

ACCULTURATION, COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG ASIAN AND CAUCASIAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined level of acculturation, openness in communication with parents, peer interaction, and self-esteem in two ethnic groups—Asian and Caucasian American adolescents who grew up in the same neighborhood. The findings provide evidence of significant ethnic differences in behavioral patterns, peer networks, family contexts, and levels of self-esteem. In general, Asian adolescents expressed more difficulty discussing problems with their parents when compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Further, self-esteem was found to be significantly lower among Asians than Caucasians. Implications for the provision of mental health services are discussed.

Acculturation generally refers to the cognitive and behavioral changes that occur as a result of close contact between different cultures, specifically the adoption of the language and values of the dominant group (Berry, 1990, 1997). Stress is inherent in the acculturation process. Depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic disorders are the most frequently identified mental health consequences among acculturating individuals (Sam, 2000).

A long-standing position in ethnic studies is that the length of residence in the U.S. and English proficiency have a strong impact on the development of self-esteem among individuals with immigrant backgrounds (Jackson & Lassiter, 2001). Self-esteem is widely considered a reliable indicator of mental health status for both native residents and immigrants. It is highly likely that low self-esteem is related to certain unpleasant emotional states and negative psychological adjustment such as dissatisfaction with life (Rosenberg & Owens, 2001).

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Ethnic minority adolescents with immigrant backgrounds face the challenge of successful psychosocial adjustment to the new social environment. They are expected to value and maintain their heritage and, at the same time, to learn another language quickly and to adapt to the host society. For instance, immigrant Asian parents tend to emphasize obedience and conformity with parental expectations and yet, paradoxically, recognize the importance of individual autonomy and self-assertion for the academic and social success of their children (Rhee, 1996; Uba, 1994; Ying, 1998). This dual expectation within the family and acculturation stress experienced by ethnic minority adolescents can have a significant impact on their self-esteem and life satisfaction, and can contribute to a variety of psychosocial adjustment problems (Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Florsheim, 1997; Gil et al., 1994; Padilla et al., 1986). In counseling, it is not uncommon for Asian American high school or college students to report feelings of confusion, anger, and frustration attributable to relationship difficulties with their more traditional parents (Ho, 1992; Lee, 1997; Thompson, 2003).

There has been increasing research into adolescents' adaptation and acculturation and their general psychological well-being. The amount of research on minority adolescents over the past two decades has also increased steadily. Several studies have shown that the level of acculturation has a dramatic impact on the development of self-esteem, and that self-esteem is a significant predictor of general psychological well-being in ethnic minority adolescents (Caetano, 1987; Flaskerud & Uman, 1996; Phinney et al., 1992). However, most studies have focused on African American and Hispanic adolescents, despite the rapid growth of the Asian American population (Carlson et al., 2000; Roberts et al., 2000). Furthermore, there is a paucity of studies comparing Asian and non-Asian American adolescents. The present study therefore sought to examine level of acculturation, openness in communication with parents, peer interaction, and self-esteem in two ethnic groups—Asian and Caucasian American adolescents who grew up in the same neighborhood.

BACKGROUND

In 1970, Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for only 0.7% of the U.S. population. In 2000, there were 11.9 million Asian/Pacific Islanders, comprising 4.2% of the total population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). Among the diverse Asian American groups, the largest propor-

tions are Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian, followed by Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese. About 88% of Asian/Pacific Islanders currently residing in the United States are either foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). The Asian population is relatively young in comparison with other ethnic groups; 33.0% are 20 years of age and under compared with 27.6% of non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001).

Although there are significant differences among Asian groups, many of them share relatively common values, beliefs, and parenting styles that originated from the philosophical principles of Confucianism. Confucian principles emphasize the importance of social order and hierarchy, loyalty, respect for and deference to older family members, obedience, and obligation to the family (Kitano & Daniels, 1995; Min, 1995). Studies of immigrant Asian families indicate that some of the most serious difficulties Asian American children experience include: unrealistic parental expectations in terms of academic and career achievements; parental overinvolvement in their children's lives; parents' overall tendency to exclude their children in the decision-making process; and negative attitudes toward their children's behaviors and lifestyles (Lee, 1997; Stevensen & Lee, 1990; Uba, 1994; Way & Chen, 2000).

There is growing concern over the family problems and psychological distress experienced by both immigrant Asian parents and their U.S.-raised children. Immigrant Asian parents tend to retain their native language, traditional values and lifestyles, and child-rearing practices, while children absorb mainstream cultural beliefs and behavioral patterns at a much faster rate than their parents. A substantial generation gap has thus become common for many immigrant Asian families (Lee et al., 2000; Ying, 1998; Chae, 1990), and the differential rates of acculturation and differences in values between immigrant parents and their children often result in greater miscommunication and intergenerational conflict.

Acculturation tends to be stressful for immigrants due to difficulties in attaining language proficiency, separation from familiar social networks, and potential cultural incompatibilities. However, studies of acculturation present contrasting views regarding its effects on emotional functioning. Some researchers suggest that the acculturation process has a negative impact on immigrants and increases their psychological distress (Rogler et al., 1991; Sanchez & Fernandez, 1993), while others report that acculturation is related to improved psychological well-being (Flaskerud & Uman, 1996). Recently, Sam (2000) examined family values, acculturation strategies, and social group identity

as predictors of mental health, life satisfaction, and self-esteem in 506 adolescents from immigrant backgrounds. The three predictors accounted for between 12% and 22% of the variance in the outcome variables.

Phinney and colleagues (1992) explored the relationship between the attitudinal aspects of acculturation and changes in self-esteem. It was found that maintaining a positive identification with both one's own culture and the mainstream culture predicted higher levels of self-esteem. Flaskerud and Uman (1996) examined acculturation, social support, education, ethnicity, and self-esteem in 491 women from various Latin American countries at baseline and one year later. One of the most significant findings was that the Latina women experienced increases in both the level of acculturation and self-esteem over the one-year period. Yeh and Inose (2002), who studied cultural adjustment difficulties and coping strategies in a sample of 274 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean adolescent immigrants, found that the most common problem across all three groups was communication difficulties. The most frequently reported coping strategy was the use of informal social support networks, indicating that help was sought from family members and friends instead of professionals such as counselors. Interestingly, Korean students tended to rely on religious practices as a coping strategy more than did Chinese and Japanese students.

Factors related to psychosocial adjustment among immigrant adolescents from the People's Republic of China were examined by Florsheim (1997). Contrary to expectations, Chinese adolescents who preferred English to Chinese (indicating a higher level of acculturation) reported more social adjustment difficulties. It was conjectured that English-speaking Chinese youth identify less with Chinese culture and are more isolated from their Chinese peers. Yu (1996) investigated the relationships between self-esteem, acculturation, and participation in recreational activities among 117 recent Chinese immigrant adolescents in New York City. Interestingly, the respondents demonstrated a low level of acculturation, but had a moderately high level of self-esteem. Most of the respondents participated in family activities and were exposed to Chinese-language mass media.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 99 Asian Americans (52.4%) and 90 Caucasian Americans (47.6%) attending a public high school in Los Angeles, in which the number of Asian and non-Asian students was evenly

distributed and formed a fairly heterogeneous multiethnic population. A stratified sampling method was used to recruit enough students from each grade level. Thirty-eight participants (20.1%) were in 9th grade, 56 (29.6%) in 10th grade, 38 (20.1%) in 11th grade, and 57 (30.2%) in 12th grade. In terms of gender, 105 (55.6%) were female and 84 (44.4%) were male. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 18 years, with a mean age of 15.50 ($SD = 1.20$). Seventy-three percent were American-born. More specifically, 51.5% of the Asian students were U.S.-born, while all Caucasian students except 3 were U.S.-born (96.7%). The foreign-born Asian participants mainly came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan, Korea, and India. Approximately 80% of the foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian participants were Chinese.

Measures

Data on demographic/social variables (age, gender, ethnicity, place of birth, family income, parents' education and occupation, type of family, religious affiliation, and grade point average), self-esteem, level of acculturation, and perceived openness in mother-child and father-child communication were obtained. Level of acculturation, openness of parent-child communication, and the demographic/social variables were examined as predictors of self-esteem among Asian American and Caucasian American adolescents.

The questionnaire consisted of four scales: 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979); 15-item Acculturation Behavior Scale for Adolescents (Chae, 1990); and 20-item Mother-Adolescent and 20-item Father-Adolescent Communication Scale (Olson et al., 1985). The Acculturation Behavior Scale for Adolescents was designed to assess the level of acculturation behavior among urban adolescents using a Likert-type format with six response categories (1 = never to 6 = always). One of the items in this scale states: "I date the person I choose regardless of my parents' opinions about him/her." The Mother-Adolescent and Father-Adolescent Communication Scale uses a Likert-type format with five response categories (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). One of the items states: "I can discuss my beliefs with my mother/father without feeling restrained or embarrassed."

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic information is shown in Table 1. Average family income significantly differed between the Caucasian students (\$69,873) and the Asian students (\$53,110), $t(149) = 4.93, p < .001$. There was

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics

	Asian		Caucasian		Total		χ^2
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	
Family income (\$)							22.5***
0 – 9,999	5	(6.9%)	0	(0.0%)	5	(3.3%)	
10,000 – 29,999	10	(13.9%)	2	(2.5%)	12	(7.9%)	
30,000 – 49,999	22	(30.6%)	14	(17.7%)	36	(23.8%)	
50,000 – 69,999	19	(26.4%)	23	(29.1%)	42	(27.8%)	
70,000 – 89,999	16	(22.2%)	40	(50.6%)	56	(37.1%)	
Father's education							7.0
High school or lower	30	(30.9%)	18	(20.0%)	48	(25.7%)	
Some college	15	(15.5%)	19	(21.1%)	34	(18.2%)	
College	33	(34.0%)	26	(28.9%)	59	(31.6%)	
Graduate school	19	(19.6%)	27	(30.0%)	46	(24.6%)	
Father's occupation							18.8**
Skilled and unskilled labor	14	(15.4%)	5	(6.3%)	19	(11.2%)	
Professional	32	(35.2%)	54	(68.4%)	86	(50.6%)	
Self-employed	32	(35.2%)	13	(16.5%)	45	(26.5%)	
Unemployed	13	(14.3%)	7	(8.9%)	20	(11.8%)	
Place of birth							49.5***
U.S.	51	(53.1%)	87	(96.7%)	138	(74.2%)	
Foreign country	45	(46.9%)	3	(3.3%)	48	(25.8%)	
Father is immigrant							115.2***
Yes	83	(86.5%)	7	(8.0%)	90	(48.9%)	
No	13	(13.5%)	81	(92.0%)	94	(51.1%)	
Mother is immigrant							99.5***
Yes	84	(87.5%)	13	(14.8%)	97	(52.7%)	
No	12	(12.5%)	75	(85.2%)	87	(47.3%)	
Family type							16.0***
Two-parent family	83	(85.6%)	62	(68.9%)	145	(77.5%)	
Single-parent family	12	(12.4%)	18	(20.0%)	30	(16.0%)	
Step-parent family	0	(0.0%)	10	(11.1%)	10	(5.3%)	
Relative/guardian	2	(2.1%)	0	(0.0%)	2	(1.1%)	
Religious affiliation							49.4***
Protestant	17	(17.7%)	36	(41.9%)	53	(29.1%)	
Catholic	7	(7.3%)	22	(25.6%)	29	(15.9%)	
Buddhist	19	(19.8%)	1	(1.2%)	20	(11.0%)	
None	30	(31.3%)	15	(17.4%)	45	(24.7%)	
Don't know	17	(17.7%)	4	(4.7%)	21	(11.5%)	
Other	6	(6.3%)	8	(9.3%)	14	(7.7%)	

p* < .01, *p* < .001

also a significant ethnic difference in fathers' occupational status: 68.4% of the Caucasian students' fathers were professionals, while 35.2% of the Asian students' fathers were professionals. However, significant ethnic differences in fathers' education were not found: over half of the Asian and Caucasian students' fathers had completed either college or graduate studies. The overwhelming majority of the Asian students' parents were immigrants (87%), whereas only a small proportion of the Caucasian students' fathers (8%) and mothers (14.8%) were immigrants.

Ethnicity was significantly related to type of family ($\chi^2 = 16.0, p < .001$). Nearly 86% of the Asian students lived in a two-parent family as opposed to 68.9% of their Caucasian counterparts. The Asian students' average number of siblings was 1.4 as compared to 1.8 for the Caucasian students. A significant ethnic difference was found in religious affiliation; over two-thirds of the Caucasian students were either Protestant or Catholic, while only one-fourth of the Asian students were either Protestant or Catholic. Nearly a third of the Asian students indicated "none" for religious affiliation, 19.8% were Buddhist, and 17.7% reported that they "don't know" their religion.

In terms of grade point averages (GPA), the two groups had a similar mean score (3.44 for the Asian students and 3.46 for the Caucasian students). The Caucasian students tended to have more friends (mean = 6.2) than their Asian counterparts (mean = 4.9). In addition, the Caucasian students reported having a more ethnically diverse circle of friends, including African American, Native American, and Latino American friends, while the Asian students reported having friends who shared a similar ethnic/cultural background.

Acculturation

Table 2 presents the results of chi-square tests on the acculturation items. Significant ethnic differences were found in regard to dating. Caucasian students tended to be more open to interracial dating, to be more independent in choice of dating partners, and to date more frequently than their Asian counterparts.

Significant differences were also found in some mainstream American behaviors such as spending time in extracurricular activities, splitting the cost when going to restaurants, or saying "hi" to strangers on the street. The Asian students were less likely to exhibit such Americanized behaviors than the Caucasian students. For example, 66.7% of the Caucasian students reported splitting the cost "very often" or "always" when they go to a restaurant with friends, while only 33% of the Asian students indicated doing so.

Table 2
Ethnic Differences in Acculturation

Item	χ^2
I date/would date a person regardless of racial background	32.8***
I date the person I choose regardless of my parents' opinions about her/him	18.1***
I spend time in extracurricular activities such as sports, craftwork, or social gathering to make friends	25.3***
I have started dating in my teen-age period	16.8**
I smoke or drink alcohol in the presence of adults or teachers without uncomfortable feelings.	14.2*
I participate in late night parties	12.5*
When we go to a restaurant with friends, we split the cost	22.9***
I say "hi" or smile when I happen to make eye contact with strangers in the street	12.2*
I accept and carry out decisions in our family affairs when my parents have made them although I disagree with them	16.3**
I follow my parents' advice and suggestions about my make-up, clothes, or laughing	5.7
I go out with my father to games, baseball, or football	12.8*
I feel happy when my parents are affectionate with me by hugging or kissing me even in public	10.0
I openly express my emotions through facial expressions, gestures, or laughing	29.2***
I ask questions about the decisions my parents have made for me in their presence	21.2***
I actively express my opinions during my family's decision-making process	24.5***

Note. Each item was originally cross-tabulated by ethnicity and six response categories (never, seldom, often, sometimes, very often, and always).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In terms of assertiveness, there were significant differences between the Caucasian and Asian students. The Caucasian students were more likely to be assertive in voicing their concerns or opinions to their parents when compared to their Asian counterparts. Interestingly, however, more Caucasian students than their Asian peers tended to accept and carry out decisions in their family affairs when their parents made them, even though they disagreed with their parents (39% vs. 17%).

The Asian students were less likely to be emotionally expressive than their Caucasian counterparts. Only about 39% of the Asian students indicated "very often" or "always" openly expressing their emotions through facial expressions, gestures, or laughing, as compared to 64.5% of the Caucasian students. However, there were no significant ethnic differences in some behaviors, such as following parental advice about make-up and clothes.

Communication with Parents

Table 3 presents the results of chi-square tests on the parent-adolescent communication items. Significant ethnic differences were found on 7 out of 20 items for both mothers and fathers. More specifically, significant ethnic differences in communicating with fathers were found on 12 out of 20 items, and on 8 out of 20 items in communicating with mothers. In general, Asian adolescents expressed more difficulty discussing problems with their parents, and tended to be more careful about what they say to their parents, when compared to their Caucasian peers. Further, compared to the Caucasian students, the Asian students more often indicated that their parents tended to say things that would be better left unsaid.

Moreover, the Asian students indicated more communication problems with their fathers when compared to the Caucasian students. They more often reported that their fathers nag/bother and insult them, and that they are sometimes afraid of asking their fathers for what they want. Furthermore, they tended to disagree, to a greater extent than the Caucasian students, with the statement that their fathers are always good listeners. These findings also suggest that the Asian students had more difficulty communicating with their fathers than their mothers, as expected.

Overall Ethnic Differences

Ethnic differences were examined using two-tailed *t* tests for independent samples. The Asian students had a significantly lower score on the Acculturation Behavior Scale (signifying less acculturation)

Table 3

Ethnic Differences in Parent-Adolescent Communication

Item	χ^2
I can discuss my beliefs with my mother/father without feeling restrained or embarrassed.	
Mother	7.7
Father	13.5*
Sometimes I have trouble believing everything my mother/father tells me.	
Mother	17.5**
Father	16.9**
My mother/father is always a good listener.	
Mother	5.3
Father	11.6*
I am sometimes afraid to ask my mother/father for what I want.	
Mother	12.2
Father	11.8*
My mother/father has a tendency to say things that would be better left unsaid.	
Mother	14.1**
Father	11.6*
My mother/father can tell how I'm feeling without asking.	
Mother	5.1
Father	3.8
I am satisfied with how my mother/father and I talk together.	
Mother	5.9
Father	7.4
If I were in trouble, I could tell my mother/father.	
Mother	5.1
Father	2.9
I openly show affection to my mother/father.	
Mother	11.2*
Father	5.2
When we are having a problem, I often give my mother/father the silent treatment.	
Mother	5.7
Father	5.0

(Table 3 continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Item	χ^2
I am careful about what I say to my mother/father.	
Mother	11.6*
Father	10.5*
When talking with my mother/father, I have a tendency to say things that would be better left unsaid.	
Mother	12.5*
Father	11.4*
When I ask questions, I get honest answers from my mother/father.	
Mother	18.7**
Father	17.0**
My mother/father tries to understand my point of view.	
Mother	8.4
Father	14.4*
There are topics I avoid discussing with my mother/father.	
Mother	8.2
Father	4.3
It is easy for me to discuss problems with my mother/father.	
Mother	11.9*
Father	13.2*
It is very easy for me to express all my true feelings to my mother/father.	
Mother	1.7
Father	6.4
My mother/father nags/bothers me.	
Mother	4.5
Father	9.9*
My mother/father insults me when she/he is angry with me.	
Mother	11.7*
Father	17.6**
I don't think I can tell my mother/father how I really feel about some things.	
Mother	2.5
Father	2.3

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

than their Caucasian counterparts, $t(179) = 7.6, p < .001$. Acculturation was moderately and positively correlated with family income ($r = .28, p = .001$) and number of friends ($r = .32, p = .000$). As expected, the students who were born in the U.S. were likely to be more acculturated than their foreign-born peers, $t(151) = 3.2, p < .01$. Furthermore, the students with immigrant parents were less acculturated than those with U.S.-born parents, $t(145) = 5.9, p < .001$.

There was a significant ethnic difference in self-esteem, $t(150) = 2.9, p < .01$. The Caucasian students had a significantly higher level of self-esteem than their Asian peers. There was a significant positive correlation between the level of acculturation and self-esteem among the Asian students ($r = .25, p = .001$), but there was no significant relationship between the two variables among the Caucasian students.

A significant ethnic difference was also found regarding openness in communicating with fathers, $t(148) = 2.4, p < .05$; however, there was no significant ethnic difference in regard to openness in communicating with mothers. Both Caucasian and Asian adolescents felt more comfortable communicating with their mothers and also communicated more openly with them. Overall, the Asian students were significantly less open in communicating with their parents as compared to their Caucasian counterparts, $t(143) = 2.08, p < .05$.

Regression Analysis for Self-Esteem

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictors of self-esteem. The independent variables included age, family income, GPA, level of communication with parents, level of acculturation, number of friends, and number of siblings. These variables explained 41% of the variance in self-esteem for the Asian students ($R = .64, R \text{ square} = .41, p = .000$). A summary of the regression coefficients is presented in Table 4. The variables significantly predicting self-esteem for the Asian group included communication with parents, acculturation level, age, and number of siblings. Specifically, Asian adolescents who communicated more openly with their parents were likely to have higher self-esteem. The more acculturated they were, the more positively they thought of themselves. The older they were, the higher self-esteem they had. Interestingly, the fewer siblings they had, the more positively they thought of themselves.

A similar regression analysis was conducted for the Caucasian students. The overall model explained 33% of the variance in the Caucasian students' self-esteem ($R = .57, R \text{ square} = .33, p = .017$). A summary of the regression coefficients is shown in Table 5. Two variables—number of siblings and communication with parents—were found to be significant predictors of self-esteem for the Caucasian

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Esteem with Seven Independent Variables for the Asian Students ($n = 55$)

Independent Variable	<i>B</i>	β	<i>p</i>	Bivariate <i>r</i>	Partial <i>r</i>	Part <i>r</i>
Communication with parents	.07	.30	.02	.38	.35	.28
Acculturation	.16	.27	.04	.35	.30	.24
Age	1.02	.26	.03	.31	.31	.25
Family income	.00	.12	.34	.18	.14	.11
Grade point average	1.63	.16	.22	.28	.18	.14
Number of friends	-.47	-.24	.06	-.04	-.28	-.22
Number of siblings	-.99	-.23	.05	-.20	-.28	-.23

Table 5

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Esteem with Seven Independent Variables for the Caucasian Students ($n = 48$)

Independent Variable	<i>B</i>	β	<i>p</i>	Bivariate <i>r</i>	Partial <i>r</i>	Part <i>r</i>
Communication with parents	.06	.29	.04	.29	.32	.27
Age	.97	.19	.20	.27	.20	.17
Acculturation	.09	.12	.49	-.09	.11	.09
Family income	.00	.14	.36	.23	.14	.12
Grade point average	3.21	.26	.08	.28	.12	.10
Number of friends	.31	.11	.44	.10	.10	.06
Number of siblings	-1.77	-.33	.02	-.27	-.36	-.31

group. The more openly they communicated with their parents, the more positively they regarded themselves. Similar to the Asian group, Caucasian adolescents who had fewer siblings were more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem than those with more siblings.

DISCUSSION

There were significant differences in the backgrounds of the two adolescent groups—almost all of the parents of the Asian students were foreign-born and nearly half of these students were themselves foreign-born, whereas the great majority of the Caucasian students and their parents were U.S.-born. Thus, it is quite understandable that the values and behavioral norms of these two groups, who lived in the same area, would be quite different. In addition, as indicated in several other studies (Min, 1995; Yu et al., 2002), significant differences in family income and occupational status among the parents, despite their comparable educational levels, suggest that many immigrant Asians face hardships in adjusting to their new environment.

Consistent with the general description of Asian American adolescents' behavioral patterns (Lam, 1997; Lee, 1997), both the U.S.-born and foreign-born Asian students in this study were significantly less acculturated than their Caucasian peers. The findings confirm empirically that Asian adolescents tend to be more dependent on their parents' opinions in terms of choice of dating partners, to be less emotionally expressive, and to be less assertive regarding parental decision-making than their Caucasian counterparts. Such orientations appear to reflect the influence of their immigrant parents' traditional values and cultural norms. As noted earlier, immigrant Asian parents generally expect their children to retain their cultural heritage and, at the same time, to master skills necessary for success in the host society. These mixed messages and resulting parent-child conflict may have significant effects on the emotional and behavioral functioning of Asian American youngsters (Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Rick & Forward, 1992).

The Asian adolescents reported greater difficulty communicating with their parents, particularly their fathers, compared to the Caucasian adolescents. They tended to be cautious about what they say and in expressing their beliefs to their parents, especially their fathers. They indicated that their parents are not always good listeners, sometimes insult them, and are not always believable. The difficulties of Asian adolescents are more evident along paternal rather than maternal channels of communication because of a strong emphasis within

the family on the unquestioned authority of the father across Asian cultures. Several researchers have found that Asian American adolescents born to first-generation immigrant parents generally perceive their fathers as making inflexible rules and telling them what to do (Rhee, 1996; Chae, 1990).

In the present study, Asian adolescents reported significantly fewer close friends compared to their Caucasian peers, suggesting higher levels of social isolation, greater social rejection, and possibly poorer interpersonal skills. This finding is consistent with the results of a recent study conducted by Lorenzo and colleagues (2000) with U.S.-born and foreign-born Asian adolescents. In their study, Asian American adolescents were found to have significantly more interpersonal problems, to view themselves more negatively, and to be more dissatisfied with social support (for example, in the domain of receiving advice and positive feedback) than Caucasian American adolescents. These findings generally suggest an overall lack of social connectedness experienced by adolescents with immigrant backgrounds. This social isolation among Asian American adolescents may be attributable to intragroup characteristics such as the cultural emphasis on familial cohesiveness and interdependence rather than on independence leading to the formation of an autonomous identity. It is also possible that the isolation results from discrimination and rejection by mainstream peer groups, limited peer choices, segregation, and lack of intergroup interaction among diverse ethnicities, such as Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Indian. Although immigrant Asian groups share many customs, their cultural backgrounds are extremely diverse and they are known to have little contact with one another (Kitano & Daniels, 1995; Min, 1995). As a consequence, Asian adolescents are likely to experience greater levels of social isolation, presenting an additional source of psychosocial stress.

A noteworthy finding was that Caucasian American adolescents exhibited significantly higher levels of self-esteem. Ethnic differences were also found in predictors of self-esteem. For the Caucasian students, level of openness in communicating with parents and number of siblings predicted self-esteem. For the Asian students, level of acculturation, age, openness in communicating with parents, and number of siblings were found to predict self-esteem. It is possible that self-esteem among those who have fewer siblings is higher, across all ethnic groups, because parents can provide more attention and support to each child, resulting in more positive psychological outcomes (Zajonc & Mullally, 1997).

Interestingly, there was a significant positive correlation between level of acculturation and self-esteem among the Asian adolescents,

but not the Caucasian adolescents. Dating someone without seeking parental approval and expressing opinions during the family's decision-making process, for example, may not necessarily be linked to self-esteem for Caucasian adolescents because they are behaving according to Western norms. On the other hand, as suggested in other studies (Phinney et al., 1992), Asian adolescents who have adopted mainstream American values and behaviors are likely to have adjusted to the school and community environments better than those who think and behave more traditionally. As a result, more acculturated youths are likely to evaluate themselves more positively than those who have difficulty relating to their mainstream counterparts on a daily basis. However, higher levels of acculturation among Asian adolescents also could cause more conflict with their foreign-born parents, who tend to adhere to tradition (Fu, 2002; Rick & Forward, 1992). It is not uncommon to find a complete breakdown in meaningful relationships between parents and children in immigrant Asian families (Furuto et al., 1992). The ensuing psychosocial stress experienced by Asian American adolescents may lead to feelings of helplessness, anger, anxiety, and depression (Wong, 2001).

Implications

Findings from this study provide evidence of significant differences between Asian and Caucasian American adolescents in self-esteem, peer networks, behavioral patterns, and openness in communicating with parents. Self-esteem was found to be significantly lower among the Asian adolescents than their Caucasian peers. Moreover, openness in communication with parents was a significant predictor of self-esteem for both Asian and Caucasian youth. These findings are consistent with previous research by Carlson et al. (2000) and Roberts et al. (2000), which provided evidence of the effects of parental acceptance/involvement and family transactions on global self-esteem. These findings also have a number of implications for the provision of mental health services.

It seems imperative for professionals to recognize the importance of communication within the family, across all cultural groups, in promoting self-esteem among adolescents. If self-esteem is deemed a treatment target, one possible focus is on nurturing more direct and open verbal expression between family members. However, in working with Asian American youth, the practitioner should pay particular attention to their distinct cultural contexts. Direct and open communication between father and child generally is seen as unacceptable and is discouraged in patriarchal Asian culture. In immigrant Asian families, self-

expression by children regarding their feelings, preferences, and opinions is often viewed as disrespectful and ill-mannered.

Asian adolescents must cope with traditional values, expectations, and communication styles when interacting with their immigrant parents. Simultaneously, they are generally pressured to succeed socially and academically in the host society. Practitioners need to understand such ecological realities and ethnocultural dynamics faced by Asian American youth in order to engage them in treatment and help them more effectively. As Feliciano (2001) emphasized, it is useful for practitioners who work with Asian American adolescents to recognize that "bicultural youths who can draw resources from both the immigrant community and mainstream society are best situated to enjoy success" (p. 865). Furthermore, helping Asian adolescents to have pride in their bicultural identity is crucial for their smooth adjustment and mental health.

Ho (1992) has stated that parenting intervention and family therapy are appropriate when "the minority child and the parents are experiencing generational, acculturational, and cultural conflicts" (p. 151). It is crucial for practitioners to develop strategies for involving parents in treatment endeavors and to assist them in gaining greater awareness of their children's stressful situation at school and in the community. Cognitive restructuring blended with family therapy interventions appears to be particularly effective in improving traditional Asian parents' views of the Westernized behaviors of their children. Immigrant Asian parents need to understand that assertive verbal expression by children is not a sign of disloyalty, but a crucial skill in their new environment. Teaching parents how to communicate with their adolescent children through behavioral rehearsals and role-playing should thus be a part of parenting education. Furthermore, it is important to be proactive in helping parents better understand that overemphasis on academic achievement, strict adherence to traditional values and behavioral norms, and constricted communication styles can have harmful consequences for their children's psychosocial adjustment and psychological well-being.

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