

Relational Interdependent Self-Construal, Imagined Interactions, and Conversational Constraints among Vietnamese Americans

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This study investigates the relative influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) on the mental processing of conversations, known as Imagined Interactions (II), and conversational constraints among Vietnamese Americans. Two hypotheses are proposed regarding the influence of the RISC on IIs and the relational dimension of conversation constraints. One research question is formulated testing the influence of the RISC and the task dimensions of conversational constraints. Data were collected from 94 Vietnamese-American college students living in a Vietnamese enclave in the southern region of the United States. Simple regressions were used to test the two hypotheses and research question. The results indicate the perceived influence of the RISC on the valence, activity, specificity, retroactivity, variety, and proactivity characteristics of IIs. However, the RISC is not perceived to be a significant predictor of the discrepancy and self-dominance characteristics of IIs. Results also reveal the perceived influence of the RISC on the relational concerns for not hurting the other's feelings and avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, but not on the concern for minimizing imposition on the other. Finally, results reveal the perceived role of the RISC on concern for clarity and effectiveness in conversations. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

Current theoretical and empirical research suggests that members of the Asian culture share similar worldviews and values (Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999). Specifically, Asians and Asian Americans are often characterized as relational, interdependent, or collectivistic (Bresnahan, Levine, Shearman, Lee, Park, & Kiyomiya, 2005; Gudykunst & Lee, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). This characterization points to the role of social relationships and cultural groups in defining selfhood (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

While much of the research focuses on Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans as representative groups of the Asian culture, Vietnamese, and Vietnamese Americans in particular, have received little to no representation in empirical studies. Further, like other Asian groups living in the United States, Vietnamese Americans have experienced the traumatic effects of displacement and the pressures and challenges of assimilation into the American society (Chung, Bemak, & Okazaki, 1997; Nguyen, 1982; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Still, the lack of research documenting Asian co-cultural groups living in the United States reflects their invisibility in the broader American society (Sun, 2007; Sun & Starosta, 2006). Hence, the purpose of this study is to extend research on the question of Asian American invisibility by focusing on the newest generation of Asian-American immigrants and their cultural and communicative dimensions of self. This study can enlighten us to the challenges that older Asian Americans have faced in negotiating self in American society.

The Vietnamese American experience exemplified by the second generation born in the United States (Zhou & Bankston, 1998) raises an important theoretical and contextual issue

concerning the construction of self in relation to the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of communication. While navigating both their culture of origin and the host culture, young Vietnamese Americans maintain an interdependent orientation to the self, grounded in close ties to family and community (Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Lam, 2005; 2006; Phan, 2005; Shea & Yeh, 2008; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Yet the communication correlates of the Vietnamese-American self are unknown. Therefore, I propose to investigate the influence of the relational interdependent nature of the Vietnamese-American culture by examining the construction of self, the cognitive processing of everyday conversations known as Imagined Interactions, and conversational constraints among young Vietnamese Americans.

Vietnamese Americans: Socio-Historical Background

With a population of more than one million, the Vietnamese comprise the largest population of Southeast Asian refugees to have settled in the United States (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center [SEARAC], 2004). Currently the fifth largest Asian American group in the United States, Vietnamese Americans are projected to become the second largest by 2030 (Kaplan, Zabkiewica, McPhee, Nguyen, Gregorich, Disogra, et al., 2003, as cited in Tran, 2008).

The history of Vietnamese migration to the United States is one of refugee status to resettlement, of fragmented family systems to the rebuilding of ethnic communities. According to Zhou and Bankston (1998), three waves of migration to the United States influence the Vietnamese-American experience. The first generation of Vietnamese Americans came to the United States following the fall of Saigon in 1975. They were the elite of the Vietnamese military and business society. They were educated primarily in Vietnam and have maintained much of their Vietnamese culture while living in the United States. Better known as the “boat people,” the “1.5 generation,” or “second wave,” of Vietnamese Americans came to the United States at an early age. They were mostly Sino-Vietnamese who fled the country after the war with China, as well as ethnic Vietnamese who followed suit. Although they were exposed to the Vietnamese culture in Vietnam, they received much of their education in the United States. They are considered the most truly bicultural generation. The second generation, or “third wave,” is composed of individuals who arrived in the United States as infants or were born in the United States. They have little to no personal memory of Vietnam. Still, parents communicate to their children the traumatic experience of fleeing their native land in a state of war and the difficult resettlement process in the United States. As a result of these migration waves, Vietnamese refugees in the United States have experienced varying levels of adjustment depending on their economic status, educational background, and level of English proficiency (Chung, Bemak, & Okazaki, 1997; Huer, Saenz, & Doan, 2001; Nguyen, 1982).

Vietnamese Americans remain fundamentally connected to each other through family and community ties (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Respect for elders, authority, and the self remains a fundamental Vietnamese cultural value that appears to transcend the American experience. Further, the common refugee experience and resettlement process have created

dense family and kinship networks in Vietnamese communities across the United States. In addition to a cultural attachment to the group, the family remains an important part of the Vietnamese-American culture, whereby individuals' needs are often subordinated to the needs of the group (Sue & Sue, 1999). Although the ethnic community and family networks provide a strong social system of norms and values aimed at preserving cultural harmony for individuals who went through the resettlement process, it can also be a source of tensions for the new generation born in the United States (Lam, 2005; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Young Vietnamese Americans, like other second generation Asian immigrants, struggle to reconcile their cultural membership to family and community with their need to strive for autonomy through relationships with their American peers. Yet unlike research on Asian Americans as a group (Berkel & Constantine, 2005; Yeh, Carter, & Pieterse, 2004), very few studies focus on the Vietnamese-American self. The latter report varying degrees of independence and interdependence according to their acculturation levels, social support, self-esteem, and cultural values (Lam, 2005; 2006; Nguyen, Messe, & Stollack, 1999; Phan, 2005; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). The same studies acknowledge the fundamental value of connectedness to other human beings and emphasis on relational support among young Vietnamese Americans. For example, in a qualitative study examining how adolescent Vietnamese-American youths perceive self in relation to family, Phan (2005) found that both the boys and the girls in the study valued a sense of moral self that is responsible for the well-being of other family members. The family remains the chief source of social identity and support for young Vietnamese Americans. Lam (2005) reported how the cohesiveness of family relationships and the social support derived from them were important mediating factors in promoting high self-esteem among Vietnamese-American adolescents who endorse an interdependent self. Considering the importance of family in shaping self, cultural values, and role expectations for young Vietnamese Americans, the relational dimension of the interdependent self-construal warrants further investigation in influencing intrapersonal and interpersonal communication patterns among young Vietnamese Americans.

The Relational Interdependent Self

The construction of self is predicated on the notion that individuals define themselves differentially in relation to others, based on contrasting cultural psychological orientations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). The interdependent self construal best describes individuals whose goal is to fit in the group and behave in ways that emphasize their connectedness to others through harmonious relationships. Thus, self-definition emerges from the social context. The interdependent self-construal is most characteristic of collectivistic non-Western cultures. The goal is to accept the influence of hierarchical others. According to Kitayama (2008), to maintain relationships within the group (interdependence) requires the voluntary control and inhibition of one's opinions and desires, leading to the development of a modest self. This "deflated view of self" serves to maintain social harmony and allows the impingement by others on one's cognitive inner self. In contrast to the interdependent self construal, the independent self construal is characteristic of individualistic societies typically found in Western cultures. It emphasizes the need to be separate and unique while developing

inner abilities. The goal is to progress independently from the social context and to influence others.

Although individuals tend to endorse both the individualistic and collectivistic dimensions of self depending on contextual and social constraints (Kashima et al., 2004; Kim, Kim, Kam, & Shin, 2003; Singelis & Brown, 1995), it appears that one dimension dominates over the other (Gudykunst et al., 1996). For example, it has been argued that individualism characterizes the White majority in the United States and is the standard imposed on minority groups to become acculturated in the host culture. Yet a sense of solidarity and connectedness characterizes in-group minority members due to their history of oppression and exclusion, resulting in higher levels of collectivism (Gaines et al., 1997). However, this is not always the case for all minority groups. According to Coon and Kimmelmeier (2001), African Americans report high individualism compared to European Americans and Asian Americans.

Cross, Bacon, and Morris (2000) argue that the specific form of the interdependent self-construal developed by members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures will vary due to their cultural differences. They propose a relational form of interdependence that is individual-based and refers to the degree to which individuals include close relationships in their self concepts. While the notion of individual level dimension of culture has proven to be a useful tool to explain behavior, it has only recently been used to examine the cultural orientation to self of minority groups in the United States (Berkel & Constantine, 2005).

The Relational Interdependent Self Construal (RISC) provides a cognitive framework for regulating cognition, emotion, and motivation when one's connectedness with others is salient in one's representation of self (Cross & Madson, 1997; Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2007). Accordingly, the RISC promotes three cognitive processes. The first process is *relational cognition*. Relational cognition refers to the notion that one's connectedness is a primary focus of consciousness that leads to an awareness of others' behaviors. This attentiveness to relational information serves to take on another's perspective and facilitates relational harmony. The second process is emotional in nature. *Relational emotion* functions to elicit and experience emotions. When connected to others, it becomes a major source of positive emotion and self-esteem; when disconnected from others, it can also trigger anxiety or distress. A sense of empathy comes from one's ability to experience vicariously others' emotional experiences. The third process is *relational motivation*. Relational motivation serves to regulate encounters through action-orientated goals. It involves considering one's actions in light of others' needs and feelings (Gelfand et al., 2007).

The RISC is linked to other relational dimensions of self among Asian Americans. For example, Berkel and Constantine (2005) report how a strong relational interdependent self-construal predicts harmony in close relationships and life satisfaction among Asian-American college women. Asian-American students with high relational interdependent self-construals tend to have a more positive attitude toward individuals with authority and knowledgeable expertise (Shea & Yeh, 2008). However, the influence of the relational interdependent self-construal on communication among Vietnamese Americans remains to be tested.

Imagined Interactions

The RISC has important implications for the manner in which individuals process self-related information. According to Cross et al. (2000), “information for close others that is closely linked to information about the self may function much like self-relevant information in cognitive processes” (p. 792). An important cognitive process enacting self through communication is known as Imagined Interactions (IIs) (Edwards, Honeycutt, & Zagacki, 1988). Grounded in Mead’s (1934) notion of “internalized conversations of gestures,” IIs refer to a type of intrapersonal communication whereby individuals imagine themselves when conversing with significant others (Honeycutt, 2003). Individuals engage in this type of daydreaming many times over the course of the day. Considered a type of operant thought process, IIs serve a message-planning function with all the characteristics of actual conversations (Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989).

There are eight characteristics of IIs: frequency, proactivity, retroactivity, variety, discrepancy, self-dominance, valence, and specificity. *Frequency*, also known as *activity*, represents how often individuals report having IIs. The occurrence of IIs is related to an individual relational well-being (Honeycutt, Edwards, & Zagacki, 1989-1990). *Proactivity* measures the occurrence of IIs before important encounters with significant others. *Retroactivity* reports the occurrence of IIs after important encounters have taken place. Retroactivity is associated with conversational sensitivity, whereby the actor is able to focus on the verbal and nonverbal messages exchanged. It is associated with self-monitoring, empathy, self-esteem, social skills, assertiveness, and lack of communication apprehension (Daly, Vangelisti, & Daughton, 1987). Proactive and retroactive IIs are associated with message planning for future encounters (Gendrin & Werner, 1996-1997; Zagacki, Edwards, & Honeycutt, 1992).

Variety focuses on the diversity of topics and partners imagined. Individuals who report high variety of topics and relational partners tend to also report high internal locus of control and conversational sensitivity (Honeycutt & Ford, 2001). *Discrepancy* determines the incongruity between IIs and the actual conversation. Individuals who are chronically lonely tend to imagine interactions that are different from the actual ones (Honeycutt et al., 1989-1990). Further, discrepancy indicates an inability to plan effectively and imagine alternative conversational outcomes (Allen & Honeycutt, 1997).

Self-dominance reflects who dominates the conversation imagined (the self or the other). While the self does most of the talking in studies relying on American samples (Honeycutt, 2003), other cultural groups do not (Honeycutt & McCann, 2001). *Valence* refers to the degree of conflict or unpleasantness experienced during IIs. It elicits affect before and after important conversations. Pleasant IIs are related to the individual’s feeling in control of his or her experience whereas unpleasant IIs tend to reflect difficult situations that remain unresolved (Gendrin & Werner, 1996-1997; Honeycutt et al., 1989-1990). *Specificity* assesses the degree of detail as opposed to being vague or abstract. Research suggests that detailed IIs show a strong association with conversational sensitivity, that is, the ability to detect meanings in another’s message, conversational memory, and plans for conversational alternatives.

Considering the importance of cultural patterns on the construction of self, with or independent from others, cognitive self representations in the form of Imagined Interactions will reflect these cultural differences. For example, Honeycutt and McCann (2001) found that the higher the regression coefficient, the more the characteristic or function of imagined interaction predicted the cultural pattern in a positive or negative direction. For example, they found that self-dominance was associated with horizontal and vertical individualism, in which the self imagines doing most of the talking. Conversely, *other-dominance*, where the self is imagined in a listening role, was negatively associated with vertical individualism and vertical collectivism.

Individuals who tend to think of themselves in relational interdependent ways are more likely to consider the consequences of their decisions for other people or to take into account the opinions or needs of close others (Cross et al., 2000). Thus, it appears that they, in turn, would imagine themselves listening to the other and report other dominated imagined interactions. Further, individuals who endorse a relational interdependent self-orientation make frequent reference to important others and others' experiences in the context of self-disclosure or discussions (Cross & Madson, 1997). According to the relevant literature, the following hypothesis is presented:

H1: There will be significant relationships between the RISC and IIs characteristics among Vietnamese Americans.

Conversational Constraints

In addition to influencing the construction of self and ways of thinking about self, cultural patterns affect communication choices people make when constructing messages (Kim, 1993). These cultural preferences determine the conversational strategies individuals make to accomplish conversational goals. They also reflect certain conversational constraints. Conversational constraints, or global goals, provide "theoretical accounts for the cognitive distinctions underlying cultural contrasts in communication" (Kim, 1994, p. 128). Kim and Wilson (1994) proposed a set of five conversational constraints that shape individuals' communication styles across cultures. They include concern for avoiding hurting the other's feelings, concern for minimizing imposition on others, concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the other, concern for clarity when stating intentions, and concern for effectiveness in achieving desired end results in a conversation. Self-construals, as cultural dimensions of self account for the perceived importance of conversational constraints. In particular, Kim and Wilson (1994) and Kim et al. (1996) found that the more interdependent the individual's self-construal, the higher the perceived concern for not hurting the other's feelings, avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, and minimizing imposition. Conversely, they report that the more independent the individual's self-construal, the higher the perceived concern for clarity and effectiveness.

Considering the prevalence of connectedness and interdependence among Vietnamese Americans, it is reasonable to argue that individuals with high Relational Interdependent Self-Construal are more likely to seek connectedness with significant others, such as family

members and friends. Additionally, they are more likely to internalize the cultural values of family members and friends they feel connected with, and express these cultural values through relational conversational constraints when interacting with them. Preliminary evidence supports the use of conversational constraints among older Vietnamese Americans. In a qualitative study examining the use of conversational constraints in Vietnamese patient-doctor interactions, Tran (2008) found that Vietnamese patients paid heed to conversational constraints when interacting with American doctors. In particular, they emphasized relational constraints over task-oriented ones. However, there is no evidence supporting the use of task-oriented conversational constraints among Vietnamese Americans. Hence, the following hypothesis and research question are proposed:

H2: Vietnamese Americans with high RISC scores will report their concern for not hurting the other's feelings, avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, and minimizing imposition.

RQ1: Do Vietnamese Americans with high RISC scores report their concern for clarity and effectiveness?

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were 94 Vietnamese-American college students living in a major Vietnamese cultural enclave located in the southern region of the United States. Of the 94 students involved in the study, 65 of them were enrolled at a local university. They were contacted through class participation in basic communication courses and completed a paper-pencil version of the questionnaire. This phase of the data collection took place over two semesters. The remaining 29 students responded to an online version of the survey using the SurveyMonkey website (37% response rate). This phase of the data collection took place over a summer term. The students contacted via SurveyMonkey came from the same region as their counterparts. Sixty-two percent of the participants were female. Ages ranged from 17 to 27 ($M = 20.43$; $SD = 2.98$). The sample consisted of 21 freshmen, 18 sophomores, 10 juniors, 26 seniors, 5 pharmacy students, 5 others, and 4 unknown.

Instruments

Survey of Imagined Interactions. The Survey of Imagined Interactions (SII) was modified from its original version to address close family and friendship relations (Honeycutt, 2003). The instrument comprised 36 items assessing the eight characteristics of IIs: frequency, proactivity, retroactivity, self-dominance, discrepancy, variety, valence, and specificity. Sample items for each characteristic are: frequency ("I have imagined interactions with close family members/friends many times throughout the week"), proactivity ("I often have imagined interactions with close family/friends *before* interacting with them"), retroactivity

(“After I meet a close family member/friend, I imagine my conversation with him or her”), self-dominance (“I talk a lot in my imagined interactions with close family members/friends”), variety (“I have imagined interactions with many different close family members/friends”), discrepancy (“More often than not, what I actually say to a close family member/friend in a real conversation is different from what I imagined I would say”), valence (“My imagined interactions with close family members/ friends are usually quite pleasant”), and specificity (“It is hard recalling the details of my imagined interactions with close family members/friends”). The eight dimensions were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The reliability estimates for the eight dimensions were as follows: frequency ($\alpha = 0.80$), proactivity ($\alpha = 0.82$), retroactivity ($\alpha = 0.71$), self-dominance ($\alpha = 0.73$), variety ($\alpha = 0.79$), discrepancy ($\alpha = 0.74$), valence ($\alpha = 0.77$), and specificity ($\alpha = 0.65$). Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations for each Imagined Interactions characteristic.

Relational Interdependent Self-Conceptual Scale (RISCS). The RISC scale developed by Cross et al. (2000) assesses the degree to which individuals include close relationships in their self-concepts. The scale comprises 11 items measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Of the 11 items, 9 are positively stated while 2 are negatively stated. The negatively stated items were reversed scored and items summed to obtain a summed score ($M = 55.09$, $SD = 9.68$). Sample items included “In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image” and “My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as close friends.” Reliability estimates reported in earlier studies ranged from 0.85 to 0.90 (Cross et al., 2000). Previous research with Asian-American students yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.84 and 0.88 respectively (Ma & Yeh, 2005; Shea & Yeh, 2008). In this study, the RISC scale showed a reliability alpha coefficient of 0.87.

Perceived Importance of Conversational Constraints. In accordance with conversational constraints methodology (Kim, 1993; 1994), stimulus materials were developed to create two face-threatening situations for both the speaker and the hearer. The two situations were created to reflect common situations encountered by Vietnamese-American students. The first scenario illustrates the hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship emphasized in the Vietnamese culture. In the second scenario, the speaker and hearer are of the same social status as found in friendships (see Appendix). Each concern measured through the two scenarios included two items. The first concern focused on avoiding hurting the other’s feelings; for example, “In this situation, being considerate towards the other’s feelings is a major concern for me.” The second concern involved minimizing imposition on the other, such as “In this situation, it is important to avoid inconveniencing the other.” The purpose of the third concern was to avoid negative evaluation by the hearer. An example item is “In this situation, it is important that the other person does not see me in a negative light.” The last two concerns focused on clarity and effectiveness in conversation. Example items are “In this situation, I want to directly come to the point while conveying my message” and “In this situation, it is very important to get the other person to do what I want” respectively.

Participants were asked to rate the relative importance of each constraint in each scenario. Responses were measured on two 7-point scales for each constraint (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The reliability estimates for feelings, avoiding imposition, avoiding negative evaluation, clarity, and effectiveness were 0.80, 0.79, 0.82, and 0.86 respectively. Table 2 reports the items measuring the importance of each conversational constraint and the associated means and standard deviations.

Results

To explore the relative influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal on Imagined Interactions, a simple regression analysis was conducted. Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis. In this analysis, the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal is the predictor or explanatory variable and the characteristics of Imagined Interactions are the responses or criterion variables. Results indicated that the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal was predictive of the valence ($R = 0.32$, $R^2 = 0.11$, $F[1,88] = 10.20$, $p < 0.01$), activity ($R = 0.47$, $R^2 = 0.22$, $F[1,88] = 24.69$, $p < 0.001$), specificity ($R = 0.26$, $R^2 = 0.07$, $F[1,88] = 6.09$, $p < 0.05$), retroactivity ($R = 0.26$, $R^2 = 0.07$, $F[1,88] = 6.40$, $p < 0.05$), variety ($R = 0.24$, $R^2 = 0.06$, $F[1,88] = 5.19$, $p < 0.05$), and proactivity ($R = 0.37$, $R^2 = 0.14$, $F[1,89] = 14.06$, $p < 0.001$) characteristics of Imagined Interactions. However, it was not predictive of the discrepancy ($R = 0.19$, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F[1,88] = 3.11$, $p > 0.05$) or self-dominance ($R = 0.18$, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F[1,88] = 2.699$, $p > 0.05$) characteristics of Imagined Interactions.

The second hypothesis and research question examining the influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal on conversational constraints were addressed using a simple regression analysis. Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis. In this analysis, the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal was the predictor or explanatory variable and the five conversational constraints were the responses or criterion variables. Results indicated that the second hypothesis was partially supported. The Relational Interdependent Self-Construal was predictive of the concern for the other's feelings ($R = 0.35$, $R^2 = 0.12$, $F[1,87] = 12.23$, $p < 0.01$) and concern about disapproval ($R = 0.48$, $R^2 = 0.23$, $F[1,86] = 25.25$, $p < 0.001$). However, it was not predictive of the fear of imposing on the other ($R = 0.16$, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F[1,86] = 25.25$, $p < 0.001$). In response to the research question exploring the relative influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal on Vietnamese Americans' concern for clarity and effectiveness, results suggest that the RISC predicted these two task-oriented concerns in conversations: concern for clarity ($R = 0.42$, $R^2 = 0.17$, $F[1,86] = 17.88$, $p < 0.001$) and concern for effectiveness ($R = 0.23$, $R^2 = 0.05$, $F[1,84] = 4.77$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1.
*Imagined Interactions Characteristics:
 Scale Items, Means, and Standard Deviations*

Item	M	SD
Discrepancy	19.36	5.79
Valence	18.57	4.56
Activity	14.55	4.05
Self-Dominance	14.55	4.05
Specificity	12.69	3.42
Retroactivity	13.55	4.11
Variety	13.47	4.12
Proactivity	14.07	4.35

n = 92

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Concept (RISC) on Vietnamese Americans' intrapersonal and interpersonal communication with close family members and friends. The first hypothesis predicting a significant influence of the RISC on Vietnamese Americans' IIs was partially supported. Using a regression analysis, the RISC predicted the valence, activity, specificity, retroactivity, variety, and proactivity characteristics of IIs. However, it did not predict the discrepancy and self-dominance characteristics of IIs. These findings suggest that the RISC is a cognitive framework that is salient in young Vietnamese Americans' representation of self. Considering the cognitive nature of the RISC in regulating cognition, emotion, and motivation, especially when one's connectedness with others is strong (Gelfand et al., 2007), IIs provide a significant cognitive framework with which Vietnamese Americans process their everyday encounters with close family members and friends. In particular, Vietnamese Americans' awareness of others' behaviors is made more salient through the activity, proactivity, and retroactivity dimensions of their Imagined Interactions. These characteristics serve to develop greater relational well-being (Honeycutt et al., 1989-1990). They are associated with conversational sensitivity, self-monitoring, and empathy (Daly et al., 1987), all characteristics aimed at reinforcing one's consciousness of and attention to others. In

Table 2.
*Perceived Importance of Conversational Constraints:
 Scale Items, Means, and Standard Deviations*

Item	M	SD
Concern for avoiding hurting the other's feelings	18.89	5.13
1. In this situation, I feel it is very important to avoid hurting the other's feelings.		
2. In this situation, being considerate towards the other's feelings is a major concern to me.		
Concern for minimizing imposition	18.23	5.19
1. In this situation, it is very important <i>not</i> to intrude upon the other person.		
2. In this situation, it is very important to avoid inconveniencing the other.		
Concern for avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer	20.75	5.19
1. In this situation, it is very important that the other person does <i>not</i> see me in a negative light.		
2. In this situation, it is very important that my message does <i>not</i> cause the other person to dislike me.		
Concern for Clarity	23.17	4.54
1. In this situation, I feel it is very important to make my point as clearly and directly as possible.		
2. In this situation, I want to directly come to the point while conveying my message.		
Concern for Effectiveness	18.80	5.44
1. In this situation, it is very important to get the other person to do what I want.		
2. In this situation, making the other person to comply with my request is very important.		

n = 92

addition to its relational dimension, the RISC serves to elicit and experience emotions. The positive emotion and self-esteem it generates are supported by the pleasantness reflected in Vietnamese Americans' IIs. They add to the feeling of being in control of one's experience (Honeycutt, 2003).

When examining the discrepancy and self-dominance characteristics of Vietnamese Americans' Imagined Interactions, the RISC was not a significant predictor. The

Table 3.
*Regression Analysis: Relational Interdependent Self-Construal
 and Imagined Interactions Characteristics*

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	P	
Discrepancy						
RISC	-0.110	0.062	-0.186	-1.764	0.081	
Model Statistics: $R = 0.19$, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,88) = 3.11$, $p > 0.05$						
Valence						
RISC	0.151	0.047	0.324	3.193	0.002**	
Model Statistics: $R = 0.32$, $R^2 = 0.11$, $F(1,88) = 10.20$, $p < 0.01$						
Activity						
RISC	0.198	0.040	0.470	4.969	0.000***	
Model Statistics: $R = 0.47$, $R^2 = 0.22$, $F(1,88) = 24.69$, $p < 0.001$						
Self-Dominance						
RISC	-0.65		0.038	-0.183	-1.728	0.088
Model Statistics: $R = 0.18$, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,88) = 2.99$, $p > 0.05$						
Specificity						
RISC	0.074		0.030	0.256	2.467	0.016*
Model Statistics: $R = 0.26$, $R^2 = 0.07$, $F(1,88) = 6.09$, $p < 0.05$						
Retroactivity						
RISC	0.110		0.043	0.262	2.530	0.013*
Model Statistics: $R = 0.26$, $R^2 = 0.07$, $F(1,88) = 6.40$, $p < 0.05$						
Variety						
RISC	0.102		0.045	0.237	2.279	0.025*
Model Statistics: $R = 0.24$, $R^2 = 0.06$, $F(1,88) = 5.19$, $p < 0.05$						
Proactivity						
RISC	0.167	0.045	0.371	3.750	0.000***	
Model Statistics: $R = 0.37$, $R^2 = 0.14$, $F(1,89) = 14.06$, $p < 0.001$						

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

incongruence between IIs and actual conversations does not appear to be a significant characteristic of Vietnamese Americans' IIs in relation to their relational interdependent self. Additionally, the role of the self in doing most of the talking in Vietnamese Americans' Imagined Interactions appears also to be unrelated to their relational interdependent self. It is interesting to note that both Beta coefficients for these two characteristics were in a negative direction. It would appear that these two characteristics are not only disassociated from their RISC, but that they are also contrary to their construction of self in relation to close others.

The second hypothesis predicting the influence of the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal on the conversational constraints of concern for not hurting the other's feelings, avoiding negative evaluation by the hearer, and minimizing imposition was also partially supported. According to the results, Vietnamese Americans report showing concern for the other's feelings, avoiding negative evaluation from their conversational partner, but not for minimizing imposition on the other. This last finding is surprising considering that

Table 4.

Regression Analysis: Relational Interdependent Self-Construal and Conversational Constraints

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	P
Feelings					
RISC	0.188	0.054	0.353	3.497	0.001**
Model Statistics: $R = 0.35$, $R^2 = 0.12$, $F(1,87) = 12.23$, $p < 0.01$					
Non-Imposition					
RISC	0.084	0.057	0.158	1.484	0.141
Model Statistics: $R = 0.16$, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F(1,86) = 25.25$, $p > 0.05$					
Disapproval					
RISC	0.255	0.051	0.479	5.025	0.000***
Model Statistics: $R = 0.48$, $R^2 = 0.23$, $F(1,86) = 25.25$, $p < 0.001$					
Clarity					
RISC	0.196	0.046	0.417	4.229	0.000***
Model Statistics: $R = 0.42$, $R^2 = 0.17$, $F(1,86) = 17.88$, $p < 0.001$					
Effectiveness					
RISC	0.130	0.059	0.233	2.185	0.032*
Model Statistics: $R = 0.23$, $R^2 = 0.05$, $F(1,84) = 4.77$, $p < 0.05$					

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

individuals who endorse a strong interdependent self-orientation tend to minimize imposition on the other during conversations (Kim et al., 1996). However, for this group of second-generation Vietnamese Americans, some of these relational conversational constraints may be less salient as they are more acculturated in American mainstream society. Lam (2005) reminds us that this generation of Vietnamese Americans defines itself in both interdependent and independent ways.

The research question posing a relationship between the RISC and task-oriented conversational constraints was answered using a simple regression. Results indicate that Vietnamese Americans' relational interdependent orientation to self has a significant influence on their concern for clarity and effectiveness in conversations. Relevant literature suggests that these task-oriented concerns are typical of individuals who endorse an individualistic, independent self-orientation (Kim et al., 1996). Although a strong connectedness to individuals who represent Vietnamese cultural values and norms defines the second generation Vietnamese American self, a style of conversation most typical of an independent self (Kim, 1994; Kim et al., 1996) appears to describe their relational interdependent self construal. For this generation of Vietnamese Americans, this study suggests that their choices of conversational constraints may reflect a dual self, both relationally interdependent and independent, reflecting a process of assimilation to the American mainstream culture, and family and community demands to maintain their ethnic identity (Lam, 2005). While closely connected to their family members and friends, second-generation Vietnamese Americans may balance a desire to avoid hurting the other's feelings

and any negative evaluation of themselves, while asking for clarity and effectiveness in conversational outcomes. In the same way independent and interdependent self-construals cannot be pitted against one another (Singelis & Brown, 1995), conversational concerns for relationship and conversational outcomes can co-exist within the same individual. In fact, this ability to show concern for the other and achieve conversational outcomes becomes an asset when living in two cultures. This duality in conversational constraints provides additional evidence for the transitional period that second-generation Vietnamese Americans go through to reconcile their ancestral cultural identity with their American identity.

As second-generation Vietnamese Americans continue to navigate both the educational, professional, and social circles of the American mainstream society and their ancestral cultural communities, they are likely to continue to adapt to the communication demands of both communities. Thus, an important implication of this study is to examine other communication correlates of the relational interdependent self and the extent to which they also contribute to young Vietnamese Americans' development of their identity, both Vietnamese and American. For example, research suggests cultural differences in the way individuals who endorse independent and interdependent selves manage face and negotiate conflict situations (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). That is, members of individualistic cultures use self-oriented, face-saving strategies and self-face, approval-seeking interaction strategies in conflicting situations. Conversely, members of collectivistic cultures adopt other face-oriented strategies and other-face approval-enhancement interaction strategies in conflict situations (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). Considering the cultural and societal demands imposed on young Vietnamese Americans, it would be important to investigate the manner in which they negotiate face and manage conflict with close family members and friends in relation to their relational interdependent self-orientation.

Another important implication of this study is to examine conversational and intrapersonal communication strategies older Vietnamese Americans use to adjust to the American host culture. Research suggests that the resettlement and assimilation process older Vietnamese Americans have gone through has been fraught with linguistic, economic, and cultural challenges (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Hence, a critical implication of this study is to examine the roles the RISC and communication plays in alleviating or compounding older Vietnamese Americans' continual adjustment to the American mainstream society.

Two important limitations affect the generalizability of this study, however. First, this study focuses on Vietnamese-American college students residing in an important Vietnamese cultural enclave in the Southern region of the United States. Young Vietnamese-American experiences may vary depending on whether or not they benefit from a strong family and community system in other parts of the United States. Therefore, it is important to investigate the cultural variability of the relational interdependent self-construal and its communication correlates in other geographical locations. Second, this study relies on a small sample size of 94 subjects. Considering the choice of regression analysis to analyze the data and the number of predictor variables, these results should be interpreted with caution (Hayes, 2005).

Nonetheless, this study contributes to an emerging body of research focusing on Vietnamese Americans, whose experience is not unlike other Asian Americans who settled in

the United States generations earlier. It is an experience grounded in a history of war, forced migration, and resettlement in the United States. It adds to our understanding of Asian minority groups who have to negotiate the demands of two cultural worlds: one that emphasizes a strong attachment to close family and community members, the other that celebrates independence and self-actualization. It provides visibility to a co-cultural group often rendered invisible in the broader American society.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by a grant from the Center for Undergraduate Research at Xavier University of Louisiana. The author would like to thank Shelly Tran, Kimberly Tran, and Phillip Luu for their research assistance.

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Appendix
Request Situations

Request for Permission (Social Status: Hearer > Speaker)

Imagine that you have been invited to a birthday party by your best friend. You haven't seen your best friend for the last eight months because s/he has been studying abroad during that time. Your best friend comes home to celebrate his/her birthday during Easter Break. You know that the party begins at 11:00 PM on a Saturday night at a location 30 minutes away from home. You definitely want to go and your best friend expects you to be there for

the festivities. However, there is a problem. Your parents do not like you to be out past 12:00 AM and you know that they will be home that evening. Before you go, you know you have to share your plans with them.

Request for Clarification (Social Status: Hearer = Speaker)

Imagine that a good friend of yours comes to you with news that your very best friend has been complaining to several people you know that you have been acting unusually “shady” lately about your success in a challenging course. You have been best friends since high school. Your best friend has always been straight forward with you. You are surprised that s/he talked to others instead of coming to you. Since you have been working very hard to make good grades in that course and you care about the friendship, you want to address the issue with your best friend.