East Asian Parenting on Children Raised in North America: Predictions and Discussions for Future Parenting Styles

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Abstract
In 2019, Canada experienced its largest population increase as the population grew by 208234 (0.6%) people with the majority being immigrants and non-permanent residents (Statistics Canada 2019). Population growth was highest in British Columbia (+0.7%) with the greatest immigrant population coming from China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan (Statistics Canada 2019; Statistics Canada 2017). The mixing of East Asian and Canadian cultures can be challenging and sometimes be conflicting for children of East Asian immigrants. This paper aims to gain a better understanding of the acculturation gap, intergenerational conflict, coping strategies of East Asian children, and how these experiences may influence future parenting behaviours of East Asian children raised in North America.

Introduction
The Acculturation Gap
Growing up in North America, children of East Asian immigrants face the unique challenge of navigating conflicting Asian and Western cultures throughout their life. Many East Asian children are faced with the decision to keep their traditional Asian values or adopt new Western values. In this paper, East Asian children are defined as both first generation children who have spent many years of their life in North America and second generation children who were born and raised in North America. Acculturation was first defined as a process where minority groups attempted to adopt new cultural values and norms of a dominant group (Graves 1967). For East Asian children, the dominant culture would be Western North American culture and the minority/traditional culture would be East Asian culture. Later, theorists like Berry (1992) divided acculturation into four strategies. Assimilation describes an individual who identifies more strongly with the dominant culture over their traditional culture (Berry 1992). Integration describes an individual who maintains both their traditional and dominant cultural identities (Berry 1992). Separation describes an individual who only identifies with their traditional culture and marginalization describes individuals who do not identify with either dominant or traditional cultures (Berry 1992). Research describes an acculturation gap, where East Asian children and their parents acculturate to Western culture at different rates. One study looked at how readily parents compared to their children adopted dominant Western cultural identities or held onto traditional East Asian identities (Lim et al. 2008). This study was conducted on Chinese mothers and their adolescents living in America, using questionnaires measuring their level of Asian and Western identification (Lim et al. 2008). The results found most youth (50.6%) identified as bicultural, followed by 24.7% identifying with East Asian culture, 23.5% identifying with Western culture, and 1.2% adopting a marginalization identity (Lim et al. 2008). These results indicate East Asian children acculturate at different rates using different strategies, but the majority of youth identify with both Western and East Asian culture. Most Chinese mothers (49.4%) identified as Asian, followed by bicultural (46.9%), Western culture (3.7%), and none adopted a marginalization identity (Lim et al. 2008). These results suggest Chinese mothers will most likely identify with East Asian culture, followed by identifying with both Western and Asian cultures, and very few will only identify with Western culture. The difference in the two results demonstrates the acculturation gap between parents and children, as children more readily adopt Western culture into their identity then their parents. Another study looked at first generation Vietnamese parents and their adolescents who had been living in the United States for over 8 years (Ho 2009). Through a series of questionnaires administered to both adolescents and their parents, the researcher found that parents identified more with Vietnamese culture while children identified more with American culture (Ho 2009). For example, Vietnamese parents preferred Vietnamese activities and language while their children preferred American activities and speaking English (Ho 2009). In this study, parents adopted a separation acculturation style as they identified with Vietnamese culture over American culture. Children adopted an assimilation acculturation style where they identified with American culture over Vietnamese culture. These different acculturation styles illustrate an acculturation gap between parents and children.
because children adapt more strongly and quickly to the dominant Western culture while parents try to maintain their East Asian culture.

The literature indicates acculturation styles of East Asian children and their parents seem to vary. However, generally children more readily adopt Western culture compared to their parents. The differences in the level of Western culture identification in East Asian parents and their children creates an acculturation gap. One limitation of this research is it does not look at the reasons for immigration. Reasons for immigration may affect the acculturation style of the parent, because parents who chose to leave their home country may be more open to the North American lifestyle than a parent who had to flee their home country. The acculturation gap exists and as it grows, family relationships may become tense as children and parents disagree about their lifestyles.

**Intergenerational Conflict**

Intergenerational conflict arises from the acculturation gap between immigrant parents and their North American raised East Asian children. As East Asian children become more Westernized, their parents may feel alienated from them (Ying et al. 1999). At the same time, these East Asian children may feel trapped between the conflicting cultural values and expectations of their East Asian home and surrounding Western society (Ying et al. 1999). This intergenerational family conflict has been linked to psychological distress and negative outcomes in East Asian children. A longitudinal study examined acculturation, intergenerational conflict, and mental health outcomes in Southeast Asian American adolescents (Ying and Han 2007). This study was conducted in two waves, with Wave 1 occurring between grade 8 and 9 and then Wave 2 occurring three years later (Ying and Han 2007). Wave 1 measured acculturation and Wave 2 measured intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms in adolescents (Ying and Han 2007). Results for Wave 1 found adolescents rated their preference for American ways of living higher than their parents (Ying and Han 2007). This indicates an acculturation gap and intergenerational discrepancies in ways of living, as children prefer an American lifestyle more than their parents. Results for Wave 2 found acculturation gaps in Wave 1 positively predicted intergenerational conflict, and intergenerational conflict was significant positively correlated with adolescent depressive symptoms (Ying and Han 2007). This means a larger acculturation gap led to greater intergenerational conflict, and as individuals experienced more intergenerational conflict they also experienced more depressive symptoms. This study highlights how greater intergenerational conflict, arising from the acculturation gap, can lead to greater negative adolescent outcomes like depressive symptoms.

A common area of conflict in East Asian children and their parents is appropriate levels of parental control. Chinese parenting is centered around obedience, so high parental control is seen as necessary and a positive parenting trait (Chao 2000). In contrast, Western parenting is centered around child self-development, so low parental control is favoured and high parental control is seen as negative (Chao 2000). Immigrant East Asian parents may endorse a high level of parental control, however, their children who are socialized in a Western society may view this as an inappropriate level of parental control and seek lower levels of control. A study examined whether differences in parental control influenced adolescent depressive symptoms and if this relationship was mediated by intergenerational family conflict (Juang et al. 2007). Adolescents also completed the Asian American family conflict scale to measure intergenerational conflict and the Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale to measure depressive symptoms (Juang et al. 2007). The study found parents preferred higher levels of parental control compared to adolescents (Juang et al. 2007). This indicates a discrepancy in the appropriate levels of parental control between children and their parents. Children preferred lower levels of parental control characteristic of Western parenting, while parents preferred higher levels of parental control characteristic of East Asian parenting. This sets the stage for intergenerational family conflict. The study also found a significant positive relationship between intergenerational family conflict and adolescent depressive symptoms (Juang et al. 2007). This means, if there were greater disagreements and conflicts regarding parental control, there were also greater levels of adolescent depressive symptoms. The greater the intergenerational conflict, the greater the negative outcome for adolescents in terms of increased depressive symptoms. As East Asian children experience negative outcomes from intergenerational conflict, their coping strategies become essential to their well-being and health in North America.

**Coping Strategies**

The coping strategies used by East Asian children have the ability to protect or exacerbate the negative effects of intergenerational conflict. One study looked at how a challenge or a threat/harm cognitive appraisal can influence the impact of intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms. Indi-
Individuals with a challenge cognitive appraisal were described as enthusiastic and viewed intergenerational conflict as an opportunity to learn and grow (Choi et al. 2019). Individuals with a threat/harm cognitive appraisal were described as angry, worried, anxious and viewed intergenerational conflict as harmful or damaging (Choi et al. 2019). Intergenerational conflict, cognitive appraisal, and depressive symptoms were measured in 119 first and second generation Asian American college students through a series of questionnaires (Choi et al. 2019). A positive relationship was found between intergenerational conflict, and depressive symptoms and a threat/harm appraisal (Choi et al. 2019). This indicates higher intergenerational conflict is linked to greater depressive symptoms and the use of a threat/harm appraisal. This study also found a challenge appraisal moderated the relationship between intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms (Choi et al. 2019). This means participants with higher challenge appraisals experienced less intergenerational conflict and fewer depressive symptoms. Results of this study suggests that the type of cognitive appraisal an individual uses is linked to the severity of their negative outcomes. Individuals with a challenge cognitive appraisal will experience a buffering of intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms, while individuals with a threat/harm appraisal will experience a greater intensity of intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms.

Another study looked at how problem solving and social support coping strategies can moderate intergenerational conflict and well-being in Asian American college students. Problem solving coping is characterized by analyzing and solving problems, while social support coping is characterized by attaining emotional support from others (Lee et al. 2005). 117 Asian American first and second generation college students completed a series of questionnaires to measure perceived intergenerational conflict, coping strategies, and well-being. Results found that intergenerational conflict was significantly positively correlated with psychological distress (Lee et al. 2005). This supports prior studies showing that higher intergenerational conflict is linked to higher psychological distress and negative outcomes. For coping strategies, Asian American students reported using both social support and problem solving coping methods equally. Social support coping buffered against the negative effects of high intergenerational conflict situations (Lee et al. 2005). This means, in high conflict situations, psychological distress from intergenerational conflict was decreased when individuals used social support coping strategies. Problem solving coping buffered against the negative effects of low intergenerational conflict, but did not provide support if intergenerational conflict was high (Lee et al. 2005). This means, if individuals endorsed problem solving coping for low conflict situations they would experience less psychological distress from intergenerational conflict. However, in high conflict situations they would not experience alleviation from the effects of intergenerational conflict. East Asian children’s experience with intergenerational conflict is influenced by their coping strategies. Effective coping strategies like seeking social support and adopting a challenge cognitive appraisal can lead to less intense intergenerational conflict and greater buffering against negative outcomes. Ineffective coping strategies like problem solving coping in high conflict situations and threat/harm cognitive appraisals can lead to intensified intergenerational conflict and negative outcomes. These experiences may shape how much an individual identifies with either Western or East Asian culture, and whether they will practice these cultures in their own parenting with their children.

**Future Parenting Styles**

The parenting styles of East Asian children is likely shaped by their experiences of the acculturation gap, intergenerational conflict, and the type of coping strategies used when growing up in North America. One prediction for the future parenting styles of East Asian children is individuals who used ineffective coping strategies will less likely endorse East Asian parenting styles and values on their children, compared to individuals who used effective coping strategies. This is predicted because, ineffective coping strategies lead to intensified experiences of intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms creating an overall negative experience of East Asian parenting in North America. For example, endorsing a threat/harm appraisal can lead to an exacerbation of depressive symptoms (Choi et al. 2019). Additionally, during times of high intergenerational family conflict the use of a problem solving coping strategy will not protect against conflict and distress (Lee et al. 2005). If an individual uses a threat/harm appraisal or problem solving coping strategy, intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms will be experienced as more intensely negative. East Asian children reflecting on their difficult adjustment to Western society due to the acculturation gap and its consequences, may consider reducing this gap when raising their own children. For example, second generation parents may integrate more Western parenting styles and values into their parenting to minimize the acculturation gap and its consequences. In comparison, perhaps East Asian children who used effective coping strategies will experience less intense intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms and not feel the need to minimize any cultural conflicts. For example, a challenge cognitive appraisal or a social support coping strategy will reduce depressive
symptoms and subsequently the intensity of intergenerational conflict (Choi et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2005). This may lead to more positive experiences of East Asian parenting in North America as there is less intense conflict and negative child outcomes. These individuals may not feel the need to integrate more Western parenting styles and values into their parenting as their experiences of East Asian parenting in North America was not negative. It is difficult to predict what parenting styles second generation immigrants may endorse, because there is little research on the topic.

However, one study did investigate East Asian and North American parenting orientations in 20 second generation Korean American mothers and their partners used semi-structured interviews (Kim et al. 2014). The researchers found an integration of North American and Asian parenting styles, with overall movement towards North American parenting (Kim et al. 2014). Parents expressed wanting their child to have an individual identity, because they had difficulty developing a personal identity under the strict parental control of their immigrant parents (Kim et al. 2014). This illustrates how an individual’s experience of East Asian parenting may affect their own parenting choices. However, some second generation parents still express the use of East Asian parenting styles. One parent articulated their desire for their child to be happy but also had high educational expectations, saying, “We’ll probably sit down and think more seriously about what their career options are going to be... We’ll guide them” (Kim et al. 2014). This displays a high level of parental control, characteristic of East Asian parenting styles, as career options for their child will be limited and influenced by their parents. One key reason why parents encourage the Western values of autonomy, personal agency, and self-determination is because they believe it is essential for functioning in Western society (Kim et al. 2014). Parents reflecting on their difficult experiences of being raised with an East Asian parenting style in a Western society may choose to raise their children to be more Western so they can better fit into the society.

Conclusion

An acculturation gap exists between East Asian children and their immigrant parents, because East Asian children generally adopt Western culture faster than their parents. For example, East Asian children are more likely to identify as bicultural (both East Asian and American), while Chinese mothers were more likely to identify as only East Asian (Lim et al. 2008). Additionally, Vietnamese parents prefer Vietnamese activates and language, while their children prefer speaking English and participating in American activities (Ho 2009). East Asian children more readily adopt Western culture compared to their parents. Intergenerational conflict arises from these acculturation gaps as different cultural values and expectations clash. For instance, East Asian children rated a higher preference for American ways of living than their parents which later predicted increased intergenerational conflict and greater adolescent depressive symptoms (Ying and Han 2007). Different lifestyle preferences led to conflicts among parents and their children. This then led to negative outcomes for East Asian children like increased adolescent depressive symptoms. Another study found parents and adolescents disagreed regarding appropriate levels of parental control. Parents preferred higher levels of parental control characteristic of East Asian parenting, while their children preferred lower levels of parental control characteristic of Western parenting (Juang et al. 2007). This disagreement led to greater intergenerational conflict and adolescent depressive symptoms (Juang et al. 2007). Different expectations about freedom and control led to increased intergenerational conflict among parents and adolescents, which likely contributed to negative adolescent experiences of East Asian parenting in North America. The intensity of these negative outcomes can be moderated by the used of coping strategies. Researchers found using a challenge cognitive appraisal (viewing intergenerational conflict as an opportunity to grow) moderated intergenerational conflict and depressive symptoms, while using a threat/harm cognitive appraisal did not (Choi et al. 2019). This means, participants with greater challenge cognitive appraisals experienced fewer depressive symptoms than those with threat/harm appraisals. Additionally, endorsing social support coping, such as seeking emotional support, buffered against negative effects of high intergenerational conflict situations while problem solving coping did not (Lee et al. 2005). Implementing social support coping in high conflict situations can reduce the intensity of negative outcomes like depressive symptoms that result from intergenerational conflict, while problem solving coping does not offer support. Individuals who use ineffective coping strategies may experience more intense intergenerational conflict and negative outcomes leading to an overall negative experience of East Asian parenting in North America compared to individuals who used effective coping strategies. These individuals may be less likely to endorse East Asian parenting styles and values when raising their children to reduce cultural conflicts. Although there is little research on potential future parenting styles of East Asian children, interviews with second generation Korean parents suggest there is an overall movement towards increasing Western styled parenting (Kim et al. 2014). However, some parents still express maintaining a high level of parental control especially over their child’s career path (Kim et al. 2014). In conclusion, the experiences of the acculturation gap, intergenerational conflict, and coping strategies
may influence the degree to which an individual chooses to endorse East Asian parenting when raising their own children in North America. Future research should examine the potential influence of coping strategies on perceptions of East Asian parenting in North America and how these perceptions may influence East Asian children’s future parenting styles. This is an important area of research as immigration continues to rise in Canada and more cultures may be faced with the struggles of conflicting cultural identities and values.

References


