to hear about and the messages I want to see.

Lucy added, "I think it's really cool that I get to share those messages myself and reach different people and connect with them in different ways."

It is also important to analyze findings from the post-feminism frame of reference. Post-feminism has been incorporated seamlessly into consumer culture, including media, merchandise, and consumption. Consumer culture today is a particularly rich context for girls and young women to build a self-brand. Post-feminism marks a historical shift in representation, academics and researchers have pointed out. They observe women have transitioned from being a vague mass of passive consumers to girls and young women with agency who are active, increasingly individualized entrepreneurs (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Indeed, the participants in this study thoughtfully considered the opinions and responses of others with respect to their own online actions. Scholar Nancy Baym (2010) notes "digital media aren't saving us or ruining us. They aren't reinventing us. But they are changing the ways we relate to others and ourselves in countless, pervasive ways" (p. 153). Technology contributes to how we are able re-envision ourselves and others. Distinct from non-digital kinds of autobiography, the self presented online is constructed not in isolation but in communication with others. The participants described that they continually seek to create selves that are relevant, appropriate, and functional within the social contexts that are significant as they strive to live with authenticity and integrity.

Passion

Research on passion is especially relevant to the findings in this paper. Every study participant:

- Described their social media work as their passion.

- Had a full-time job in addition to creating content for social media.

- Worked in various sectors and industries such as healthcare, social services, banking, finance, and consulting.

- Observed that digital technology enabled them to follow their passion, do what they loved, and feel empowered.

As illustrated in **Table 5** on **Page 105**, the women I interviewed (Blia, Chia, Lucy, Mai Kia, and Sonya) said they selected their social media content based on their passions. Below, I discuss the dualistic model of passion in connection to identity construction and improved well-

being. Also, I provide an overview of Karl Marx's (1973) construct in understanding work as a social institution and apply it within the construct of the themes discovered in the research for this paper.

A quick search on Google using the phrase "my job is my passion" shows 48 million results. There is no shortage of advice on the internet guiding career seekers to "follow your passion." During a Stanford University commencement address, Steve Jobs famously said, "The only way to do great work is to love what you do" (Stanford University, 2005). And then there is Richard Branson: "There's no greater thing you can do with your life and your work than follow your passions in a way that serves the world and you" (Andersen, 2013).

Until recently, little has been written on the psychology of passion for activities. The few psychologists who have looked at the concept have underscored its motivational aspect (Vallerand, 2012). For instance, some authors have proposed that people will spend large amounts of time and effort to reach their passion goals (Frijda et al., 1991) or work on the activity that they love (Baum & Locke, 2004). Nearly all empirical work on passion has been conducted in the area of close relationships under the rubric of passionate love (Hatfield & Walster, 1978).

Vallerand (2012) and his colleagues recently developed the dualistic model of passion (DMP), exploring the role of passion for activities in sustainable psychological well-being (Vallerand 2008). Vallerand et al. (2003) define passion as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important, and in which one invests time and energy regularly. The DMP proposes there are two types of passion, harmonious and

obsessive, that can be distinguished in terms of how the passionate activity has been internalized into one's identity (Vallerand, 2012).

Vallerand (2012) also notes that "harmonious passion originates from an autonomous internalization of the activity into one's identity while obsessive passion emanates from a controlled internalization and comes to control the person" (p. 4). All five participants said they experienced positive emotions while engaging in social media content development, which took place regularly. Participants felt excited, enthusiastic, driven, and challenged when creating social media content. It is posited that harmonious passion contributes to sustained psychological well-being while preventing the experience of negative effects, psychological conflict, and ill-being (Vallerand, 2012). One of the most striking examples was when Mai Kia said, "I see it [video podcast] as a passion project and my lifestyle." She continued:

I have a very full life outside of my work because my job…only activates certain notes. And then this part of me [video podcast] is very fulfilling in its own way. I still have things that I'm doing outside of work that rejuvenate me and keep me excited about life.

Identity is also an important consideration. In fact, passionate activities come to be so self-defining that they represent central features of one's identity (Vallerand, 2012). Based on the narrative stories of these women, the presentation of self online in an autobiographical format was expressed as an extension of each participant's identity. An example of this was when Chia explained the purpose of her social media platform:

Ultimately, the primary intent is for me to learn to move past the trauma. It's my way of taking ownership and reclaiming my life again. I think that the secondary intent is to

share my story and then after that, it becomes hoping that people will understand me better.

The primary purpose of Chia's social media platform served as a continuation of her self-healing work. Mai Kia also expressed that her video podcast was connected to her identity in relation to her collaborators. She said, "I needed it [collaborators] to be an extension of who I am, and I need to believe in them."

In addition to describing the work in social media as a passion, the study participants noted that new technology offered them more autonomy. They felt that they had more control over the work they produced and posted on social media as compared to their full-time jobs. It is helpful to discuss the passion theme in the context of two concepts by the social scientist Karl Marx (1973) that are critical to understand work as a social institution: alienation and autonomy. Marx argues that we experience alienation when we have no control over our work or how it is done. In contrast, we experience autonomy when we have control over our work and how it is sold in the marketplace (Marx, 1973).

Literature on the effects of alienation and autonomy in the new digital economy varies. Individual feelings of alienation and autonomy vary by the kind of work people perform and their employment status (Rohlinger, 2019). New media contribute to alienation because they enable companies and managers to control every aspect of work. Some individuals find new media give them autonomy, allowing them to determine when and how they work better. Regarding today's digital and online technologies, Blia experienced what Marx calls autonomy. Today's technology enables Blia to have creative freedom and control. She explained:

It [social media] allows me to be myself. At work we have to be very professional. We

have to talk and act in a certain way. When you are your own boss or you create your

own content, you can be funny. You can be ridiculous, swear and cuss and can dress

however you want or wear the makeup you want. I think it has allowed me to continue to

be myself and be creative.

In summary, the findings in this research are consistent with the literature. The study

participants expressed what Vallerand (2012) describes as harmonious passion, which leads to

regular engagement in the passionate activity that facilitates positive effects during activity

engagement. Positive affect seems to endure for a substantial period of time, and that positive

affect positively predicts psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, engaging in social

media activities that these women were passionate about provided important emotional benefits

that fostered psychological well-being.

Social Connection

Social connections are the fabric of society. Just like communication-related technologies

such as the telegraph and telephone did not reduce social connectivity, online social networks

will not either. If anything, it is likely to increase connectivity or reduce the cost of

communicating with others (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2019). There is a variety of research

perspectives and conclusions regarding how Internet use influences social connectivity (Wang &

Wellman, 2010). This study's digital entrepreneurs explained the importance of social media in

their lives from an early age. These women revealed they started using social media for

entertainment and then it evolved into a platform that was used to connect with friends and

family. In this section, I discuss the role of intimate self-disclosure in creating social bonds and

connections with followers.

As cited by Pew Research (Heimlich, 2011), roughly two-thirds (67 percent) of social media users say that staying in touch with current friends and family members is a major reason they use social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn; about half say they use these sites to reconnect with old friends. Seventy-two (72) percent of female social media users and 55 percent of male users cite family connections as a major reason for using these sites (Heimlich, 2011). According to a Neilsen (2017) study, more than half of Asian American women are on YouTube and 86 percent use Instagram.

In the past decade, the social media impact has transitioned from entertainment to becoming an integrated part of nearly every aspect of daily life for many (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2019). Professor Kevin Werbach has spent two decades exploring trends at the intersection of the Internet, digital media, and communications. He notes that "Social media has become really fundamental in the way that billions of people get information about the world and connect with each other, which raises the stakes enormously" (Knowledge at Wharton Staff, 2019). All of the participants viewed staying connected to friends and family as an initial motivation for use of social media.

For example, in her early 20s, Chia decided to attend college out of state. That was when she began to view social media as an important tool. She said, "I realized how important the social media world was to stay connected with people, especially folks back home in the Twin Cities. I really valued staying connected and maintaining my relationships." Sonya recalled that "we would make connections and lose them because we moved every two years. I saw that [social media] as an outlet so that people can see into my life and what I've been up to and vice versa." Lucy added, "I think it's really cool that I get to share those messages myself and reach different people and connect with them in different ways."

All five participants viewed social media as a valuable tool to help them stay connected with friends and family. However, they expressed different perspectives regarding online and offline relationships. Chia shared that as a content creator, the idea of staying connected on social media deepened relationships. She provided this example:

> I went to a music festival this past weekend and I met some people for the first time. Being able to stay connected on social media I feel like an even deeper connection with these people because not only did we share or have that shared experience, but now we're able to continue our conversations online.

Blia shared that there were benefits to online relationships that did not exist for in-person interactions. For example, she could talk about almost anything with others online because it was less personal. She also felt that virtual conversations allowed her more time to respond which resulted in a more respectful exchange. On the other hand, Mai Kia, Sonya and Lucy felt that they could not share themselves fully with those they met online. The women expressed caution in keeping the online and offline relationships separate because they could reveal more with in-person relationships. Lucy explained, "I would say that [for] my in-person relationships, they see a very raw version of me…sustained and built off memories and spending time together."

Implicit in participants' responses was that what is posted on their social media platform is suitable for public consumption, with all the consequences that accompany such practices. For instance, all participants were clear about their purpose, intentions, what they did and did not post, and how they came across. Furthermore, each participant discussed their own perspectives on the differences between online and offline relationships. Participants expressed the intent to connect and build relationships with followers.

It is especially helpful to understand the role of intimate self-disclosure as a strategy in helping to create long-term online relationships which are often used in the context of building source credibility and brand trust through social media. Intimate self-disclosure describes the level of intimacy in the disclosure pertaining to a specific area of an individual's life (Kim & Song, 2016). Studies have drawn out various results while analyzing intimate self-disclosure on social media. For example, intimate self-disclosure may enhance feelings of connection (Utz, 2015), perceived closeness (Lin & Utz, 2017), and friendship (Kim & Kim, 2020). In contrast, high levels of intimate self-disclosure sometimes can lead to negative outcomes, such as reduced attraction (Baruh & Cemalcılar, 2015).

Researcher Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) explored the culture of self-branding among women and found that individual commodification through self-branding, is "a new social arrangement that relies on different strategies for identity construction" (p. 69). As part of her exploration of the culture of self-branding as it relates to women, Banet-Weiser (2012) points to the increasingly viable construct of "self-as commodity," one that "involves a social relationship with oneself, one of innovation, production, and consumption, charged with ideally producing a unique 'authentic' self" (p. 73). The rise of online entrepreneurship appears to have reached a new form of social contract where activism and consumerism cohabitate. This creates an environment where brands and consumers now engage in reciprocity previously unimagined.

Autobiographical narration such as the content produced by these women seems to be the most prevalent form of intimate self-disclosure. The participants described *how* they communicate their messages to the audience; methods included verbal narration, video, images, and writing. Increasing self-disclosure plays a substantial role in constructing an online narrative of oneself. Such self-disclosure is part of a social exchange that creates value (Cheung et al.,

2015). In recent years, studies have examined self-disclosure behavior among virtual environment users (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). Researchers have begun to discuss how social media users, such as celebrities, perceive others' self-disclosure, YouTubers, and brands (Labrecque, 2014).

In alignment with findings on intimate self-disclosure, Blia provided this example:

Now I can understand how celebrities feel. Singers like Selena Gomez or Justin Bieber who are so committed to their fans…even when they're really sick, they will go out there to perform for their fans because they know how much that means to their fans…having this platform help me understand …these people [followers] look forward to my posts or they look forward to my videos.

In one study, Bickart et al. (2015) sought to understand how social media influencers build a brand following by sharing secrets. They found that social media influencers disclose personal information intentionally rather than randomly. The five participants believed that revealing intimate personal information can be a powerful tool for connecting with followers. The rationale is that content creators have the power to approximate their realities to those of their followers by revealing intimate information. This way, followers may see that self-revelations can make social media influencers approachable (Hosek & Presley, 2018). For example, Chia shared that she frequently asked the following questions throughout the process when developing content:

What is my intention for this post? How does this relate to my brand? What impact could this have? Is it representative of who I am as a person? Is it true to who I am? What aspect of who I am is this showing to others?

In conclusion, although all the participants viewed staying connected to friends and family as an initial motivation for use of social media, they have developed differing perspectives about online and offline relationships as they became content creators. Two participants felt that they could have deep online relationships. The other three participants noted a difference between their online and offline relationships and that they did not feel they could reveal all of themselves online. Each participant believed that revealing intimate personal information can be a powerful tool for connecting with followers.

The Creative Process

The themes that emerged during the interviews indicated there were many similarities between the five participants, but differences should also be noted. Participants spent various amounts of time on social media and each had a unique creative process that she used to develop content. Three of the participants described experiences that exhibited what is known as "flow," "peak experiences" or "optimal function" related to their creative process. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) studied the creative process in artists. They were struck by the fact that when work on a painting was going well, the artist persisted single-mindedly, disregarding hunger, fatigue, and discomfort—yet rapidly lost interest in the artistic creation once it had been completed (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). With focused energy and attention, flow indicates a state in which the rest of the world is cut off, shut off or forgotten.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014) notes that there are four characteristics found in flow including clear goals, optimal challenges, and clear, immediate feedback. These are necessary features of activities that promote intrinsically rewarding experiential involvement. For Mai Kia, a key element to creating content was to follow her energy. The process of collaborating was different

each time because each collaborator was different. Mai Kia believed in people and their potential to create change, which motivated her even when things get tough. She said:

> If I'm excited about [the topic], then it's worth it. It's worth doing it all the way. Even when it's the toughest, even when we're filming on a day where I've already had a 12-hour day, even when we're filming impromptu stuff. Just to make sure that we're connecting the dots. I will always weather the storm because it's something that I truly believe in.

Chia observed her creative process unfolded in various ways. There was no set checklist she used to identify and create posts. If she felt enthusiastic about a topic, she followed her energy and created the post on the spot. She also quickly considered other components that came with creating a post, such as selecting visuals and writing captions to catch the reader's attention. In an example of flow, Lucy discovered she had a natural talent for writing blogs. "I realized how much I loved it. I realized that sometimes it takes people hours, days, and weeks to write essays. It took me like 10 or 30 minutes to write and publish." She continued: "I love curating. It's…an art form for me. Writing itself is… an art form for me. I also discovered that I love doing videography through social media." Lucy affirmed that sometimes when her vision was clear, the shoot was the same day.

On the other hand, Sonya and Blia were more methodical in creating content. They both wrote down their thoughts and then selected images that were complementary to the content or set aside time to shoot the video. Sonya described the process: "I take my laptop and I start writing down the main topic and key points for every video." On filming day, Sonya set aside time for hair and makeup and then reviewed the key points that she created before she

proceeded. She explained that actual filming took about an hour and then she began the post-production work.

Blia usually set aside time to write her first draft before it was published. She said:

I write all of my blogs on my blue host platform. It has a really good system for spelling errors. Making sure everything flows and looks nice and neat. I would save it as a draft first to see how it appears before I publish it… Once I'm done writing…[the] second part is looking for a photo to go with it."

The final feature of flow includes immediate feedback. Participants explained that the social media platform offered immediate feedback through "likes," comments and instant message exchanges with the audience. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2014), because flow takes place during a high level of challenge, the feedback one receives during the course of an activity will inevitably include negative performance feedback. Research on task involvement suggests that the importance an individual places on doing well in an activity (i.e., competence valuation) predicts the individual's involvement in that activity.

All five participants discussed the digital environment with respect to audience interaction though they had various perceptions about the importance of receiving positive validation. When Blia anticipated the topic she chose to write about would be controversial, her mind immediately jumped to what the haters would say: "They're always waiting for you to make a mistake." The voice of haters spoke loudly to her. She provided this example:

[Haters are] always in the back of my mind. I try not to let it bother me because I'm gonna focus more on the good and the positive things over what the haters have to say.

The majority of people who don't like my platform are usually Hmong men…As long as my husband and brother like me, then that's all that matters.

Chia, on the other hand, expressed that though the number of "likes" and increased "follows" including positive feedback from the audience would be a good thing, she did not post for that reason alone. Her intent was to interact with the audience in a compassionate way; she wanted the content to be meaningful to them.

Each participant used a unique creative process. Though there are similarities, it is imperative to avoid stereotyping or labeling these women as a single group. Their individual experiences and particular voices remain integral to this study. As noted in this section, artistic and other creative efforts depended on acquiring, recombining, or producing information. The creative process required participants to pay close attention to their emotional energy and at times, technical tools that required concentration. Each participant expressed some element of flow during the content creation process.

In conclusion, the first research question, "What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women's digital entrepreneurs' stories?" was answered affirmatively via rich narratives and insights gleaned from these participants. The four themes that emerged from my analysis of the data include passion, connection, authenticity, and creative process.

Research Question: To create the desired change in their lives and communities, how do Hmong women entrepreneurs embody the use of self in the digital environment?

In answering the second research question, it is important to include the themes discussed in the previous research question: "What are the similarities and differences in Hmong women

entrepreneurs' stories?" Hmong women entrepreneurs embody the use of self in the digital environment on multiple levels:

- First, the notion of creating positive change through visibility of having one's life displayed for others to observe and interact with, permeates all five participants.

- Second, the desire to recreate the authentic self online through self-branding, impression management, and intimate self-disclosure are connected in the fusion of public and private life online.

- Third, these women reconstructed their best selves online. Each employed use of self to serve their communities and to address social problems they found to be significant. To support their online work, the women created distinct self-images or self-brands, engaged relationally with others, and created opportunities for positive reinforcement that engendered feelings of self-worth.

To deepen our understanding of UoS in the digital environment, in the next section I explore two dimensions identified in the data: positive change and best self. The study indicates there is an interconnectedness between participants' identities, behavior, and stories.

Positive Change

The five participants discussed seeking positive change through the visibility of having one's life displayed for others to observe and interact with. Previous debates on social implications of social network sites on users have not yielded definitive conclusions on the social costs and benefits (Brandtzaeg, 2012). In this section, I review the findings and literature in three areas related to positive change. First, participants in this study expressed the intent to

create positive change and reported the positive benefits of using social media. Second, these women demonstrated the presence of what researchers coined as the *positivity bias,* which indicates that within social networking sites, individuals favor positive forms of self-presentation over negative aspects of the true self (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Third, participants report unintentional positive changes at an individual level.

Each participant noted her intent to make positive changes. They were aware of the positive impact they had on the community through direct feedback and interaction with followers. Several participants described how followers had reached out to them and provided encouragement and positive feedback on how they were impacted. Chia noted that followers had reached out to her seeking advice. Blia discussed how she referred followers to mental health professionals. Lucy described the positive feedback from people she worked with and online followers who kept her motivated to carry on being the better version of herself.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective postulates that individuals try to strategically control how others perceive them in their day-to-day social interactions. They do that by carefully emphasizing favorable aspects of the self, resulting in the construction of a positive and desirable self-presentation in interactions with others (Goffman, 1959). Such strategies relate to the social media positivity bias trend (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Schreurs and Vandenbosch (2021) define the positivity bias as "the extent to which social media users strategically post self-related content, which is typically highly selective, curated and unspontaneous as the goal of a positive self-presentation prevails over other goals of social media usage" (p. 329) and can be seen as an intentional process towards making and posting the "perfect" post (Bij de Vaate et al., 2018). Though participants expressed some positivity bias, they did not agree that positive self-presentation prevailed over all other goals.

For example, Chia, Blia, Sonya and Lucy stated it was important to bring awareness to issues in the Hmong community even though they perceived that the topics would be difficult to discuss. They felt it was necessary to shed light on taboo issues. These study participants demonstrated awareness that to achieve the goal of creating positive change, their social media platforms would include self-disclosure of negative aspects of themselves. Lucy offered the following insight:

> I realized that people are watching. Not [that] I need to be perfect because people are watching but people are watching and that means that how I heal, how I hurt, how I celebrate, how I win, how I lose, they're gonna see all those moments…. A lot of young people are watching me and I want them to know that all of those parts are okay in your life and that your life isn't gonna always be high.

In addition to intentionally creating change, Seashore et al. (2004) explore the UoS as an instrument of change and notes that "Use of self is a link between personal potential and the world of change" (p. 43). As we use ourselves to create change, we are also intentionally and unintentionally changing. Seashore et al. (2004) refers to this process as self-differentiation or individuation. Consistent with the literature, the five women digital entrepreneurs noticed an increased sense of well-being and described the change within themselves after they became digital entrepreneurs.

Following her passion, Chia felt more confident, Blia expressed that she could be herself on social media, Mai Kia noted that she was more credible, Sonya became more intentional and Lucy gained clarity about herself as an individual. As a result of engaging in social media activities, Lucy experienced changes within herself. Sharing her life experiences creatively and

publicly helped her build confidence. She became clearer about who she was and more in tune with herself. Lucy said:

> I think I've had massive changes within myself as I started becoming more creative and being more intentional about what I'm sharing [on social media]. I can see that I've gotten a lot more clear [about] who I am. I have become more confident, I'm a lot more in touch and in tune with myself.

Use of Self as an instrument of change begins with the conscious understanding of who we are, our perception of self and the unconscious awareness of the self that is always present. Understanding of the self is linked with our perception of what is needed in the world around us, our choice of strategy, and the role in which to use our energy to create change (Seashore et al., 2004). Findings from this study indicate that these women used what they knew about ourselves to intentionally draw on aspects of their whole selves to positively impact the current situation.

In summary, this study demonstrates that to create the desired change in their personal lives and community, Hmong women entrepreneurs created the intention of positive change. They expressed their passion through their work in social media, recreated the authentic self online, incorporated the strategy of intimate self-disclosure through sharing life experiences which created connections with the audience, and embodied the best version of themselves in the digital environment for the purpose of service to advance social issues.

Interconnection

The use of self is influenced by additional factors such as race, ethnicity, national culture, gender, age, social identities, life and family histories, intentions, personal agency, and self-efficacy, levels of consciousness, self-awareness, and defensiveness (Jamieson et al., 2010).

Managing our UoS begins with awareness, requires conscious sensing and interpreting, and takes form as a result of our intentional and unconscious actions. Learning to manage our use of self is a lifelong process as we constantly receive new and updated feedback on ourselves and our work. Successful use of self requires ongoing self-inquiry and personal growth. Individuals can fall back into old habits and limit effectiveness unless they are diligent about presenting their best selves (Jamieson et al., 2010).

There is an interconnected and reciprocal relationship between one's environment and one's development as an individual. All of us move in and out of this co-constructive space in our daily lives, creating a perpetual balancing act between fitting in and being ourselves (Harré, 1984). Research has shown social media users aim to convey the "best" version of the self (Throuvala et al., 2019). The five study participants referenced the desire to represent themselves positively. Drawing on Goffman's theory (1959), these online self-presentations likely reflect a very positive and desirable self-image that is strategically constructed. The data for this study indicates there was an interconnectedness between each participant's description of their best self and the stated purpose of their social media platform. In the next section, I explore this interconnection between best self and social media. **Table 6** shows each participant's interview responses to two corresponding questions about their best self and their intent of using social media platforms.

Table 6

Participants' Descriptions of Best Self and Intent of Social Media Platform

Participant	Description of Best Self	Intent of Social Media Platform
Mai Kia	3 examples: • "I have been able to face it [healing from trauma] head-on and carefully	• "[The] whole purpose of my platform is connecting with people

	dissect it and have done the work to move forward from it and be better because of it."	and then connecting them with one another."
	• "Being completely present with somebody."	
	• "When I push myself to the ultimate limit."	
Sonya	• "I see an older version of me come to me and talk to me. This has happened [since] I was a kid. Especially during times when I'm uncertain …The older version [of me] will come and tell me, 'you're gonna be okay and this is how it's gonna happen.'"	• "I try to connect the mysteries in our culture for the Hmong people. When it comes to shamanism, there's a lot of secrecy involved and then there's mistrust and animosity."
		• "I put myself out there knowing that there's probably people who don't agree with me telling 'secret' information that our younger generation is not going to have."

Table 6, continued

Participants' Descriptions of Best Self and Platform Intent

Participant	Description of Best Self	Intent of Social Media Platform
Chia	• "My highest self is someone who is kind, forgiving, gracious and compassionate. Someone who's very understanding. She's like the bigger older sister who hugs you when you are talking down on yourself instead of saying 'I told you so' she hugs me and says, 'everything's gonna be okay.' She's wise and she doesn't say things that will make me feel bad. • "I think my highest self comes out more intentionally when I'm journaling."	• "I think ultimately, the primary intent is for me to learn to move past the trauma. It's my way of taking ownership and reclaiming my life again. I think that the secondary intent is to share my story and then after that, it becomes hoping that people will understand me better. And for those that may share a similar experience, to know that they're not alone."
Blia	• "When I'm with my kids. I'm playful with them or rowdy. We go outside and are outdoor kids. We hike, we talk about life."	• "I want them to feel happy. I want them to feel good about themselves. I want them to…laugh, 'wow, that made me feel better about my crappy situation….'" • "Our traumas may be different. I want people to be able to read or see the post that I'm creating and [think to themselves] 'hey, I went through that too. I understand the feeling and that I'm not alone even if life is hard right now.'"
Lucy	• "I am the best version of myself when I am in tune with myself and I'm just being completely authentically wholesomely myself."	• "My overlying message is about embracing and accepting everything that you are and being yourself at your fullest capacity."

Note. Statements made during interviews with the five study participants in October 2022.

The interconnection between best self and the purpose of each participant's social media

platform are summarized below.

- Mai Kia used three examples to describe the best version of herself that focused on her state of being in relationship with self and others. The purpose of her video podcast platform was to connect with others and help people connect with each other.

- Sonya explained that the best version of herself was an older and wiser person who appeared during an uncertain time. The purpose of Sonya's social media platform was to help demystify the mysteries of shamanism and serve as a bridge to connect others with the Hmong culture focused on supporting the younger generation.

- Chia described her highest self as an older sister who provided comfort and support during a time of need. Chia explained that her platform was a way for her to move past trauma and reclaim her life. Her social media posts were often written in the third person with the voice of kindness, compassion, love, and forgiveness.

- Blia said she experienced the best version of herself when she was with her children, being carefree. This allowed her to express herself freely in playful bliss. She created a space through her social media platform where her posts were infused with humor and followers could have fun, laugh, and engage to move past their trauma.

- Lucy described the best version of herself as deeply self-aware and authentic. The main message to her followers on her social media platform was to encourage self-acceptance.

In summary, the construction of self online for these five women was an expression of their identity and the embodiment of the best version of themselves. As technology is infused into our everyday lives, it is more important than ever to understand how individuals can become

the most effective versions of themselves within the digital environment. The study suggests there is an interconnectedness between participants' identities, behavior, and stories.

Research Question: How do Hmong women digital entrepreneurs engage in self-inquiry and personal growth?

All participants noted the aim of their social media platform was to create positive change. Social media platforms enable these women to create content that is an expression of their passion. Their stories celebrated the courage, wisdom and tenacity of each woman who teaches us that we, too, can trust our authentic life experiences to create that which comes from our soul; and that which comes alive through our own words to impact positive change in connection with others. In this section, I explore three themes that emerged as participants discussed how they engaged in self-inquiry and personal growth. The three themes are the foundation that enable each participant's to effectively embody the use of self online and included the outsider perspective, critical self-reflection, and well-being. **Table 7** provides applicable statements made by participants regarding each theme.

Table 7

Themes and Sample Statements that Support Each Theme

Theme	Applicable Statements
The Outsider	• "I don't really have a lot of exposure to a lot of other Hmong children." • "We became really secluded." • "People can point fingers 'she's an orphan and she's a divorcee.'" • "Fear that others in the community, the Hmong community specifically, would judge me. Would judge my parents. Would judge my family." • "It shaped my Hmong American experience [to be] different from my friends."

Table 7, continued

Themes and Sample Statements that Support Each Theme

Theme	Applicable Statements
Critical Self-Reflection	• "I never aspired to be married and have children. That wasn't a goal of mine. I needed to start focusing on myself." • "I went through this, like spiritual awakening, where I question everything for myself." • "I created these limiting beliefs or narratives, and it was only through reflection that I realized this." • "I've also encouraged people to have difficult conversations about Hmong women and their timeline…unlearning that. Challenging themselves, challenging what they've always heard, and challenging tradition." • "One of my biggest initiatives in the last several months has been elevating voices of people who are BIPOC and being able to put them in spaces that are non-traditional to them."
Well-being	• "I had a therapist that I worked with. I had a life coach that I worked with." • "It's very lonely and having that talk and knowing about our mental health, it's so important." • "That's when I started going to therapy for myself." • "I would classify seeing a therapist as is part of personal growth." • "I went to therapy, and I was very honest with my therapist, too."

Note. Statements made during interviews with the five study participants in October 2022.

The Outsider

Standpoint theory is valuable for this study because it sheds light on larger issues such as voice, belonging, discourse, power, and issues central to female development. Standpoint theory emphasizes stances taken by those outside the "norm," which says knowledge develops from and is determined by social position, addresses the underlying epistemological issues with normative models and structures that do not describe the experiences of women (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). All participants in this study articulated they were outsiders. They recounted stories about how they lived outside the norm of the Hmong community at some point in their lives.

In this section, I discuss the outsider perspective from a feminist standpoint, which offers an advantage for the participant stories to limit the intrusion of androcentric norms and to honor their lived experience as recounted in their stories. The stories of these women spoke of ways in which the patterns of a participant's inner discourse had changed.

Hmong history and culture exclude the contributions and voices of Hmong women. Symonds (2014) states that "In the Hmong community, there is no compensatory power for women. Women contribute to the continuance of the male hegemonic structure…." (p.9). To understand Hmong women's role within its cultural context, one must look at how women's roles as wives, daughters, mothers, and grandmothers are reflected in men's roles as husbands, sons, fathers, and grandfathers. All five participants discussed life experiences that shaped their identities. Four of the five participants named either their parents or their mother as the people who impacted them the most. The fifth person described that her son and role as a mother shaped her identity.

This is consistent with scholars who note stark differences in the roles of women in America and traditional Hmong culture (Donnelly, 1997). Hmong traditions are deeply rooted in patriarchal customs. Symonds (2014) observes that within the Hmong culture, women occupy a structurally subordinate position with no public voice through the political, economic, and ritual spheres which are restricted to men. Symonds (2014) further notes that "[Hmong] women rarely take collective action in response to abuse or unfair decisions, although within the household and lineage they frequently develop friendships with one another. These friendships are strong and close, but they do not appear to create female solidarity…" (p. 74).

Feminist thought is an important consideration when examining the research participants' stories. Like other women of color, Asian American women as a group have not been included in the predominantly white middle-class feminist movement (Chow, 1987). Social activist, feminist, intellectual, poet, author, academic, and teacher bell hooks' provides an influential voice in feminist thought that is unique perspective in facilitating our understanding of the personal stories of these participants. In the introduction of her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, hooks (2015) describe how her social position informed her perspective:

> Living as we did-on the edge-we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. (p. ix)

> This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us an oppositional world view-a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity. (p. ix)

Her critical perspective draws widely across many fields and she weaves together the ideas of such critical thinkers as Paulo Freire, Martin Luther King, Jr., Sojourner Truth, Pema Chodron and Thich Nhat Hanh. hooks (2015) identified herself as living on the margins of

society, which means "being a part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks, 2015, p. xvi.) and, thus, has been able to provide a perspective that challenges the status quo.

Like hooks, all research participants described living on the margins of the Hmong community and their experiences as insiders and outsiders. Participants recalled this awareness during two points in the interview. At the beginning of the interview and the end of the interview, when asked to describe herself and what experiences shaped her life, each participant described how she did not have a typical upbringing. Growing up, Mai Kia did not interact much with the Hmong community, Sonya's mother and her siblings were shunned because of her parent's divorce, Chia felt judged by the Hmong community because of her life choices, Blia felt like an outcast due to her life experience as a divorcee and orphan, and Lucy felt that she had a unique upbringing as compared to her peers due to her parent's strong educational background. The outsider perspective is further demonstrated by the following quotes from the research participants.

Mai Kia explained:

We went to Catholic school, so I don't really have exposure to a lot of other Hmong children. All my friends are wealthy white kids and that's kind of what I identified as success. I associated poverty and Hmong together, which wasn't accurate.

Sonya noted that due to her mom's decision to get divorced, "We became really secluded and when I would meet our uncles [mom's brothers], they always whisper… 'don't be different' or 'don't tell people [about] your life.'" Blia shared that she learned this life lesson through personal challenges. She said:

I went through my divorce back and 2014. Being an orphan [and] being a Hmong woman

divorcee as well. I feel like those experiences built me to reflect, to be bold and [become]

who I am today. People can point fingers "she's an orphan and she's a divorcee". Just

because those happened to me, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person…it doesn't make you

bad, it makes you badass.

Before she began posting autobiographical content about her life, Chia imagined that

people would judge her and the life decisions she had made. Especially the decisions she made

leading up to her breakup with her ex-fiancé. She said:

It was an unhealthy and toxic relationship and what kept me in that relationship as long as

it did was fear that others in the community, the Hmong community specifically, would

judge me. Would judge my parents. Would judge my family.

In her teen years, Lucy felt different from her Hmong peers. She described how her

parents' higher education impacted her life:

Mom and dad both have bachelor's and master's [degrees]. It shaped my Hmong

American experience [to be] different from my friends who were the first to attend

college and did not have parents that could speak English. I feel like I fell into a different

margin in the Hmong experience.

hooks' (2015) ideas and books on feminism strongly challenge and confront oppression

and injustice. For example, her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* dives into the

history of feminist movements and challenges the limitations of speaking against sexism without

acknowledging the complexities it brings with race, class, and ethnicity. hooks also reminded her

readers, particularly feminists, that part of the process of fighting sexism is to confront the sexism women have internalized and the patriarchal ways they may think and act. She offers a unique perspective that provides context to the experiences of these five research participants.

Critical Self-Reflection

In addition to the keen awareness these women shared about living outside the Hmong community, each also described how they engaged in critical reflection. To better understand this theme, I invoke the writings of the father of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (2014). Critical pedagogy is a teaching method that aims to help in challenging and actively struggling against any form of social oppression and related customs and beliefs. Born in Recife, Brazil, Paulo Freire grew up in what he describes as a middle-class family. Freire described himself as a "connective kid," meaning that those symbolic middle-class markers simply enabled him to connect with others who were considered middle-class, but in reality he deeply identified with the poor, experiencing acute hunger and poverty (Freire, 2014). To overcome what he describes as a "culture of silence" he developed educational programs enabling those in poverty to participate more fully in voicing how injustice was institutionally perpetrated (Freire, 2014).

Focused on social and educational programs, Freire observed how unjust policies kept masses of people from equal opportunity. In response, he went on to promote a successful literacy program for adults. His teachings are revolutionary for those who have historically lived in the shadows. Freire (2014) believed that history does not need to be fixed, nor is it predetermined. Rather, history is a possibility; it can be made, invented, and reinvented. Engagement of those who have been marginalized in their movement toward becoming more fully human is rooted in Freire's conviction that humanization is an ontological vocation and

implies the political nature embedded in the process and the non-neutrality of its practice (Freire, 2014).

While listening to his pupils discuss critical consciousness, Freire (2014) offered this observation, "The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation" (p. 36). Freire (1998) describes critical capacity as connected to our ability "to intervene, to compare, to judge, to decide, to choose, to desist…" (p. 53). Each participant described a point in her life when she experienced critical awareness. These women questioned the established order and society in understanding her role. Participants described the role of critical reflection in the following examples.

As an adult, Blia experienced a period in her life when she questioned her spiritual beliefs, including Christianity and shamanism. She experienced critical reflection by disassociating herself from a discourse or vision of life that was being imposed on her, and by unveiling such views, she then reintegrated a set of values into her day-to-day being and action. She said:

> I went through this spiritual awakening, where I question everything for myself. I'm not gonna believe in this just because my pastor told me or because aunts and my uncles told me so. I want to seek my own truth and see what aligns with my beliefs. I want to live in my truth and also allow others to live their truth. I think that's a beautiful thing.

Chia explained the impact of how reflection prompted action in her life as an adult. Her critical reflection allowed her to deconstruct certain assumptions inherent in her everyday discourse as rooted in her narratives (consciously and unconsciously). The awareness of her

internal dialogue provided an opportunity to reconstruct her own vision of a good life. Chia recounts that during the last fitness competition, her parents were not present, and she decided to challenge her assumption:

> I called my parents because they were at home or running errands and I invited them. I think that I didn't realize that was a narrative that I told myself…that I couldn't have the support. I created these limiting beliefs or narratives, and it was only through reflection that I realized this.

When Sonya created the YouTube channel about her experience as a shaman, she received resistance from the shaman community. Sonya's experience of critical reflection was pivotal in demystifying the politicalized societal narrative intended to sustain a power imbalance. She explained, "When it comes to shamanism, there's a lot of secrecy involved and then there's mistrust and animosity." Sonya said:

> It does not have to be this way. I put myself out there knowing that there's probably people who don't agree with me telling "secret" information that our younger generation is not going to have. This isn't an issue that's going to go away. I was Americanized. I never thought I was a shaman. If I could help other people in any small way and this is all I have to do, I will do it.

Mai Kia takes a dialogic approach to critical reflection by seeking encounters between persons and different perspectives. Her video podcast offers individuals the platform to launch investigations and formulate interpretations of questions arising from their lived experiences. She noted:

One of my biggest initiatives in the last several months has been elevating the voices of people who are BIPOC and being able to put them in spaces that are non-traditional to them. In our Hmong community unfortunately, a lot of *meka* [white people] don't really know their music and they deserve to have that space too.

Critical reflection supported Lucy when she situated her experience within a social, cultural, political, and personal context. This understanding of her narrative within time and locale helped to build bridges linking her experience in the Hmong and American community to the past, present, and future. Lucy explained how she struggled with community expectations:

I was going through this phase of unlearning the Hmong woman timeline for myself. I was 26 and I was single. The voices you hear in your ears from family functions and community events about where you should be at 26…my American counterparts did not understand much about what I'm talking about. I lived in two different worlds. I existed in this little space that nobody can see. I walked here in Minnesota alongside other like other *meka* [white people] people, right? They didn't understand that while we're walking in the same space, I felt like I'm in my own little bubble.

In summary, all research participants expressed a state of awakening in which they developed independent thinking through critical reflection. The stories of these women spoke of ways in which the patterns of a participant's inner discourse had changed. hooks (2015) suggests that it is the outsider experience that allows her to provide a perspective that challenges the status quo. Blia questioned her spirituality, Chia recognized her own limiting beliefs, Sonya challenged taboo topics in the shaman community, Mai Kia sought a vision that connected people across multiple communities and Lucy challenged the Hmong woman timeline.

Well-being

The therapeutic relationship with self and others became an overarching theme during participant interviews. Four of the five participants noted they had received therapy and considered the relationship with their therapist to be instrumental in their personal growth. All participants valued mental health on multiple levels. First, participants discussed receiving therapy. Second, they chose to discuss the topic of mental health and well-being on social media platforms. Third, they advocated for the importance of mental health and well-being.

The connection between therapy, well-being and use of self runs deep. One of the earliest concepts of use of self came from Fredrick Alexander in the 1980s. He developed the Alexander Technique focused on the integration of mind/body and the relationship between the physical and psychological functions that have been adopted across many disciplines (Jamieson et al., 2010). For decades, UoS has been a tool that therapists, counselors, nurses, social workers, and other helping roles such as organization development have used (Baldwin, 1987). The early literature stemming from therapy focuses on the therapists intentionally bringing themselves into the therapeutic relationship. UoS and self-as-instrument were established around the same time as those doing this work in therapy began working in organizations (Hinckley, 2014).

Chia noted that she used social media as an extension of her self-healing journey. The main message that Blia conveyed on her platform was to stay true to yourself and have self-love. Lucy expressed that her platform conveys self-acceptance. Mai Kia described her interest in mental health both in her full-time job as a social worker in seeking help for clients and within her own life. Sonya noted that the mental health of a shaman is so important that she was working on a book that focused on this subject.

At the core of use of self is increasing one's self-awareness through paying attention to the whole self, including one's hidden shadow sides (Jung & Storr, 1983). Experiences shape us and the conscious and unconscious beliefs that drive behavior. A heightened level of self-understanding increases awareness of day-to-day choices in decision-making, which allows for effective behavior management. Strozzi-Heckler (2014) states that others' perceptions are formed based on the experiences of interaction and may not be in alignment with true intentions. This is critical for individuals to understand as they develop a sense of self-awareness through reflection and feedback.

Each participant was keenly aware of how they engaged in self-inquiry and personal growth. In the area of self-awareness, Mai Kia said that self-reflection did not come naturally. However, with a life coach she was able to work on retraining her automatic responses and build intentional awareness. She said:

> Now I think it's a little bit more natural because it shows up in energy. If somebody's draining me, my job is draining me, and situations are draining me…well, then I ask myself, is this worth it? I think it [self-awareness] happens a lot more naturally now.

Lucy and Sonya on the other hand noted that self-awareness came naturally to them. They remember being keenly self-aware as young children. Chia and Blia expressed that they had to work on their self-awareness and hone it as a skill. Blia shared that her personal growth and development had been a painful process. Recently she started meditating to bring light and positivity into her life. This included practicing positive affirmations, reflecting on life questions and generating more self-awareness. Blia described how she worked on turning around her negative self-talk into positive affirmations. When she caught herself in negative self-talk, she described the process of how she challenged her negative assumptions.

All participants felt that self-awareness impacted their short-term and long-term goals. When asked about self-inquiry and reflection, Lucy noted that she reflected daily. She continually engaged in conversations with herself and journaled. Lucy further added that self-inquiry and reflection had impacted her short-term and long-term goals. She explained that "I do not say yes to long-term opportunities, or long-term commitments without questioning whether it aligns well with me and if it will enable the best version of me to exist."

I explored three themes including the outsider, critical self-reflection, and well-being that emerged as participants discussed how they engaged in self-inquiry and personal growth. All participants noted that the aim of their social media platform was to create positive change. Each individual said they were an outsider to the Hmong community and how that experience impacted them. They also engaged in critical reflection and described how that experience fits into their personal growth and development. Consistent with the literature review, the sociological imagination is core to this study. C. Wright Mills (1959) argues that it enables the participants and the researcher to understand their inner lives within the broader historical context. Sociological imagination "enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (p.6).

In conclusion, **Figure 2**, is a visual representation of the connection between the themes uncovered in this research study. I was inspired to use symbols found in traditional Hmong *paj ntaub* (pronounced "pahn-dow") or "Flower Cloth" to create the visual. Hmong folklore explains how the Hmong lost the written language. One story recounts a time when the Hmong lived in China and were a prosperous ethnic minority group with their own written language. During a civil war in China, when the Hmong lost to the Chinese, officials banned the use of the written Hmong language. Throughout the years, Hmong women hid some form of the Hmong language

in the design of their *paj ntaub* or flower cloth (Faderman & Xiong, 1998; Yang, 2011). A common story shared by many elders say that *paj ntaub* are the remnants of the Hmong language that Hmong women coded onto clothing through embroidery and stitching to disguise their stories from their oppressors (Project Paj Ntaub, 2020). Traditionally, these flower cloths were applied to clothing worn during courtship festivals such as the Hmong New Year, baby-carriers, and men's collars as decoration. Overtime, *paj ntaub* transformed into the primary way of communicating Hmong Culture and history between generations (Utah Division of Arts and Museums, 2018).

Figure 2

Flower Cloth: Connecting themes in Hmong women use of self online
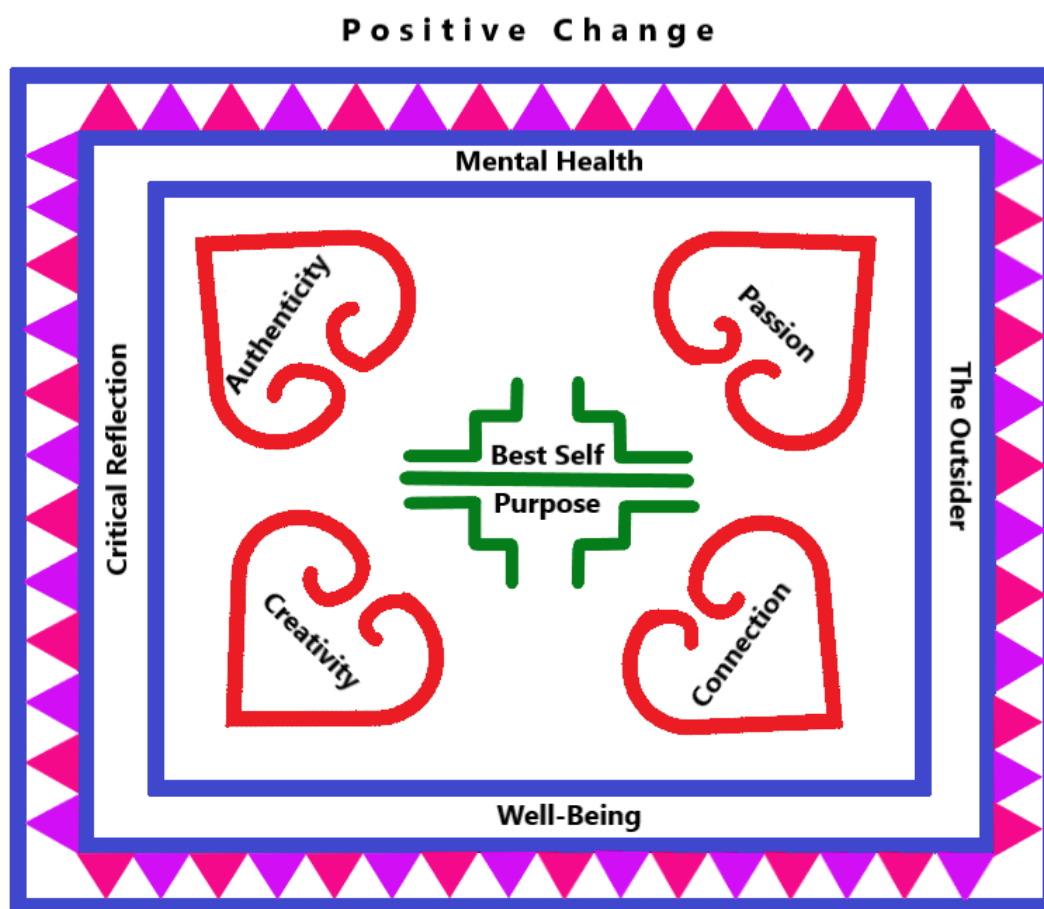
Symbols found in traditional Hmong *paj ntaub* was used in **Figure 2** to illustrate the connection between the themes uncovered in this research study. All participants noted that the aim was to create positive change. The outside frame represents themes that support personal growth in these Hmong women: outsider perspective, critical self-reflection, mental health and well-being that serve as the foundation which enables each participant to effectively embody the use of self online. The heart symbol depicts the four themes that were common elements in all participant stories: authenticity, connection, creativity, and passion. These themes empowered and strengthened their sense of agency in presenting their best selves online to impact positive change in alignment with their purpose.

Implications for Practice and Research

Gergen & Kaye (1992) wrote, "[A] story is not simply a story. It is also a situated action in itself, a performance with illocutionary effects. It acts so as to create, sustain, or alter worlds of social relationship" (p. 253). Not only do stories occur within worlds, they also illuminate that world (and what it is not). Our stories are not just our own: They interweave with the stories of others. The women in this study created stories that provided information about themselves and shared it publicly, which is an act of personal agency.

The stories of these Hmong women underscored the importance of themes, which contributed to their state of well-being and agency. Passion, social connection, authenticity, and a creative process are all aspects that contributed to increased psychological well-being for these women. The remaining themes of intentional positive change, mental health and critical self-reflection offered them a foundation for empowerment that strengthened their sense of agency. In this section, I offer implications for practice in Hmong women leadership development, future research, and final thoughts.

Hmong Women Leadership Development

Learnings from this study about how Hmong women leveraged entrepreneurship as a conduit for self-realization within online spaces can inform leadership development. This study demonstrated how Hmong women entrepreneurs embodied the UoS to gain thousands of followers by being authentic. Creating an authentic brand is something that is highly desired. Organizations can learn how to successfully harness lived experiences and turn them into authentic brands within the reciprocal and participatory culture of social media.

The individual woman entrepreneur has become the signature of a postfeminist woman, whose success and personal consumption habits are shared with millions. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), "The image of successful, individualized girlhood itself is one of the most profitable products being sold" (p. 61). Organizations should invest in the rise of young women like those in this study who understand how to implement the use of self in the digital environment and move with ease between media platforms. These are individuals who produce content online using videos, blogs, comments, and feedback. They participate in and through interactive technology, find a self and broadcasts that self, through spaces that authorize and encourage reciprocal relationships.

The stories told by these women confirmed they were the agents of their own learning, not just recipients of information. They acknowledged and embraced new technologies to change the ways they related to others and themselves. Such practices manifested as new-found expressions of self-as-instrument-of-change to help others. Foundational to UoS is the mental health and well-being of each woman. The study found all participants recounted stories about how they lived outside the norm of the Hmong community at some point in their lives. This requires investment in the psychological well-being of Hmong women and girls.

Furthermore, organizations should encourage and foster the creation and implementation of Hmong women leadership development that follows in the honorable path of scholar-practitioners such as Paulo Freire and bell hooks; use education as a liberating tool for enhanced awareness, learning, leadership development, and action. Implications for practice are listed below:

- Uncover the grand narratives inherent in traditional Hmong culture and examine issues of justice, ethics, and power within patterns of discourse.

- Create new stories that focus on actual lived experience and the fostering of preferred narratives that uplift the entire community.

- Emphasize the importance of understanding the normative nature of social narratives and leverage Hmong women's outsider experiences to confront oppression and injustice.

- Use the UoS model to maximize positive impact and influence of social media with clear intentions to disseminate new personal and social narratives.

- Leverage digital entrepreneurship as a conduit for self-realization for women and girls.

Implications For Future Research

The study of Hmong women digital entrepreneur stories yielded valuable information about how they saw themselves in the past, present, and future. The perspectives of these women can be used in future research. Implications for research are as follows:

- Compare and contrast use of self in the digital environment within various demographic populations such as gender, age groups, racial diversity, and socioeconomic status.

- Expand the UoS model to address issues such as voice, power, privilege, perspective, etc. that are essential within marginalized groups (such as women, low-income populations, youth, and minorities).

- Expand research to assess whether the intent of creating positive change through self-presentation online is in alignment with the impact on individuals and communities.

- Complete a meta-study analyzing images and content for the collective voice of Hmong women in the digital space.

- Build on this study and assess the impact of Hmong women digital entrepreneurs on the followers and Hmong community.

Final thoughts

Use of stories in research and analyzing and interpreting stories effectively offer an immeasurable opportunity. This study added to our understanding and practice in using stories for research. For Hmong women and Asian American women, the use of narratives was particularly salient as they engaged in the process of storytelling through curating and communicating narratives to thousands and even millions of followers on social media platforms. Hmong tradition (and tradition of many cultures and ethnicities) of passing down wisdom and culture orally using stories highlights the importance of narratives.

One's culture, families of origin, gender, ethnic groups, countries of origin and inhabitance provide the context in which stories are formed, interpreted, and heard through assigned meaning. Donald (2001) made this point by saying, "Not only does each culture teach children how to find out where to direct attention in a given situation [or not], but it also teaches

them what to remember and how to learn" (p. 205). Our narrative world consists of these stories in early life. As Plummer (1995) notes, "for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics" (p. 87). For our narratives to make sense and develop, there must be a community to receive them.

When we seek to make a change in our own narrative identities, it is important to have a social narrative to support personal narratives (Rappaport, 1995). Epston and White (1992) wrote that "we tend to internalize the 'dominant narratives of our culture, easily believing that they speak the truth of our identities. . . dominant narratives [that] tend to blind us to the possibilities that other narratives exist" (p. 14). Part of the process of changing our narrative identity is seeking a parallel shift in our defining stories. In that process, there is a dialogic relationship between our personal stories and our community's stories (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995). It is this dialogue that offers possibilities for transforming narratives that protest and influence the normative social narratives which leaves more room for choice in personal narratives.

As Hmong women entrepreneurs establish themselves as influential brands within social media along with digital technology in everyday life, they impact the personal and community narratives. A key point within feminist pedagogy is the value of and respect for one's lived experience. The images created by these women, the language used, and the introduction of taboo topics that have been carefully selected and curated by curious minds push the boundaries and challenge the confounds of cultural limitations. These stories of Hmong women entrepreneurs depict a strong counter-narrative to the subservient images within the broader grand narratives of the traditional Hmong women that have existed for centuries. The identity of the traditional Hmong woman has been rooted in the core social narratives. Hmong women

entrepreneurs are co-creating and influencing the modern Hmong woman identity in the digital space through use of self online.

When I began this research study, I hoped to discover a new chapter for Hmong women. Instead, I found a new book. The stories, images, content and positive changes created by these women in this study have not only created a seat at the table, but they have built a whole new dynamic table inside of a digital context to be shared with anyone in the world who cares to access it. I hope this research on use of self empowers others to engage in self-discovery and share their stories of personal growth and renewal.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

[Introduction of researcher] My name is Lilian Vu and I am a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. I am pursuing an EdD in Organization Development and Change Management.

[Description of the study] I am pleased that you have agreed to participate in the study, which focuses on Hmong women digital entrepreneurs' personal and professional growth. The purpose of this research is to understand how Hmong American women such as yourself use social media to create the change you seek in your life and community.

[Verification of Informed Consent] I want to take a moment and make certain that you understand the informed consent form. As a follow up, I will provide you with a copy for your records. Your interview today is part of a larger study including 5 Hmong women. Everything we discuss will be confidential. A transcript of the interview will be used as part of the analysis with no reference to you specifically. No one except for me and the confidential transcriber will know what you said in response to the questions we discuss during this interview. Please sign the consent form if you would like to proceed with participating in this research.

[After participant signs consent form and agrees to proceed]

1. I would like to proceed with the interview. Do you give permission for me to record this interview for reference purposes? Audio? Visual?

2. You may request that the recording be paused at any time if it presents a problem or makes you feel uncomfortable answering a given question. I want to remind you that you may withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

3. Do you have questions for me?

Interview Questions

[The following questions establishes rapport]

1. Tell me about yourself. When asked, how do you describe yourself to others?

2. How would others describe you?

3. What is your age?

4. What is your family size?

5. What is your level of education?

6. What is your occupation?

[Responses to the following questions will be used to understand how study participants and their social media participation leads to desired change in their lives and communities.]

1. How and when did you become aware of social media?

2. How did you learn to use or participate in social media?

3. Describe the role or roles social media has in your life.

4. How did you move from a social media user to a content creator?

5. Please share how those around you view you now compared to the time when you did not use social media.

6. If that has changed since you became a social media influencer, explain how.

7. Imagine you could never be a part of this group again. Describe what that would mean to you; how would your life be different?

8. How do your online relationships differ from in-person relationships?

[Responses to the following questions will be used to understand the application of the Situational Action Learning Cycle including (situation, intention, sense making, choices, action, and reflection) alongside the three competencies (seeing, knowing, and doing).]

1. Tell me about a social media project you find meaningful that you have authored or are working on currently.

2. Situation (Seeing): How did you identify ideas for content?

3. Intention: What is your intent with the content you choose to post?

   - What is the message you want to convey?

   - How do you convey that message?

   - How are you creating change as an influencer?

4. Sense-Making (Knowing):

   - What makes a project interesting or meaningful enough to take the time to do it?

   - Describe how you feel when creating a post – that is, how do you feel at the beginning, when you're in the planning stage, when you are writing, and when you post?

5. Choices:

   - What decisions and choices do you commonly make when creating content as a social media influencer?

   - What is important about how you appear to others?

6. Actions: (Doing)

   - Tell me the steps you take when developing content: walk me through the entire process, from identifying topics or information you will share through planning and completion.

7. Reflection:

   - How does the process of creating and posting content make you feel?

- What do you learn from the entire process?

- Does being a social media influencer add to or promote your professional calling, identity, and connection with others? (If participant responds, "yes," ask how.)

- How do you see your future as a social media influencer? How is this important to how you see yourself?

- Overall, how do you see yourself? Give me an example of what you see as a legacy?

[The following set of questions are designed to help the researcher understand how Hmong women digital entrepreneurs engage in self-inquiry and personal growth.]

1. What experiences have shaped you and continue to influence who you are today in your many roles as entrepreneur, influencer, sister, mother, wife, friend, etc.?

2. Who has helped you become who you are?

3. What beliefs drive your behavior?

4. How have you engaged in personal growth?

5. How do the experiences you've shared here show up in how you present yourself?

6. Describe your authentic self.

   - Are there occasions or circumstances when you choose to not share who you are? If yes, what are they?

7. Tell me about a situation in which you have engaged in self-inquiry.

   - What caused you to make time for self-inquiry?

   - What did you learn about yourself?

   - Assuming the self-inquiry increased self awareness, how does self-awareness impact your daily decisions?

   - How does increased self-awareness impact decisions you make for the long term?

- How has increased self-awareness caused you to modify your goals, both personal and professional?

8. Describe your best self.

- When are you your best self?

9. Who are you becoming?

10. Please, feel free to add anything you would like to regarding your self-identity as an influencer or your social connection to the online community?

Conclusion

I would like to take a moment and let you know what happens next. I will listen to the recording of our conversation within the next 5 days and transcribe it. I will then send it to you for your review. At that time, please, verify that the transcript is accurate and add information if you would like. Once you return the transcript to me, your work is done. In case you have additional questions, a follow up meeting will be offered at that time. I will then conduct my analysis using your data along with that of the other interviewees. Once my dissertation is finished and approved by the University of St. Thomas, it will be published. Remember neither your name nor your contact information will be published. I will be the only one with access to your data. Do you have any questions? Thank you so very much for your time.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT EMAIL REQUEST

Dear [First name],

Hello! I am reaching out to invite you to participate in research I am conducting about the use of social media. My name is Lilian Vu and I am a doctoral student at the University of St. Thomas. This research explores Hmong women digital entrepreneurs' personal and professional growth that results from the kind of work you are leading on social media. My research seeks to expand understanding on how Hmong women like you use social media to create change in your life and in your community.

You likely meet the criteria for participation in my research. For example, I am recruiting women who:

- Be 18 years of age or older

- Self-identify as Hmong

- Author and post autobiographical content online

- Has more than 1,000 followers on a social media platform such as Facebook or Instagram.

Participation in the research project is voluntary and includes:

- Interviews lasting 60-120 minutes through a zoom call, one-on-one with me at a previously agreed upon location or over the phone to accommodate work schedules and limit interruptions.

- Prior to the interview, I will provide a copy of the questions that I will ask for you to reference; however, I may have follow-up questions if clarity is needed.

- Review of your interview transcript--20 minutes.

- Your information will be kept confidential, and your name will be changed to protect your identity.

You will be asked to review, sign and date an informed consent form. The interviews will be conducted between August 1, 2022, and October 31, 2022. If you choose to participate, I have attached a copy of the consent form for you to review.

To notify me of your decision to participate, please respond to this email on or before <insert the date>. If you respond that you will participate, I will reach out to you by phone to schedule your interview.

 I look forward to hearing from you, <insert first name>.

Lilian Vu, EdD Candidate
Phone: (651) 600-0845
Email: vu005548@stthomas.edu
Attachment: Participant Consent Form

Research Participation Key Information

Use of Self Online

What you will be asked to do:

Participants will be asked to participate in one interview. This will be audio recorded. The time commitment is between 45 – 90 minutes per interview. The study will take place in a previously agreed upon private location, over the phone or audio conference to accommodate work schedules and limit interruptions.

Participating in this study has minimal risks.

You may become uncomfortable when answering questions due to personal reflections on your life and experiences.

Since there are only five participants in this study, it may be possible for someone in your field to recognize you in my research paper or presentations if they know you well. I will not use your name in any reports I create.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

You are invited to participate in a research study about Hmong women digital entrepreneurs' personal and professional growth and how they use social media to create the change they seek in their life and community. The title of this study is Use of Self Online. You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you are a Hmong woman, author and post autobiographical content online and have more than 1,000 followers on a social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram or blog. All participants must be 18 years of age or older. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether you would like to participate or not.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in one 45 - 90 minute interview.
- You will be asked to review, sign and date an informed consent form.
- The interviews will be one-on-one with me at a previously agreed upon private location, or over the phone, or audio conference to accommodate work schedules and limit interruptions.
- You will be asked to review your interview script.
- There will be 5 participants in this study.

What are the risks of being in the study?

The study involves risks:

- You may become uncomfortable when answering questions due to personal reflections on your life and experiences.

- Since there are only five participants in this study, it may be possible for someone in your field to recognize you in my research paper or presentations if they know you well. I will not use your name in any reports I create.

Here is more information about why we are doing this study:

This study is being conducted by Lilian Vu, Doctoral Student, Department of Organizational Development, and Rama Hart, Ph.D., Doctoral Dissertation Chair, Professor, Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether, and if so, *how* Hmong American women digital entrepreneurs embody the use of self in their work. This research explores five Hmong women digital entrepreneurs' stories of self-inquiry and personal growth. The themes in these women's stories identify how they embody the use of self online in creating change in their lives and community.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

While we can never guarantee complete confidentiality in research, we believe your privacy and confidentiality are important. Here is how we will do my best to protect your personal information:

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Although I will not include your name in any research findings, the Hmong community is small and someone who knows you very well may be able to identify that you participated if they read my paper. All records will be stored securely and kept confidential for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

The records of this study will be kept confidential. The types of records I will create include:

- Audio will be made. Audio recordings of the interview will be shared only with a professional transcriptionist. Audio recordings will be erased once the accuracy of the transcript has been confirmed

All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years once the study is completed. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas have the right to inspect all research records for researcher compliance purposes.

This study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and I can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by contacting Lilian Vu at vu005548@stthomas.edu. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Who you should contact if you have a question:

My name is Lilian Vu. You may ask any questions you have now and at any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions before or after we meet, you may contact me at 651-600-0845 email vu005548@stthomas.edu or contact my advisor, Rama Hart PhD. 612-296-2406 rkhart@stthomas.edu. Information about study participant rights is available online at https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/. You may also contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns (reference IRBNet project number 1942687).

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. **I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.**

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_____

Signature of Study Participant   Date

_____

Print Name of Study Participant

_____

Signature of Researcher   **Date**