

Relationship of Recalled Parenting Style to Self-Perception in Korean American College Students

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ABSTRACT. The authors examined the relationship of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles and the number of years in the United States with self-perception (academic competence, morality, and self-reliance) as recalled by Korean American college students ($N = 144$). Authoritative parenting behaviors were most common in Korean American families, followed by authoritarian behaviors, with permissive behaviors a distant 3rd. Authoritative parenting styles and the number of years lived in the United States were predictive of higher academic competence. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were predictive of lower self-reliance, whereas number of years lived in the United States was related to higher self-reliance. Those findings provide partial support for generalizing D. Baumrind's (1971) model of parenting styles to Korean American families, and the findings demonstrate the importance of considering acculturation issues in parenting studies.

Key words: Korean American, parenting style, self-perception

RESEARCHERS HAVE SUPPORTED the idea that parenting style has an impact on child and adolescent development (Baumrind, 1991b). Parenting style is related to academic achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992), psychosocial functioning (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991), substance abuse (Baumrind, 1991a), and morality (Boyes & Allen, 1993). However, there are several questions and limitations concerning this well-established line of research as it applies to Asian Americans. First, there is an inadequate base of research on Asian American parenting styles and their relationship to various developmental outcomes. Second, in the few existing studies on Asian Americans no considera-

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tion has been given to within-group differences, particularly ethnic variations, or to the acculturative changes over time. Third, the question of the cross-cultural validity of the parenting typology needs further study. Finally, the range of age of those studied needs to be extended beyond childhood and early adolescence and into late adolescence and young adulthood so that the latent effects of parenting on developmental outcomes can be examined. Our purpose in this study was to address those limitations.

Parenting style is a pattern of attitudes that parents express toward their children. It differs in the ways and degrees to which parents convey their values, behaviors, and standards to their children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). As defined by Baumrind (1971, 1991b), one can assess parenting styles by determining the amount of nurturance in child-rearing interactions and the amount of parental control over the child's activities and behaviors to appropriately classify that style into one of four types—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting–neglecting. Authoritative parents demonstrate high levels of both responsiveness and controlling behavior. They respect their child's individuality, hold high expectations, and create an environment of being consistent, affectionate, responsive, and supportive. They also are controlling in an age-appropriate manner and balance their demands with explanations for standards of behavior and warmth (Baumrind, 1989). Children reared by authoritative parents have the highest levels of competence, achievement, social development, and self-perception (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Lamborn et al., 1991).

Authoritarian parents show high levels of controlling behavior but low levels of responsiveness. They exercise firm control over their children and set strict standards of conduct. They expect absolute obedience and deference to parental authority and allow minimal personal freedom and autonomy. They also demonstrate little emotional warmth and responsiveness to their children (Baumrind, 1991b). Although children reared in that manner have low levels of school misconduct and drug use, and are obedient and conforming (Baumrind, 1991a; Lamborn et al., 1991), they also suffer from low achievement, poor self-perception, and high levels of psychological and somatic distress (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

Permissive parents exercise minimal authority and control over their children and fail to define appropriate limits and standards of acceptable behavior. The permissive–nondirective parents are responsive and warm, whereas the rejecting–neglecting parents are neither responsive nor demanding (Baumrind, 1989). In general, children raised by permissive parents tend to have poor academic competence and achievement, high involvement in delinquency, and low psychological functioning (Baumrind, 1991a; Lamborn et al., 1991). Children from neglectful families in particular tend to have the poorest developmental outcomes (Steinberg et al., 1994).

Baumrind (1991b) noted that although there is a substantial base of conceptually and methodologically sophisticated research on the relationship of parent-

ing style to adolescent development for middle-class European Americans, “similar high-quality research for ethnic families of color is virtually absent” (p. 746). This is particularly true for Asian Americans, who are plagued by stereotypic and superficial understandings on the basis of the model minority image (Cocking & Greenfield, 1994). Given variations among cultural, political, historical, and migration patterns in that population, failure to examine ethnic group differences perpetuates the myth of homogeneity. In one study in which ethnic variations among Asian American adolescents were considered, significant differences emerged. Dornbusch, Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, and Chen (1990) found unique patterns of family decision making when Vietnamese adolescents were considered separately from other Asian Americans. On the basis of the findings of their study, the authors recommended an ethnic-specific approach in future research on Asian Americans. Although others have echoed this need (Baumrind, 1991b; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990), it remains largely unaddressed, particularly for Korean Americans. Within the Asian American population, Korean Americans are one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic groups, with a 125.3% increase during the 1980s (Min, 1995). Despite that growth, there are few studies of Korean American families and adolescent development (Uba, 1994).

Among various developmental outcomes examined in relationship to parenting, self-perception is one of the most important indicators of overall adolescent development (Klein, O’Bryant, & Hopkins, 1996). Self-perception is defined as an individual’s own global judgment about self-worth (Neemann & Harter, 1986) and refers to the process of becoming aware of one’s quality, relationships, events, or capability (Chapline, 1985). It is gradually formed through feedback from significant others within one’s environment, particularly parents (Beane & Lipka, 1984). Self-perception is a multidimensional construct that has been defined to include specific dimensions of self-reliance, academic competence, and morality (Greenberger, 1984; Hopkins & Klein, 1993; Lamborn et al., 1991; Neemann & Harter, 1986).

In applying the parenting style theory to Asian Americans, Chao (1994) argued that the concept of authoritarian parenting is particularly problematic as applied to Asian Americans because the high level of control in authoritarian parenting may have a different meaning because of cultural differences. Unlike European American children, Chinese American offspring may not interpret authoritarian behaviors of strictness, control, insistence on a strict code of conduct, and lack of overt expression of warmth as lack of love. In fact, those behaviors tend to be viewed as an expression of love rather than a sign of rejection by Chinese Americans.

Although the detrimental effects of authoritarian parenting are not as evident in Asian Americans as in European Americans and other minority groups, the overall pattern of the relationship between parenting style and adolescent development is similar, particularly with regard to the benefits of authoritative parent-

ing. Across racial and ethnic groups, adolescents raised by authoritative parents reported higher levels of self-reliance and school performance, fewer psychological problems, and less involvement in delinquency in comparison with those from nonauthoritative homes (Dornbusch et al., 1990; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, and Dornbusch, 1991). However, the benefits were most pronounced for European American, middle-class, and intact households (Steinberg et al., 1991).

In light of the inconsistencies and limitations in the existing research on parenting style and its impact on psychosocial development of Asian American adolescents, our purpose in this study was to examine the relationship of recalled parenting style to self-perception in Korean American college students, taking into account the acculturative dimension of the number of years in the United States. In doing so, we extended existing research and theory in several ways. First, we addressed the need for more ethnic-specific inquiry and examined within-group differences among Asian Americans, specifically Korean Americans. Second, we further tested the validity of Baumrind's (1971) framework of parenting style by determining to what extent the findings of existing studies on the relationship between parenting style and adolescent self-perception are replicated in Korean American college students. Third, we extended the age range of existing studies on the relationship between parenting style and self-perception beyond childhood and early adolescence to young adulthood and examined the latent effects of parenting style on self-perception.

Method

Participants

A total of 144 Korean American college students, 59 men and 85 women, participated in this study. They were recruited from Korean-language classes at various institutions in Southern California (46 from a large private university, 59 from a large public university, and 39 from a community college). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 24 years old, with a mean age of 20.4 years. In terms of generational status, 47% were foreign-born and 53% were native-born, with an average of 18 years in the United States. Most of the respondents (79%) came from intact families; the remainder came from divorced (10%), remarried (5%), or widowed (6%) families.

Self-report of family income and parents' level of education revealed that the majority of students came from middle to upper-middle socioeconomic classes. Forty-eight percent of the respondents reported annual family incomes in excess of \$60,000, 22.9% reported income between \$40,000 and \$60,000, 16% reported income between \$20,000 and \$39,000, and 10.4% reported earning less than \$20,000. In terms of parental educational levels, 62.5% of the participants report-

ed that their mothers completed 4 or more years of postsecondary education and 70% reported that their fathers had similar levels of education. The relatively high socioeconomic status and low proportion of single-parent families observed in this study are consistent with census data on Asians and Pacific Islanders living in the United States (Barringer, Gardner, & Levin, 1993).

Instruments

The survey instrument was divided into three sections. The first section contained demographic questions on age, gender, family income, ethnic background, years in the United States, and family structure (intact, divorced, remarried, or other). The second section contained a measure of parenting style, and the third section contained three measures of self-perception (self-reliance, academic competence, and morality).

Parenting style. We measured the independent variable of parenting style by using the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) developed by Buri (1991). The PAQ, which is based on Baumrind's typology of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles, contains 30 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale. This particular instrument was selected because of its psychometric properties and appropriateness for use with the intended population of this study. The PAQ was developed specifically for use with the college-age population in reporting parental behavior. Participants were instructed to respond to the items on the basis of their overall perceptions of recalled parental behavior. Three separate scores (ranging from 10 to 50) were derived for each parenting subscale. The PAQ's reliability is reported to range from .74 to .87 for internal consistency and .77 to .92 for test-retest. Coefficient alpha for this sample ranged from .72 to .86. The PAQ also has strong discriminant and criterion-related validity (Buri). Investigators also have used the PAQ with adolescent and young adult populations to examine the relationship between recalled parenting behavior and self-perception (Klein et al., 1996), academic achievement (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000), self-esteem in Korean Americans (Kim, 1997), and coping styles in Chinese adolescents (Wei, 1998).

Self-perception. We measured the dependent variable of self-perception by using a combined assessment of self-reliance, academic competence, and morality. These dimensions were selected because of their use in previous research on self-perception. To measure self-reliance, we used the self-reliance subscale from Greenberger's Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (Form D; Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975). This scale, which was used in previous research by Steinberg et al. (1991) and Lamborn et al. (1991), consists of 10 items on a 4-point Likert-type scale and assesses dependence on others, sense of control over one's life, and initiative. The scale is comprised of such items as, "It's not very

practical to try to decide what kind of job you want because that depends so much on other people,” and “It’s best to agree with others rather than say what you really think if it will keep the peace.” The reported alpha coefficient for this scale is .89; for the participants in this study it was .87.

To measure academic competence and morality, we used two subscales from the Self-Perception Profile for College Students developed by Neemann and Harter (1986). Each subscale consists of 4 items with reported alpha coefficients of .84 for academic competence and .86 for morality. The alphas for the current sample were .87 for academic competence, and .80 for morality. The academic competence item assesses student’s perception of actual schoolwork and the feelings of competency that he or she feels by accomplishing the academic work. Sample items from that subscale include, “I feel confident that I am mastering my course-work,” or “I do not feel so confident.” The morality items ask respondents to rate the extent to which they view their behavior as moral such as, “I live up to my own moral standards,” or “I have trouble living up to my moral standards.” Respondents were instructed to rate each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale on the basis of how well each statement reflected how they viewed themselves.

Procedure

We recruited participants from Korean-language classes at several colleges and universities in Southern California because most of the students in those classes are from Korean American backgrounds. We contacted instructors of Korean-language classes to obtain their cooperation in administering the survey in their classes. After obtaining their permission, the investigators went to the classes and described the nature and purpose of the study as well as the rights of participants in accordance with American Psychological Association ethical guidelines for conducting research (American Psychological Association, 1992). The surveys, which took about 20 min to complete, were distributed and collected within the same class period. As an incentive for participation, a pen was attached to each survey for the participants to keep after completion of the survey.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the major variables of parenting style, years in the United States, and self-perception (academic competence, morality, and self-reliance) are presented in Table 1. Authoritative parenting had the highest mean rating, followed by authoritarian and permissive parenting.

Authoritative parenting style was significantly and positively correlated with academic competence and morality; whereas authoritarian parenting was significantly and negatively correlated with academic competence. Years in the United

States was significantly correlated with self-reliance. Those patterns of correlations were reflected in the subsequent regression analyses.

We examined the relationship of parenting style and years in the United States to self-perception more explicitly by performing three separate multiple regressions, one for each of the self-perception variables of academic competence, morality, and self-reliance. Parenting style was related to academic competence, $F(4, 139) = 5.52, p = .01, R^2 = .14$, and to self-reliance, $F(4, 139) = 10.51, p = .01, R^2 = .23$, but not to morality. For academic competence, authoritative parenting and years in the United States were positively correlated, whereas for self-reliance, both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were negatively correlated (see Table 2). However, number of years in the United States was positively correlated with self-reliance. The relatively low R^2 values for both models suggest that although parenting styles and years in the United States do predict academic competence and self-reliance, other factors may play a more important role in accounting for variability in these characteristics.

Discussion

Our purpose in the present study was to obtain a better understanding of parenting practices of Korean immigrant parents and to examine the relationship of perceived parenting style to self-perception among Korean American college students. The findings of this study provide a more nuanced understanding of patterns of parenting behavior in Korean American parents and their relationship to self-perception in their children. Different styles of parenting appear to have varying effects on academic competence and self-reliance. First, the finding that authoritative parenting was the highest rated parenting style contradicts the results of the majority of previous studies on Korean and Asian Americans. Although there are a few studies to the contrary, the bulk of existing research on parenting practices of Asian Americans indicate that authoritarian parenting behaviors are most common (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Kim, 1997; Lin & Fu, 1990; Steinberg et al., 1991). One reason for the contradictory finding of this study may be changes in parenting practices over time with increasing exposure to the host culture. Lin and Fu found that on the dimension of parental control, the scores of Chinese immigrant mothers was between those of Chinese parents in Hong Kong and European American mothers.

We found mixed results when examining the main research question of the relationship of parenting style to the three self-perception variables. For academic competence, only authoritative parenting was predictive. The benefit of that style of parenting is well documented across racial groups, including Asian Americans (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991). That result suggests that authoritative parenting is meaningful and culturally relevant as a construct and that its positive impact on academic competence extends to young adulthood. However, because the overall percentages of variance in academic competence

accounted for by parenting style and by the number of years were relatively low, other factors may have greater explanatory utility. One such factor that may be more specific to Korean and other Asian American adolescents is the amount of time devoted to study-related activities. Sue and Zane (1985) found that Chinese American college students spent more time studying and took fewer classes per term to attain higher academic achievement. Such adaptive strategies may have a more direct relationship to self-perception of ability to perform academic work.

In contrast to academic competence, which was positively correlated with authoritative parenting, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were negatively correlated with self-reliance. This result suggests that overly controlling or indulgent parenting practices contribute to lower self-reliance in young adults. In contrast to substantial evidence in favor of the relationship between parenting style and morality in European American adolescents (Boyes & Allen, 1993; Santrock, 1996), we did not find such relationship in our study. This result suggests that factors other than parenting style play a significant role in shaping morality for this population.

Despite the findings of this study that are consistent with the existing literature on the relationship of parenting style to self-perception, they provide only partial evidence to support the validity of Baumrind's (1971, 1989, 1991a, 1991b) parenting typology. For example, it appears that the benefits of authoritative parenting are limited to academic competence and are unrelated to morality or self-reliance, whereas the detrimental impact of authoritarian and permissive parenting is limited to self-reliance. Further research is indicated to better understand the culturally specific conceptions and interpretations of parenting behavior and their latent impact on self-perception of Korean American college students.

The relationship of the number of years in the United States to academic competence and self-reliance is suggestive of an acculturation effect occurring over time. The positive relationship between academic competence and the number of years in the United States may have been caused by the combined impact of increasing fluency in English and greater familiarity with the American educational culture. Because academic competence is defined as belief in one's ability to accomplish academic work, it is likely that language and comfort with the host culture and its institutions would contribute positively. The significant relationship between self-reliance and number of years in the United States is also understandable given the greater emphasis on individualism, independence, and autonomy in American culture than in Korean culture. With increasing exposure, Korean American college students may internalize those values, thereby becoming more self-reliant. These findings suggest that the acculturative effects associated with sustained interaction with the host culture contribute to positive self-perception.

Limitations of the current study include the relatively small number of participants and a limited sample of college students. The present sample size was sufficient for the number of dependent variables and was appropriate to a study

of this scope, but because a vast majority of Korean American adolescents continue on to attend college, future studies should be based on a larger and more diverse sample. Another limitation of the study was the use of the young adults' perceptions of parenting behavior. However, the use of such data to determine parenting style has been well established in the existing research literature (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991), and the findings of those studies are consistent with others that have used parent self-report. Furthermore, Steinberg et al. (1991) argued that, "if a child experiences his or her parents as authoritative (regardless of how parents may characterize themselves, or how they may appear to outside observers), then this is what they in fact are, at least as far as the child's psychological development is concerned" (p. 31). Nevertheless, parents need to be included in future studies so that the findings of this and other studies relying on perceived parenting behaviors can be confirmed and extended and the interrelationships among a wider array of self-perception variables can be examined.

Our modest goal in this study was to expand a well-established branch of developmental research and to draw attention to the importance of considering cultural variations. In doing so, we have provided a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between parenting style and self-perception and have illustrated the need to consider within-group variations, such as number of years in the United States. In general, the findings of this study extend the benefits of authoritative parenting and the deficits of authoritarian and permissive parenting in influencing self-perception to Korean American college students as well.

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