Family Assistance Attitudes and Family Cultural Conflict: A Comparative Study of Second-Generation Asian American and Native-Born European American Emerging Adults

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Research shows that ethnic minority and immigrant youth hold stronger attitudes about helping their families compared with native-born European American peers. Though often portrayed as burdensome, there has been limited empirical research on how family assistance attitudes affect the mental health among diverse emerging adults. We examined the influence of various attitudes toward family assistance on family cultural conflict, a mental health risk factor. Results from our survey showed that second-generation Asian Americans (N = 328) rated family assistance as more important than nonimmigrant European American (N = 343) college students, and that this was partly explained by differences in interdependent self-construal. As predicted, higher levels of self-expectations of daily family assistance were associated with lower self-reported family cultural conflict among second-generation Asian Americans but not among native-born European Americans. Findings suggest that for second-generation Asian Americans who are emerging adults, an incongruency between self- and family expectations for assistance may be more predictive of mental health risk than for nonimmigrant European Americans. Potential implications for mental health prevention among ethnic minority, immigrant-emerging adults are discussed.

Keywords: family assistance, emerging adults, interdependence, Asian American, second generation

In the news, youth growing up in immigrant families are portrayed as being burdened by the self-expectation and importance of serving as cultural brokers for their foreign-born parents (Kratochvil, 2001). ‘Immigrants’ kids say they [want to] help their parents . . . but translating information that affect[s] the well-being of their families . . . can be a huge responsibility” (Nisman, 2004). However, there is limited empirical evidence on whether family assistance attitudes are associated with mental health outcomes, and if so, in what ways and for whom? In this article, we take a comparative perspective of the association between family assistance attitudes and a known mental health risk factor, family cultural conflict, among second-generation Asian American and native-born European American emerging adults.

These are important populations to better understand. Emerging adulthood (e.g., ages 18–25; Arnett, 2000) is a developmental period characterized by self-focus, identity exploration, and a search for identity-based work in the United States (Arnett, 2000; Jensen, 2010). As emerging adulthood gains prominence in the psychological literature, the United States is simultaneously experiencing...
record increases in immigration. Second-generation Asian Americans are among the ethnic minority youth from immigrant families who now comprise 22% of emerging adults in the United States (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). Asian Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group. The onset of many psychological disorders (i.e., depression) also coincides with this developmental phase (Hwang, Chun, Takeuchi, Myers, & Siddarth, 2005); thus, another reason to study this important life stage is so that research findings can potentially inform mental health interventions.

These populations allow for an important comparison, even though ethnicity and immigrant status are conflated, as they often are in reality. The populations differ in both the strength of family assistance attitudes and in their sense of self relative to others (e.g., self-construal; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Ong & Phinney, 2002). Native-born European Americans are described as having a more independent self-construal than Asian Americans (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Okazaki, 1997); they also hold weaker family assistance attitudes than Asian Americans (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). As such, we can test self-construal as an underlying explanation for observed population differences in family assistance attitudes.

Understanding Family Assistance Attitudes

Family assistance attitudes are the beliefs, including self-expectations and perceived importance of helping, respecting, and contributing to the family (Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). The definition includes “self-expectations” to capture thoughts about what one ought to do; we wanted to avoid using the word “obligation” because it carries a negative connotation. The definition also includes attitudes about the importance of family assistance, as opposed to feelings of importance.

Population Differences

Researchers have demonstrated that Asian American (e.g., Chinese and Filipino) and Latin American (e.g., Mexican, Central, and South American) adolescents hold stronger family assistance values in comparison with their European American peers (Fuligni et al., 1999). In a sample of over 800 high school students, the ethnic differences in family assistance attitudes were large effects and consistent across the youths’ generation status, gender, and socioeconomic background.

Attitudes Versus Behaviors

Actual family assistance seems to be ethnically patterned, as well. For example, Orellana (2001) discussed how grade-school aged Mexican and Central American immigrant children living in California work every day as cultural and linguistic brokers between their homes and the outside world. In another study, first- and second-generation Mexican and Chinese American adolescents spent more time actually helping their families than their peers from European American backgrounds (Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). It is important to remember, however, that family assistance attitudes and behaviors do not correspond perfectly. Juang and Cookston (2009) followed Chinese American adolescents across 2 years and found that family assistance attitudes remained stable whereas family assistance behavior decreased.

Relevance to Self-Construal

Are second-generation Asian Americans’ greater family assistance attitudes explained by a stronger interdependent self-construal or by a weaker independent self-construal relative to native-born European Americans? Markus and Kitayama (1991) have described the values of autonomy and relatedness as differentially weighed across Western and Asian cultures, respectively. For example, an independent self-construal reflects an emphasis on self-reliance, separateness, and uniqueness of the individual and is predominant in many European American communities. On the other hand, an interdependent self-construal reflects an emphasis on social relations and connectedness with others, which is predominant in many Asian American and other ethnic minority communities (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Although presented as binaries, these are orthogonal constructs (Singelis, 1994). Asian Americans who are born to immigrant parents, but raised and socialized in schools and other mainstream contexts are exposed to two sets of normative expectations.
around family assistance (Giguère, LaLonde, & Liu, 2010). As bicultural individuals, second-generation Asian Americans may demonstrate both high independent and interdependent self-construals. Native-born European Americans, on the other hand, are high on independence and low on interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, population differences in family assistance attitudes may be explained by variation in interdependent, as opposed to independent, self-construal.

Consequences for Mental Health and Well-Being

In contrast to media portrayals, researchers have discovered that strong family assistance values among ethnic minority immigrant youth are associated with decreasing risk for negative mental health consequences. In a longitudinal study of Chinese American adolescents, higher levels of family assistance importance and self-expectations, as well as actual family helping behavior, were associated with decreasing depressive symptoms (Juang & Cookston, 2009).

We wanted to examine the influence of family assistance values on a mental health risk factor from a comparative perspective. We used family cultural conflict (FCC) to gauge perceptions of problematic family relations in the study. FCC is the disruption of family relationships as a result of different parental and child goals and cultural values (Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980; Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). Family cultural conflict has been linked to greater psychological distress among Asian American college students (Lee & Liu, 2001) and to increased depression symptoms among first- and second-generation Southeast Asian American adolescents (Ying & Han, 2007).

Fuligni and his colleagues (1999) have already demonstrated that greater family assistance attitudes among both Chinese American and European American adolescents are associated with closer family relationships. However, these associations may differ in the emerging adult life phase. There is scant literature on family assistance attitudes among emerging adults, with one notable exception. In a longitudinal study that followed Asian American and European American youth from high school to their early 20s, Fuligni (2007) described greater attitudinal endorsement of cultural traditions of family assistance, support, and respect among Asian Americans (particularly Filipino Americans) compared with their peers from European backgrounds. This difference continued even as these youth entered into a new life phase.

These population differences may also be found in families’ expectations for the emerging adults to help the family. Autonomy and independence are emphasized in most middle-class European American families (Collins & Steinberg, 2006), so these families may have lower expectations for family assistance from their 20-year-old sons and daughters. As such, the native-born European American emerging adult who has few self-expectations to assist the family may not experience FCC, because the family- and self-expectations are congruent (Ong & Phinney, 2002). On the other hand, Asian American families highly value and expect family assistance (i.e., filial piety; Juang & Cookston, 2009). Therefore, a second-generation Asian American with low expectations of family assistance may experience greater FCC, compared with an individual with high self-expectations. Therefore, we expected increasing family assistance attitudes to be associated with decreases in FCC among second-generation Asian Americans; however, we expected this relationship to be weaker among native-born European Americans.

We examined population differences in family assistance attitudes among second-generation Asian American and nonimmigrant European American college students. We expected second-generation Asian Americans to endorse the importance of and self-expectations around family assistance more highly than native-born European Americans (Hypothesis 1). We then tested the prediction that increasing family assistance attitudes would be more highly associated with reduced frequency of FCC among second-generation Asian American than native-born European American college students (Hypothesis 2). Last, we tested interdependent cultural self-construal as an explanation for Hypothesis 2 (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants

Almost seven-hundred (N = 671) participants (M age = 19.08 years; 58% female) from a large, public university on the West Coast took part in our study in exchange for course
credit or for $10. All European American (N = 343; 56% female) and Asian American (N = 328; 60% female) participants were born in the United States. For European Americans, both parents were born in the United States. All Asian Americans were the children of immigrants from Asia.

**Procedure**

Participants completed the study on computers in a lab. Participants answered a series of questionnaires, which were randomized in their order of presentation. The results reported in this article represent data from a portion of the survey.

**Measures**

**Family Assistance (FA; Measure of Adolescents’ Attitudes Toward Family Assistance, Fuligni & Tseng, 2008).** The FA scale assesses one’s perceived self-expectations around currently helping the family (e.g., current assistance; FA-current), the importance of respecting elders (e.g., respect for family; FA-respect), and the importance of helping the family in the future (future support; FA-future).

The Current Assistance subscale is a 12-item measure of beliefs about how often one should spend time and help the family on a daily basis. In response to the prompt, “How often do you think you should do the following things,” items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Items include, “Spend time with your family on weekends,” “Do things together with your brothers and sisters,” and “Run errands that the family needs done.” The scale was reliable (α = .83) across ethnic groups; α = .86 for European Americans and α = .81 for second-generation Asian American.

The Respect for Family subscale is a seven-item measure assessing views about respecting authority as well as views toward sacrifice and considering the needs–wishes of the family. In response to the prompt, “In general, how important is it to you that you . . .,” items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). Items include, “Treat your parents with great respect,” “Do well for the sake of your family,” and “Follow your parents’ advice about choosing a job or major in college.” The subscale was reliable (α = .82) across ethnic groups; α = .85 for European Americans and α = .76 for second-generation Asian American.

The Future Support subscale is a six-item measure of attitudes toward types of assistance that may be provided to one’s family in the future (adulthood). In response to the prompt, “How important is it to you that in the future you . . .,” items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). Items include, “Help your parents financially in the future,” “Have your parents live with you when they get older,” and “Help take care of your brothers and sisters in the future.” The subscale was reliable (α = .82) across ethnic groups; α = .68 for European Americans and α = .72 for second-generation Asian American.

**FCC (Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Synder, 1991).** Family cultural conflict was measured using a subscale of the Hispanic Stress Inventory (Cervantes et al., 1991). The FCC scale is a five-item measure of how frequently conflict with family occurs. Participants rated how often an event occurred on a 3-point scale, ranging from 1 (hardly ever or never) to 3 (often). Samples items include, “Your personal goals have been in conflict with your family” and “Because of the lack of family unity, you have felt lonely and isolated.” The alpha reliability in this study was α = .68 across ethnic groups; α = .66 for European Americans and α = .68 for second-generation Asian Americans.

**Self-Construal Scale (SCS; Singelis, 1994).** The SCS is a 24-item measure of independent and interdependent self-construal based on the conceptualization of the self in Markus and Kitayama (1991). Items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The scale consists of two 12-item subscales, Independence and Interdependence. Samples items from the Independence subscale include, “Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me” and “I act the same way no matter who I am with.” Sample items from the Interdependence subscale include, “My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me” and “It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group.” The alpha reliability in this study was α = .71 for the Interdependence subscale, and α = .73 for the Independence subscale among cross-ethnic groups (e.g., α = .69 and α = .72 for European Americans and α = .71 for second-generation Asian Americans).
Americans and $\alpha = .73$ and $\alpha = .73$ for second-generation Asian Americans, respectively).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports the mean levels of the demographic characteristics and scores on individual differences scales. Second-generation Asian American reported lower subjective social (SSS; a measure of socioeconomic status) status and greater FCC than native-born European Americans. Consistent with past evidence, second-generation Asian Americans rated themselves less independent and more interdependent in their self-construal than native-born European Americans.

Correlation Analyses

Bivariate correlations between the demographics, FCC, and individual difference measures are reflected in Table 2. There is no evidence of multicollinearity between the variables of interest. For both groups, all three FA subscales were moderately, positively correlated with interdependent self-construal. For second-generation Asian American, all three FA subscales were significantly negatively correlated with FCC. For native-born European Americans, however, only FA-respect was significantly negatively correlated with FCC.

Hypothesis 1: Second-generation Asian American emerging adults have stronger attitudes about the importance of and self-expectation to assist their families than native-born European American participants.

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted using population to predict each of the three FA subscales separately. After controlling for the influence of demographics (e.g., sex, age, SES) and self-construal (e.g., interdependence, independence), we found that second-generation Asian Americans rated family respect ($B = 0.17$), $t(661) = 4.63, p < .001$; future family assistance ($B = 0.27$), $t(661) = 7.84, p < .001$; and self-expectations of current family assistance ($B = 0.10$), $t(661) = 2.52, p = .01$, as more important than native European Americans.

Hypothesis 2: Family assistance attitudes are more protective against FCC for second-generation Asian Americans than for native-born European American emerging adult peers.

To establish an empirical link between attitudes toward family assistance and participants’ mental health, we conducted hierarchical linear regressions using family assistance attitudes as the independent variable and self-reported FCC as the dependent variable. We expected greater

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics Stratified by Population ($N = 671$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Native-born European Americans ($n = 343$)</th>
<th>Second-generation Asian American ($n = 328$)</th>
<th>$t$ test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ $SD$</td>
<td>$M$ $SD$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>19.00 (1.03)</td>
<td>19.16 (1.07)</td>
<td>−1.99**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.56 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.60 (0.49)</td>
<td>−1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>6.66 (1.51)</td>
<td>6.07 (1.54)</td>
<td>4.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA-current</td>
<td>3.37 (0.63)</td>
<td>3.54 (0.63)</td>
<td>−3.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA-respect</td>
<td>3.64 (0.76)</td>
<td>3.94 (0.58)</td>
<td>−5.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA-future</td>
<td>2.87 (0.66)</td>
<td>3.41 (0.75)</td>
<td>−9.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent self-construal</td>
<td>5.17 (0.74)</td>
<td>4.95 (0.75)</td>
<td>3.90***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent self-construal</td>
<td>4.79 (0.70)</td>
<td>5.04 (0.70)</td>
<td>−4.67***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCC</td>
<td>1.41 (0.41)</td>
<td>1.65 (0.47)</td>
<td>−6.95***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Sex: male = 0, female = 1. Population: Native-born European American = 0, Second-generation Asian American = 1. Subjective social status = SSS; family assistance–current assistance = FA-current; family assistance–family respect = FA-respect; family assistance–future assistance = FA-future; family cultural conflict = FCC.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.  
family assistance attitudes to be associated with decreasing FCC among second-generation Asian Americans, more than for native-born European Americans.

Table 3 represents the results from the last step of three separate hierarchical linear regressions. In each regression, we first controlled for the influence of demographic variables on frequency of FCC (i.e., Step 1). Next, we tested for the influence of individual differences scales on family assistance attitudes (i.e., Step 2). In Step 3, we regressed the relevant subscale of family assistance on FCC. Step 4, we tested the independent influence of population and respect for family cultural conflict. Finally, in Step 5 (see Table 3), we tested the joint effects of each of the three family assistance subscales and population by testing their interaction terms. The interaction terms between population and current family assistance (B = −0.56), t(660) = −2.64, p = .01, and between population and respect for family assistance (B = −2.19), t(660) = −2.19, p = .03, were significant.

In Figure 1, we graphed the interaction using a simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991), where current family assistance values were 1 SD below and above the mean. For second-generation Asian Americans, increases in current family assistance attitudes were associated with decreases in FCC (B = −0.57), t(326) = −7.78, p < .001. However, there was no association among native-born European Americans (B = −0.01), t(341) = −0.04, p = .97. The

Table 3
The Interaction Between Population and Future Subscales on Family Cultural Conflict Using Linear Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>FA-current</th>
<th></th>
<th>FA-respect</th>
<th></th>
<th>FA-future</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.29***</td>
<td>(.37)</td>
<td>1.50***</td>
<td>(.35)</td>
<td>1.46***</td>
<td>(.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSS</td>
<td>−0.03**</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>−0.03**</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
<td>−0.04***</td>
<td>(.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA subscale</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
<td>−0.12**</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>−0.08*</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>0.71***</td>
<td>(.19)</td>
<td>0.68***</td>
<td>(.20)</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA subscale *</td>
<td>−0.14**</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>−0.11*</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
interaction between population and respect for family attitudes was difficult to interpret because neither the slopes for native-born European Americans ($B = -0.12$, $t(341) = 0.43$, $p = .67$), nor for second-generation Asian Americans ($B = -0.23$, $t(326) = 1.09$, $p = .28$), were statistically different from zero.

**Hypothesis 3:** Differences in interdependent self-construal explain population differences in family assistance attitudes.

We tested whether differences in independent self-construal serve as an underlying mechanism explaining stronger family assistance attitudes among second-generation Asian American than U.S.-born European Americans. We conducted mediational analyses. As predicted, we found that interdependence partially explained differences in all three subscales of family assistance attitudes, as detailed in Figures 2–4 and below. We also tested independent self-construal as a mediator to rule out the alternative hypothesis. In each analysis, we incorporated a bootstrapping mediational model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with 10,000 samples.

**FA-Current**

As shown in Figure 2a, being second-generation Asian American was associated with greater interdependence, $B = 0.25$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$ (Step 1). Higher interdependence predicted higher agreement with current family assistance attitudes, $B = 0.28$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$ (Step 2). Being second-generation Asian American was significantly associated with increasing FA-current attitudes, $B = 0.17$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$ (Step 3). The relationship between population and current family assistance attitudes was significantly reduced when controlling for interdependence, $B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$ (Step 4). As predicted, interdependence was a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero (0.04, 0.11).

As shown in Figure 2b, independent self-construal also mediated population differences in current family assistance attitudes. Being second-generation Asian American was associated with less independence, $B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$ (Step 1). Higher independence pre-
dicted higher agreement with current family assistance attitudes, $B = 0.10, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ (Step 2). Being second-generation Asian American was significantly associated with higher ratings on FA-current, $B = 0.17, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 3). The relationship between population and current family assistance attitudes was significantly changed when controlling for independence, $B = 0.19, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 4). Independent self-construal was a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero ($-0.04, -0.01$).

**FA-Respect**

As shown in Figure 3, being second-generation Asian American was associated with greater interdependent self-construal, $B = 0.25, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 1). Higher interdependence predicted higher agreement with family respect, $B = 0.41, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ (Step 2). Being second-generation Asian Americans was significantly correlated with higher ratings on FA-respect, $B = 0.30, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 3). The relationship between population and respect for family attitudes was significantly reduced when controlling for interdependence, $B = 0.19, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 4). Interdependence was a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero ($0.06, 0.16$). Independent self-construal, however, did not significantly mediate population differences in family respect attitudes. Independence was not a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval included zero ($-0.04, 0.001$).

**FA-Future**

As shown in Figure 4, being second-generation Asian American was associated with greater interdependent self-construal, $B = 0.25, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ (Step 1). Higher interdependence predicted higher agreement with the importance of future family assistance attitudes, $B = 0.38, SE = 0.04, p < .001$ (Step 2). Being second-
generation Asian American was significantly associated with higher attitude ratings of FA-Future, \( B = 0.53, SE = 0.05, p < .001 \) (Step 3). The relationship between population and future family assistance attitudes was significantly reduced when controlling for interdependent self-construal, \( B = 0.44, SE = 0.05, p < .001 \) (Step 4). Interdependence was a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not include zero (0.05, 0.14). Independent self-construal, however, did not significantly mediate population difference in future family assistance attitudes. Independence was not a significant mediator because its 95% bias-corrected confidence interval included zero (−0.01, 0.02). In summary, interdependence partially explained population difference in all three types of family assistance, whereas independence only significantly mediated population differences in one type.

**Discussion**

In a comparative analysis of nonimmigrant European American and second-generation Asian American college students, we found the latter group held stronger attitudes about current family assistance (i.e., self-expectations of spending time with family), respect for family (i.e., the importance of following your parents’ advice about choosing friends, a job, or a college major), and future family assistance (i.e., the importance of future financial assistance to your parents, living in the proximity of parents). We replicated earlier results. It is important to note that we also demonstrated that the cultural context of family assistance attitudes is important for understanding their influence on FCC, a mental health risk factor. Increasing self-expectations of helping the family were associated with declines in the self-reported frequency of FCC.
among second-generation Asian Americans but not among native-born European Americans emerging adults. These findings differ from past research, which has demonstrated psychological benefits with increasingly strong family assistance attitudes in both Chinese American and European American adolescents (Fuligni et al., 1999). One possibility for the inconsistency between our European American data and findings from the past is that family expectations around family assistance may decrease as native-born European Americans transition to emerging adulthood. However, this is speculative without longitudinal evidence.

Our findings also provide a counterpoint to other research, which suggests that youth who take on adult responsibilities prematurely (i.e., parentalization) have lower self-concepts (Earley & Cushway, 2002; Godsall, Jurkovic, Emshoff, Anderson, & Stanwyck, 2004) and more frequent somatic problems (Johnston, 1990). These studies were conducted in difficult home environments, such as families where parents suffered from mental (i.e., substance abuse) and physical distress (i.e., cancer). As such, their relevance to many ethnic minority or immigrant families may be somewhat limited.

A second contribution of this article to the literature is that we found some preliminary evidence that one mechanism for group differences in family assistance attitudes is interdependent self-construal. On the other hand, independent self-construal did not mediate ethnic differences in two of three subscales of family assistance. This evidence clarifies that second-generation Asian Americans' greater attitudes toward family assistance are not explained by lower independence values but by higher interdependence values.

Despite these empirical observations, an obvious limitation to this study was its cross-sectional design. Using a longitudinal design in the future would allow us to have more confidence in the causal order of variables, particularly for mediational analyses. Moreover, our sample was limited to college students. By selecting college students, many of whom live away from their parents and siblings, our results may be too conservative. Future research should replicate these findings with more socioeconomically and residentially diverse samples. Lastly, all constructs were measured by using self-report data. Demonstrating converging evidence with multiple types of measurement (e.g., self-report and psychophysiological stress data) would add greater validity to our conclusions.

These findings have clinical implications. They suggest that ethnic minority immigrant youth may not be so much burdened by family assistance self-expectations but rather protected from at least one mental health risk factor. Perhaps measuring family assistance values in primary care settings will be a useful screen for the mental health risk factor of family conflict. On the prevention side, reinforcing and validating family assistance values among this diverse group may support them as well, as these youth are often well-aware that their values are not the same as their U.S.-born European American peers.

Finally, the evidence also sheds light on the issue of mental health disparities. Native-born Asian Americans, most of whom are second-generation, suffer from a higher lifetime prevalence of mental health disorders than their European American peers (24% vs. 20%; Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Kin, & Walters, 2005; Takeuchi et al., 2007). There is a dearth of research on the psychology of ethnic minority, second-generation immigrants that explains this disparity. These data explore how family assistance attitudes which may be incongruent with the family’s expectations may play a role in the disparity. Family assistance attitudes are an example of the unique stressors these youth experience in growing up with dual, and sometimes competing, sets of values at home and beyond.

References


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