Chapter 9
Psychology of Asian American Children: Contributions of Cultural Heritage and the Minority Experience

Lisa L. Liu, Shu-wen Wang, Joey Fung, Omar G. Gudiño, Annie Tao and Anna S. Lau

Introduction

Chapter Focus

This chapter presents information on mental health issues in Asian American children, focusing on cultural orientation and minority-related experiences as posing challenges to the maintenance of mental health, as well as providing strengths which contribute to resilience in this group. We then recommend some ways through which we may draw upon the strengths of Asian American youth to promote resiliency and overcome vulnerabilities in adjustment.

Demographics

In 2000, there were 11.9 million Asian Americans, with approximately one quarter (3.3 million) being children under 18 years of age. This highly diverse population originates from over 20 different countries. Due to an Asian American immigration history that largely began with a small, early influx of laborers in the nineteenth century followed by longstanding exclusionary immigration policies, some Asian American children today are now well into the 7th generation, while larger proportions of Asian American children are 3rd and 4th generation descended from post-1965 immigrants. Of course with significant continuing immigration, over 60% of all Asian Americans are 1st generation. As such, any two Asian American children may share little in common, having different immigration histories, heritage cultures, languages, and living conditions in the United States.

L. L. Liu (✉)
Department of Psychology, University of California Los Angeles,
1285 Franz Hall, P.O. Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563, USA
e-mail: lisaliu@psych.ucla.edu

Though there is representation in all 50 states, almost half of all Asian American children reside in only three: California, New York, and Hawaii. Remarkably, over half of all Asian Americans live in one of seven metropolitan areas, including Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Honolulu, Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Chicago. Clearly then, most Asian American children grow up within dense coethnic enclaves. However, in most towns and cities in the interior of the country, the Asian American population falls well below the national average of 4.2%. This tells us that Asian American children are a heterogeneous group who grow up in a range of socialization settings. Much of what we know about Asian American children is based on research with 1st and 2nd generation youth of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent living in urban areas with notable coethnic density. Thus, the experiences of many Asian American children are likely not well understood.

With this important caveat in mind, we examine the development of Asian American children and youth through an integrative framework that considers heritage cultural influences, adaptation processes in migration and acculturation, as well as the unique contextual demands associated with minority group status (Garcia Coll et al. 1996). We begin by introducing a broad cultural theme with specific implications for familial values that have developmental significance across many Asian American ethnic groups. Next, we diverge toward themes focused less on heritage cultural influences and more on experiences attributable to ethnic minority status. We examine developmental issues involving ethnic identity formation and cultural socialization with the goal of understanding the essential processes involved in navigating what it means to be Asian American.

Heritage Cultural Influences in Broad Strokes: Interdependence

It is an impossible task to summarize the rich cultural teachings and morés of over 20 originating Asian countries. As such we will rely instead on heuristically helpful conceptual models of cultural orientation that have been thought to broadly account for differences in emotions, behaviors, and beliefs about personhood between Western and non-Western cultures (e.g., Hofstede 1980; Triandis et al. 1988). Briefly, in this tradition, Asian cultures have been broadly viewed as interdependent, where individuals see themselves as fundamentally connected with others. Subsequently, social relationships, roles, norms, and group harmony affect one's behavior more than personal beliefs and needs (e.g., Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1989). In order to maintain harmonious relations, Asian values emphasize the control and regulation of personal attributes and desires so that individuals may align themselves within the roles and demands of their social contexts (e.g., Markus and Kitayama 1991; Weisz et al.1984). Similarly, the emphasis on interpersonal connectedness and fitting in with others is also associated with concerns about saving face, or maintaining one's public image (e.g., Ting-Toomey 1994). Thus, Asian cultural

values tend to underscore social and relational priorities, such as reciprocity, conformity, politeness and humility, hierarchy, respect for authority, honor, and family duty.

We contend that socialization within an interdependent tradition and internalization of these values has a variety of implications for Asian American child development, serving as both sources of competency and vulnerability. First, we review how a cultural emphasis on personal restraint, moderation, and self-control appears to also have positive implications for temperament, behavior regulation patterns, and coping strategies among Asian American youth. Additionally, we explore how the interdependent nature of Asian cultural values essentially shapes the family structure and the socialization experiences of youth. These influences are illustrated through an examination of parent–child relations, the importance of filial piety, and parenting styles and practices used in Asian American families. In these ways, we discuss how the interdependent cultural script can often lead to positive outcomes for Asian American youth.

Heritage Culture and Sources of Strength for Asian American Children

Culture and Child Temperament In examining sources of strength for Asian American children, we commence with a consideration of temperament, which refers to biologically based individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation that are present early in life (Rothbart and Bates 1998; Rothbart and Derryberry 1981). Evidence from cross-national research on temperament suggests that Asian infants and toddlers are generally less active, more reserved, and quicker to calm in stressful situations (e.g., Caudill and Weinstein 1969; Kagan et al. 1994; Chen et al. 1998) than their Western counterparts. In terms of self-regulation, Chinese toddlers were also more likely to display mature self-control behavior compared to Canadian children (e.g., self-generated control; Chen et al. 2003). In addition, Zhou et al. (2004) reported that high levels of effortful control—an ability to sustain attention and inhibit inappropriate behavior—among Chinese children predicted positive adjustment in terms of decreased behavioral problems and increased social competence. Such temperamental differences in arousal, activity, and self-regulatory processes may promote calm dispositions and a capacity for self-restraint in children of Asian descent.

Although the biological underpinnings of temperament are often emphasized, an alternative view posits that temperament is a product of culture, such that enculturative socialization practices result in differences in temperament (Matsumoto 2006). Scholars note that behavioral inhibition and low reactivity may be adaptive within an interdependent cultural script as these dispositions may be essential for maintaining harmony (Chen 2000). Consideration of the impact of one's actions and behaviors on others is highly emphasized in Asian culture (Chen et al. 2003)

while lack of self-control is strongly discouraged (Zhou et al. 2004). Thus, children may be socialized to inhibit the expression of strong emotions because they may be detrimental to interpersonal relationships.

While European American children display more emotional expressivity compared to Chinese and Chinese American children, there is evidence that cultural differences in family environment determine levels of expressivity. Maternal strictness discouraging the expression of strong affect results in lower levels of expressivity in Chinese American children relative to Chinese children adopted by European American parents. In terms of affect valuation, Tsai et al. (2007) noted that Chinese American and Taiwanese preschoolers tend to prefer calmer facial expressions and story elements over excited expressions and elements in storybooks compared to European American children, with evidence suggesting that cultural differences in ideal affect are evident in socialization influences such as storybooks. Thus, both familial and cultural socialization forces may converge to promote restraint of activity level, affective expression, and pursuit of individual desires, thereby heightening capacity for self-control and inhibition in children of Asian descent.

Culture and Parenting It has been argued that psychological models of parenting have largely been ensconced within an independent cultural worldview (e.g., Chao 1994; Rothbaum et al. 2000). Given that parenting styles have predominantly been studied in Western cultural contexts, autonomy, expressiveness, and assertiveness are emphasized as desired endpoints of child development. However, interdependent cultures are often typified by socialization goals that involve interpersonal accommodation, deference to authority, and group harmony (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Rothbaum et al. 2000). Accordingly, researchers have described Asian childrearing traditions as strategies that cultivate parental authority (Chao and Tseng 2002). Compared to European Americans, Asian American parents report establishing more strict rules and limits on child conduct, granting less autonomy, and expecting more obedience (e.g., Wu 1996). These parental strategies seem motivated by the goal of maintaining order and organization in the family (Rohner and Pettengill 1985).

Evidence suggests strategies emphasizing parental control and authority may be adaptive in Asian and Asian American familial contexts in ways not observed among European American families. While forms of restrictive parental control have been associated with perceived parental hostility and rejection in European American families, these strategies have been associated with perceived parental warmth and acceptance in Japan (Kornadt 1991; Trommsdorff 1985) and Korea (Rohner and Pettengill 1985). Similarly, while parental control is negatively related to family cohesion in European American families (Nomura et al. 1995), it is positively associated with warmth, cohesion, and lower levels of conflict in Asian American families (e.g., Lau and Cheung 1987). Furthermore, parental control is linked to developmental benefits including self-regulation, confidence, positive relationship attitudes, and frustration tolerance among Chinese children (Xu et al. 1991).

These findings can be understood through a consideration of Confucian roots that provide the foundation for parenting and parent-child relationships in many Asian cultures. According to the Confucian doctrine of filial piety, children are taught to respect and obey their elders with specific obligations to defer to the wishes of their parents (e.g., Ho 1986). Parents, in turn, are responsible for governing, teaching, and disciplining their children. As such, Asian American parents have been found to emphasize control, obedience, and obligation to family (Leung et al. 1998; Lin and Fu 1990). While these parenting characteristics may be construed as restrictive or demanding in Western independent cultural contexts, they embody parental care, concern, and love for children among families of Chinese descent (Chao 1994).

Given that Western concepts of parental control do not capture the salient features of Asian American parenting, investigators have identified parenting constructs that are indigenous to Asian cultures. Chao (1994) described training ideologies which emphasize parental responsibility to teach children appropriate behaviors which motivate high levels of parental involvement and concern. This involvement may take the form of setting clear expectations, close monitoring of child's behavior, and prioritizing caretaking and education of the child (Chao 2000). Research indicates that training is positively associated with health and life satisfaction (Stewart et al. 1998), relationship harmony (Stewart et al. 1999), and academic achievement (e.g., Chao 2000) among Asian and Asian American adolescents.

Another indigenous construct of parenting behavior involves the socialization of shame. In line with the emphasis on maintaining group harmony in interdependent cultures, shame is a central emotion that can help guide behavior within interactions across social settings (Fung 1999). Shaming may involve evoking shameful feelings in children through explicit disapproval of misbehavior or social comparison against more well-behaved children. Although the practice of shaming children is sometimes viewed as hostile or punitive, some research indicates that shame socialization appears distinct from other measures of harsh or authoritarian parenting in Chinese samples (Wu et al. 2002). Fung (1999) suggests that shaming serves to foster the development of children's awareness and sensitivity to moral values and social rules, an important socialization goal given the interdependent orientation of Asian cultures. As such, Asian children understand and demonstrate a sense of shame earlier than children in Western nations (Fung et al. 2003). Additional research is needed to determine the developmental outcomes of shame socialization among Asian American children, and to evaluate potential links to interpersonal attunement skills, such as empathy or perspective-taking.

Academic Achievement The phenomenon of Asian American academic achievement has been widely noted. As of 2004, 48.9% of Asian Americans had a bachelor's degree or higher, a proportion well above that of any other group (US Census Bureau 2004). It is a statistic made much more likely due to the fact that on the road to college, Asian American students have higher GPAs, better scores on achievement tests, and lower drop-out rates than other ethnic groups (Aldous 2006; Chen and Stevenson 1995; Goyette and Xie 1999). Although high

rates of educational attainment are evident, there are competing explanations for this performance. Though commonly invoked, the explanatory value of cultural upbringing remains a subject of debate. In their consideration of the phenomenon, Sue and Okazaki (1990) reviewed several hypotheses, the most controversial of which points to heritable differences in intelligence. Evidence in support of this position indicated IQ advantages among Asians compared to European Americans (Lynn 1977; Sowell 1978); however, these studies were riddled with methodological flaws leading most scholars to dismiss a purely biogenetic explanation (Sue and Okazaki 1990). Other research points to structural differences in the home environments of Asian American youth that may account for their academic advantage (e.g., Goyette and Xie 1999; Peng and Wright 1994). For instance, Asian American children are more likely to reside in an intact family with two parents, and to have parents with advanced college degrees. The average household incomes of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and South Asian Americans are higher than that of European Americans. Yet these characteristics also fail to account for ethnic group differences in educational attainment (Sue and Okazaki 1990). Furthermore, these demographic findings merely beg the question of how Asian American families have come to enjoy these conditions that facilitate academic success.

A variety of research findings have been discussed as evidence supporting the notion that aspects of Asian American culture and parenting explain high levels of educational attainment. For example, studies have suggested that Asian American home environments structure key-learning opportunities (Peng and Wright 1994), Asian cultural values cheer educational success (Kim and Chun 1994), and indigenous parenting practices support academic motivation (Chao 2001). Fuligni et al. (1999) identified family obligation values as central in promoting academic values, studying, and educational aspirations among Asian American adolescents. However, the burdens of assisting the family on a daily basis can actually interfere with academic performance (Tseng 2004). These findings serve as an important reminder that the associations between cultural values and academic achievement are likely complex.

Research on the cultural socialization of beliefs and expectations about achievement supports a social cognitive approach to understand Asian American school success. There is a strong correlation between student achievement and high academic expectations held by Asian American parents (e.g., Goyette and Xie 1999). High parental expectations appear to derive from an emphasis on effort (Stevenson and Stigler 1992) leading Asian American parents to teach their children to believe that internal and controllable factors lead to success, especially in educational attainment (Kim and Chun 1994). Beliefs that effort and time-on-task are more important than native ability may explain why Asian American parents exert more control over children's time outside of the classroom (e.g., Peng and Wright 1994), structuring free time with extra homework and tutoring lessons. Accordingly, Chinese American mothers cite pushing their children to work hard as the number one reason for their children's school success (Chao 1996).

Asian American students appear to internalize these messages, tending to attribute success to effort more so than ability, and studying more hours per week compared to their European American peers (Chen and Stevenson 1995; Sue and Zane 1985). Some evidence indicates that the temperamental characteristic of effortful control in sustaining attention and inhibiting impulsive behavior may also contribute to academic success among Chinese children (Zhou et al. 2007). Asian American parents also appear to adopt an internal locus regarding their ability to support their children's achievement. Studies indicate that Asian American parents are more likely than other groups to be involved in their children's schooling (Schneider and Lee 1990), especially during the early school years (Choi et al. 1994; Shoho 1994). In the elementary grades, parents support learning through direct methods, such as teaching math and reading or assigning extra homework (Chao and Tseng 2002). However, as Asian American children reach adolescence this advantage seems to expire and Asian American parents actually appear less involved in children's schooling than parents from other groups (Chao and Tseng 2002). It is possible that this reversal may be an artifact of how parental involvement is measured. As children enter high school, Asian American parents shift their focus to college admittance, thereby also shifting to indirect methods of involvement, such as providing resources for SAT preparation.

While the findings reviewed here have generally been cited as evidence of heritage cultural influence on achievement, an alternative explanation focuses on constraints in the attainment of social mobility faced by Asian Americans as a minority group. Sue and Okazaki (1990) discuss the importance of the relative functionalism of academic achievement for socioeconomic advancement among groups. They argue that Asian American youth may be steered toward educational achievement for upward mobility because other avenues toward advancement are blocked to minorities. Therefore, Asian Americans tend to enter fields which require high levels of education (e.g., engineering, medicine), where hiring and promotion depend largely on academic credentials and are less likely to be affected by discrimination. The emphasis on minority status as an important contextual factor in the relative functionalism hypothesis serves as an important counterpoint to a purely cultural thesis in explaining Asian American achievement. The notion of adaptive culture may be invoked to integrate the two positions. According to Garcia Coll et al. (1996), "adaptive culture is the product of [a] group's prior collective history (cultural, political, and economic) and the contextual demands placed by the promoting and inhibiting environments" of the host culture. The inhibitory environment limiting social mobility opportunities for Asian American youth highlighted by Sue and Okazaki (1990) may potentiate existing cultural values about family obligation, effort, and achievement. The interaction of the contextual constraints and heritage socialization traditions may culminate in the adaptive cultural response of Asian American investment in higher education, highlighting the important roles of both the relative functionalism and heritage cultural influences.

Heritage Culture and Sources of Vulnerability
for Asian American Children

Avoidant Coping Building further upon our discussion of cultural orientation, we identify areas of challenge that are manifested in particular mental health concerns relevant to Asian American youth. Traditional Asian cultural values and the interdependent tradition may at times present challenges for the development and well-being of Asian American youth and their families. For example, the restraint of self-expression (e.g., Kim and Sherman 2007) and use of indirect coping strategies (Weisz et al. 1984) demonstrated by many Asian American youth can result in avoidant forms of coping that may negatively impact well-being. Asian American college students report using avoidant coping strategies, such as problem avoidance and social withdrawal, more than their European American counterparts (Chang 1996). While indirect coping strategies can be adaptive in some situations, they may also be associated with more depressive symptoms in Asian American youth (Chang 1996), thus, posing concerns for their well-being.

Given the interdependent and relational focus of traditional Asian cultural values, one might infer that Asian American youth would turn to loved ones, and actively seek out social support to cope with stressful events. A large body of research concludes that being socially integrated with access to support confers a wealth of beneficial mental and physical health effects (Seeman 1996). However, recent evidence indicates that the importance given to harmonious relationships in traditional Asian values may actually deter support-seeking behaviors in Asian American youth. Asian American college students seek social support less often and find support-seeking to be less helpful compared to European American college students (Kim et al. 2006; Taylor et al. 2004). Findings suggest that Asian American students are less willing to actively seek out social support primarily because of interdependence concerns about disrupting the harmony of the group, unduly worrying others, and losing face (Taylor et al. 2004). Similarly, cross-national research has indicated that mobilizing social support actually caused more stress for students in China in ways not seen among American students (Liang and Bogat 1994). Recent research suggests that Asian American students may benefit more from implicit forms of social support that are relationally less "risky" (Taylor et al. 2007). Thus, any potential benefits of receiving support may be outweighed by concerns about burdening others with one's problems, or losing face in the eyes of loved ones. These interdependence concerns appear to provide social disincentives for Asian American youth to seek help from others in times of trouble.

Perfectionism and Distress Interdependence concerns may also contribute to psychological challenges for Asian American youth through their link to perfectionist tendencies, which have been found to be higher in Asian American students relative to their peers (e.g., Peng and Wright 1994). Researchers have often attributed perfectionism among Asian American students to a cultural focus on achievement to fulfill family obligation and avoid loss of face (Stevenson and Lee 1996; Sue

and Okazaki 1990). While some aspects of perfectionism promote adaptation by inspiring individuals to strive for excellence, researchers have identified "maladaptive perfectionism" as being motivated by a fear of failure (Slade and Owens 1998) and characterized by self-doubt and excessive concern over mistakes (Bieling et al. 2004). Maladaptive perfectionism has been linked to depression and suicidality among Asian Americans (Beevers and Miller 2004; Castro and Rice 2003), with recent findings that Asian American college students are more vulnerable to maladaptive perfectionism and associated depressive symptoms when they hold more interdependence values (Yoon and Lau 2008). Thus, the same interdependent cultural traditions that promote achievement may also confer some burdens borne by Asian American youngsters.

In sum, the literature suggests that being oriented toward interdependence may confer some psychological costs. Interdependence concerns may increase the risk for psychological distress in Asian American youth and young adults because of tendencies toward avoidant coping, maladaptive perfectionism, and a decreased willingness to seek support from others. Furthermore, these challenges related to interdependence are also compounded by hardships that Asian American youth may encounter owing to their minority status in the United States.

The Minority Experience

The Minority Experience and Sources of Vulnerability for Asian American Children

The Model Minority Stereotype In addition to the challenges engendered through cultural influences, Asian American youth also encounter and respond to a variety of prevailing racial stereotypes. One of the most common stereotypes attributed to Asian American youth is the "model minority" stereotype, a widely shared belief that Asian Americans have successfully overcome discrimination to become a uniformly successful minority group worthy of admiration by other minorities (Chun 1995). On the surface, the model minority stereotype appears to ascribe a positive image to Asian Americans, but critics point to its divisive effect on race relations and the many inaccuracies in interpretation of evidence used to propagate a myth of success (Chun 1995). Touting the model minority stereotype effectively conceals the wide diversity that exists within the Asian American community, allowing for the needs of Asian American children and youth with problem behaviors to go unrecognized and untreated (Tsunokai 2005). Given the widespread acceptance of the model minority stereotype, Asian American students who drop out of school are often overlooked and do not receive the resources needed to achieve academically (Lew 2003). Barriers to college achievement faced by Asian Americans also go unrecognized. For example, in 2005, Asian American freshmen were more likely

than the national freshman population to come from poor or low-income families, require remedial work in English, and seek employment to help pay for college (Chang et al. 2007).

Furthermore, despite higher aggregate levels of academic achievement, Asian American students tend to experience the world as less comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Ying et al. 2001a), and are more likely to have negative or ambivalent attitudes toward pursuing academic achievement (Lee and Ying 2001). Moreover, there is also evidence that the model minority stereotype leads to peer harassment as children from other ethnic groups perceive Asian American children as receiving preferential treatment by teachers (Rosenbloom and Way 2004). The stereotype of Asian Americans as being gifted academically has also been linked to the segregation of Asian American youth from other peer groups (Kao 2000). Furthermore, the salience of the model minority stereotype to Asian American students has ironically been shown under some circumstances to undermine their performance in achievement contexts. Although some studies have demonstrated that subtly priming Asian ethnic identity can boost performance on math achievement tasks (Shih et al. 1999), Cheryan and Bodenhausen (2000) demonstrated that making public expectations of the model minority stereotype salient can cause Asian American students to "choke under pressure." Hence, propagation of what may seem to be a benign or positive stereotype about Asian Americans can be racially divisive, interfere with recognition of genuine mental health or educational needs, and be detrimental at an individual level for interpersonal functioning, academic performance, and psychological well-being.

Acculturative Stress and Acculturation Gaps Another challenge that Asian American children face in growing up in the United States involves the acculturative process, or the process by which attitudes and/or behaviors of persons from one cultural group are modified as a result of contact with a different culture (Moyerman and Forman 1992). Studies indicate that individuals who feel marginalized and separated from ethnic and dominant cultural groups tend to experience the highest levels of "acculturative stress," the psychological difficulties originating from adjusting to a new environment, which involves loss of social support, experiencing discrimination and stereotyping, overcoming linguistic barriers, and having to adapt to changes in political and economic contexts (e.g., Berry and Kim 1988). For Asian American immigrants, studies have found that higher levels of acculturative stress are related to mental health problems, including anxiety and somatic symptoms (Williams and Berry 1991), depressive symptoms (Shin 1994), and maladaptive eating patterns (Furukawa 1994).

One source of acculturative stress among Asian American immigrant families is related to the different rates of acculturation between immigrant parents and their children, since children in immigrant families tend to acculturate to American traditions and values more quickly than their parents (Okagaki and Bojczyk 2002; Ying and Chao 1996). Research with Asian American samples has shown that perceived acculturation gaps are associated with intergenerational family conflict (Ying et al. 2004, 2001b), a proposed mechanism of action in the relationship between accul-

turation gaps and youth maladjustment (e.g., Lee et al. 2000; Ying 1999). The clashing nature of the differences between the host and heritage culture exacerbates this problem for Asian American families, as presses for autonomy are likely met by increasingly controlling parental responses, with both sides becoming more polarized by repeated conflicts.

Especially within the interdependent tradition of Asian cultures, acculturation gaps and conflict or estrangement between parents and children may place Asian American youth at heightened risk of detrimental outcomes (Lau et al. 2002). Indeed, several studies among Asian American adolescents have indicated that higher levels of family conflict are associated with low self-esteem, depression, and lower educational achievement (Rumbaut 1994, 1997). Similarly, studies among Asian American college students have found that family conflicts are related to lower family satisfaction, negative affect, and somatic symptoms of distress (Lee et al. 2005). Hence, the literature suggests that Asian American immigrant youth are at heightened risk for maladaptive adjustment and intergenerational conflict which may accompany the rigors of acculturation.

The Minority Experience and Sources of Strength for Asian American Children

Biculturalism and Positive Ethnic Identity Development While some processes encountered during acculturation may pose significant challenges, other forms of adaptation to acculturative demands lead to healthy development for Asian American youth. Multidimensional theories of acculturation take into account not only how one relates to other ethnic groups in society, but also one's sense of ethnic belonging (Berry 1980). Research on acculturation styles indicate that a strong sense of belonging to both one's ethnic group and to the dominant culture is associated with healthy psychosocial outcomes, including greater academic achievement, stronger ethnic pride, higher levels of self-esteem, and perceived social support (Berry and Kim 1988; Kim and Omizo 2005; Phinney et al. 1992). These findings suggest that biculturalism, accomplished through the facile integration of oneself into the social worlds of both the heritage and mainstream American cultures, permits the flexible navigation of the many adaptational demands faced by Asian American youngsters.

The importance of one's ethnic group and heritage culture is further highlighted by research that points to the protective and adaptive role of ethnic identity, a sense of identification or belonging as a member of a minority ethnic group (Phinney 1990). Ethnic identity development is thought to be facilitated by two socialization processes. First, enculturation processes expose children to cultural opportunities that promote ethnic awareness and pride. Second, racialization processes promote awareness of the social reality of discrimination and aid children in developing strategies to manage these experiences. Studies of Asian American youth have

found that ethnic pride, involvement, and ethnic identity achievement are related to positive adjustment as evidenced by increased happiness, self-esteem, and goal directedness, and lower levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Kiang et al. 2006; Martinez and Dukes 1997; Shrake and Rhee 2004). In addition, having a well-developed sense of ethnic identity has been found to protect Asian American youth from the negative psychological effects of discrimination by facilitating the employment of more adaptive coping skills such as problem-solving strategies (Yoo and Lee 2005). Lastly, Kiang et al. (2006) have also suggested that a sense of ethnic belonging may relate to the construction of solid social support networks, and feelings of positive ethnic regard may evolve into a broader sense of well-being that supports healthy social and emotional development.

Discussion

Applying Strengths to Meet Challenges

In this chapter, we reviewed literature asserting that an interdependent cultural orientation serves as a foundation for competencies and resilience for Asian American youth by shaping contexts of family and community. The strengths described in this chapter are rooted in priorities emphasizing group harmony, nurturing relationships, and duty to family which often converge to drive positive adaptation. More importantly, we contend that this interdependent view of the world can serve as an important resource in addressing the challenges Asian American youth encounter in their adjustment and growth. Thus, we believe that a key strategy for harnessing the strengths of these children in order to promote resiliency is to capitalize upon the interdependence values that broadly characterize their cultural heritage (see Table 1).

One essential avenue to promote youth resiliency would be to support Asian American parents to leverage naturally occurring strategies that promote optimal child development. In order to capitalize on the cultural importance given to interconnectedness and group solidarity, encouraging parents to participate in parenting enrichment programs within the Asian American community can cultivate well-being in their children. Research has suggested that traditional Western psychological treatments and services may present multiple cultural and practical barriers to participation by Asian Americans (e.g., Leong and Lau 2001). Thus, embedding supportive parenting programs within well-accepted Asian American community institutions (e.g., heritage language schools, faith-based organizations, health and wellness clinics, and community schools) would make them more welcoming and better attended. Programs that are collaborative with respected community leaders and offered in group format may appeal most to Asian American families with interdependent sensibilities. Emphasizing valued socialization goals (e.g., promoting values of educational attainment, strengthening family cohesion and integrity) and the modern day relevance of heritage cultural practices (e.g., training) within these programs would also increase their relevance.

Table 1 Summary of demographics, challenges, strengths, and recommendations

Demographics	Challenges	Strengths	Recommendations
1.2% of the general population	Challenges related to cultural orientation	Strengths related to cultural orientation	Capitalizing on strengths to promote resiliency
Over 60% of all Asian Americans are 1st generation	• Interdependence concerns about disrupting group harmony may lead to less social support seeking behaviors	• Characteristics of temperament, such as self-control and inhibition may be related to cultural emphasis on maintaining group harmony	• Given importance of family, encourage parent participation in parenting programs with emphasis on valued socialization goals
Over 75% of all Asian Americans reside in large metropolitan areas	• Maladaptive perfectionism may stem from a cultural focus on academic achievement, family obligation, and loss of face	• Indigenous parenting behaviors, such as parental control and socialization of shame may be related to positive developmental outcomes	• Psychoeducation regarding maladaptive perfectionism, intergenerational acculturation conflicts, etc. would be important given tendencies not to mobilize support to cope with common stressors
Heterogeneous group includes more than 20 different cultures		• Values such as deference for teachers, high academic expectations and belief in hard work may bolster academic success	• Encourage positive ethnic identity development in youth through participation in mentoring programs and cultural activities
	Challenges related to the minority experience	Strengths related to the minority experience	
	• Acculturation processes may lead to acculturative stress and heightened family conflict	• Biculturalism or integration allows one to navigate demands of both heritage and mainstream cultures	
	• Youth encounter discrimination and stereotypes, such as the model minority stereotype	• Ethnic identity and parental cultural socialization have been found to be related to positive youth adjustment	

Parenting programs can be instrumental in educating Asian American parents about how to identify and address potential adjustment difficulties for their children. Psychoeducation regarding concerns of particular relevance for Asian American youth (e.g., maladaptive perfectionism, intergenerational acculturation conflicts) would be important, given the concern that Asian American youngsters tend not to mobilize support to cope with common stressors. These groups could also provide a venue through which Asian American parents can connect with other parents who are likely to be encountering similar struggles with their children, providing a safe and culturally responsive forum where parents can share, compare, support, and normalize each other's experiences. In a nonevaluative group setting, an appreciation of mental health issues for Asian American youth can be fostered, potentially leading to decreased feelings of stigma regarding concerns about psychological wellness. Therefore, providing resources and information, as well as empathetic connections with other Asian Americans, can promote a sense of community and the spirit of collaboration among parents of Asian American youth.

A specific example of a supportive community-based program for Asian American parents would focus on how to best encourage academic success in children, since this appears to be of paramount importance in the community. Group leaders can provide much sought after practical information regarding the American school system, how to collaborate with teachers, and how to overcome possible language and cultural barriers in supporting children's learning. Parents can be educated about how academic pressure and demands for perfection may negatively impact youth, and acquire skills for promoting resilience in academically demanding settings. Group leaders must be trained to facilitate supportive group process which fosters interdependence through encouraging parents to rely on and help each other, instead of struggling in isolation due to concerns about losing face or burdening others.

In addition to supporting parents to promote resilience in their children, special efforts should also be made to directly reach Asian American youth to help them overcome developmental challenges. Given the established research finding that achieved ethnic identity is related to psychological well-being, it would be advisable to promote resiliency in Asian American youth by encouraging positive ethnic identity development. While there is a dearth of intervention studies for Asian American youth, studies conducted with other ethnic minority samples have indicated that programs which expose minority youth to cultural beliefs, values, and practices, and minority role models, strengthen ethnic identity and self-esteem (e.g., Belgrave et al. 2000). Programs of this type might foster resiliency among Asian American youth by ensuring that they feel cared for and embedded within a distinctive and worthwhile community. This may include participation in heritage language schools, after school enrichment programs, religious communities, and cultural activities such as martial arts, calligraphy, and folk dancing. Participation in these activities can expose Asian American children to their peers in positive, identity-building settings, and to create stronger support networks. Mentoring programs where Asian American children can benefit from relationships with older

Asian Americans may prove especially beneficial in providing guidance to youth who may not actively mobilize support from others.

Future Recommendations

While we believe the strengths and challenges proposed in our review may apply to many Asian American children, they cannot be generalized to the entire population given the tremendous heterogeneity within this group. Hence, a general direction for future research is to distinguish the factors influencing development across Asian subgroups with special attention to the historical context of their immigration histories and the specific ecological demands of their local social contexts. Since research has largely focused on Asian American youth in ethnically dense cities, more attention is needed to understand the development of Asian American children growing up in relative ethnic isolation.

Gaps in the extant literature also suggest specific areas for future research. First, recent findings identifying reticence among Asian American young adults in seeking social support warrant further investigation. These findings are alarming given that previous researchers have suggested that Asian Americans are reluctant to seek mental health services and instead rely on informal social support. Taken together, these findings imply that we should be doubly concerned about the health behaviors of Asian Americans in distress. Second, we have noted that previous research has not examined the intersection of cultural influences and minority status concerns in jointly explaining Asian American academic achievement. Third, research on the beneficial effects of Asian American parenting have largely been focused on school performance outcomes and more research is needed to examine whether benefits may extend to other developmental outcomes (e.g., emotion regulation, social competence). Fourth, it would be helpful for intervention development to identify the mechanisms by which ethnic identity promotes healthy adjustment and protects against the ill-effects of discrimination. Finally, we hope to see work begin on the development and evaluation of programs and interventions that cultivate ties within the community, raise awareness of mental health issues, and promote ethnic identity formation among Asian American children to encourage healthy bicultural adaptation.

Concluding Comments

Our review of the literature demonstrates that Asian American children and youth exhibit many strengths that extend across a number of domains, including dispositional characteristics that promote self-regulation, family systems marked by parental involvement, and positive developmental outcomes including academic achievement. Yet, while the presence of these strengths suggests that Asian Ameri-

can youth should have the resources to maintain psychological well-being, some evidence suggests that this group is vulnerable to certain developmental challenges. We conclude that Asian American youth are uniquely faced with the rather difficult task of residing at the intersection of two disparate cultural traditions. On the one hand, Asian American children are socialized by their families and ethnic communities to embody interdependent values and norms, and on the other hand, they are expected to function in an independently oriented society that demands assertion and expression of individuality. Individuals who are able to successfully negotiate the demands of these two worlds may be best described as bicultural—possessing a well-developed sense of achieved ethnic identity while also integrating toward the expectations of the dominant American culture. Asian American youth must develop the skills to successfully navigate the dualities in their local social world by adjusting themselves to operate under differing cultural frameworks from one context to the next.

This flexibility is particularly important given that some of the purported strengths of Asian American youth can contribute to maladjustment under certain conditions. For example, behavioral inhibition and shy temperament among Chinese youth may be seen as desirable and adaptive within interdependent cultural contexts because they may aid in maintaining group harmony. However, these same dispositions are associated with increased psychological distress in Western societies (Chen et al. 2005). Similarly, parenting practices that involve high levels of control may be associated with positive school adjustment when applied in traditional Asian American families and communities, but may have negative consequences in contexts where the prevailing norms for family relations differ.

Thus, we contend that resilience among Asian American youth can be optimized in two ways: through the strengthening of ties within the community and by cultivating positive ethnic identity development. We propose that encouraging Asian American parents and youth to participate in supportive programs in the community not only allows for them to acquire knowledge and learn new skills, but also helps to create a local social world in which cultural vitality can thrive. Community institutions could be instrumental in promoting networks within the Asian American community that bring together children and families who share similar histories and traditions. In these settings, the strengths of Asian American youth can be fostered through the cultural socialization practices of enculturation and racialization. Fostering ethnic identity development may promote successful transitions between dual cultural contexts by enabling Asian American youth to flourish both within heritage cultural contexts and by buffering them from occasional negative interactions within dominant cultural contexts.

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