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Asian Immigrant Parents and their Asian/Asian-American Children: Bridging the
Emotional Gap

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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To my parents, Jocelyn & Nathaniel, and my twin sister Josephine. To all family, mentors, professors, and dear friends, who have helped me navigate life with tough love, and open and welcoming arms.

To the Asian immigrant parents have worked hard to give us, Asian/Asian-American children, comfortable lives in the United States. We will never fully & truly know the emotional pain and sacrifices you had to endure. We may never know what you still carry. All we can do is try to understand you with open hearts. There are experiences that you have gone through that we will never understand, just as there are things we will go through that you may never fully comprehend.

Inevitably, as we live in America, mental health and emotionality are on the rise. Emotions are tough, and talking about them may be a fairly new concept for Asian/Asian-American families. Attention to emotions as immigrant parents was not a priority, as they were trying to build a life for us and to achieve the American Dream. The world is changing and even though talking about emotions is difficult, I want to acknowledge why it might be challenging and why it might be difficult for us children to voice our emotions.

This paper is an attempt contributing to understanding the emotional gap between Asian immigrant parents and their Asian-American children. I hope that by my action of trying to understand Asian parents, you see that as Asian-American children, we yearn to be understood, too. I chose to write on this because I care. I hope to bridge the gap, even just a little bit, to understand my generation by reflecting on the experiences of those who have come before us. My goal is to give recognition and acknowledgment to Asian

parents' and Asian/Asian-American children's complex emotional lives, and to be a part of the further exploration of ourselves relating to mental health.

I want Asians/Asian-Americans parents and their children to know that it is okay to talk about what is hard and what hurts. You are allowed to give yourself space to do so, and ultimately, that permission comes from within.

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Abstract

This manuscript explores and examines Asian/Asian-American identity and values. A brief discussion of Asian immigration history, intergenerational trauma, and the impacts of COVID-19 will be linked to Asian identity. Eastern values are explored in conjunction with Western values to highlight the differences and contradictions Asians/Asian-Americans navigate. Biculturalism is explained, as well as how the navigation of values results in individuals living in their ethnic and host cultures simultaneously.

Acculturation and enculturation, the model minority myth, education and the American Dream, and bicultural stress experienced by Asian-Americans and Asian international students are explored to highlight the various ways in which biculturalism is apparent in the lives of Asians/Asian-Americans. Emotions, parenting, and attachment among Asians/Asian-Americans are examined. A definition of emotions is presented, as well as a theoretical framework explaining the complexity of how emotions are an intricate part of culture. Western notions of parenting and attachment are explored, along with parenting and attachment styles relevant to Asian culture. Lastly, implications for counselors regarding mental health stigma, paucity of attachment research, interventions for biculturalism, race-based trauma, and intergenerational connection are presented to contribute to culturally-sensitive interventions mental health professionals may implement in the therapeutic processes with Asian/Asian-American clients.

Introduction

Throughout mainstream research and media, Asian-Americans are typically viewed through a “binary racial lens” in which Asian parent and child relationships are characterized as strict, passive, and hierarchical (Chung, 2016, p. 45). In Angie Y. Chung’s *Saving Face: The Emotional Costs of the Asian Immigrant Family Myth*, the author posits the following regarding Asian family relations:

“The common understanding is that the physical intimacy, deep affection, and open, honest communication that are prized in the ideal American family are largely absent in the Asian family -- a condition that suggests a misguided prioritization of money and success over love and affection” (p. 45).

“The dual image of Asian family harmony and intergenerational conflict fails to consider the complex emotional and psychological dynamics underlying parent-child relations and the way different family members including children can play an active role in negotiation these conflicts” (p. 47).

In an attempt to understand the emotional gap between Asian immigrant parents and their Asian/Asian-American children, Asian/Asian-American identity, cultural values, acculturation, and parenting practices will be explored. A culture clash between Asian children and parents exists, wherein it may be difficult for both parties to find a common language and understanding by which to express emotions (Chung, 2016). Asian immigrant parents have learned to adapt to stress, difficulty, and trauma in order to live successful lives in the United States, and their children are learning how to live and grow in the U.S. as well. Parents and their children exist in the realm of traditional (Asian) and mainstream (U.S.) values. This paper serves to “make sense” of Asian intergenerational conflict, to bridge the emotional gap between generations, and to initiate a shared understanding of Asian immigrant parents and their children.

Asian/Asian-American Identity

Asian-Americans represent a plethora of cultures and continue to be the fastest-growing racial and ethnic group in the United States (Litam, 2020; Hynes, 2019, Yang & Dinh, 2018). AAPIS, or Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders, are a racial/ethnic group comprised of 40 subgroups, “each of which demonstrates heterogeneity across language, educational background, religion, immigration/migration history, beliefs about mental health, and attitudes toward help-seeking behaviors” (Litam, 2020, p. 144). In the United States are 17.3 million Asian-Americans, representing 5.6% of the population (Yang & Dinh, 2018).

Within the broad Asian/Asian-American Pacific Islander sphere are East Asians (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese), South Asians (e.g. Bangladeshi, Indians, Sri Lankans), Southeast Asians (e.g. Cambodians, Filipinos, Vietnamese), and Pacific Islanders (e.g. Samoans, Tahitians, Fijians) (North Carolina Asian Americans Together, 2022).

A Brief History of Asian Immigration

To create a framework of Asian immigration, Min (2006) divided periods of immigration into the following categories: the old immigration period, 1850-1942; the intermediate period, 1943-1964; and the contemporary period, 1965 to the present.

Asians have immigrated to the United States prior to 1850, and each Asian culture and individual have their own distinct histories of immigration.

Several theoretical models attempt to explain why Asians have emigrated from their countries of origin. First is the push and pull theory, reviewing the motivations for individuals leaving their home country to a new country – push factors “pushing” individuals out of their country and pull factors “pulling” individuals to a country abroad

(Min, 2006). To examine the immigrant trends and multifaceted range of beliefs of Asian-Americans living in the United States during this contemporary period, the Pew Research Center conducted a telephone survey of 3,511 individuals who identified as Asian-American. The study lasted for over three months in 2012 with results from major Asian-American subgroups in the United States: Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Indian Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans. Results revealed that a majority of Asian-Americans favored the United States for several reasons, e.g. economic opportunity, political and religious freedoms, favorable conditions for raising children, and fleeing from conflict/persecution. 73% of Asian-Americans born in the U.S. and 71% of Asian-Americans born in a foreign country believed that America yielded greater economic and vocational opportunities (Pew Research Center, 2013, p. 124). Thus, remittances, monetary transfers to an individuals' country of origin, are sent as a result of lucrative career opportunities in the U.S. In regard to political freedom, 79% of Asian-Americans born in the U.S. and 66% of Asians born in a foreign country expressed greater freedom to express such beliefs compared to their country of origin (p. 125). Conditions for raising children in America were favored by 67% of Asians born in the U.S. and 61% of Asians born in a foreign country (Pew Research Center, 2013, p. 129).

Other theoretical models explaining Asian immigration examine U.S. immigration policy and emigration policies of Asian countries, political and economic links between the U.S. and Asian nations, as well as the globalization of education, travel, media and expanded opportunities for population movement. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned or restricted individuals from Asian countries. Additionally, Korean immigrants

were able to settle in America 1903 and 1905, due to the changes in their “traditional antiemigration policy” (Min, 2006, p. 8) An influx of Chinese immigrants in the 1980s occurred as a result of the Communist government allowing individuals to travel or obtain permanent residence in the United States (Min, 2006).

Intergenerational Trauma

With migration and racial trauma comes intergenerational trauma for several Asian and Asian-American groups. Intergenerational trauma, also known as historical trauma, is a result of trauma being unaddressed in previous generations. Trauma is then “passed on through generations within families and communities” (Yang & Dinh, 2018, p. 2). When trauma is untreated, each generation may notice its effects as it shows up in interpersonal patterns within families. It is also passed on to each generation on biological levels, as DNA is modified when an individual experiences trauma, indicating that distressing events have persisting effects on one’s body. Additionally, research has shown that those who experience trauma may encounter challenges in creating secure attachments to their children (Yang & Dinh, 2018).

Historical events highlighting intergenerational trauma from two distinct time periods are discussed, specifically groups from Southeast Asian countries and Japanese Americans. Many individuals from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam fled their home countries to escape persecution, and Japanese-Americans experienced internment in the U.S. as a result of racial discrimination. It is important to note that the following experiences are not the sole incidents of trauma among Asian/Asian-Americans.

War and Occupation in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam

Prior to the Vietnam War, relevant wars included World War II (1939-1945) and the First Indo China War (1946-1954). Both the French and Japanese occupied Southeast Asia, 1887-1941 and 1941-1945, respectively. The Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Secret War in Laos (1955-1974), and the Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979) were cause for Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians to escape from persecution. Cambodians during Pol Pot's regime (1975-1979) experienced starvation, disease, and mass execution, with 1-3 million Cambodians dying through such conditions. As a result, families were involuntarily separated and sought safety in refugee camps (Yang & Dinh, 2018).

Many started new lives in the West, with a large population of refugees finding new ground in the United States. This relocation embodies a "collective trauma" experienced by Southeast Asians. Refugees have experienced internalizing their trauma as a result of the reluctance to speak of traumatic experiences and navigating survival in a new environment (Yang & Dinh, 2018).

Japanese American Internment

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, individuals and families of Japanese ancestry were to be removed from the West coast. This order from President Franklin D. Roosevelt was an attempt to expel those who were "potentially disloyal and capable of espionage or sabotage" as a result of their "proximity to Japan" (Nagata, Kim, & Nguyen, 2015, p. 357). Japanese Americans were given less than 3 weeks' notice of the removal, and were also given little information about future plans for their fates. Inmates lived in crowded confines, and privacy was intruded when having to use communal spaces. *Issei*, first generation immigrant Japanese Americans, fathers "lost their role as the primary

provider” as they were unable to control the conditions in which they were kept (Nagata et al., 2015, p. 358). Approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans lived in incarceration camps for two to four years, with two-thirds of the incarcerated individuals being born in the United States (Nagata et al., 2015).

To explore the effects of the internment, the Nisei and Sansei Projects used national surveys and individual interviews to collect information on Japanese Americans’ experiences. *Nisei* refers to U.S.-born second generation Japanese Americans and *Sansei* refers to Japanese Americans who are third generation, those whose parents were incarcerated. Many Nisei were found to avoid speaking on what their parents had experienced, as a way to prevent “burdening” their children of their trauma (p. 362). Sansei reported hearing about their parents’ experiences indirectly or passively, with Nisei using phrases such as “before camp” and “after camp” (p. 362). Sansei noticed their Japanese heritage becoming suppressed, as Nisei attempted to assimilate into mainstream American culture as much as possible (Nagata et al., 2015).

COVID-19 - A Modern-Day Example of Racial Trauma

The coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic on January 31, 2020, and many states in the U.S. were given a “shelter in place” order to prevent spreading the virus (Litam, 2020, p. 144). Social media, the internet, and news outlets dispensed misinformation, expressing discrimination toward Chinese individuals and those who identified as Asian. Schild, Ling, and Blackburn et al. (2020) conducted a data analysis of language from two websites from November 1, 2019 to March 22, 2020. Racial slurs were found to have increased during this time period,

after President Donald Trump called COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” (Litam, 2020, p. 145).

Discrimination against Chinese individuals and Asians regarding COVID-19 is an example of racial trauma, “the events or danger related to real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination” (Litam, 2020, p. 146). In a study by Litam and Oh (2021), it was found that Chinese individuals who were young and middle-aged reported much higher depression levels compared to older-aged Chinese individuals. The authors suggested that

“older individuals may be more likely to internalize a strong sense of self and acceptance of their intersectional identities in ways that buffer against discrimination compared with younger individuals in the earlier stages of their identity formation process” (p. 79).

Intergenerational effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Asian-Americans are still yet to be explored through research.

Asian/Asian-American Values

In addition to the historical and modern-day context of Asian/Asian-American experiences, it is vital to understand Asian values. Asian parents and their children adhere to traditional and non-traditional values in a variety of ways, and it is this integration of opposing values that present challenges in the everyday lives of this population. Each Asian group and individual follow values within their own unique familial and individual constellations.

Western and Eastern Values

Many Asian immigrant parents and their Asian/Asian-American children live according to a belief system that is juxtaposed with both Western and Eastern values. Western values are characteristic of the United States, and Eastern values are attributed to

Asia. To highlight the differentiation in values, characteristics of Western values will be discussed first, following Eastern values.

Individualism and Western Values

The United States is a culture of individualism, one where values of “independence, autonomy...personal achievement,” “self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, mastery, and control” are fostered (Joshani, 2014, p. 477; Ma, Pitner, Sakamoto et al., 2020, p. 35). The needs, aspirations, and distinct qualities of the individual are prioritized, and emotions are understood as “one’s own private qualities that reflect the inner self” (Trnka, Poláčková & Tavel et al., 2018, p. 31).

Joshani (2014) conceptualized Western happiness and well-being within the traditions of hedonism and eudaimonism. Hedonism is the stance of achieving pleasure and happiness with little pain, and hedonic-oriented psychologists view well-being as “dependent on the pleasure and pain experiences of an individual over a certain period of time” (p. 466). On the other hand, eudaimonism is characterized as attaining well-being through actualizing one’s potential and in line with one’s virtues. Values of eudaimonism include “self-esteem, meaning in life, optimism, enjoyment of activities as personally expressive, and autonomy” (Joshani, 2014, p. 477).

Collectivism and Eastern Values

Asian cultures are considered collectivist, fostering “interdependence, harmony, conformity, and reciprocity” (Ma et al., 2020, p. 35). The needs of the group, or collective, are put before individual agendas, and success is viewed as a collaborative effort (Ma et al., 2020; Ng & Wang, 2019).

Confucianism is considered a traditional base for many Asian cultures and reflects collectivistic values. Harmony in social and familial relationships is a core tenet of Confucianism, where actions of the individual are a reflection of the relationships with others. Cardinal virtues of Confucianism include benevolence, righteousness, and propriety, and these virtues are to guide one's interpersonal relationships. A good life is attributed to attaining both internal and external harmony, following and practicing virtues, self-control, having a "fully functioning family with compassionate bonds among the members," and "maintaining a harmonious attachment with others and the world" (Joshanloo, 2014, p. 481).

A psychometric measure encompassing Asian values is the Revised Asian-American Values Scale by Kim, Li, and Ng (2005). Composed of 42 items, Asian-American values are separated into four subgroups: collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, and humility. A higher Likert-scale rating for each item, on a scale of 1 to 5, indicates higher agreement for the description of the value. Twelve items on the measure are reverse-coded. Examples of each value are as follows:

- The welfare of the group should be put before that of the individual. (collectivism)
- One should adhere to the values, beliefs and behaviors that one's society considers normal and acceptable. (conformity to norms)
- It is better to hold one's emotions inside than to burden others by expressing them. (emotional self-control)
- One should achieve academically since it reflects on one's family. (family recognition through achievement)
- One should not sing one's own praises. (humility) (Kim et al., 2005, pp. 192-193)

Additional Asian values include respect for authority, hard work (Wei, Ko, Liu et al., 2019), hierarchical relationships, filial piety (Hynes, 2019), and academic

achievement. Respect for authority, hierarchical relationships, and filial piety go hand-in-hand in that Asian families are obedient and defer to family members who are their seniors (Ng & Wang, 2019).

Biculturalism

“Asian immigrant families must be reexamined not only as a site of harmony, discipline, and reciprocity but also as a site fraught with multiple contradictions, tensions, and conflicts that have been growing with the rise of the global economy. Immigrant parents and young children who are physically separated in this manner often struggle with feelings of guilt, emotional estrangement, and resentment toward their absentee parents” (Chung, 2016, p. 10).

Chung (2016) conducted a qualitative study with 61 second-generation Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese American men and women aged 25 to 38, and all participants have resided in the New-York New Jersey metropolitan vicinity for at least three years (Chung, 2016, p. 17). The author sought to examine how Asian-American adults made sense of the experiences with their Asian immigrant parents, and how those experiences have been carried with them in their present lives. The following section will discuss acculturation and enculturation, how the model minority myth permeates in the lives of Asian/Asian-American families, the significance of educational achievement in Asian families, and bicultural stress.

Acculturation and Enculturation

Acculturation and enculturation are constructs describing how individuals retain and/or adapt to the values to the country which they emigrated to or are born in, and the values from their country of origin, respectively. Acculturation is the process by which an individual adapts and adopts values, behaviors, and beliefs of the dominant culture, while enculturation involves retention or maintenance of cultural norms within the dominant culture (Hynes, 2019; Huang, Calzada, & Cheng et al., 2017).

Huang et al. (2017) explained that an individual and/or group's adaptation to culture has been studied either unidimensionally or orthogonally. A unidimensional, or linear, approach to culture describes adaptation as a “single process where one simultaneously loses his or her ethnic characteristics when adopting the host characteristics” (p. 573). Studying culture orthogonally, or through a bidimensional lens, is explained as both ethnic and host values and characteristics “moving along separate but parallel continuums” (p. 573). Hence, acculturation and enculturation are derived from the orthogonal or bidimensional approach (Huang et al., 2017).

To create a framework of cultural adaptation, J.W. Berry coined four categories of cultural adaptation: *assimilation*, low enculturation and high acculturation; *separation*, low acculturation and high enculturation; *marginalization*, low acculturation and low enculturation; and *integration* or *biculturalism*, high acculturation and high enculturation (Huang et al., 2017). Asian-American parents and their children exist on different points of the acculturation and enculturation continuums, as each experience of cultural adaptation is unique to each individual and family. The following section discusses the “model minority” myth, an example illustrating the complexity of cultural adaptation within the Asian/Asian American population.

Model Minority Myth

“Asian Americans in the media and the general public have been dominated by the stereotypical portraits as the ‘model minority’ because they appear to fare well as a group despite challenges associated with an ethnic minority status and generally disadvantaged socioeconomic background, so much so that they are not officially recognized as a minority in many ways” (Ng & Wang, 2019, p. 109).

The above definition highlights the belief that Asian-Americans can overcome racial and economic barriers through “hard work, strong cultural and family values, and

entrepreneurial thrift” (Chung, 2016, p. 4). In the United States, Asian-Americans reportedly have the highest college completion rate among all ethnic groups and are “twice as likely as the average American to have a graduate or professional degree” (Ng & Wang, 2019, p. 109). While Asian-Americans seem to encompass a significant amount of success, it is important to note that each Asian subgroup did not begin with equal opportunity in their journeys navigating life in the United States (Ng & Wang, 2019).

Chung (2016) explained the model minority myth as having two sides. The first describes the myth commending Asian families encouraging and/or surpassing the nuclear, heteronormative, white, family ideal, in which one parent is the breadwinner and the other parent tends to and nurtures the children. The second side portrays the negative characteristics of Asian culture, in which Asians are criticized for “excessive parenting, oppressive hierarchies, and emotionless pragmatism in a monolithic Asian culture” (p. 7)

In reality, Asian/Asian-Americans are more complex than what the model minority myth suggests. Asian immigrant parents and their children have learned to adapt through the myriad of societal messages, the clashing of conflicting values, and through intergenerational conflict and repair. Challenges for Asian-American families involve an acceptance of differing cultural values, and at the same time, maintaining a connection to their own unique heritages within the realm of Western values and the U.S. mainstream narrative of individualism.

Education and the American Dream

Although the importance of education varies, it is worthwhile to briefly explore the motivations for an emphasis on education among Asian immigrant parents and their children. Education, for some participants in Chung’s (2016) study, served to ensure a

stable career to provide for their parents as they grew older. Many participants who have come from low socioeconomic status saw education as an obligation, as they had witnessed their parents working hard to support and sacrifice for the good of the family. Others viewed education as a “passport to financial security” to achieve the American Dream, with the belief that education will enable them to climb up the “socioeconomic ladder” (p. 34). Those with this notion in mind came from both low and high ends of the socioeconomic continuum in Chung’s study.

Another motivation driving educational success for individuals in the study was to achieve self-actualization, explore themselves, and discover their potential – “Education does not have to be a means to an end; it can be an end in itself” (p. 38). Participants following this belief were raised by parents who experienced financial stability and have attained high levels of education (Chung, 2016).

Bicultural Stress Among Asian-Americans and Asian International Students

For Asian-Americans, bicultural stress can be illustrated as “functioning, juggling, and switching between both Asian and American cultures” (Wei, Wang, & Ko et al., 2019, p. 352). Wei and colleagues argued that bicultural stress contributes to personal growth. The authors examined how Asian-American college students may make “positive sense” from experiencing bicultural stress, as well as how meaning-making as a result of adversity would mediate bicultural stress-related growth (p. 353). Additionally, cognitive flexibility could moderate the facilitation of making sense of adversity and bicultural stress. Cognitive flexibility was explained as the “perceived ability to generate multiple alternative explanations and solutions when encountering stressful life events or difficult situations” (p. 353). Making positive sense of adversity

touches on Asian values regarding adversity: challenges and difficulty are normal parts of life, and adversity presents opportunities for growth. Asian-Americans must negotiate conflicting demands and beliefs from two cultures, and this adaptation is a core component of cognitive flexibility. The authors found that making positive sense of their bicultural stress through experienced adversity can be an opportunity for Asian-Americans to navigate bicultural challenges and to extend compassion toward those who experience adversity and/or challenges as well. Additionally, cognitive flexibility moderated bicultural stress and making positive sense of adversity. Those with high cognitive flexibility reported high scores in making positive sense of bicultural stress. Though there were participants that reported having lower cognitive flexibility, the authors found that they reported increased self-efficacy and compassion through making sense of experienced adversity (Wei et al., 2019).

Although bicultural stress may serve to increase one's resilience, it may also present a significant challenge. For example, Ma et al. (2020) explained that Asian international students entering higher education may be vulnerable to depression for a variety of reasons. These students must adjust to a culture that is vastly different from their country of origin, as well as navigate and negotiate conflicting Eastern and Western values. Asian international students typically have friends and family close by to support them during times of distress, and experiencing life in unfamiliar territory is a risk factor for depression.

Additionally, these students "often work under tremendous internal pressure to excel at school in order to honor their family" (Ma et al., 2020, p. 35). Other internal stressors include adjusting to the host culture's language, experiencing loneliness and

homesickness, and feeling uncertain about one's future. Emotional and psychological stress may be experienced when trying to communicate with those who speak a different language. Stressors external to the student include interpersonal and academic challenges, financial difficulty, and discrimination (Ma et al., 2020). The researchers report that for an Asian international student to achieve a successful transition to a host culture, they and their social supports must cultivate "a sense of predictability, a sense of group inclusion, an avoidance of extensive anxiety, and a sense of sustained self-concept" (Ma et al., 2020, p. 36)

The above studies highlight examples of how bicultural stress can have significant effects on a young adult's well-being. How each Asian or Asian-American individual navigates the plethora of cultural dichotomies differs, with no "correct" approach in doing so.

Emotions, Attachment, and Parenting among Asians/Asian-Americans

For Asian immigrant parents and their American-born children, emotions may not be translated or conceptualized in the same ways. To help bridge this emotional gap, a brief definition of emotions is given, and the ways in which culture shapes emotions is explored.

Emotions – What Exactly Are They?

According to the American Psychological Association (2022), emotions are defined as "complex reaction pattern[s], involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event" (para. 1). Similarly, Matsumoto and Hwang (2012) stated that emotions are "transient, bio-psycho-social reactions to events that have consequences for

our welfare and potentially require immediate action” (p. 92). Trnka et al., (2018) provided a conceptual framework of cultural complexity relating to emotions. The authors explained that emotions are not separate from one’s culture, “because they emerge in the perpetual flow of momentary emotion constructions, i.e. during dynamic interactions between individuals and the socio-cultural context” (p. 28). Individuals make sense of the world through their own cultural contexts, and emotions are responses as a result of the information presented in the lived experiences within their culture.

5 Areas of Cultural Complexity Relating to Emotions

The elements of Trnka et al.’s (2018) theoretical framework of cultural complexity relating to emotions are as follows: emotion language, emotion concepts, emotion-related values, feeling rules, and display rules.

Emotion language is composed of terms that are used to help individuals understand their own emotions, and they are “conventionally understood as abstract representations with which people compare their real, everyday emotional experiences” (p. 30). Each language and culture has variations of emotion lexicons, whether for basic and/or complex emotions. Emotion concepts are abstract representations and “cultural prototypical scripts or scenarios” that are formed according to situations that bring about emotions and the behavior that proceeds emotions (p. 30).

Emotion-related values are those that reflect preferences for experiencing emotionality and regulating emotions. As stated previously, emotions in Western cultures are typically viewed as reflective of one’s own inner experiences. Emotions are considered to be interdependent in Asian cultures, in that every individual is connected to one another and emotions are a result of interactions with one another. Additionally,

emotional suppression is a strategy that tends to be valued in Asian cultures along with moderating one's emotions.

Feeling rules for each culture describe how appropriate an emotion may be in certain contexts, and display rules are "cultural norms focused on the management and modification of emotional expressions depending on social circumstances" (p. 32).

Parenting in Asian Culture

Children's first understandings of emotions are closely connected to the way their parents display, manage, and express emotions. For Asian immigrant parents and their children, parenting practices have an influence on how emotions are to be managed and expressed. The responsibility for both mothers and fathers in Asian households to raise their children appropriately is influenced by Confucianism, in that to preserve harmony, parents must train their kin to grow into individuals that bring honor and respect. Individuals are thought to reflect one's family and the larger community. How a child thinks, acts, and speaks is indicative of the parenting a child receives. Ng and Wang (2019) explain that a common fear of East Asian parents is having their children criticized, as this is essentially a criticism of how parents have raised their children. East Asian parents place emphasis on their children succeeding in school, and being "obedient, respectful, and committed to the family" (p. 116). Training children requires "the total, unconditional, and loving devotion" of parents, as parents subjugate their own wants and needs to prioritize their development (p. 116). In Southeast Asian cultures, a child's achievement, benevolent behavior, obedience, and diligence are characteristics of successful parenting (Ng & Wang, 2019).

Attachment and Parenting Styles Relating to Asian Culture

Attachment theory, coined by John Bowlby, describes an individual's "ways of relating in intimate caregiving and receiving relationships" with attachment figures, whether they be children, parents, friends, or romantic partners (Levy, Ellison, and Scott et al., 2010, p. 193). Attachment figures are seen as safe and secure bases when an individual can explore the world around them, are able to return safely back to their attachment figure, and perceive their attachment figure as being able to provide love, protection, and support. The four attachment styles include secure, ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized (Levy et al., 2010).

Parenting styles, as described in current research, are characterized as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting (Ebrahimi, Amiri, Mohamadlou et al., 2017). Each style is placed on a continuum of acceptance and demandingness – authoritative (high acceptance, high demandingness), authoritarian, (high demandingness, low acceptance), permissive (high acceptance, low demandingness), and neglectful (low demandingness, low acceptance) (Ebrahimi et al., 2017).

Parents and guardians are often the initial points of contact in a child's life, and the relationships formed between caregivers and children are influential in the growth of individuals. Attachment styles and parenting styles go hand in hand. For example, studies have shown that parents engaging in secure attachment and authoritative parenting are "sensitive to their child's needs" and treat their child with "warmth, kindness, and intimacy" (Ebrahimi et al., 2017, p. 1065).

Attachment studies have largely been conducted on Western populations, and research is mixed regarding authoritative and authoritarian parenting in Asian cultures.

There has been debate over whether Western connotations of authoritative and authoritarian parenting being effective in studying Asian parenting styles. For example, prior research presents a “paradox” where although Asian parents tend to be characteristically authoritative, Asian/Asian-American children typically surpass academic performance compared to European Americans. This finding challenged the notion that authoritative parenting results in positive academic achievement (Ebrahimi et al., 2017).

Examples of Parenting Indigenous to Asian Cultures

It is important to note that although attachment and parenting have been widely studied in the West, Asian parenting styles may not fit into the categories proposed by attachment and parenting theories. Moving away from Western concepts of attachment and parenting styles, examples of Asian parenting will be described: *guan*, *ga-jun-kyo-yuk*, and the tiger mother.

Guan is a Chinese concept of parenting that is characterized by “governing” and guiding their children “out of love and care to ensure that their children grow into thriving members of society” (Ng & Wang, 2019, p. 135). The growth of a child is influenced by how well parents adhere to the practice of firmly controlling aspects of their child’s life in order for them to achieve success. *Ga-jun-kyo-yuk* describes a Korean style of parenting in which parents train their child using a combination of authoritative and authoritarian parenting, as well as Asian values. It is similar to *guan* in that both encompass traditional Asian values of filial piety, collectivism, emotional control, and humility. The tiger mother notion of parenting is derived from Amy Chua’s self-portrait

as a Chinese immigrant mother. Characteristics of a tiger mother include high expectations, strict rules, punishment, and psychological control (Ng & Wang, 2019).

Implications and Recommendations for Counselors

Mental Health Stigma

Research has found that Asian-Americans are less likely than other racial/ethnic groups to seek services for mental health. Shahid, Weiss, and Stoner et al., (2021) discussed that a 2007 study by Kim (2007) reported 8.6% of Asian-Americans, compared to the 17.9% of the U.S. population, sought support for their mental health concerns. Various studies reported an “inverse relationship” between the adherence to Asian values and help-seeking attitudes for mental health (Shahid et al., 2021, p. 138). For instance, Kim’s (2007) study examining these attitudes within 146 Asian-American students revealed that one’s enculturation to Asian values showed an inverse relationship to seeking professional mental health support. Shahid and colleagues (2021) studied a sample of Asian-American college students to explore the associations between Asian values and help-seeking, and found that similar to previous studies, strong adherence to Asian values yielded a significant association with less mental health-help seeking.

Mental health stigmatization in Asian culture has also presented a barrier for Asian/Asian-American individuals from seeking mental health services. For example, to study this vignette of stigmatization, Goel, Thomas, and Boutté et al. (2022) utilized focus group methods to explore South Asian women’s perspectives of barriers and facilitators relating to seeking treatment for eating disorders. Six themes regarding barriers emerged from the voices of the participants: the differing medical views of the east and west, social stigma, parents’ unresolved mental health issues, providers

displaying bias toward their patients, lack of knowledge pertaining to mental health and eating disorders, and the lack of South Asian representation in the mental health field (pp. 5, 9-10). Additionally, South Asian women in the study reported that providers facilitating intergenerational conversations and psychoeducation about mental health with parents and the community may alleviate the stigma of seeking mental health services. They also reported that along with dialogue and psychoeducation, providers must be educated in culturally-sensitive practices related to mental health (Goel et al., 2022, pp. 10, 13).

Chan and Litam (2021) illustrated another example of stigmatization within an Asian subgroup. The authors reviewed mental health stigma among Filipino communities, revealing barriers that prevent Filipinos seeking mental health support. One of these barriers included intergenerational and internalized notions of oppression. In Filipino culture, coping with mental health issues appropriately is usually viewed as turning to faith, close friends, and family, rather than seeking external sources of support. The cultural expectation of *bahala na* suggests that experiences of distress are not to be worried about, leading to Filipinos potentially minimizing the magnitude of traumatic and/or personal difficulties (Chan & Litam, 2021, p. 77).

Paucity of Attachment Research and Discussion of Collectivistic Therapeutic Interventions

Attachment research continues to be evolving, and there is a paucity in the research studying Asian/Asian-Americans and culturally-sensitive interventions for this population. Behrens (2016) indicated that attachment studied cross-culturally is far from being complete, and that there are few studies demonstrating valid attachment measures in relation to culture.

While research lacks studies demonstrating the effectiveness of mental health interventions specific to Asians/Asian-Americans, Hynes (2019) proposed suggestions for therapists working with individuals and families of Asian/Asian-American descent. The author emphasized that therapists, when appropriate, must explore emotions in relation to the mutual experiences of others rather than interpreting emotion. This indicates a collectivistic stance in which the therapist is responding with empathy and authenticity, and as a result, a reciprocal connection develops through the impact of the client's narratives and emotional experience. Also, emotions may be discussed subtly at first instead of explicitly, as not to breach "the social contract that binds the group" and the therapeutic alliance (p. 395). It is important to note that emotional expression and verbal communication of a client in session may seem non-existent, when in reality, the client may be saving face to avoid bringing shame and disrespect upon one's family for discussing issues in therapy (Hynes, 2019).

As discussed above, collectivism is a value that must be approached with respect in therapeutic processes. Another ethnic/racial group that is similar in collectivistic ideals is the Latinx population. Thus, interventions discussed in the following two studies may be integrated in therapeutic practices with Asians/Asian-Americans.

Drawing on familial values, *familismo* is a cultural value common in Latinx populations, where family is prioritized and where one cares for others over themselves. Hawkins, Posadas, and Manale et al. (2021) studied interventions that may be helpful for Latinx individuals experiencing isolation. These interventions may also be applied to Asian/Asian-American populations, as loneliness and isolation are common when individuals navigate conflicting values and expectations between their heritage and

Western ideals. Hawkins and colleagues suggested that during assessment, therapists can ask questions that imply how family is an integral part of their livelihoods:

“Who do you go to for emotional and instrumental support? Have you received this type of support in the past, and, if so, who provided it for you? What kind of support do you feel you are lacking? How is this lack of support affecting you? What have you tried to do to gain more support?” (p. 116).

Counselors must explore ways to connect with their clients that indicate curiosity about not just the individual, but their familial system as well. Therapists can express a willingness to explore the relational and interpersonal dynamics their clients experience with their families. It is also important to emphasize confidentiality with clients, thoroughly explaining what is said in the therapeutic session, stays there. Additionally, collaborating with clients to find ways for clients to connect with their family can garner opportunities to repair and bond with their ethnic roots. For example, therapists could encourage clients to call family members that the client has not spoken to for a long time, facilitate safe and honest discussion between family members, and engage in traditions that give clients a way to be in touch with their ancestral roots (Hawkins et al., 2021).

Rodriguez and Smith (2021) discussed the role that filial therapy may play in establishing connection between parents and children. Although the authors' study is aimed toward Hispanic and Latinx families, Asian/Asian-American families may also benefit from this modality of therapy. Filial therapy is an approach designed to cultivate and nurture the relationship between a parent and their child, with the support of a mental health professional that trains parents to engage in nondirective play with their children. The therapist guides parents in the process, along with observing and processing the interactions, themes, skills, that the parents use with their children. It was discussed that when Hispanic and Latinx clients feel their culture is understood, they are more willing to

engage in services. Values that are central to this population are *familismo*; *respeto*, or respect; *personalismo*, or personal relationships; and *confianza*, or trust. Since filial therapy is child-centered it can encourage families to build their own support network and challenge the mental health stigma within Hispanic and Latinx cultures (Rodriguez & Smith, 2021), and the well-being and growth of children are prioritized, similar to Asian/Asian-American cultures.

Biculturalism

Bicultural stress may be an ongoing and lifelong challenge for Asian/Asian-Americans, attempting to bridge the emotional and intergenerational gaps between them and their immigrant parents. Wei et al. (2019) suggest that discussing this stress in therapy may be beneficial for clients. Therapists can help clients explore what it might mean for clients to live in two cultures at the same time, and discover what it may say about them that they are able to navigate and negotiate clashing ideals in a multitude of ways throughout their lives. Thus, this may help expand a client's cognitive flexibility, encouraging clients to take different perspectives of how their stress may help them grow. The hope is that by doing so, clients' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and compassion toward others will grow (Wei et al., 2019).

Considerations for Addressing Race-Based Trauma: Asians and COVID-19

Lastly, although a recent development, it is imperative to briefly discuss how therapists might practice treating race-based trauma as a result of Asian discrimination during COVID-19. Litam and Oh (2021) suggest that counselors must be mindful of how sociopolitical messages may impact Asians and perpetuate racial discrimination. As a

result, Asian/Asian-Americans may ruminate and engage in negative self-evaluation when instances of racism occur. Litam (2020) emphasized the following:

“POCI [people of color and Indigenous groups] who respond passively, ignore, or do not stand up for themselves may experience greater feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, or be more likely to endorse the fatalistic belief that racism is normative and must be accepted” (p. 148)

The author proposed ways in which therapists express sensitivity and knowledge relating to racial and multicultural issues. For instance, during initial assessment and intake, counselors must take into consideration how an individual, group, or family’s identities intersect with one another (e.g. ethnicity, country of origin, affectional identity, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status) (p. 147). Additionally, counselors must also be cognizant and check their own biases regarding the worldviews of Asian/Asian-American clients.

Symptoms of race-based trauma may not be readily apparent in clients. For example, Southeast Asian and Chinese populations have been found to report their symptoms somatically, expressing to their counselor that they are experiencing dizziness, fatigue, chronic pain, etc. Mindfulness and compassion meditation strategies are known to be culturally sensitive for Asian/Asian Americans, as Buddhist practices of self-compassion encourage one to pay attention to and let go of distressing feelings. Self-compassion then fosters development of “unconditional regard toward the self and others” (Litam, 2020, p. 148).

Parents Are Human - Bilingual Card Game

A potential tool to use in therapy with clients, or among Asian/Asian American children and their immigrant parents, is the Parents Are Human Bilingual Card Game. Created by Joseph Lam and Candace Wu, every deck contains “70 increasingly deep

prompts, with two difficulty levels, to inspire connection, compassion, and vulnerability” (Parents Are Human, LLC, 2022, para. 1, *About*). Figure 1 shows a sample card from the deck. Currently, editions for the card deck are translated in Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, Korean, and Filipino/Tagalog. Co-creator Joseph Lam shares the following anecdote inspiring the creation of this product:

“Growing up, I didn’t know how to talk to my mom and dad. We had a broken and distant relationship for twelve years. Rebuilding my relationship with my parents – confronting the guilt of having mistreated them, seeing them as human, and showing up in the ways I have always wanted – has been the most important journey I have ever gone on. I wanted to get to know my mom and dad before it was too late and I co-created Parents Are Human to help you do the same” (Parents Are Human, LLC, 2022, para. 2, *About*).

Lam’s story highlights the bicultural and intergenerational struggles that Asian/Asian-American children struggle with today. Hopefully, as children make bids for connection with their Asian immigrant parents, understanding of each other’s pain, healing, and sacrifice can be translated and conveyed through each generation.

Conclusion

A working knowledge of Asian culture is necessary to provide appropriate and ethical mental health treatment for clients that identify with the Asian/Asian American community. To understand the emotional gap between Asian immigrant parents and their children, practitioners must strive to recognize the scope of bicultural experiences and intergenerational trauma Asian clients may express in the therapeutic environment. Mental health providers, Asian immigrant parents and their Asian/Asian American children must engage and participate in various ways to foster intergenerational communication that will help bridge the emotional gap present within many Asian families.

Figure 1

Parents Are Human Bilingual Card Game to Spark Deep Conversations Between You and Your Loved Ones (English + Filipino/Tagalog Edition)



Note. By HomeFurnitureLife.com, 2022.

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