

## Exploring Adolescent-parent Relationships in Asian American Immigrant Families: An Ecological Perspective

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The relationship between an adolescent and his/her parents is one of the most important relationships that can have a significant effect on adolescents' well-being and functioning. While there has been an increase in research on Asian American families in recent years, still much less is known about adolescent-parent relationships in these families. Asian American adolescents face some of the challenges that mainstream European American adolescents face, but their experiences are complicated by the cultural and immigration-related factors that have unique contribution to their relationships with their parents. As such, there is urgent need for research that identifies and provides a comprehensive understanding of factors that contribute to the experiences of Asian American immigrant families. The current paper provides a systematic look at adolescent-parent relationships in Asian American immigrant families using the Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. More specifically, this paper provides a succinct review of the literature on developmental issues, immigration, and culture-related factors that affect Asian American adolescent-parent relationships, and guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, an ecological framework of Asian American adolescent-parent relationships is proposed.

*Keywords:* adolescent-parent relationships, adolescence, Asian/Asian Americans, culture, ecological theory, immigrant families

### Introduction

As the most significant social relations for a developing child, parent-child relationships have received much research attention over the past several decades. Many researchers have investigated how adolescent developmental processes, in which significant developmental transformations take place, affect parent-child relationships (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996; Laursen & Collins, 2009; Steinberg, 1990). While there has been an increase in research on Asian American (AA)

families in recent years, still much less is known about developmental processes and parent-child relations in AA immigrant families (Dinh & Nguyen, 2006). A better understanding of the immigrant family relations is crucial especially because immigrant children are an important growing segment of the U.S. population. For example, Asian population grew 4 times faster than the general U.S. population between 2000 and 2010 (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). More specifically, adolescents from AA families comprise 4.6% of all adolescents in the U.S., and this number will reach 6.8% by 2050 (U.S. Census). As a growing segment of the population, AA adolescents are likely to have different family experiences from that of majority adolescents due to the different

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developmental, ecological, and cultural contexts. Moreover, the quality of the parent-child relations can have a significant effect on adolescents' well-being and functioning (Buehler, 2006; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2004). As such, research shows a strong association between AA adolescent-parent relationship and adolescents' emotional or psychological well-being and behavioral functioning (Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Hwang, Wood, & Fujimoto, 2010; Kim, Chen, Wang, Shen, & Orozco-Lapray, 2012; Lee & Liu, 2001; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009; Qin, 2008; Ying & Han, 2007). Therefore, the understanding of family processes and parent-child relations in AA immigrant families is much needed.

Evidence shows higher rates of parent-adolescent conflicts and challenges among AA families compared to Anglo-American families (e.g., Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Farver, Xu, Bhadha, & Narang, 2007; Kwak, 2003; Lee & Liu, 2001); however, there is a lack of insight into the processes involved. Most previous research on intergenerational relationships in AA families has focused on a few constructs (e.g., cultural conflicts between parents and their children and/or parenting practices) to examine how they are linked to relationship outcomes. To the best of our knowledge, no study to date has simultaneously examined multiple factors that may affect adolescents' experience in their relationship with their parents. Moreover, acknowledging the existence of diverse developmental contexts of minority youth and youth across cultures, there have been calls for a more contextual view of adolescent experiences (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Garcia Coll, Lamberty, Wasik, Jenkins, McAdoo, Crnic, Wasik, & Garcia, 1996). This paper aims to fill this gap by providing a more comprehensive understanding of parent-adolescent relationships in AA immigrant families. Specifically, we examine AA adolescents' experiences in their relationships with their parents by applying an ecological framework informed by developmental and cross-cultural perspectives. In doing so, we propose a conceptual model

based on ecological theory (Brenfenbrenner, 1986) in our attempt to achieve these goals.

This paper will be divided into three primary sections. First, the existing literature that informs us about developmental issues critical to understanding parent-adolescent relationships will be reviewed. An overview of Asian immigrant families in terms of their cultural background and immigration-related factors that are relevant to understanding of parent-child relationship within these families will follow. Then we will apply an ecological theory to identify and understand various contextual factors that may shape AA adolescents' relationship with their parents.

*Note about Terminology.* It should be noted that, while many differences between Asian subgroups exist (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000), due to the scope of the current paper and space constraints we will use the overall umbrella term 'Asian Americans'. There certainly are variations among different populations from the Asian continent, in terms of family, social, cultural, and religious variations. However, for the purposes of this paper we will be reviewing studies that examine various Asian American subgroups. As a result of that, and to keep the paper more streamlined, the term 'Asian Americans' will be used to encompass various Asian American subgroups. Similarly, throughout this paper we use the term *culture* and *cultural factors*. Culture is extremely complex and fluid rather than static (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Shih & Pyke, 2010). However, some similarities in cultural values and beliefs do exist across different Asian American families. Therefore, while we acknowledge the complex nature of culture and its many facets, we use the term *culture* in its simple form to keep with the scope of the paper.

### **Overview of Literature on Adolescent-parent Relationships**

Researchers largely agree that parent-child relationship undergoes considerable transformation during adolescence (Collins,

1990; Larson et al., 1996; Laursen & Collins, 2009), shifting from unilateral to mutual authority (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and becoming less contentious and more equal (Collins & Laursen 2004; Collins & Steinberg 2006; Steinberg, 1990). Overall, this transformation in parent-child relationships is viewed as a positive and necessary step as adolescents develop into adulthood (Laursen & Collins, 2009; Youniss & Smollar, 1985; Steinberg, 1990, 2001). Many researchers have seen these changes in adolescence, especially in regards to potential parent-adolescent challenges, as being associated with the issues of autonomy and renegotiation of parental authority in adolescent's lives (McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana, Villalobos, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2009; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). In the following section, we discuss how these specific factors are related to changes in parent-child relationships during adolescence.

*Autonomy and Parent-adolescent Relationships.* A central factor influencing the change in parent-child relationships during adolescence is adolescents' development of autonomy. Historically, achievements of autonomy and separation from parents have been viewed as contributing to the adolescents' identity formation, one of the central tasks of adolescence (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Steinberg 1990; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Research is increasingly showing that the healthy adolescent autonomy is established not at the expense of attachment with parents, but in the context of close parent-child relationship (Kagitçibasi, 2005; McElhaney et al., 2009; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). However, developmental researchers in general view adolescents' pursuit of autonomy as normative and positive. They also support the notion that some degree of separation from parents is desirable for healthy development during adolescence (Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), particularly as autonomy is seen as necessary to make age-appropriate commitments to adult roles and

responsibilities (McElhaney et al., 2009; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). In that context, some level of emotional distance from parents is adaptive because it enables adolescents to become more mature and more responsible while relinquishing childish dependence on parents (Laursen & Collins, 2009; McElhaney et al., 2009; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

*Renegotiation of Parental Authority.* Whereas autonomy indicates adolescents' separateness and self-directedness, renegotiation of parental authority between adolescents and their parents explores adolescents' level of embeddedness or relatedness to their parents (Kwak, 2003). Research shows that adolescents' conceptions of parental authority are differentiated according to conceptual domain of their life (i.e., in terms of what adolescents consider their parents have the right to regulate), and are renegotiated during adolescence (Darling, Cumsille, & Martinez, 2008; Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana et al., 2009; Tisak, 1986). Research indicates that adolescents' perception of endorsement of parental authority is important in shaping their interactions with their parents (Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana et al., 2009). For example, adolescents are more responsive to their parents when they perceive them as having the "right" to exercise influence based on social definitions about what's "appropriate" (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). This suggests that parents' ability to influence their children may be based on social norms that "legitimize" their authority.

Research shows some discrepancy in the ways adolescents and parents view parental authority, indicating that parents generally view themselves as having greater authority than adolescents actually believe they do (Smetana & Asquith, 1994; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). This may contribute to the increased likelihood of parent-adolescent conflict which is likely to arise when parents assume more parental authority and enforce it against adolescents' will. This normative discrepancy between mainstream American parents and adolescents may become even greater when parents assume more parental

authority and grant less autonomy to their adolescents, as is the case in AA families (Jung, Syed, & Takagi, 2007; Kwak, 2003)

In sum, research shows that developmental issues of autonomy and endorsement of parental authority shape adolescents' relationships with their parents. How would these normative experiences be applied to AA youth because of the cultural and immigration-related issues pertaining to Asian American families? In the following, we provide an overview of Asian American family context, focusing on cultural and immigration-related factors.

### **Adolescent-parent Relationships in Asian American Immigrant Families**

In general, the literature has shown that parent-child relations in AA immigrant families are affected by culture-specific factors and the immigration experiences.

*Cultural Context of Asian American Families.* Culture-specific factors, such as collectivism often play a role in the life of many AA families. Collectivism highlights "we" consciousness, collective identity, emotional dependency, in-group harmony, and obligations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this cultural context, self is defined in terms of social embeddedness or interdependence, characterized by social dependency and diffused boundaries (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These cultural values may shape Asian immigrants' parenting practice (e.g., parents emphasize adolescents' relatedness more than autonomy) and their day-to-day interaction with their children (e.g., parents assume obligations and rights to stay highly involved in adolescent's social life) (Kwak, 2003).

Confucianism, an ethical and philosophical system that is salient in many Asian countries, particularly East Asian countries, emphasizes filial piety, family harmony, unconditional loyalty and devotion to parents and family, commitment to self-sacrifice for family needs, and the patriarchal family order (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Chuang, 2005; Cooper, Baker,

Polichar, & Welsh, 1993; Ho, 1986; Park & Chesla, 2007; Sung, 2001; Tung, 2010; Ying & Han, 2007). Among the AA families influenced by Confucian cultural values, parent-child relationship is characterized by clear hierarchical relationships in which parental authority is emphasized while children remain in subordinate position to their parents throughout their life. In this hierarchical relational context, open exchange of ideas and feelings between parents and children is not common and often discouraged (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Uba, 1994). Moreover, reflecting these cultural values, Asian socio-cultural norms emphasize a reciprocal role of children in their relationship with their parents. For example, children have a lifelong responsibility to repay their debt to parents by providing filial care in their old age and respecting their wishes (Sung, 2001; Uba, 1994).

### **Immigration-related Factors**

In addition to general developmental factors that impact parent-child relations during adolescence, the experiences of AA families are exacerbated by varying immigration-related factors. For example, many studies have shown that immigrant youth acculturate to the mainstream American society at a much faster rate than do their parents (e.g., Chung & Okazaki, 1991; Kwak, 2003; Okagaki & Bojczyk, 2002). As a result, immigrant children function in a culture that is different from their parents' culture. This contributes to additional conflicts between adolescents and their immigrant parents, which may not be present in mainstream American families. Indeed, many studies have shown that intergenerational cultural dissonance contributes to parent-adolescent conflicts in AA families (Ahn, Kim, & Park, 2008; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Dinh & Nguyen, 2006; Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; Ho, 2010; Hwang et al., 2010; Juang, Syed, Cookston, Wang, & Kim, 2012; Lee & Liu, 2001). Studies that have compared AA youth with their European American counterparts have found that AA

youth experience higher rates of intergenerational conflict that often stems from differences in acculturation between parents and their children (Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Farver et al., 2007; Lee & Liu, 2001). Moreover, studies have linked cultural dissonance between AA youth and their parents to heightened distress among these youth (Choi et al., 2008; Greenberger & Chen, 1996; Hwang et al., 2010; Kwak, 2003; Lee & Liu, 2001; Qin, 2008; Ying & Han, 2007).

Moreover, other immigration-related factors play a role in shaping parent-adolescent relations. For example, due to lack of language proficiency, many adult immigrants begin employment in less desirable, labor-intensive businesses, such as mom and pop shops (Hurh & Kim, 1984; Park, 2005), which may limit parents' availability for their children (Kang, Okazaki, Abelmann, Kim-Prieto, & Lan, 2010). Parents' lack of English language proficiency also contributes to stressors such as placing demands on children to be language and cultural brokers by mediating the mainstream American culture for their parents (Trickett & Jones, 2007; Wu & Kim, 2009). These practices have shown some indication that parents and children in immigrant families experience role reversal, where children take on more adult responsibilities and take care of the various aspects of family life (Puig, 2002; Trickett & Jones, 2007; Weisskirch, 2005). Moreover, the immigrant context may further reinforce children's family obligations due to practical needs, as socioeconomic hardships may necessitate family members' collaboration in household and family tasks (Min, 1998) or family members may need to work together to meet the demands of running a family business (Hurh & Kim, 1984; Park, 2005).

Taken together, the factors discussed above play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between AA immigrant parents and their adolescent children. AA family's cultural and immigration-related factors provide a unique family context in which AA adolescents often have to negotiate between contrasting cultural norms related to intergenerational relations. In addition, immigration places numerous added

stressors, making relationships between family members more challenging than usual. As such, the experiences of adolescents from AA immigrant families in this transitional period are likely to be marked with changes and challenges unique for this subgroup of American adolescents. Placing these various factors in the framework of the ecological model can help us better understand how these processes contribute to family dynamics.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

This section of the paper aims to provide an understanding of AA adolescent-parent relationship using the ecological perspective. Bronfenbrenner (1986) viewed human development as occurring in the complex interactions between an individual and his/her surrounding environment, where the individual (and his/her family) and the environment are interdependent (White & Klein, 2002). Thus, parent-child relationship is likely to be affected by interactions between the family and its environment, as well as between an individual and his/her environment. Moreover, development of an individual always takes place in the context of relationship between connectedness and embeddedness of various ecological systems and the continual need for adaptation to the constant currents of change. In this context, as individuals adapt and develop, they change their interactions with environment. For example, a child's developmental changes will cause changes in his/her interaction within his/her family, forcing changes in the parents and family in return, leading to an adaptation in respect to the parent-child relationship.

### **Ecological Model of Asian American Adolescent-parent Relationships**

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1986), we propose a conceptual ecological model of AA adolescent-parent relationships to identify factors that affect AA adolescent-parent relationships and position them within a set of nested domains representing

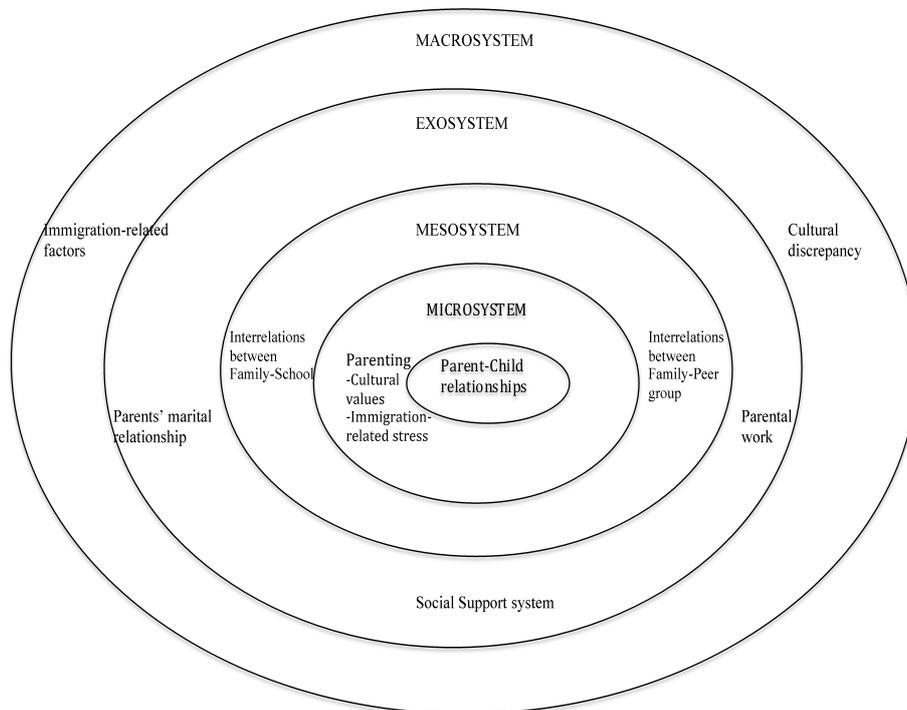


Figure 1. *Conceptual Ecological model of Asian American Adolescent-Parent relationships*

different ecological contexts (e.g., family, interactions between immediate settings, sociocultural factors). Moreover, we aim to synthesize the research findings and conceptualize the processes involved in AA adolescent-parent relationships. Figure 1 depicts our version of the ecological model, adapted to reflect relevant factors to AA adolescents with regards to their relationship with parents. Given the complexity of this model, an empirical test is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we use this model to organize a review of the literature, paying particular attention to how factors at each ecological level change due to cultural and immigration-related factors.

In the following, we will discuss the ecological system in which AA parent-child relationship is embedded. Although all levels of ecosystem will be considered, primary focus will be on the family due to its more direct and powerful influence on a child's

well-being. We note that while ecological theory (Brenfenbrenner, 1986) highlights the importance of context and the influence of various factors on child development (i.e., peers, school system, neighbors, mass media, etc.), our focus on and discussion of specific factors and contexts were informed by the literature on AA families and youth. Moreover, it is important to note that although levels of the model were discussed separately, each level of ecological system, as well as factors in each level of the system, are closely interconnected with each other.

#### **Applying the Ecological Model to Asian American Immigrant Families**

*Microsystem-level Cultural and Immigration-related Factors.* In general, the relationship between adolescents and their parents plays a crucial role in the developmental trajectory. It

has been suggested, however, that family interactions might be particularly important for adolescents from a cultural background that emphasizes family interdependence as is the case with Asian Americans (e.g., Tseng, 2004). We will focus on parenting and parent-child dynamics in AA families as they play an important role in adolescents' experiences in their relationship with their parents, and are often the focus of the existing literature on parent-adolescent relationships in these families.

Parenting is affected by the parent's perception of competency that fits with the environmental demands specific to the family (Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Ogbu, 1991), shaping their socialization goals and parenting strategies. Hence, immigrant parenting practices may involve constant negotiation between values and norms of the host and heritage cultures (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010). The most common parenting style adopted by AA parents is authoritarian parenting, characterized by high involvement in their children's lives and strict regulation of their children's behaviors (e.g., Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011; Farver et al., 2007; Nguyen, 2008). For example, in a study that examined Korean American adolescents and their parents' perception of parental control, both adolescents and parents reported that the parents tend to be moderate to firm in their behavioral control (Kim, 2005). In general, research finds that authoritarian parenting, or high rates of parental control, is more prevalent among AA families compared to European American families (Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011; Fuligni, Hughes, & Way, 2009; Smetana & Chuang, 2001). Moreover, Asian parents tend to hold later expectation for their adolescent children's autonomy compared to non-Latino White parents (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991; Fuligni et al., 2009), which may be at least partially due to their cultural values of collectivism and filial piety. In this context, as opposed to open communication and negotiation, which are more common in European American families, AA parents are likely to demand obedience from their children. Rather than being permitted or encouraged to be assertive and develop

individuality (McElhane et al., 2009), AA adolescents are often required to sacrifice their self-interests for the sake of family interests and to maintain family harmony (Kwak, 2003). Moreover, as noted earlier, they are often required to take on family obligations, due to demands of the immigrant family (e.g., Fuligni et al., 2009; Kwak, 2003; Min, 1998). While many researchers are cautious about misinterpretations of certain cultural parenting practices, such as strictness, as negative aspects of parenting practices (Chao, 2001; Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman, & Mason, 1996), AA adolescents' perceptions of parenting may be shaped by a contrast between their home and mainstream American society.

Similarly, the ways that parents express their parental affection are shaped by culture (Uba, 1994; Wu & Chao, 2005), which in turn may shape AA parenting practices. Research shows that Korean American and Chinese American parents tend to be less physically and emotionally expressive with their children (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Kim, 1997; Wu & Chao, 2005). Instead of expressing affection openly through words or physical affection, AA parents, compared to White European parents for example, tend to demonstrate their love and affection to their children through their instrumental support and sacrifice for their children (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Uba, 1994). However, these parenting practices may be misinterpreted by AA youth as lacking parental warmth due to their exposure to, and adoption of, mainstream American parenting practices which are usually characterized by direct and open expression of parental love and affection (Pyke, 2000; Wu & Chao, 2005).

AA immigrants' parenting practices may be further affected by immigration-related challenges. Many immigrant parents face stress in their own adaptation to the host culture. For example, they experience acculturative stress stemming from language barriers, cultural conflicts, lack of social support, and discrimination (Williams & Berry, 1991; Liebkind, 1996; Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco,

2001), all of which may affect AA immigrants' parenting. Indeed, a study indicated that acculturative stress is associated with risk factors for AA parents' increase in aggression toward children (Lau, Takeuchi, & Alegria, 2006). Similarly, immigrant parents' well-being (i.e., depressive symptoms), affected by contextual factors such as work pressure, has been linked to parent-adolescent relationship qualities (Wheeler, Updegraff, & Crouter, 2011). These immigration-related stressors may interact with aforementioned cultural factors, affecting AA parents' interactions with their children.

These differences in parenting practices are likely to affect adolescents' experience in their relationship with their parents. In particular, the existing gap between AA adolescents' ideal and their perceived experience may affect their perception of their parents as well as their relationship with them. Specifically, AA parents' lack of support of their adolescent children's pursuit of autonomy and high parental control may create a mismatch between ideal vs. perceived parenting. Indeed, Korean American and Vietnamese American youth in a qualitative study described their immigrant parents as emotionally distant and "deficient" (Pyke, 2000, p. 248).

*Mesosystem.* While the microsystem of AA adolescents consists of enmeshed parent-child relationships, their mesosystem often involves a significant gap between different microsystems. Specifically, the gap between home and school as well as between home and peer group may affect parent-adolescent relationships. One of the reasons for the gap between home and school, for example, is the relative low involvement of Asian immigrant parents in their children's schooling due to cultural values that emphasize absolute deference to the authority (e.g., teacher and school personnel), parents' busy work life as immigrants, their lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system, and their lack of confidence in their ability to speak English (Lee & Manning, 2001; Steinberg, 1990; Yang & McMullen, 2003).

Interrelations between peer group and family

may also affect the AA adolescents' relationship with their parents. During adolescence, peers often become increasingly important as significant others (Brown & Larson, 2009; Crosnoe, 2000) and become an important point of reference (Brown & Larson, 2009). Moreover, research has shown that negative family experience or low parental supervision may increase the magnitude of peer influence (Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2001; Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001). This can be especially true for AA adolescents whose family environment is characterized by intergenerational cultural conflicts and a lack of parental availability. Thus, congruency in terms of values and parenting expectations between peer group and parents may affect AA adolescents' relationship with their immigrant parents. For example, AA youth's level of social interactions with peers from their own ethnic group was significantly related to their ethnic identity (e.g., Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Thus, interactions with other AA peers may help them to be more in sync with their parents' cultural values while strong association with European American peers who emphasize autonomy and separation from parents may increase the discrepancy between AA adolescents and their parents. Indeed, Korean American youth considered their Korean American or Asian American peers as a source of understanding and empathy for their parents (Kang & Larson, 2013). Although, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical study that investigated the direct role of peers in AA adolescents' relationship with their parents, the important role of ethnic composition and value compatibility between peer group and the family in ethnic minority adolescent development has been noted (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) postulated that the multiple links between different settings of microsystems facilitate better adjustment of children (e.g., a child may adapt better when her/his mother is well connected with her/his teacher). Moreover, he viewed goal congruency between different settings as important

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, a mesosystem of AA adolescents is characterized by discontinuities and conflicting cultural values and norms. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1979) posited that a lack of interconnections between various ecological contexts of the child's life can be potentially deleterious in his/her development. Although there is no literature that examines the effect of these disconnections in AA adolescents' ecological contexts, they may contribute to a sense of alienation and distance between adolescents and their parents.

### **Exosystem**

*Parental Work.* Scholars (Grzywacz, Quandt, Arcury, & Marin, 2005; Min, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) have pointed out that immigrant parents' work environment may affect their family life. For example, as described in the first section of this paper, Asian immigrant parents' busy work schedule is likely to reduce their availability for their children while affecting their own mental health. In this context, parent-adolescent relationship can be affected by parents' physical and emotional distress from overwork and stress. For example, in Park's (2005) ethnographic study of Korean and Chinese American youth and families, 87% of adolescent and young adult children reported that their fathers worked an average of 70 hours a week, and 80% of respondents reported that their mothers worked an average of 70 hours a week. Korean American young adults recollected parental unavailability due to busy work schedule as one of the family challenges they experienced (Kang et al., 2010). In addition to already existing generational differences and higher risk for conflict due to cultural differences, a lack of interaction due to parents' work may reinforce the alienation between parents and adolescents.

*Parents' Marital Relationship.* Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the importance of the mutual influence of all microsystem relationships on one another. This statement has been supported by studies examining the association between

marital quality and parent-child relationships. For example, studies have shown that marital conflict affects the attachment relationships between parents and children, which in turn impacts children's mental health and contributes to child behavioral problems (Feeney, 2006; Frosch & Mangelsdorf, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Owen & Cox, 1997). In addition, hostile and conflictual marital interactions were associated with poor parenting behaviors, again impacting the well-being of the child (Coln, Jordan, & Mercer, 2013; Cui & Conger, 2008; Erel & Burman, 1995).

The impact of parents' marital relationship is particularly relevant to AA immigrant families as AA parents may encounter immigration-specific challenges in their marital relationship. Studies suggest that immigration creates a number of significant changes in family structure (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Lamb & Bougher, 2009; Short & Johnson, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001), which may contribute to increasing challenges of immigrant families, including AA immigrant families. For example, married AA women often assume full-time employment upon immigration which contributes to changes in their family role, especially if they were not employed in their native country but rather stayed at home to take care of the family (Min, 1998, 2001; Rhee, 1997). As a result of this change in family structure, scholars have reported increasing rates of family conflict, including domestic violence (Kim, 1997; Rhee, 1997). Moreover, adjustment-related stress may further strain marital relationships. Indeed, preliminary evidence suggests prevalence of marital conflicts among Korean American families as reported by Korean American young adults who often described witnessing parental conflicts growing up (Kang, 2010). Therefore it is very likely that these factors (e.g., marital conflict, parenting style) operate together to impact the relationship between adolescents and their parents in AA families.

*Social Support System.* Surprisingly little attention has been given to the social support

system of Asian immigrants, though some scholars have pointed out the importance of the extended kin for Asian immigrants. For example, Min (1998) reported that kin assistance was the most important source of help for psychological, emotional, and spiritual support for Korean American immigrants. Thus, immigrants' extended kin may moderate the stress and conflict experienced by immigrant parents and their children through providing support to the family, particularly the parents. In fact, the social support system was proven to be the best predictor of reduced immigrant family conflict (Al-Issa, 1997).

The analysis of Korean American adolescents' ecological systems reveals that their lives are embedded in the complex interplay of various ecological factors, compounded by conflicting cultural values and immigration-related factors. This supports the increasing awareness of the importance of studying the social context for ethnic minorities (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). It also highlights the methodological needs to tease apart ecological, cultural, and immigration-related factors that are often undifferentiated in the existing studies on racial/ethnic minority groups. It should be noted that there is an increased awareness of the needs to go beyond the identification of differences based on cultural membership and to identify the underlying values and attitudes that account for group differences (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmsson, 2005).

### **Macrosystem**

The outermost layer of the ecological model is the sociocultural context, representing macro-level forces that indirectly affect individuals' everyday lives. Sociocultural forces, such as aforementioned cultural values of intergenerational relationships and immigration-related factors may shape AA adolescents' relationship with their parents. Specifically, as we have noted, AA youth deal with contrasting sets of values related to parent-adolescent relationships between their home and the

mainstream society. During adolescence, adolescents' developmental issues/needs come to interplay with these sociocultural forces, creating an environment for heightened parent-child conflicts. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), one's ecological contexts are "not simply objective external conditions...They are subjectively experienced; and the family and its members perceive, interpret, and create meaning on the basis of their needs, values, and goals." (p. 427). Here we discuss briefly how AA's sociocultural contexts may shape youth's perceptions of their family experience, hence may affect their experiences in their relationships with their parents.

Evidence indicates that AA adolescents' perceptions shape their subjective experiences (e.g., Dinh & Nguyen, 2006; Kim, 2005; Pettengill & Rohner, 1985). As noted earlier, adolescence is a time when parents and their children experience increased disagreement and conflicts due to adolescents' increased desire for autonomy and independence from their parents (Laursen & Collins, 2009; Smetata & Asquith, 1994). Such disagreements with parents may be experienced differently among AA adolescents, and generational differences may be perceived as deviant cultural conflicts, thus creating more distress. For example, a study (Wu & Chao, 2005) that examined AA adolescents' and European American adolescents' perception of ideal and experienced parental warmth revealed a difference between them in terms of how they interpreted their experience with their parents. Specifically, for AA adolescents, perceived gap between their ideals and perceptions of parental behaviors signified a cultural deviance, whereas their European Americans counterparts perceived the discrepancies as a normative generational gap with their parents, thus may not be as stressful as the cultural "deviance". Similarly, another study found that perceived parent-child acculturative gap among AA college students were actually a stronger predictor of the quality of parent-child relationships than their level of acculturation (Dinh & Nguyen, 2006). Studies further suggest that sociocultural context shapes adolescents'

interpretations of parental behavior. For example, U.S.-born Korean American adolescents and adolescents in Korea interpreted high parental control differently – the former as an indication of lower parental acceptance while the latter as an indication of parental warmth and low neglect (Kim, 2005; Pettengill & Rohner, 1985).

### Conclusions and Future Directions

Adolescence is a time when parent-child relationships undergo considerable transformation due to various developmental issues pertaining to adolescence (Larson et al., 1996; Laursen & Collins, 2009). As a growing segment of the U.S. population, AA adolescents are likely to have different family experiences from that of majority adolescents due to cultural and immigration-related factors embedded in their ecological contexts. There is an urgent need for research that identifies and provides a comprehensive understanding of factors that contribute to the experiences of Asian American immigrant families. To further this endeavor, we presented a conceptual ecological model incorporating factors related to parenting and parent-child dynamics that have been identified as important influences on parent-adolescent relationship among AA immigrant families and reviewed the literature on developmental issues, immigration, and culture-related factors. The goals of our model were to identify factors influencing these relationships and to conceptualize possible mechanisms that may underlie AA parent-adolescent relationships.

Current literature provides insight into AA adolescent-parent relationships, often shedding light on how those families may be distinct from White mainstream families due to cultural and immigration-related factors (e.g., Dinh & Nguyen, 2006; Ho, 2010; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Juang et al., 2012). While the literature is invaluable, it lacks a conceptual model that would provide insights into the processes during this important developmental period, which often involve significant changes in parent-child relationships. We posit, however, that our

ecological theory framing of AA parent-adolescent relationships may provide a more complete look into the complex processes involved in parent-adolescent relationships among this population. The proposed model aimed to expand the understanding of AA adolescent-parent relationships from a focus on a single or small number of constructs (e.g., cultural conflicts, language barriers), to a focus on interrelations of various factors operating at different levels of AA adolescents' ecology. This helps us gain a better insight into nuanced processes involved in parent-adolescent relationships.

One general theme that has emerged from our review of the literature is the interplay of cultural and immigration-related factors in different ecological levels of AA families, shaping AA adolescent-parent relationships. During adolescence, parent-child relationships go through salient changes due to developmental issues that adolescents face. In the case of AA families, these changes are shaped by cultural and immigration-related factors embedded in various ecological contexts, affecting AA adolescent-parent relationships. In general, the research suggests that AA adolescents' ecological contexts in regards to their relationship with their parents pose more challenges due to differences and disconnections between their different ecological contexts, most importantly between their home and other contexts. This seems to support the findings that indicate high rates of parent-adolescent conflicts among AA families (e.g., Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Farver et al., 2007; Juang et al., 2012; Lee & Liu, 2001).

It is important to note that AA adolescents' subjective perceptions and interpretations of their context are important factors that may affect their relationship with their parents. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1986) argued that individuals' interpretations may be more important than the actual contexts for guiding behavior. Therefore, adolescents' interpretations or perceptions of objective contexts may shape their relationships with their parents. Lastly, there are issues related to individual factors, such as level of

acculturation and gender (not examined at present due to the focus of the paper), which would provide additional information and understanding of the complexity of family processes.

Throughout this paper we have used the term 'Asian American immigrant families', combining many different subgroups under the same umbrella. Many studies have used the term 'Asian American' to refer to the larger group of immigrants from Asian countries. However, despite the widespread use of the pan-ethnic term "Asian" in the literature, there are distinctions between Asian sub-groups (Choi et al., 2008; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000). Future studies should explore unique differences between families from various Asian countries to further understand the factors that play unique roles in family dynamics. Similarly, future studies should tease apart different aspects of Asian American culture to further examine the nuanced factors that make up this particular culture, and that operate in a unique way to contribute to parent-child relationships.

In addition, in this paper we have focused only on research that has been done with Asian American immigrant families, and have not addressed challenges of Asian immigrant families in other countries. While not numerous, research with Asian families in other countries provides invaluable information in helping us understand the challenges of Asian immigrant families in other contexts (e.g., Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Tardif & Geva, 2006). More comparative studies between the experiences of Asian American immigrant families and immigrant families in other countries would provide even better understanding about the contextual processes that may play a role in impacting immigrant families.

More research is needed in the area of AA parent-adolescent relationships. The proposed conceptual model should be interpreted with caution in light of its limitations. Although our ecological model identified important variables that may affect parent-adolescent relationships in AA families, it is very unlikely that it captured all existing variables that might be linked to

these relationships given the scope of the paper and space limitations. For instance, some factors that have been found affecting parent-adolescent dynamics (e.g., family types, such as single/divorced vs. two-parent families) were not included. Future research should expand the model to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parent-adolescent relationships in these families. Despite the limitations, this model provides a starting point to guide the direction of future studies, and demonstrates that the ecological approach is a promising tool for furthering our understanding of parent-adolescent relationships in AA families. Importantly, this paper highlights the complexity of parent-adolescent relationships that are embedded in various levels of ecological systems and their interrelations.

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