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Asian American Parenting and Parent-Adolescent Relationships

 Springer

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Preface

The relationships between children and their parents are the building blocks for family relationships throughout life. The nature of the parent-child relationship begins with parenting—the practices and strategies that parents engage in as they raise their children. Parenting during childhood sets the stage for parent-adolescent relationships. These relationships make a critical difference during the teenage years: we know that when parent-adolescent relationships are healthy and strong, adolescents are more likely to have high aspirations and achievement, and to make healthier choices when it comes to risk-taking.

Most of the research in this field has been based in the United States and has been conducted through studies of European American families. Yet a growing body of research suggests important ethnic differences in styles of parenting and the qualities characterizing the parent-adolescent relationship. In this area of research, most existing studies have examined ethnic and cultural group differences using widely accepted measures and concepts of parenting. Comparative studies assume that dimensions of parenting such as parental warmth or control have the same meaning across cultures; however, given that conceptualizations of adolescent-parent relationships have been developed and tested on samples comprised largely of European Americans, we cannot rule out the possibility that the way we understand parenting has been shaped by the predominantly Western- and U.S.-focused research in this field. Thus, the meanings of relationship qualities that underlie parenting practices and parenting styles in other ethnic/racial populations have rarely been examined, and there is little basis for knowing how well parenting constructs apply in other racial/ethnic groups.

Although most of the existing research has been based in the United States and has typically focused on European American families, it is also the case that, due to the growing numbers of non-European Americans in the United States, there are strategic opportunities to study the cultural basis of parenting practices and parent-adolescent relationships. For this book, the emphasis on Asian American parenting and parent-adolescent relationships is rooted in two important trends. First, at the population level, Asian Americans are among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. Within this broad ethnic group are diverse ethnic subgroups that, while sharing an Asian cultural origin, have very distinct subcultural identities and histories that have shaped the nature and dynamics of family life. We focus

on Chinese and Filipino Americans in this book, the two largest Asian American ethnic groups in the United States. Further, they are two groups that share Asian cultural heritage yet have distinct histories of Western cultural influence in their respective countries of origin: the historical cultural separation and independence of China has had notably different implications for the culture of family life when compared to the Western colonization of the Philippines. Further, these two ethnic groups have had different histories of immigration to the United States, which have led to differences in their U.S. immigrant experiences.

The second relevant trend that led to this study of Asian American family relationships has been a trend in research. A growing number of studies have shown that there are distinctive cultural processes for the family socialization of Asian Americans. In particular, in the last decade, studies have shown that the two dimensions of parenting that have been held to be fundamental—warmth and control—have distinctly different relevance and meaning from the perspective of Asian American culture. Based on this work, a focus on Asian Americans—and the distinctiveness of Chinese versus Filipino American family life—is strategic for new research that may illuminate the cultural underpinnings of parenting and parent-adolescent relationships.

Thus, the goal of this book is to bring together a diverse group of studies of Asian Americans and their families that, taken together, can tell a new story about the cultural basis for parenting and parent-adolescent relationships. This book draws from complementary sources of data to contribute to the understanding of measures, meanings, and cultural beliefs about Asian American parenting and parent-adolescent relationships. We include (1) a large, nationally representative survey of adolescents' relationships with their parents; (2) a survey study of adolescents and their parents designed to investigate cultural differences in parenting between Asian immigrants and European Americans; (3) a survey study designed to compare the experiences of Chinese and Filipino American adolescents; and (4) a qualitative study that investigates parent-adolescent relationships from the perspective of contemporary Asian American adolescents.

Our results highlight the contributions that can be made by applying multiple research methods; we show that different methods provide distinct but complementary insights for understanding cultural differences in parent-adolescent relationships. We point out differences between European, Chinese, and Filipino Americans, and show that understandings of parenting vary by ethnicity but also for adolescent females compared to males, and for relationships with mothers compared to fathers. Thus, in addition to contributing to the growing body of research on ethnicity and parenting, our study advances understandings of ethnic diversity in contemporary parenting behaviors and adolescent-parent relationships.

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Tucson, AZ

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