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Kimberly Doe

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY  
School of Behavioral Health  
in conjunction with the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies

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Intergenerational Congruence in Chinese American Young Adults

by

Kimberly Doe

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A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Marital and Family Therapy

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September 2014

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this dissertation in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ABSTRACT

Intergenerational Congruence in Chinese American Young Adults

by

Kimberly Doe

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Marital and Family Therapy  
Loma Linda University, September 2014  
Dr. Curtis A. Fox, Chairperson

Chinese American families are often underrepresented within the family therapy literature. This grounded theory study used a symbolic interaction framework to understand how second generation young adults locate themselves within the larger cultural context to construct an individual ideology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese American young adults between the ages of 18-24. Family and cultural experiences influences how young adults develop and transition from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood. This study suggests the importance for family therapists to identify Chinese American young adults' experiences and their development to understand how multiple factors impact their construction of "I".

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Purpose**

Research in the field of family therapy has worked to establish a body of literature on healthy family relationships and family functioning. As researchers continue to study and enrich understandings on ways to promote family relationships, attempts are made to acknowledge diverse family compositions. Though, family research has sought to expand knowledge and research there is still a need for literature pertaining to family functioning within minority families, specifically Chinese American families. Key differences among Asian families include: parenting in Asian American families is approached differently as compared to mainstream American families as it involves not only the biological parents but extended family. If children misbehave that reflects negatively on the family as a whole. In Asian culture, success is often measured through the success of children and their accomplishments. Given these and other significant differences, there is much knowledge that is still needed in understanding culture and family relationships from a collectivist perspective.

Asian Americans have been deemed the “model minority” misrepresenting them as being immune from conflicts, mental health illnesses, etc. (Das & Kemp, 1997). There is much to be learned about this population starting with the family unit, their culture and traditional values. With regard to American born Chinese, social and cultural contexts interact to shape values and beliefs. Much of the existing research on family conflict is based upon Anglo families and the factors which impact those relationships may not be relevant to Asian American immigrant families. Asian American first and second

generation immigrants have been socialized between two cultures, their native culture from which they came, and their American culture through which they have assimilated. First and Second generation Asian Americans represent a general term for individuals who have emigrated from any Asian country to the United States. In studying this group, there will be a better understanding as to what best represents the family unit as well as factors that increase conflicts within family systems. Thus, because individual experiences differ depending on various factors that are uniquely meaningful, the current body of literature may not be transferable to Chinese American young adults.

This present research study builds upon the notion that intergenerational congruence in Chinese American families influences parent-child relationships and self-identity. Intergenerational congruence is how well two different generations agree on issues of values, beliefs, behaviors, and cultural perspectives. The degree of agreement between two different generations (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2004) lends itself to levels of congruence. Children are raised in one setting and socialized in another (Morrow, 1989) resulting in such conflicting perspectives between parents and young adults. As a group that lives within two cultures, there is a sense of struggle to maintain what they traditionally know and how they can learn to survive now in the American culture. These struggles appear in intergenerational parent-child relationships and how well the family is able to adapt to changes.

## **Background**

Because cultural context is a major factor in shaping parenting approaches and the relationships that parents assume with their children, it is important to understand how

traditional Asian and American cultures play a part in shaping relationships between first and second or second and third generation Asian American parents and children. This section will begin with an overview of the two cultures and show how they conflict in regards to family functioning and communication. Moreover, this chapter will highlight cultural differences that may influence the development of American born Chinese American young adults and their sense of self.

### *Asian American versus Anglo American Cultural Values*

Whereas Asian American children are taught to behave in ways that bring honor to the family (Das & Kemp, 1997), Anglo Americans are socialized to be independent of one's family. When Asians immigrate to the United States, they seek a better future for their children and expect them to assimilate within the mainstream American lifestyle while maintaining traditional Asian values. As children become more socialized into American culture, they tend to be conflicted which causes frustration and resentment at home where they are not able to voice their concerns. Asian American parents see their children's response and resistance to parental expectations and feel disrespected leading them to feel great shame in their family as a result.

Furthermore, while American children are expected to find their own success, life, and move away from home, Asian American children are also expected to find their own success but remain close to home to take care of their parents for the rest of their lives. Asians tend to be collectivist and there is a sense of community and family from birth through adulthood.

This dissertation study utilizes symbolic interaction to study the meaning and creation of intersections of culture, family communication, and intergenerational congruence. Symbolic interaction is best fitted to this study due to its ability to reflect and understand the role culture plays in family which enhances our concepts of family functioning. As stated before, immigrant families often live between two cultures (Hwang, 2006; Kim, 2011) struggling to find the best fit while maintaining what they already know and what they think they should know.

Moreover, symbolic interaction focuses on how meanings, objects, behaviors are created individually. Every action or behavior represents how we think, feel, or behave. Symbolic interaction works with these meanings to create understanding. With symbolic interaction in Asian American families, one can understand how children and parents see their actions and intentions to improve communication and work through differences in perspectives, culture, and tradition. Thus, using symbolic interaction, the present study studies how family interactions, cultural values, and conflict resolution impact intergenerational congruence within Asian American families through the meaning and intentions behind behaviors, thoughts, and values.

### **Objectives**

This present study was designed to explore the following overarching research question: How does the larger social context impact the experience of intergenerational congruence in Chinese American families in a sample of Asian American young adults between the ages of 18-24? This question was addressed through qualitative interview and a grounded theory approach. In addition, to exploring experiences of intergenerational

congruence, as a family therapist there is an awareness of clinical implications as well as well-being (psychological and physical) that influences development. This study sought to highlight the needs of Chinese American young adults as they exercise autonomy and create their self-identities. This is an important stage in the lives of young adults as they are beginning to cement their place in society. As the landscape of the United States

### **Rationale**

Despite the increasing minority population in the United States and promotion of mental health care, Asian Americans continue to underutilize mental health or family therapy services and this reality lends itself to the gaps in the scholarly literature pertaining to this minority population. Asian Americans tend to underutilize psychological services (Kim & Atkinson, 2002; Kim & Omizo, 2003; Sue, 1975) but, continue to seek advice at the academic counseling center (Kim & Omizo, 2003). It has been seen that Asian Americans would seek treatment only when the symptoms became severe enough due to the social stigmas surrounding psychological centers (Kim & Omizo, 2003). By understanding their culture, family dynamics, and community beliefs, we will be able to work with them to remove some of the stigmas surrounding mental health and stress the importance of mental health and wellness.

Knowing that collectivism is a predominant aspect of Asian culture and being able to work within the family systems will be beneficial by emphasizing how awareness of such issues can improve children's success in life. Beliefs and traditions are passed down from generation to generation and to begin breaking the cycle, we need to start with the most basic family unit to begin disseminating information and care. By introducing a new

perspective to children being defiant or shameful, parents can learn how children are struggling between two cultures. There is a great need to study these bicultural families to help children become more successful, create healthier family relationships, and promote mental wellbeing and health.

To summarize, this study explored how experiences of intergenerational congruence: affected the relationship Chinese American young adults have with their parents, their evaluation of culture, and self-development. This was an exploratory study to seek deeper understanding about the understudied Chinese American young adults and their lived experiences. The findings from this study have brought more awareness to culturally appropriate clinical implications, practice, and future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This present study used a symbolic interaction theoretical framework to explore intergenerational congruence in Asian American young adults. Symbolic interaction looks at meaning, symbols, behaviors, etc. As such this study sought to understand how the meaning behind interactions and behaviors impacted intergenerational congruence in Asian American young adults. Through a symbolic interaction framework, we are able to expand our understanding of the Asian American culture to consider how the interaction between society and culture impacted personal development and self-identity.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2001, 2012), Asian Americans continue to be the fastest growing minority group with a growth of 43 percent within the last decade between 2000 and 2010. Over the recent decades there has been an increased interest in minorities and cross-cultural issues within families. As the United States continues to grow culturally diversely, immigrant families continue to struggle to balance two different cultures. Among Asian American families, struggles of identity and independence impact the parent-child dynamics at home.

#### **Symbolic Interaction**

The theory of Symbolic Interaction was first introduced by George Herbert Mead and later published by his successor Herbert Blumer (1966; 1969). The theory looks at how social interactions, the very process of interacting and communicating with other people gives way to the formation of meaning.



### *Major Assumptions and Core Principles*

Symbolic Interaction theory studies how people create meaning based on social interactions, objects, events, and behaviors. The following section will briefly introduce the major assumptions, core principles, and premise for symbolic interaction.

First, the main assumptions are that: individuals are born into a setting through which they develop a sense of self identity and our self identity is shaped by our experiences and feedback from the environment and our communications with others (Blumer, 1969). Under this theory, our development of self translates into our development of self within a family and community. We are able to interact and communicate based on roles and rules that we learn within a family thus, to begin studying families we need to understand how to accurately interpret behaviors.

Next, the core principles such as: meaning, language, and thoughts will be introduced. Meaning is complex as we are constantly creating meaning towards objects, events, and interactions (Blumer, 1969). Meaning is never constant as it evolves based on social feedback, relationships and the interpretations that are attributed at any given moment in time. Meanwhile, our ability to create meaning is based on the language we learn and connect with different situations (Blumer, 1969). Language makes meaning possible. Finally, our thoughts represent our inner reflection and ability to process both language and meaning. These three components work together allowing us to create significance in our lives.

Finally, the major premises of symbolic interaction are as follows. As human beings, we are motivated through meaning to behave in certain ways and being able to interpret different situations reflects our complex ability to differentiate (Blumer, 1969).

We are not born all knowing and continue to learn, process, and act until the day we die. Social interactions may dictate how we behave but, it is our understanding of such interactions which prove most valuable and worth analyzing (Blumer 1969).

Conducting multi-cultural research is a complicated task that has become increasingly difficult as the cultural groups in the United States are constantly evolving and adapting to changes in the environment. Researchers (Yick & Berthold, 2005) have found themselves struggling to identify research that is culturally appropriate. Culturally sensitive research would involve understanding personal values, social context, and meanings all the while, maintaining the rigorous research process (Palofox, Buenconsejo-Lum, Riklon, & Waitzfelder, 2002; Yick & Berthold, 2005). Historically, cross-cultural research has been based on Western philosophy and beliefs through empirical research which has not considered unique lived experiences (Palofox, et al, 2002; Uba, 2002). But, a consistent issue for researchers (Kim & Abreu, 2001; Kim & Atkinson, 2002; Lee, Yoon, & Liu-Tom, 2006) has been trying to figure out the best ways in which to conceptualize these experiences to be measureable and universal across groups. The lack of empirical research supports the myth that Asian Americans are the model minority who do not need services outside their family (Browne & Broderick, 1994; Fong & Mokuau, 1994; Mui & Domanski, 1999). But, this also hints at issues that may be ignored and other explanations as to why Asian Americans avoid mental health services. So, to understand the layers beyond face value, this study takes a framework of symbolic interaction to look at the meaning of these relationships between Asian Americans, culture, and family.

## **Asian American Culture**

This present study first began to explore where research stands in addressing cross-cultural issues. Researchers have found there to be flaws in the research regarding culture which shows that the research process is flawed and lacking in the area of culture (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993) from different entities. Although, investigators tend to overlook culture as a variable, cross-cultural investigators have also failed to identify specific aspects of cultures which influence behaviors. The results often conclude that there are social and cultural factors which influence behaviors but are unable to pinpoint specific components (Cummins, Simmons, & Zane, 2005). These findings add to the limited literature that impedes our ability to fully understand differences among and between ethnic groups. Moreover, to be better able to provide culturally sensitive services, there is a need to create ways in which behaviors can be culturally measured and accurately reflective of a population.

First, before analyzing culture this study looked to define what culture means and represents. Rohner (1984) defined culture as being a highly variable system through which meanings are created, learned and passed on with each generation and is also shared with a part of the population who have the same views and beliefs. Culture represents a way of life that is passed down by generations including: familial roles, communication patterns, individualism, collectivism, and more. In the end, Betancourt and Lopez (1993) concluded that in order for the field of psychology to continue to grow as a scientific discipline as well as maintaining their ethical and social responsibilities, there needed to be efforts made to integrate more cross-cultural issues into psychology. Some advancement has been

seen in this area but, as the cultural makeup of the United States is constantly evolving this is an ongoing project.

For Asian Americans, culture dictates that any known psychological disorders should be kept within the household and no one outside the family should know about it for fear of being looked down upon within the community. It is an expectation that Asian Americans are able to control their emotions and remain reserved and clear headed in times of extreme stress and turmoil (Kim & Omizo, 2003). There is pressure within the community to blend in and conform to everyone else instead of being outwardly different from everyone else. Culture has taught Asian Americans to shun mental health and to view these illnesses as shameful. The meanings behind having mental illnesses reflect a bad family, but why is this? What does having a mental illness really mean? Where did the negativity come from? These are some of the questions that can only be learned from within the culture and to understand how these messages are passed down from generation to generation. In what ways can researchers help to understand these meanings and practices and integrate modern perspectives with traditional ideals?

Additionally, Asian Americans are seen as being the “model minority” which means that they are seen as being superior among the minority groups (Das & Kemp, 1997). Asian Americans are seen as positive and overcoming stereotypes due to the low rates of doctor visits. People often overlook the possibility that Asian Americans are the same as everyone else. Nevertheless, Asian Americans are just as susceptible to mental illness, sickness, poverty, and environmental factors, etc that anyone else living in the United States faces. Scientific research suggests that Asian Americans develop the same

problems (e.g. loneliness, withdrawal, rejection, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc) as their dominant counterpart (Zhou and Siu, 2009) but the manifestation may appear differently.

However, this perception of the “model minority” (Das & Kemp, 1997) pressures Asian Americans to live up to these standards to appear well-adjusted, successful, and able to strive for higher education. According to Das & Kemp (1997), they are also obligated to bring honor to the family and community. There is a myth that holds that Asian Americans have easily assimilated into the mainstream culture but, in reality they continue to struggle between multiple cultures and social expectations. Symbolic interaction will help researchers begin to uncover the layers and depths of these perceptions, in hopes of understanding and connecting with this population to provide outreach and support.

### **Symbolic Interaction and Asian American Families**

By using a symbolic interaction framework, this study was better able to understand how Asian American families are constructed and maintained through the meaning they apply to objects, events, and behaviors. This framework helps this study focus on why there are cultural differences between generations and conflicts within families. Immigrant families are often living between two worlds with conflicting messages which causes conflict between parents and children over time (Hwang, 2006; Kim, 2011). This leads to discrepancies within intergenerational acculturation and the incongruent cultural values increases the risks of mental illness and family issues (Hwang, 2006).

In conducting research and predicting response styles, researchers need to consider the meaning of questions and the interpretations of participants (Dana, 1995; Yick &

Berthold, 2005). The terms race and ethnicity have often been used interchangeably but, researchers (Suyemoto, 2002; Tuan, 1998) have argued that ethnic identity is socially constructed and fluid. This is especially true within the Asian culture where ethnic diversity is vast and linked to ancestral roots. When researchers generalize this population as being “Asian Americans”, it undermines the complexities of differences and meanings of life experiences (Suyemoto, 2002) within different ethnic groups. More recently, researchers have begun to break down Asian Americans into ethnic subgroups (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Cambodian, etc). But, differences still exist within subgroup based on: immigration experiences, acculturation, socioeconomic status, and community supports (Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, & Cota, 1993; Yick & Berthold. 2005).

Additionally, in Bernal et al's, (1993) and Yick and Berthold's (2005) participant sample, they found that participants preferred to choose their ethnic identity based upon personal meanings, for example, identifying as Taiwanese versus Chinese due to the ongoing political battle between the two nations. It has been seen that ethnic identity is essential to personal identity and represents how someone connects with their environment.

Therefore, this study looked at understanding Asian American young adults from a symbolic interaction framework to be able to include aspects of social and cultural context to understand lived experiences and integrate this framework into instruments geared towards assessing cultural values and family dynamics. Family and community are threaded with Asian identity that it would be imperative towards research to include and create instruments in which to assess these factors and its impact on other areas of daily family lifestyles.

The theory of symbolic interaction provides us with a conceptual framework through which relationships are examined by sociocultural indicators (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Mead, 1934). Some theorists (Felson, 1985; Mead, 1934) argue that our self concepts are developed through feedback from significant interactions and members within our reality. The research has shown that our self-concepts are linked to how we believe others perceive us and the appraisals or criticism from others is crucial to the development of our self identity. The interaction and meaning behind these interactions can be more important than the actual feedback (Felson, 1985) itself and more telling of a one's reality.

In relation to Asian Americans, this theory suggests that Asian Americans have internalized the external stereotypes (Kim, 1981) and opinions. And the value placed on being Asian American lies within the socio-cultural context. This adds to the literature about the identity of Asian Americans being fluid based on socialized messages and adaptations that are impacted by lived experiences and perceptions. In the 1990's there were little empirical research into socio-cultural factors (Helm, 1990), but since then there have been more attention to including ethnic minorities in research. However, culture continues to be understudied in the literature. There is a need for awareness of racial group socialization as a component of self-identity due to the increasingly multicultural society through which we live and relate. The concept of reflected appraisal common in symbolic interaction will be important to study issues of acculturation and assimilation for Asian Americans and their family.

## **Symbolic Interaction in Asian Americans families with Intergenerational Congruence**

In looking at intergenerational patterns, this study looked at how the Asian culture has defined them and considered stereotypes. Symbolic interaction allows us to process and picture the historical context of expectations and parenting styles. Mead (1934) believed that we are born into a society and we are never truly independent from the moment of conception to the moment of death. It is best to understand how these issues as simple as the language you learn and speak is to be linked to larger societal systems. Children learn to speak and write English in school which is acceptable because that is the national language. However, once the child goes home there is another system that they must navigate and another language may be spoken. These children often struggle with balancing cultural pressure and stereotypes with their internal dialogues.

Asian Americans are labeled the "model minority" which implies that they are successful and smart although there may be some examples to support this stereotype it is not true for all Asian American living in the United States. It is easy to lump all Asians together into one category which is all the more important to hear the perspective from within the culture and understand how they create and frame their experiences. Their struggles to acculturate in a new society have gone unnoticed despite the vast external pressures to conform forcing many to lose their cultural identity. Our inability to accurately measure these variables has impeded out effectiveness in providing services to this population.

Overall, understanding the changes between generations will help professionals understand the reality of this population and how to connect with them. It is important to



recognize that not all Asian Americans have the same cultural experiences and that there is a difference between generations and the level of acculturation. When working with Asian American families, it is important to recognize and validate each experience as being true to that individual without undermining and judging one culture over another. It is also important to create the family story that they wish to pass on to future generations on intergenerational patterns and resolve the intercultural conflicts. This is an area of study that still needs to be developed as no story will be alike which will be hard to conceptualize but, this study will begin by finding underlying themes, meanings, and similarities through their story and discover how much Asian Americans still adhere to Asian values and how Asian American families have evolved over time and generations. Through symbolic interaction, we can attempt to track commonalities within meanings to find universal truths to begin to depict a more culturally accurate portrayal of the Asian American family's struggle for happiness between two cultures. Research (Goodnow, 1983; Feldman, & Quatman, 1988) has shown that culture plays a central role in parent's expectation more so than the parent's own educational background, socioeconomic status, or gender. This is the story of a working relationship between parents and children and how one's upbringing influences the raising of the next generation and so forth.

### **Future Development**

Asian culture is heavily influenced by external feedback and by using a symbolic interaction lens; this study saw what roles culture played in the formation of relationships, values, beliefs, and the meaning that is attributed. Rules and roles are central in this culture and to be able to relate to the father as the patriarch, the mother as the nurturer, or

the children as successor to the family name, we are better able to relate to the family and understand their frame of mind. Symbolic interaction is only the beginning layer to understanding deeper meanings and symbolism within a family. For example, it is well known that parents put their children before themselves and even their marriage in hopes that their children will bring their family great pride and status. Through research, researchers can collaborate with participants to frame questions and triangulate data for the best interest of the population. The hope for this research direction is to benefit Asian Americans in reaching out to a population that has learned to count only on one's family. This research aims to help mental health professionals build rapport through reframing cultural issues. For example, helping parents see that their children are not out of control and disrespectful but, rather that their children are learning to be independent like other American children. And to show children that their parents are not overbearing, but concerned about their future and have sacrificed a lot in raising their children. The success of children is essential and the lifeline for many Asian American families as an example of their success as parents and Asian Americans.

Specifically, to the field of marriage and family therapy, symbolic interaction will help future researchers in conducting research with Asian Americans and other ethnic minorities. By looking at the family unit, family therapists are better able to work within the client's reality and develop therapeutic skills through which to interact and connect with family members. This theory will also help therapist understand where the client is coming from and the influence behind their intentions. This study seeks to begin bridging the gap between theory and clinical practice by thoroughly understanding family by family, and in some ways the research will be never ending as perspectives are evolving,

but in other ways the underlying messages of love and respect will carry forth no matter the experience. Respect may be central to Asian American hierarchy but, it is also an important human characteristic. As researchers, there must be a balance between finding the differences between individuals and also tracking the similarities. Therapists need to be able to give clients a reality check and not take everything they say at face value, as Asian Americans will tend towards giving more socially acceptable answers (Li, 2009).

Therefore, symbolic interaction helped to create a more interactive framework in creating a collaborative relationship with our clients in stepping back as experts and allowing ourselves to be educated.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, utilizing a symbolic interaction framework was a good fit in this study of Chinese American young adults. Change could not occur without truly understanding the meanings and motives behind behaviors. It is not possible to illicit effective change without truly understanding the intentions and hopes behind one's actions and mindset. Once the history through which Asian American parents value hard work is understood, those same ideas can be applied to each family in a way that will allow them to build their own goals as a family and connect on a single dream. It is often easy for parents to tell the children how to do something believing in their best interest but, it takes more courage to do something with the children and take risks in the best interest of their children. Asian American families are afraid of failure because to them the only guarantee in life is hard work to be able to build a stable family. The value of emotions has long been repressed in the older generations thus, creating tension with the younger generations who are freer

with their expressions. The lesson with symbolic interaction is teaching both generations the value of each other's experience and discovering ways in which they can teach and share with each other to minimize misunderstandings and gain a new reality within a family system.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To evaluate the research on Asian American families, articles included in this review meet the following criteria: the study samples included Asian Americans, explored intergenerational conflicts, and looked at the parent-child relationship. Asian Americans in the studies consisted mostly of Southeast Asians. Studies which included Asian Americans in a larger sample were included if they reported specific analysis on Asian Americans. A literature search on specifically Chinese American samples yielded less than 25 studies so the search criteria were broadened to include Asian Americans. The lack of literature on Chinese Americans lends to the need of this present study to address and explore the lived experiences of this population.

The present review looked to discover how issues of intergenerational relationships between young adults or adolescents and their parents have been studied in previous years. The intergenerational experiences to be studied are shared by two or more generations within a family context. Relevant research findings will be discussed and analyzed from a cultural and socialization perspective. This section will provide a critical review of the current body of literature.

#### **Intergenerational Conflicts**

Intergenerational conflicts arise within Asian American families mainly due to differences in cultural identity and cultural practices. Intergenerational congruence is the degree of agreement between two different generations (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2004). Children are raised in one setting and socialized in another (Morrow, 1989) resulting in

such conflicting perspectives between parents and young adults. For example, when parents' behavioral standards and values are inconsistent with their children's, or when two cultures demand two different standards that are inconsistent with each other (Wu & Chao, 2005; Sue & Chin, 1983). These differences not only exist between minority groups but also within one's family when the struggle of acculturating becomes an obstacle and affects relationships between family members. Intergenerational issues can be found in simple daily interactions such as: attitudes about breakfast, approach to homework, or even ways to sleep.

Previous researchers (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008; Dinh, Sarason, & Sarason, 1994; Ying & Chao, 2006; Lee, 1997) have found that traditional Asian immigrant families can experience greater family dysfunction and conflict as compared to other ethnic minority groups especially during adolescence. The search of the literature showed a limited number of resources specifically targeting this topic and the following articles are presented by year of publication.

### *1990's*

In the search of the literature, there were only a few articles that discussed intergenerational conflicts or cultural differences and their impact on parent-child relationships (Chan & Leong 1994; Yau & Smetana, 1996). The majority of the articles during this period discussed issues such as: immigration, acculturation, adjustment, or divorce. The following study from Hong Kong specifically studied the relationship between adolescents and parents in regards to family conflict.

Yau and Smetana (1996) were interested in studying the manifestation of conflicts within the relationship between parents and adolescent children in Hong Kong, China. They collected data from 120 early, middle, and late adolescents from middle to lower class families. The participants were interviewed at their schools and filled out questionnaires rating their perceptions about their parents and experiences with conflict. The researchers used qualitative methods to study the transcripts of interviews. The interviews were coded by another group of research assistants who were blind to demographic information of the participants. The participants reported more than 200 conflicts with their parents at home and it was surprising that girls reported more conflict compared to boys but the frequency of conflicts did not vary by gender. Most of the conflicts involved mothers; girls were more likely to have conflicts with their mothers whereas boys were more likely to have conflicts with both parents.

The researchers attempted to capture both sides of the relationships but only through the children's perspective. The authors had the children put themselves in their parent's perspective while responding to questions therefore, the parent's true perspective was never known. It would be beneficial to understand how big or small these distortions may be to be able to begin breaking down negative parent-child communication patterns and promoting more positive interactions. This study showed that girls were more likely to report conflicts from everyday arguments to major fights whereas boys were more likely to report only the bigger fights. There is a limited body of literature studying the gender differences in Asian Americans or other minority children. Even though this study was conducted outside the United States it reflected a growing awareness of family conflicts

within the Asian culture. There is still a need to understand more about the children's experiences and how culture shapes their relationship with their parents.

### *2000's*

There appeared to be a number of years before other studies were published looking at intergenerational conflicts within Asian culture. It is interesting that the following studies were all quantitative as the researchers noted a gap in this methodology but, searches for previous studies seemed to be lacking also in sound qualitative research looking at intergenerational conflicts within Asian American families. Studying the body of literature there is a need to promote both methods to sufficiently understand these family systems. The following studies are organized by publication year and separated into adolescent only samples and parents and children samples.

#### **Adolescents/Young Adults Samples**

In 2001, researchers (Ying, Lee, Tsai, Lee, & Tsang) discussed the gap in quantitative research concerning the impact of cultural adherence on the quality of parent-child relationships. They conducted a study looking at whether cultural adherence mediated the relationships between length of time in the United States and the quality of the parent-child relationships. Some of their hypotheses included: US born Asians adhering more towards American values, cultural adherence would vary by migration statuses, stronger American association will result in a poorer parent-child relationship, etc. The study consisted of 353 Chinese- American college students from the Western



United States. The participants were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires to assess the different variables.

The researchers found that there were significant intergroup differences for cultural adherence. The researchers note that early immigrant Chinese (immigrated when they were under 12) adhered more towards American values as compared to later immigrant Chinese. The researcher's hypotheses that cultural identification varies by group and quality of relationships varied by cultural identification were confirmed. The researchers were surprised that American born Chinese reported better relationships with their parents but suggests that their parents may be better acculturated towards American values. This study introduces the importance of age on the process of immigration and the impact it has on one's rate of acculturation.

The researchers suggest further research in studying the differences between immigrant groups as well as considering differences within Asian cultures that can be furthered differentiated. However, this study contributes to the literature by showing the differences in intergenerational relationships among immigrant families and provides empirical evidence for these results.

Lee and Liu (2001), compared the coping strategies of Asian American college students dealing with intergenerational conflict with other ethnic groups. For Asian American families, intergenerational conflicts tend to intensify during the early- late adolescent years/ early adulthood phase (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008; Greenberger & Chen, 1996) regarding issues of independence and autonomy (Laursen & Collins, 1994). The researchers were interested in the type of coping mechanisms children would utilize to offset these conflicts.

The sample consisted on 406 college students with 145 Asian Americans. The majority of Asian Americans were 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generations immigrants. The researchers used three measures in their study which were: Asian American Family Conflict Scale, COPE, and the Brief Symptom Inventory. Overall, from their results the researchers wanted to highlight the evidence which points out that the existence of cultural differences between parents and children heighten intergenerational conflicts. The results from this study are important in comparing Asian Americans to other ethnic groups and highlight the need to study how Asian Americans cope. However, more attention is needed to study the roles of intergenerational issues and coping techniques and how Asian Americans can learn to create more effective coping skills that are congruent with their culture.

In 2004, researchers noticed that the literature lacked a good method to measure intergenerational conflicts therefore, they (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2004; Ying & Tracy, 2004) created a scale (Intergenerational Congruence in Immigrant families) with two versions (Child and Parents scale) to address these factors. Ying and Han (2007) used these scales to measure intergenerational conflicts among Southeast Asian American families.

The researchers (Ying & Han, 2007) found that the participants were more likely to align with the views of their mother as opposed to their father, more likely to view their mother more positively, and report a better relationship with their mother. These results contradict the previous study where adolescents reported more conflicts with their mothers (Yau & Smetana, 1996). Additionally, the results showed moderate satisfaction with their mother which indicates a poorer satisfaction for their father. The participants also reported moderate levels of family conflict which were similar to previous studies (Ying & Han, 2007; Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000). It was interesting for the researchers to note that

the presence of more American values (discussions, affections, etc) within a family was correlated with greater parental satisfaction.

In sum, although this sample consisted of college students they were all voluntary. Many times college students are required to participate in studies which can lead to inaccurate responses. However, the majority of the sample was from a four year university indicating high socioeconomic status which is not representative of most Asian Americans. It would be better for future studies to have a more diverse sample (Socioeconomic, education, age, etc) to better represent the Asian American community.

Furthermore, Su, Lee, and Vang (2005) were also interested in intergenerational conflict and coping but their sample consisted entirely of Hmong American college students. They were interested in studying coping for a specific Asian group. Similar to another study (Lee, Su, & Yoshida; 2005), the researchers hypothesized that problem solving and social support would mediate the effects of family conflict on psychological disorders using the same measurement scales. This study consisted of 86 college students from a Midwestern university who were recruited through the university Hmong association.

The researchers found that although social support was a mediating factor for distress; problem solving added to the levels of distress. Previous research (Parkes, 1984; Lee, Su, & Vang, 2005) indicated that problem solving was more effective when dealing with controlled variables as opposed to emotional factors such as distress resulting from intergenerational conflicts. The researchers also note that self-blame is a mediating factor between distress and family conflicts, such that higher levels of self blame correlates with

higher levels of distress. But, it is also important to note that this is true only when family conflicts are high.

Wu and Chao (2005) conducted their study in California with a sample of 184 Chinese American high school students who were mostly second generation immigrants and 80 European American high school students. They were interested in how the adjustment process for adolescents in California would be impacted by cultural differences between their parents and their peers. The researchers compared Chinese American students to their European counterparts by looking at the expression of warmth in families. This research topic is not as studied due to the perceptions that Asian Americans do not freely express emotion which makes this an innovative and interesting study in regards to generational differences and expectations.

The questionnaires were administered during class time to all participants whose parent's consented. This study highlights the gap between perception and ideals of parental expectations which contributes to the overall negative parent interactions and impacts behaviors as well. There were higher levels of conflict when children perceived their parents as being less warm which adds to the understanding of ethnic standards and norms. This was a good study as it chose to focus on one cultural norm (warmth) and compared Asian culture to the mainstream culture to highlight differences and expectations. The sample was a good size sample and unusual as there was more Chinese American than European American participants. It would be interesting to see how perception of parental warmth impacts one's well being over a long period of time from childhood through young adulthood.

Another study looking at coping, Lee, Su, and Yoshida (2005), followed up on Lee and Liu's (2001) study of how Asian American college students dealt with intergenerational family conflicts. Research showed that parent and child conflicts were one of the most common issues reported by college students (Tiwari, 2002; Lee, Su, & Yoshida, 2005). Lee, Su, and Yoshida (2005) chose to be more specific and similar to previous studies identified two coping categories (problem solving and social support seeking) that they believed would offset the negative experiences. The researchers used a series of five instruments (Asian American Family Conflicts Scale, Family Satisfaction Scale, Coping Strategies Inventory, etc), to study the relationships between coping and intergenerational conflicts. The researchers found their results to be similar to previous research such that family conflicts are relevant to Asian American families especially during adolescence and young adulthood. This study is a good example, that there is a need for better measurement of family conflict. Their results of their study were similar to previous studies and did not seem to add to the literature which highlights the need for the development of more culturally appropriate measurement models to better assess these issues of conflict.

Ying and Han (2007) were interested in the longitudinal effects of intergenerational conflicts on mental health from early to late adolescents. They used existing data from a national survey and included 490 Southeast Asian Americans who had completed both waves (2004 and 2007) of survey in this study. The researchers found there to be discrepancies in level of acculturation which were positively correlated with the presence of intergenerational conflicts. And that over time, these factors correlate with the presence of depressive symptoms. In some ways the questions in the survey are

subjective to the researcher's bias such as asking about one's preference for the American way of doing things. It is difficult to imagine that everyone will have the same interpretation for the American way. The researchers reported there to be correlations between preference for the American way and level of acculturation which is similar to other research. However, it may be helpful in the future to compare how one would rate the American way versus the Asian way. For example rating statements like: I prefer to be independent, I like to play sports, I like to travel with family, etc. Overall, this study was the first to study the longitudinal effects of acculturation differences. But, again it would be more helpful to break down the more universal thoughts such as the American way, to be able to identify specific aspects of culture or values that contribute or buffer intergenerational conflicts within families.

In a study by Tsai-Chae and Nagata (2008), they sought to understand the differences of Asian values between parents and their college aged children. The researchers believed there to be a relationship between adherence to Asian values and the quality of parent-child relations. They surveyed a sample of 101 Asian American college students and included 93 in their study. Using three different scales, the researchers measured: behavioral acculturation, Asian values, and family conflict. Furthermore, the researchers found that Asian American college students report lower cultural adherence to traditional values compared to their parents which is expected as most of the parents were immigrants. Through the use of multiple regressions, the researchers could summarize that the only significant relationship was between Asian values and family conflict; the less adherence of Asian values among college students the greater the experience of family conflict. In sum, the findings of the article only supported the author's first hypothesis but

they were also able to note the emphasis on behaviors and actions within Asian families. This study was an example of how some measures and instruments are not universal when assessing for cultural adherence or family conflicts. More culturally relevant questions that can better assess gender or culture differences need to be applied.

Finally, in 2011, Wu and Chao did a follow to their study in 2005 by examining the gap between adolescent's ideals and their current perception of their parent-child relationship. This study included a larger sample of 249 Chinese American adolescents and 385 European adolescents living in Southern California. A series of multiple regression analysis were conducted to test differences between ethnic groups. Researchers found that second generation Chinese Americans experienced the greatest level of dissonance as compared to first generational Chinese Americans or their European counterparts. The differences resulted from their perceptions of their relationships with their parents rather than their ideals. In regards to parental warmth, second generation Chinese Americans reported receiving less warmth which leads to poorer satisfaction in their relationship with their parents. European American adolescents also experience discrepancies between their ideals and perceptions but, unlike for Chinese Americans it may not lead to negative development. The researchers point out that to some degree parent-child discrepancies are normal but, the questioning of parental love represents greater issues.

Overall, the previous research all added to the literature on issues of intergenerational conflicts for families but they only gathered data from the children's perspective and made inferences about the parent-child relationships which were not true representations of parent-child relationships. Most of the studies involving adolescents

administers the measures in school during class time which makes me wonder how this may impact the responses and whether the children's participation are truly voluntary as none of the researches mention gaining the child's assent only parental consent. The following set of studies present data collected on both parents and children.

### **Parents and Children Samples**

From 1996, authors saw a need to further examine the distinctive features of Asian culture which cause family conflict to be better able to understand how ideals are constructed and integrated into the development process of adolescence. Here are a few articles which discuss both sides.

In 2005, researchers (Crane, Ngai, Larson, & Hafen) sought to add to the literature exploring the relationship between family functioning and differences in acculturation between parents and children. The response rate was 30% from parents and the author's discussed whether this was a low response rate or acceptable for the population. The researcher's confirmed their hypothesis that differences in acculturation and low family functioning are correlated with adolescent depression and delinquency behaviors. The researchers highlight that the greatest predictor for adolescent depression was acculturation differences between parents and children. This was the first study to look at acculturation differences as an independent variable. An important lesson to take away from this study is that adolescents do not develop independently from their family and problems that exist should be looked at from a systems perspective.

In 2006, Costigan and Dokis, take a different approach and look at how acculturation differences between parents and children affect their ability to adjust to a



new culture. They were interested in studying these dynamics within families. The families were recruited voluntarily through community agencies and the questionnaires were conducted in participant's homes. Questionnaires were completed independently to ensure family member privacy which is important to Asian culture. The researchers conclude that the degree to which parents were involved in Chinese culture impacted the children's adjustment to Canadian culture but, their level of involvement in Canadian culture did not matter. The researchers suggest that immigrant children do not differ from non-immigrant children although they may struggle with adjustment they find ways to overcome these differences. These observations are telling of parent-child relationships and the role that culture plays in directing such communications.

In 2007, Choi, He, and Harachi wanted to study the effects of intergenerational cultural dissonance on behavioral problems to be able to create interventions targeting these cultural gaps in families. The researchers used existing data from a longitudinal study to track changes in behaviors over time. The researchers found there to be four significant paths (intergenerational cultural dissonance to child report of conflict, child report of conflict to bonding, bonding to problem behaviors, and parent report of conflict to problem behavior). The researcher's findings provide insight as to how cultural differences can lead to behavior problems and family dysfunction. The results are important to note that the child's perception of conflict has a greater impact than parents' but, that the quality of bonding between parent and children offset the negative consequences. This study was a small sample and is not generalizable to the population and although they attempted to identify more specific characteristics they were unable to

but, point to future studies. However, this study adds to the limited literature on Vietnamese and Cambodian families.

In another 2007 study, Juang, Syed, and Takagi, were interested in studying the mediating relationships between family conflict, parental control, and adolescent depressive symptoms. Surveys were administered to students during school and parent's surveys were taken home and returned by mail. The surveys were administered both in Chinese and English. The researchers found that in regards to parental control, the more educated the parents were the less they used parental control and the generational status of the parents had no impact. The researchers hypothesize that due to their small sample size the mediation effects were not significant. But, depressive symptoms were significantly correlated with family conflicts.

The research supports previous findings such that, intergenerational conflicts through family conflicts are linked to poorer mental health among adolescents. The research points out that the rate of acculturation may differ and parents are capable of acculturating quicker than their children which adds to the dynamics.

In 2009, researchers (Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe) conducted a study looking at the mother-child dyad relationships in Asian American families. They looked at how acculturation differences may cause distress and if parenting styles mediated this relationship. The researchers found contrary to previous research that their results only partially supported the relationship between distress and gaps in acculturation. They did not find any significance in association with somatic symptoms (depression, anxiety) either which suggests that more research is needed in these areas to gain a better picture of these discrepancies in research. They found there to be significance when the children

were less acculturated than their parents and tended to report more symptoms of depression. The researchers found that their results contradicts previous research but explores other methodologies that may be more helpful. And, their variables were more internalized feelings versus other research which focused on behavior and external factors which could lend itself to the differences in results as Asian Americans are more receptive to external variables.

### **Summary**

Over the past 20 years, awareness about the experiences of intergenerational congruence within Asian American families has grown. Unfortunately, the awareness of these issues has not benefitted the population such as through new interventions or resources. The previous researchers have studied how intergenerational congruence are experienced and created within Asian American families and culture but, there has been a lack of detailed information to help promote mental health interventions for this population. Firstly, the research even those including parents and children, have not been sufficient in studying these growing issues. Secondly, there is a lack of literature on specific Asian subcategories such as Chinese Americans and parent-child relationships. Thirdly, intergenerational congruence is a general term which manifest differently for different people. There is a pressing need for more services and awareness of relational and cultural family problems for young adults to be able to better treat any psychological or mental health issues which stem from their family of origin. Asian Americans are less likely to seek psychological services and tend to put off these services until their

symptoms worsen. There is a need to better integrate the research back into the community to benefit those who we study.

This present study utilized opened ended questions to gather the in-depth experiences of young adults regarding intergenerational congruence and how the meaning they attribute to these beliefs influence their relationships with their parents. Although this study only looked at a small part of how culture, society and family interact it helped to provide more enriched and detailed experiences from the population. Many of the previous studies have looked at both high school and college student and this study focused on college students to control for parental influences as well as the transition into adulthood. Young adults are at a place in their lives where they have the opportunity to make their own decisions for the first time. Subsequently by studying how they view their upbringing, culture, and parental relationships while being able to reflect on their growth will add another perspective to the current literature by giving voice to an understudied population. As previously mentioned, studies only looking to study Chinese Americans is sparse and often involve quantitative methods which do not add more understanding about in-depth experiences. This present qualitative study sought to add more dimensions by looking at multiple factors adding to current knowledge to be able to improve clinical practice and future research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODS

A qualitative research methodology was used to elicit in-depth understanding of the experiences of Chinese American young adults with regard to intergenerational congruence in their relationship with their immigrant parents. Qualitative research refers to procedures that are not experimental nor measured by in quantity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) but one that has an emphasis on social reality. Qualitative research looks at the meanings and experiences of a phenomenon (Berg, 2007), which is compatible with the symbolic interaction framework used in this study to guide process and analysis. A grounded theory approach was chosen to explore the data and to produce a theory that explain the nature of the parent and youth relationship over the generations.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive material and practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research provides opportunity to study the lived experiences of participants and focuses on fluid discovery as opposed to hard facts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It seeks answers to questions by studying how individuals live and function based on their values, traditions, beliefs, and rituals. The purpose of this method is to enrich understandings around human behavior and not to generalize findings (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2006).

Moreover, qualitative researchers are interested in exploring and understanding human processes (Daly, 2007) in regard to behaviors and interactions. Qualitative research illustrates patterns and relationships that assist in developing theories which explain reality or events (Berg, 2007). Additionally, it should be noted that Corbin and Strauss (2008) pointed out a number of assumptions involved with qualitative research. Some of these

assumptions include: that new meanings are generated through interactions, actions are not always rational, and there is no separation between internal or external worlds. Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize the complexities of human nature and that there is no simple explanation for any single phenomena as actions result from the interaction of multiple variables. The aim of this study was to better understand how meaning behind intergenerational congruence is created and experienced in Chinese American young adults.

### **Self of the Researcher**

Researchers practice transparency when using grounded theory. By being explicit about their perspectives and biases, the researcher acknowledges how their interpretation of the data may be influenced. As a researcher, I acknowledge that my ethnic and cultural background influence my worldviews and may impact the interview questions or direction of data collection and analysis.

I am a second generation Chinese-American that was born and raised in Northern California. My parents are from China and Hong Kong and immigrated to California in the early 1970's. Coming from a collectivist cultural background, both my mother's and father's extended family reside in California and continue to be a close-knit group.

My own experiences of intergenerational congruence began at school-age as I was placed within two cultures and two languages. I was expected to excel at both cultures due to the fear of losing my cultural heritage and native language. My parents stressed the importance that being bilingual means greater success as an adult. As a result, I come from the perspective that intergenerational congruence exist in parent-child relationships and is

affected by different variables, expectations, and interpretations. Intergenerational congruence has been both a positive and negative experience in my life and continues to influence my behaviors and thoughts today.

In relation to this study, my Chinese American background helped me in gaining initial rapport with the community to be able to collect data. In addition to my age, I felt able to relate to this population as I am part of the sample group and they represent my peers. However, my similarities with this population may have caused some participants to feel self-conscious about their responses and limited their amount of self-disclosure. I offered the participants the opportunity to refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview process at any time they feel uncomfortable or upset with the questions. I shared my own experiences and background with the participants as appropriate to help facilitate discussion and build rapport. I was aware of my assumptions and biases before beginning my study, therefore I remained within the grounded theory structure and process to gain trustworthiness throughout this study.

## **Methodology**

There is relatively little research in the areas of Chinese American young adults, thus grounded theory is an appropriate methodology as it allows us to “discover theory from the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This type of exploratory study works well for beginning research on areas in which there is little or no previous study (Daly, 2007) and is “hypothesis generating” rather than hypothesis testing (Daly, 2007).

Grounded theory was developed collaboratively by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as an inductive approach to being able to develop theories about human processes. They

advocated for theories developed from within the data collection process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin and Strauss challenged the more dominant quantitative research approach by drawing upon the division of research and theory, data collection and analysis, as well as challenging the notion that qualitative research does not produce theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As described by Daly (2007), researchers are continually engaged in a process of constant comparison as patterns emerge to explain action and interaction. Charmaz (1995) explains grounded theory as a continual process of data collection and analysis occurring simultaneously. This method allows for the codes and themes to emerge from the data and not from predetermined assumptions. Connections can be made between the data, participant's interpretations of their experiences, and the researcher's interpretations of the data.

Grounded theory set forth by Glaser and Strauss helped to give credence to qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006). They established analytic guidelines and structure for data analysis and research strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This study will use an adapted form of grounded theory as introduced by Charmaz (2006) that takes the position of multiple realities and interpretative understandings of subjective meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) referred to as constructive grounded theory. Meaning and analysis are created through interactions and observations between the researcher and participant giving space for multiple meanings to explain participant perspectives and experiences.

Additionally, grounded theory begins with data. According to Charmaz (2006), data represents the foundation of theory and through analysis of the data concepts emerge. Data is constructed through information gathered from sample participants. The constant process of data collection and data analysis helps researchers obtain the necessary data



needed to illustrate the experiences of the participants (Daly, 2007). This process also allows researchers to identify categories throughout the data as well as patterns between and within each participant experience. As analysis develops by studying specific social processes to identify patterns and themes analytic interpretations are created (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

This present study uses the principles as stated by Charmaz (2006), which include: theoretical sampling, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sampling is used when additional data are studied in comparison to existing data as a way to further develop understanding and concept development. Theoretical sensitivity exists to ensure that the data truly represents the phenomenon and theory. Theoretical saturation was especially relevant in determining the sample size for this study. Grounded theory is guided by a three-step analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding is the first stage of data analysis by recognizing relevant data and categories. Next, is axial coding where categories are refined and compared across all the interviews to track similarities and note exceptions that emerge from the data. Finally, selective coding is the last stage where categories are merged together to identify emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006). The use of grounded theory will give voice back to the participants as their stories are shared.

### **Participant Selection**

The relationship between researcher and participant is highly involved in grounded theory research. It is expected that this type of work will produce change in both the researcher and participants through this process of co-creation (Corbin & Strauss, 1967).

Theoretical sampling is the guiding process to participant selection (Glaser, 1998) as additional data is gathered to clarify themes and identify gaps in the data. This study collected data from Chinese American young adults between 18-24 years of age currently enrolled in universities within the California. My rationale for collecting data from this population stem from my research interests that the child's self-identity around culture and values impact the level of intergenerational differences within Chinese American families and vice versa. In Asian culture, emphasis and focus are placed on the children as they represent the future. So, by studying the children's perspective, this study will be able to see their impact on the larger family system. The researcher began with a convenience sample of Chinese American young adults residing in California then relied on snowball sampling to recruit additional participants.

### **Sample Demographics**

The study sample was made up of 31 Chinese American young adults (10 males and 21 females). Participant ages ranged from 18 to 24, with a mode of 19 and a mean of 20.7 years of age. Participants were recruited from universities all across California, with the majority attending universities in northern California.

All participants in the present study were full time students currently enrolled at four-year universities in California. Six of the participants were pursuing master's degrees, and the rest were pursuing a bachelor's degree. College majors represented a range from: biology, chemistry, engineering, political science, psychology, economics, and human development. Participants were from lower middle to upper middle class families living in California, reporting an annual family income above \$50,000. All of the participants

identify as being fully Chinese American whose parents are both immigrants from China. All of the participants' parents are still married and living together. All but one participant reported no religious affiliation. Twelve participants reported being only children, fifteen reported having one sibling, and four reported having two or more siblings.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval for Study**

Prior to the collection of research data, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Loma Linda University. This is a critical process in conducting research in order to protect the welfare of human subjects and highlight issues of confidentiality, ethics, risks, benefits, and informed consent. There were minimal risks associated with participation in this study including the possibility of emotional changes associated with personal experiences and reflections. All the interviews were digitally audio recorded and could contain potentially identifying information. As such, audio files were erased after the completion of transcription for each interview.

Upon receiving approval from IRB, the researcher began interviewing participants at mutually convenient locations throughout California for both the researcher and participant. All potential participants were introduced to the study including inclusion criteria. All interested participants were given the informed consent document which outlined: the purpose of the study, potential risks, referrals, and their rights. The researcher met with each interested participant to further explain the purpose of the study as well as the risks and benefits for participating. The informed consent documents were signed, reviewed, and returned to the researcher before the interviews began. In addition, the interview guide was created to engage participants in a discussion that may be personal or

challenging. All participants were given the option of omitting answers to questions or stopping the interview at any time. Participants were provided with the researcher's contact information should questions arise after the completion of interviews.

### **Procedures**

This study relied on convenience sampling such as snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants from California. The researcher began by initially contacting seven different Chinese American student organizations at large four years university campuses through email to introduce the study and invite students to participate in the study. Once the organizations agreed to participate, the researcher attended one of their general meetings to introduce the study to the rest of the members. Potential participants had the opportunity to ask questions and state concerns associated with participating in this study. The initial contact helped to facilitate rapport with participants (Berg, 2004). The researcher provided all qualified participants who were interested in contributing to this study with the informed consent forms in person and via email so they could be read and reviewed before consenting to participate. Follow ups were conducted based on the collected personal information at the initial contact so interview times could be arranged at a date and time convenient for both the researcher and participant. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews with the participants in the present study were conducted face-to-face at a central location such as a school library, public library or local park. The location was up

to the discretion of the researcher and participant and their level of comfort. The in-depth interviews that were conducted lasted between sixty minutes to ninety-five minutes. The study utilized an open –ended interview guide to gather information and explore individual experiences. A full copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix B. An example of the questions from this interview guide is: In what ways have social and cultural values, beliefs, or practices played a role in your relationship with your parents? Probes to expand responses include: What are some specific examples of social or cultural values? How have society and culture influenced your self-identity?

All interviews were audio recorded on a digital recorder and later transcribed. The researcher additionally took notes of non-verbal behaviors and personal responses during the interviews. The interview began by asking the participants to share the story of how their families immigrated to the United States. The participants were then asked semi-structured open ended questions about how intergenerational congruence and culture impact their relationship with their parents. Interviews with the young adults focused on the following areas: family ideology, socio-cultural factors, intergenerational congruence, and conflict resolution. The goal of the interviews was to collect rich details of their lived experiences.

### **Data Storage**

Data collected from the interviews were stored both electronically and in hard copy format. Electronic data was stored on a password protected computer. Hard copies are also filed in a locked cabinet within the Department of Counseling and Family

Sciences at Loma Linda University. As mentioned, audio files were destroyed once transcription of the interviews was completed.

### **Data Analysis**

Daly (2007) describes the process of discovery as two-fold in which the meanings held by participants are interwoven and constantly interacting with the meanings held by the researchers. In using grounded theory, the goal is to be able to develop theories about Chinese American young adults and experiences of intergenerational congruence. The theories will explain how intergenerational congruence influences Chinese American young adults and their development of self-identity as well as their relationship with their parents. The coding method developed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) was utilized in this study. In the spirit of grounded theory, the theories developed from the data and the researcher did not begin with any predetermined assumptions or categories. Using the analytical coding methods, I looked for the impact of society and culture on self-identity. This process was guided by my theoretical framework of symbolic interaction and the creation of meaning.

### ***Open coding***

After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the first level of analysis was line by line open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, this step involved a complete reading of the interview and then a micro analytic line by line analysis of the transcripts. The researcher carefully analyzed each line and attributed phrases that described the content of each portion of the interviews. During this process, the researcher also identified patterns,

feelings, and behaviors which developed in the interviews. Take for example, the following statement, “My parents are never home anyways so it doesn’t matter.” I might code this as being “hidden desire for parental involvement”. Another example could be, “My parents don’t believe in children making and decisions for themselves”. This statement could be coded as “parental authority or balancing power and autonomy”. The main purpose of this first step was to be able to identify major categories or themes from the data.

### *Axial Coding*

Next, systematic analysis or axial coding was used to compare the previously coded data with new data to check whether it represented new themes or similar themes. When the new data reflected existing codes they were given the same code. However, if the data represented new information then new codes were created. This process is known as constant comparison to make sure that the themes came from the data rather than any preconceived assumptions that may have been projected in the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In the present study, the codes were developed by analyzing each individual interview and then analyzing the codes across participants to check for differences and similarities. Participant responses were organized into similar categories. According to Daly (2007), these categories emerge as the link between codes are identified, developed and created. As these categories continued to emerge and develop, formal theories evolved to help explain major processes.

### *Selective Coding*

Finally, selective coding was used to review the last interviews and further identify relevant data reflective of the emerging theories. Core theories emerged to explain the experiences of Chinese American young adults. The data was reviewed and analyzed several times by the researcher to ensure the emergent themes were reflective of the participant's experiences. The researcher constantly went back to the data to review and reflect on the codes and categories to help define the best fit and interpretation of the theories to the data. All in all, the continuous analytical process helps to ensure that saturation of the theories is met when describing the experience of intergenerational congruence in Chinese American young adults.

### *Collaborative Coding*

Throughout the coding process, the researcher met with her supervisor and colleagues to conduct more focused and selective coding collaboratively. The process allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the themes and ideas as they relate to the data. It is during this process that the phenomenon of “constructing and I” developed in which, due to their lived experiences of intergenerational congruence, Chinese American young adults were able to construct their sense of self. Collaborative coding helped to ensure that the theory represented the participants' reality.

### *Analytical Memos*

Additionally, in accordance with grounded-theory methodology, the researcher kept detailed analytic memos during this stage of my analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1967).



These memos helped the researcher think through the emerging themes and conceptual relationships. They helped me more in the discussion section of this study. The researcher began to move from simple statements of what she was seeing to more complex descriptions of the integration between categories of responses and started to see how Chinese American young adults responded to intergenerational congruence. The researcher continued to look for exceptions to these themes and began to formulate ideas about how these responses were impacted by their experiences.

### **Trustworthiness**

My overarching goal in conducting this study was to highlight concepts that are original, useful, and which resonate with what readers have experienced (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is my desire that professionals reading this paper will be motivated to continue reading and researching this topic and that it will improve their work with minorities (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I have tried to strive towards these goals by consistently and completely using grounded theory methods which was detailed throughout this paper.

One of the main tenets of grounded theory is the social constructionist idea that rather than having “truths” that are waiting to be “found,” the interaction between participant and researcher produces concepts which hold true across changes in fact (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It has been the goal to hold on to professional and individual insights while at the same time “staying grounded in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

It is important to me that the theories emerged fit the population from which it was developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While these categories will not be applicable to every

population, it is my hope that the concepts are general enough so as to be useful across a wide variety of people and situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I have attempted to communicate the results in a way that is easily understandable by therapists, other healthcare professionals, and laymen (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with a goal of widening our impact on effective work with minorities (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In accordance with grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the research process has been collaborative between participant, researcher, and reader. Researchers are guided by a set of standards that are integrated into their methodology and epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). One of the ways in which we have demonstrated responsibility in research is the detailed descriptions of data collection, analysis, and results (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By including a high number of quotations from participants, the reader is allowed to come to his or her own conclusions about the participants' experiences. Reflexivity is a self-reflection practiced by researchers as they are "instruments" in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In order to demonstrate my own process and honesty to research, I have outlined my reflections in the discussion section (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition, I feel that studies in which researchers are "unknown" are much less effective. I have chosen to add authenticity to this study by describing my position as being a researcher, including personal and professional investment in this topic and unique experiences which have led to this interest.

### **Presentation of Findings**

In presenting the findings, the researcher aims to provide accurate descriptions of participant experiences. The researcher used examples of the data to show the patterns

found in the data to help convey these experiences. The researcher was also able to draw from personal reflections as comparative data to stimulate thinking and discussion of prominent concepts.

### **Addressing Potential Issues in Research**

In qualitative research, researchers play an integral role, as they are involved in all areas of the research process from data creation to data analysis, resulting in a number of challenges that qualitative researchers may face (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2010). In working with minorities, it is important to be sensitive to issues of culture and acculturation. Many of the participants may have experienced prejudice, discrimination, or stereotypes throughout their lifespan. It is important to be mindful of vulnerabilities and differences in race and class (Daly, 2007) and the influence it may have on the research process.

Some critics of qualitative research refer to the biases and inherent assumptions that exist in all relationships and the inability to fully distance ourselves from these biases. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to practice transparency about any biases that may exist (Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). By practicing transparency, the researchers hope to reduce potential biases and increase credibility of the study.

Moreover, in regards to biases and personal assumptions, the relationship between the researcher and participants may affect the study. For example, the imbalance of power that is inherent in the researcher role may influence the participant's responses. The researcher shares the same cultural identity as the participants, which may also influence

their responses. Thus, the researcher needs to practice mindfulness throughout this entire process to manage such relationships and potential ethical concerns.

In conclusion, as researchers we take on the responsibility to practice within ethical and legal standards to protect the rights of all human subject participants. Researchers have the responsibility to ensure that the rights of all participants are protected (Daly, 2007) through the research process to the presentation of data. Because researchers are a tool used in the research process, the entire process is made transparent to the readers. This research gives voice back to the participants as their voices help to convey the emerging themes and theory.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

Reading through the many interview transcripts was a painstaking experience. It was necessary to do that so as to stay close to the data and to look for the emerging of patterns in the responses of the participants. This detailed process forced the researcher to become aware of biases that may have been present and the need for transparency in that process. I acknowledge two biases that emerged during the course of the interviews.

The first bias that I note in the course of this research is that the researcher began from a position of respect and equality because the participants were both her peer group and similar in ethnic background. White and Epston (1990) stated that in a scientific story, the researcher is the privileged author helping to create the story in which both the observed and the observer play a role.

The second bias is that the analysis lies in eyes of the author. The researcher interacts with the participants to create a story through which the direction of the story is influenced by the researcher's choices. The researcher's goal is to present these findings as close to the participant's reality as possible.

Qualitative research is different from quantitative research in this way because the researcher is an essential part of the process, from conducting interviews to the data analysis, through various interactions and observations. It is important to acknowledge that the biases stated above existed before the formal research began. The researcher continued to be transparent about the process. The researcher examined each transcript in response to the explorative research question for this qualitative study: How is

intergenerational congruence experienced in Chinese American young adults in regards to their relationship with their parents?

Chinese American young adults are a part of a diverse group of minorities that must manage bicultural membership in their daily lives. The many facets of being bicultural lend themselves to issues of intergenerational congruence in Chinese American families involving both immigrant parents and their American born children. Intergenerational congruence has been previously introduced as the level of agreement between two different generations such as parents and children or first and second generations on issues such as values, traditions, behaviors, beliefs, or culture.

Findings from this qualitative grounded theory approach that was used in this present study suggest that Chinese American young adults' experience of intergenerational congruence within their families have influenced their self-development and construction of "I". Participants in this study have made conscious and unconscious decisions, which allowed them to manage parent-child relationships and cope with differences.

The overarching theme that emerged from the data for this present study is testing newfound autonomy towards a construction of "I". Three sub-categories emerged from the data as well. These include: (1) managing family baggage, (2) weighing bicultural membership, and (3) counteraction to conflicts. These sub categories illustrate how intergenerational congruence experiences in Chinese American young adults contributed to their construction of "I".

## **Constructing an “I”**

Who am I? How do I make sense of myself as a social and cultural being? How do I interpret identity as defined by culture, race, history and the meanings which are attributed to each facet? These are some engaging questions to bring greater awareness to how we begin to construct a concept of “I”. In the present study, it was shown that young adults varied in their experiences with constructing a sense of “I”. This notion of individuality is often desired in young adults as they transition away from childhood into adulthood but, often repressed in Chinese families who value community and conformity. However, there is no clear trajectory from one life phase to the next and often times it involves much growth and perseverance.

The young adults in this study fall into three categories in regards to where they are on their path to constructing an “I”: (1) unsure about who they are, (2) desire more autonomy and opportunities to move toward a sense of “I” or (3) confident about self.. These young adults drew upon the experiences with regards to family, culture, and conflicts to being aware of how they describe their identity. These experiences in combination with their awareness for increased autonomy motivate their desire to foster a sense of individuality.

### ***I Am Unsure***

Chinese American young adults have been socialized by multiple cultural and societal messages. These messages have impacted their sense of identity in relation to their environment and the people around them. As minority children, they have often wanted to fit in and feel like they belong amongst their more American classmates but, it

does not always happen. For example, Charles shared that “sometimes it makes me more confused. Am I right or are they right? What I hear and what I have experienced sometimes differs. It has made me question things more”. As young adults, eleven participants are still unsure and learning and constructing their sense of “I” separate from their family, friends, or culture.

Adam reported that he still questions who he is because he continues to experience different cultures and has interacted with more diverse individuals especially since he has gone away to college. He has come to recognize different cultures and lifestyles but, is uncertain where he fits in. Adam shared that he does not have an identity separate from his family of origin.

Sometimes it makes me question who I am. Especially when I went away to college it was more people and I interacted with lots of other cultures. We seemed to all be a mix of different things and that was acceptable. But, I wasn't sure how to fit in sometimes. I still see myself as the oldest in my family and whenever I talk about myself it is about them.

Adam continued to share his struggles with not knowing how to answer simple questions like his favorite hobby. He was surprised how hard it was to introduce himself to other people.

I remember in writing class one day we had some ice breaker questions. You were supposed to get to know other people in the class and they got to know about me. I had such a hard time answering questions about myself. I could not even think of what my favorite hobby was. My mom could probably tell you though.

Laura shared a similar experience with Adam in trying to fit with her peers. She shared her internal struggles and hardships with feeling invisible in society.

I'm still trying to fit in and find my place in society. I have a good group of friends who are supportive. I think my parent have influenced me more. There was a time when I suffered from depression and eating disorders because I felt like a



“nobody” because everyone else seemed to know what they wanted to do and I was content being at home reading a book. I felt self-conscious about myself and always felt like someone was judging me.

Laura continues to struggle between two different concepts of “I”. She has her role as a daughter at home and her role as herself among her peers.

I feel like I have two identities still. I am more confident and know what I want to do when I am not around my mom. But, whenever I am with her I don't know why but I am more indecisive and ask for her opinion. I don't know why this is because it is dumb. You know something about being around your parents makes you a kid again. It just happens you know? I can't go home without her telling me how to clean my room. Maybe, if I had a better idea about what I want to major in but nothing is really interesting.

### *I Lacked Opportunity and Desire more Autonomy*

In this study, ten participants were uncertain about themselves because they said their parents never allowed them the freedom to make their own choices growing up. Some have felt like they have been isolated from their peers while others have felt like their parents dictated everything. These young adults reflect back on their experience and desire for more autonomy now. Chinese parents often believe they know best and within Chinese culture, children are often taught to respect and obey their parents at all times.

Mary is currently a freshman in college and living on her own for the first time. She explains that her mom used to tell her what to do and how to think when she was growing up. She believes that her mom was using her own experiences to control her life. She reported:

I don't really know what I want to do with my life. I haven't been exposed to a lot of things. I have interest but my mom tells me what those are too. I think my mom is trying to make me live her life in the same way not realizing that things aren't the same for me as they were for her. Like you know she never got to learn how to swim, so she made learn how to swim which I hated. She tries to make me do everything she couldn't do growing up and it is blah.

Mary also said that she was often naïve to things in the media and pop culture. Her mother had sheltered her from too many things that she was unable to fit in with her peer group. She understood that her mom wanted to protect her from bad influences but, this also prevented her from becoming more self-aware about important topics in the media.

Mary further stated:

I am definitely more shy and reserved as compared to my friends. I feel left out sometimes because I don't know what celebrity or TV show they are talking about. So, I feel like I live isolated from everyone else. I remember one time there was a discussion in class about a news event and I had to admit that I never heard about it. I felt like everyone thought I was stupid or didn't have a clue what was going on in the real world. My mom kept me so isolated for fear of bad influences. All the participants in this study fell into the previous three categories their journey to constructing an "I".

### *I Am Confident*

Some young adults have grown more confident about who they were over time in response to their intergenerational experiences. These young adults have taken their experiences with their parents, siblings, culture, or peers to help enhance their sense of who they are or are not. For example, one young adult shared that it has made him "more aggressive in what I wanted. So, I made a decision and didn't let them say no" or "I just don't want to turn into them really so I try to be different". Ten young adults in this category have grown more certain of themselves as a response to: their differences with their parents, parental control, culture, and life experiences.

Mike had to raise himself as a child because his parents were rarely home. He attributed his parents' absence to his need to grow up fast and support himself. He realized that he was not able to count on anyone else but himself. This resulted in a more

confident, self-reliant, and decisive Mike. He shared his desire to not become like his parents and vows treat his own children differently.

I had to grow up fast and be responsible. I try to be independent more and not count on anybody. If I can't do something for myself then I learn how to do it. I can't rely on other people to do something. I see myself as an adult now and I am on my own. The main thing was that it made me realize I wouldn't want to be like them. If I ever had children I would be home with them and not work so much. My parents tried to tell me what to do and how to behave but, I don't want to be like them. I make my own decisions. I know that I don't want to become them. I enjoy little kids and am in the big brother program at a local community center. I want to help other children deal with a lack of a role model.

Anna's experience is similar to Mike in finding the need to become self-sufficient due to the lack of parental presence. Anna is currently a sophomore in college pursuing a degree in biology. She is working fulltime at a local coffee shop to be able to pay for her own college tuition. She is trying hard to separate herself from her parents and hopes that her brother will too.

I am more self-sufficient. I don't depend on my parents for anything. I found a job to be able to help pay for school. I don't get along with my parents but that doesn't mean that I can't be myself. I am more independent now so maybe my parents don't have to work that hard any more. Although my brother will be going off to college next year but hopefully, he will be able to find a job too.

Anna believes this experience has given her the confidence she needed to differentiate herself from her parents' beliefs and opinions. She feels that she needed to be sure about what she wanted before she could effectively communicate her needs to her parents.

I think it gave me more self-confidence. I can make my own decisions for once. I am able to speak my mind and know what I want for myself. If I'm not sure what I want then I can't tell my parents. Some differences is good because then I am not just listening to my parents and making my own decisions. I always thought I wanted to cure Aids or win a peace prize one day.

The Chinese American young adults in this present study continue to practice autonomy and self-awareness especially since leaving home for the first time. After the aforementioned categories comprising the construction of “I” have been introduced next, the categories which help to facilitate the process of constructing “I” based on their intergenerational experiences will be discussed. In this study, the construction of “I” is comprised of three sub-categories which emerged from the data in response to their experiences of intergenerational congruence: (1) managing family baggage, (2) weighing bicultural membership, and (3) counteraction to conflicts.

### **Managing Family Baggage**

Managing family baggage is a category that emerged from the data to explain how Chinese American young adults utilize their past experiences within their family to influence their present sense of self and identity. From Childhood through adulthood, the theoretically symbolic baggage carried is filled with our past experiences, memories, and family history both positive and negative. The experiences and memories that we have acquired within our family of origin, lasts with us throughout our lifespan and continues to influence our self development and our position within the larger socio-cultural context. These past biases, beliefs, and values influences our present set of biases and will continue to impact our future growth. Being able to recognize that we carry symbolic baggage helps us to manage negative family baggage which may hinder our present and future growth and development. Participants were deliberate in how they described their family experiences counteracting negative experiences with more positive characteristics. The

meanings that are attributed to baggage are unique to each individual's culminating history.

### *Learned Experiences*

Among the family baggage that participants carry with them is that of learned experiences and expectations. Participants in this study linked these experiences with the lack of a more open parent-child relationship. These learned experiences taught young adults that their parent-child relationships were unequal in nature and power often resulting in rebellious thoughts and actions or indifference.

Amy shares that she did not follow the mold her parents had about girls. They expected her to be like her sister but, she chose to follow her own path with skateboarding.

Amy noted:

I see my parents as parents. Sometimes they try to dictate what I do because they think they can. Well, I guess they could but, I think they realized that I wasn't like my sister. They believed that girls should be more ladylike and mature and they hated that I skateboard at the park. I think I've broken all the stereotypes of Asian girls. I skateboard to school and hang out with my guy friends. I do well in school but, I'm not the bookwork type of Asian.

Mary explained that she learned her role as a child growing up was to respect and obey her parents at all times. Now, she desires more trust and independence from her parents but, understood that her parents were driven by their own beliefs therefore, continuing to treat Mary as a little kid. Mary has learned how she is expected to properly behave from her interactions with her mom, for example, her mother has strict rules about how to keep a clean room. She explained:

Yea...we would get into trouble if we made a mess. We had to make our beds every morning and clean our room before school. Mom was a neat freak. She

would get mad even over a pencil. It was so silly. They are more strict and overbearing. They have to know where I go and who I go with. They never allowed me to hang out with boys because they were afraid I would be corrupted or something. I tried to tell them that not everyone was like that but they don't care. They hear about something and always assume we are doing the same thing.

Beth shared a similar experience as Mary in that her parents were also strict and made decisions for her. But, Beth learned that her parents model their parenting after her grandparents. She also explained that even though she enjoyed playing piano, she resented this activity simply because her parents pushed her to take lessons. Beth has taught herself to automatically resent any decisions her parents make for her. According to Beth:

My grandparents are very traditional and stuck in their old views. This has influenced my parents who share similar traditional views. My parents still hold very traditional views. They were super protective and overbearing. They made all the decisions for me and I never got to do what I really wanted. I enjoyed playing piano but I resented the fact that my parents forced me to learn and practice all day long. It would have been nice to make that decision myself, you know?

Many of the participants in this study shared what they learned through interactions from their parents. More examples include: “sleeping with your head away from the door”, “don't wear white in your hair”, and “you can't wear shoes around the house.” Although these appear to be minor, they all represent a set of beliefs and values parents instill in their children. The young adults in this study remember these lessons as they influence their daily interactions and behavior

### ***Family Expectation***

Children often transition into young adults during their college years when they often experience autonomy and independence for the first time. However growing up, they have been given messages about expectation and responsibilities by their family limiting

their use of autonomy and decision-making. For example, “My parents have a lot of expectations for me to carry on the family name and have a good career” or “I have to support my own family one day so I need to work harder than my sister because she can just get married and be supported”. Participants described their experience with and reaction to family expectations.

Jessica’s parents expected her to be able to take care of herself by the time she turned 13 because they were already working and supporting the family by then. Her parents did not understand that circumstances and laws are different in America than they were in China. Her family expectations have actually caused her to feel abandoned by her parents when she was growing up. She shared:

I wish they were more like parents and understood that we were just children. I think because they were expected to work at a young age and take care of themselves. They thought it would work the same with us as well. I don’t know if they expected us to start working at like 13 like my dad did. But, they had really different expectations I think. Maybe I will understand them more when I have my own family or career. But, as a child I felt like we were abandoned. I never told them that because I would probably hurt them. Maybe one day I will have the courage to tell them how I felt which may shatter their reality of being great parents to us.

Philip has continued to feel the pressure of achieving from his parents. He is the only child so his parent’s focus and attention is all on him. This makes him feel overburdened with carrying the family legacy and saving face. He described:

I’m still trying to get out of my parents shadow and expectations but they just keep getting bigger. I don’t think I can ever get away from my parents. Maybe if I had a brother they would find something else to focus on but it is just me. Maybe if they got a dog...nah...my dad hates dogs. They expect too much from me and rely on me when they get older which makes me feel guilty but I don’t know what else to do.

Family expectations represent a source of pressure that young adults are unable to handle and often feel trapped under their parent’s control. These experiences have added

additional layers that young adults must navigate to find their true self. They have been conditioned and exposed to certain messages their whole lives influencing their ability to differentiate their views from their parents’.

### *Family Differences*

Immigrant parents often share different views than their American born children. Immigrant parents have been socialized differently and are often stuck in a specific frame of reference. It can be seen that immigrants are often the less evolved group because they are too often stuck in the olden days and are often surprised by how much their country of origin has changed since they were younger. They do not realize that everyone keeps changing and improving but, are rather more comfortable in a setting that they are familiar with and can control. Children often understand their parent’s backgrounds but are unable to figure out ways to compromise. For example, Sarah shared that her parents still rely on their parents and “that they could act more like adults. They punish me and try to teach me discipline but, they aren’t very successful at it. My grandparents are still trying to run their lives. So, they have to figure things out for themselves first”. Rose feels as though she is living a life separate from her parents even though she was living in the same household.

She feels as though her parent can never understand her. Rose reported:

I feel like I live parallel lives with my parents sometimes. We co-exist in the same house but follow different worldviews. It’s very strange sometimes. That’s all. Parents and children live in two different universes. Our generation had changed so much with I-phones. It has already been so different in my lifetime. I can’t imagine how different it will be for future generations.

Steven is able to recognize that his parents are content living in their own little world not being exposed to current events. He says that differences are caused by his



parent's inability to understand how complicated life events can become. He explained:

Uh...I think...that in some ways they are just naïve to American media and stereotypes. They are not into technology and social media and all that. They just live inside their little bubble and see things one way. They do not know who like Brad Pitt or Jennifer Lawrence are and they really don't care to. They focus on their lives and work and everything else has like no effect on them. So, I just think they don't know how complicated life can be now with so much like expectations.

Anna's parents are not as isolated from the media as Steven's parents. However, they are critical of what they see on television. Anna said that her parents were raised more conservatively and judged the way people dress and behaved in public. She has learned that it is better not to try and argue with her parents because they would end up lecturing her on proper behaviors. Anna conveyed:

Sure. All the time. They would make comments about the kids these days and their poor behaviors. We don't really fight though. I usually just listen and nod to what they are saying so they think I agree and move on. I made the mistake once of trying to question my mom and she lectured me for hours. So, now I know better and stay quiet. I think that culturally, they left a more conservative China and are not used to the freedom that Americans exhibit today. They are always complaining that people on TV need to put more clothes on. I think that they had a different childhood in China and they always comment that we have it easier. I think in regards to the different generations, the situations are different. The nuances we face aren't the same as in the past. They don't understand how it is at school.

The differences in background have been the source of many misunderstandings and conflicts. In this present study, Chinese American young adults have felt like their parents are stuck in one generation unable to adapt to change. These differences have influenced their ability to relate to their parents resulting in conflicting parent-youth relationships.

### ***Parental Control***

In Chinese culture, children are expected to practice filial piety which represents

the act of obedience and respect to one's parents and ancestors. Parents often believe they know what is best for their children and try to dictate how their children live. The way parents choose to exercise their authority and control can have lasting effects on their relationships with their children. For example, Shawn found a way to work around his parent's control:

But, I have to say that whenever I have to decide on something I think about their reactions and it helps me to make decisions. Like I had to buy a new bike for school and I knew they would ask me how much it costs and try to make me buy the cheaper one. So, I just picked the one I liked and told them it was cheap for a bike. They don't know about bike anyways.

Grace is currently a senior in college as she reflects back on how her parents exercised their control over her. She recalls her mom keeping a really structured home life due to certain beliefs and practices. Her parents believed that children needed to be constantly monitored to make sure they were behaving properly. She revealed:

Well they still try to control me like all Asian parents. They tell me what to do and when to do it. My mom used to make me go to bed at 930 every night because it was supposed to be good for my health or something like that. She believes that all children need to be taught and like monitored. My dad tries to be more reasonable but then my mom starts telling him what to do (laughs) and so he stays out of it now. It is kind of funny sometimes. Even my dad can't argue with her.

Similar to Grace, Heather's parents tried to limit her freedoms. Her parents were a bit more restrictive than Grace's parents in knowing her every action. Heather compared her experience to her friend's and desired more autonomy. She explained more in detail:

I think for me, it has been independence. My parents never used to let me go anywhere by myself or with my friends. They always had to drive me or chaperone. But, some of friends had more freedom and could do whatever they wanted. I was envious because my parents would check up on me and it could be embarrassing. I had to check in every 30 minutes or else my parents would go crazy and call the cops or something. They threatened to cut me off for not being home by curfew. I don't know if it is culture but definitely differences in generation for media and music. My parents always complain about the music on the radio and not understanding anything they are singing.

Altogether, the experiences of intergenerational congruence on these categories (learned experiences, family expectations, family differences, and parental control) have taught the young adults in this study the roles and rules within their family of origin. These were the main examples of family baggage which appeared in the data influencing every young adult's construction of who they were and how they fit into society or amongst their peers. These early experiences and memories help lay the foundation to answer such questions as: Who was I? Who am I now? And who do I wish to become? In this study, being able to manage family baggage is only one part of testing their autonomy and constructing an "I". In this next part, the experience of intergenerational congruence on weighing bicultural membership will be introduced.

### **Weighing Bicultural Membership**

As children of immigrant parents, there is a continual battle between aligning with our native culture versus our parent's native culture. We are born into a family with an existing structure but, socialized within another causing us to respond positively or negatively. It is normal for parents to pass on their beliefs and values through their parental practices, but it is also normal for children of two cultures to become conflicted when they are given opposing information from two different cultures. As children grow they are better able to determine their bicultural membership based on their personal preferences or experiences. In this study, the Chinese American young adults shared how intergenerational congruence influenced which cultural identity they aligned with more in regards to Asian, American and Asian American cultures.

## *Asian Culture*

The perceived culture of the participants is automatically labeled as being Asian or Chinese. However, some of the young adults would object to this label due to their experiences with Asian culture such as: lack of knowledge, reaction to stereotypes, and lack of exposure to Chinese culture. In this category, the participants referenced Asian or Chinese culture as being traditional practices and values from China. They have varying responses when talking about how they identify with Asian culture.

Nathan shared a negative experience with his perceived Chinese identity and how it prevented him from fitting in with his peers. Nathan revealed:

I was picked on in high school because of the way I looked. I do well in school but I didn't have very many friends. I hated being Asian and there was a time when I wished I had different parents or that I could change the way I looked. Being Asian was not a good thing.

Paul did not have a lot of experience with Chinese culture growing up. He said that this was a result to his lack of education about Chinese culture at home and his immersion into the American school system. Paul disclosed:

I identify as being me. I don't know much about Chinese culture because my parents don't talk about it. I was born and raised here and go to school here so I just know my environment. I don't really identify with 2 different cultures.

Nancy, on the other hand, had the opportunity to learn about Chinese culture and language but, choose this as an opportunity to rebel against her more traditional parents. Nancy tries to fit in and be more American but, she explains that she will always look Asian on the outside. She stated:

Umm yea, I tried to rebel from all those labels. Sure I eat Chinese food but I didn't pay attention at Chinese school. It was like the one thing I could do to like go against my parents. So I don't know the Asian culture as you call it. I try to be more American but because I look Asian I will always be called an Asian.

Rose shared a similar experience as Nancy in wanting to rebel against her parents. She did not want to become like her parents so she chose to reject their culture attributing culture to their beliefs and values. She did not feel as though she could be both Asian and American. Rose imparted:

I felt like I had to choose one or the other. My parents were super Asian and I didn't want to be like them. They were so embarrassing you know? So I tried to be more American I guess and talk about music and movies.

Kate shares her experience with cultural stereotypes and how she has tried to prove them wrong. She attributed being Asian as quiet and a follower. She used her experience with stereo types and perceptions to help change who she was. She felt like the Asian stereotypes were negative and did not fit with how she saw herself. She articulated:

You know there are all the Asian girl stereotypes out there. I don't listen to them because usually they aren't true for me. But, I feel that other people see us and already think of us in a certain way. I try to prove them wrong. I try to be confident and I am loud. So don't think that I am the meek little girl that will agree to everything you say. I have been told that I have a temper and that can get me into trouble, But, I won't be some pushover.

Most of the young adults in this study rejected Chinese culture in favor of American culture. Through their experience of intergenerational congruence and their relationship with their parents they have evaluated Chinese culture as a being more negative and not beneficial for them.

### *American Culture*

Many families immigrate to the United States to pursue a better quality of life and future opportunities for their children. They expect their children to learn the American way of life but, are unaware how their own influence of culture impacts their children's individual identity. While American culture has become increasingly eclectic and all-

inclusive it has also become more varied and complex. There is no singular perspective as to what defines American culture, because it depends on a matter of perspective and experiences unique to each individual. Most of the participants in this study reported that they aligned more with American culture. Mike said that he sees "...himself as being more American than Asian. Although my parents are more Asian than anything" and John says that he tends "...to have more American behaviors and thoughts...I identify more with being American because that is what I have been exposed to".

Elizabeth shared that although she was not sure how to explain American culture, she identified with it more due to her upbringing within the American culture. She stated:

I think I might identify more with being American right? I grew up in this lifestyle. I don't know how to describe it. I wouldn't say that I grew up in American culture because my school was pretty ethnically diverse. We weren't traditional American you know what I mean?

Elizabeth goes on to explain how she has become more independent and outspoken which her parents do not appreciate. She credits this independence to the American values of individuality and freedom. Elizabeth further shared:

I am more independent and do my own thing which my parents don't like. They don't like that I stay out with friends. They try to make me stay home all the time. I think I speak back to them so we always get into fights. It's just not cool.

The young adults in this study were born in America resulting in American culture being their dominant cultural identity. Additionally, their interactions with their parents have caused them to adopt more American attitudes and beliefs.

### *Asian American Culture*

The last category in weighing bicultural membership is exploring the Asian American culture. The young adults in this study are unique by being exposed to two

different cultures and having the opportunity to experience and learn about both cultures. However, it can be seen that some of the participants in this study do not experience Asian and American as two individual cultures rather they see a blending of two cultures. Sarah explained it well by saying that she does not "...see it as two different cultures but as one meshed identity. I was born an Asian American and raised as an Asian American. I feel like it is one identity and I never had to choose one or the other". The participants have identified positive aspects of both Asian and American culture that fit them the best and conform to their ideals and beliefs.

Peter believes that constructing an identity is a continual life process that occurs throughout our lifetime. He said that he was unable to fully identify with only one culture and explained:

I think being Asian American, it is a constant process. It never ends. I don't fully identify with being with American or Asian. I don't really fit in to one label. It is hard sometimes knowing how to relate to other people or what their expectations are for me.

Peter goes on to say that both cultures are a part of his identity. He cannot say that he is only one culture and not the other culture as well. Both cultures represent a part of him. He has found a way to balance both cultures and recognizes that it does not always have to be equal. Even though there may be times when he may like characteristics of one culture over the other it does not diminish the influence of the other culture in his life.

I think that I accept both Chinese and American perspectives. I can't say that I am only American or only Chinese because that isn't true. I may like more Asian stuff sometimes but only because American things don't appeal to me.

Jane had a similar experience in taking both cultures and embracing both experiences. She explains that she has taken characteristics and values from both cultures to explain who she is today. Jane stated:

I think I take aspects of both. I like to think I am smart like Asians and more aggressive like Americans. I take parts that work best for me. So, I can't say that I am more one or the other. I think I have the option to choose whether I want to be Asian or American. And not a lot of people can do that. Both define who I am. I wouldn't say that I am one more than the other because I was raised kind of in both of those lifestyles or cultures as you say.

Weighing membership across two cultures can be difficult especially when their values and beliefs differ tremendously. While American culture values autonomy and freedom more, Asian culture values family and community. The participants in this study have shown how their experiences with intergenerational congruence have impacted their cultural membership. A majority of the participants aligned more towards American culture for a number of different reasons such as: rebelling against their parents, their lack of exposure to Chinese cultures, or their upbringing within the American education system and lifestyle. Cultural membership is a crucial component to their construction of "I" because it not only represents culture but their family, values, behaviors, beliefs, and ideals. The last component to be introduced is counteraction to conflicts.

### **Counteraction to Conflicts**

Differences in opinions, values, beliefs, and practices can lead to conflict and tension in parent and youth relationships. It is normal for parents and young adults to have arguments every so often as differences arise. However, not everyone is comfortable managing conflicts especially conflicts with their parents. In this present study, the participants shared how tolerant they were of conflicts and their approach to conflict resolution or management. The participants shared that when they experience emotional discomfort in the face of conflicts they: (1) usually admit and accept they were wrong or (2) avoid confrontations with their parents.



### *Acceptance*

As children we learn through trial and error on ways to manage our relationships with our parents, the ways they get angry, what they expect, how they will react to certain situations, when is the best time to ask for a favor, and more. Emotion is not often expressed and talked about within Chinese American families. Emotion has often been considered a sign of weakness and lack of control over oneself. Thus, Chinese American young adults do not have a lot of experience with expressing emotions and often feel uncomfortable when dealing with them. In the face of conflicts, the participants have learned to accept that they will not win arguments with their parents and have coped by admitting they were wrong. Mary's experience with her parents was this: "They ground me for 2 weeks and then ask if I thought about it. It's usually nothing as long as I apologize they forget about it". These young adults have learned that the simplest way to resolve conflicts is by saying sorry and moving on.

Jason revealed that he has learned early on through his interactions with his parents to compromise with his parents whenever there are arguments because he has come to learn that they do not understand his perspective. His sister and him have come to accept that there is no resolution to conflicts with their parents. He shared the following:

The greatest conflicts have been what I should major in for college. My parents think that I should be a doctor or lawyer. They think those are the only professions that are credible. Eventually we compromise or someone apologizes...usually me...because my parents are stuck in their ways. My sister and I just accept that this is the way it is. She hates fighting because they are just talking at you and not listening. We don't really have a choice to not agree with them. It is just easier that way. I never questioned them and respected what they have taught me or tried to.

Nathan learned more through trial and error that his views were different from his parents. He experienced conflicts with his parents before that did not turn out well and he

has been conditioned to have negative feelings towards conflicts which caused him to give up trying to fight with his parents. He accepts that his parents will never agree with him or feel like they care enough to listen to his perspective. He described:

Umm well, I never really rebelled although I have friends who did. I think the biggest argument was staying out late on a school night and not understanding why my friends could and I couldn't. They didn't care to listen to my explanations and I was grounded. It never seems fair. I think I just accepted that my parents were mean and moved on. I just think about going to college and being on my own...although they still call me all the time ugh I moved 6 hours away and it still does nothing.

The young adults in this study have accepted differences with their parents. They are able to deal with conflicts by taking the one down position and admitting they are wrong. Although, they reported that conflicts are never resolved but, it is more a matter of how to end a disagreement or uncomfortable position and move on until the next one arises.

### *Avoidance of Confrontation*

On the other hand, rather than acknowledging that arguments will occur and accept them, other participants have learned how to avoid confrontations with their parent based on previous experiences or observations. They are highly uncomfortable with emotions, tensions and conflicts.

Susan says that she is unable to handle being emotional which often happens during arguments with her parents. Therefore, she now behaves in ways to avoid having confrontations or tension with her parents. Susan explained:

I try to avoid it. Emotions make me too uncomfortable. I never handled big emotions well. It doesn't feel good and I hate when my mom screams. I just try my best not to do anything wrong.

Ryan hides out in his room because he says that his parents are too strict and constantly telling him what to do. The only place where he can have some privacy is in his bedroom. He says that his bedroom is his place of peace and quiet away from his arguing parents. Ryan stated:

Ignore them in my room usually. Eventually I would have to say sorry but, I try to stay away from them as long as I can which isn't too hard since they work all day. I can pretend that I am asleep when they get home or too busy with school work to talk to them. It usually works. We don't talk about things. They just tell me what to do and how to behave. not really...they don't understand American lifestyles..and I don't understand their lifestyle. Just miscommunication all around. My parents live in their bubble and their own world. They are so isolated from the rest of the world so I feel that we don't see and experience the same things.

Tim also used to also hide in his room to avoid his parents. He said that they had a different way of thinking which caused arguments with his parents. He tends to ignore them to avoid fighting as he shared:

They are old fashioned and think that things are still the same as when they were kids even though they were kids back in like China. They just don't get everything we have to do as kids today. There are so many expectations and pressure to be like everyone else, to be the best, and all that. I used to play video games in my room all day to stay away from them or play games at a friend's house until dinner time. Now, I can just ignore the phone because they always want to ask me too many questions.

The participants in this study are unable to handle conflicts effectively. They have learned through their interactions with their parents how to avoid and ignore conflicts and tensions. Their experiences with intergenerational congruence have helped them to understand why and how some of these differences exist between their parents and themselves. However, their experiences with intergenerational conflicts have also prevented them from being able to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts that arise within their parent-youth relationships. Their inability to address conflicts has contributed to their construction of "I" both positively and negatively.

## Summary of Findings

All in all, from this present study, we have learned how experiences of intergenerational congruence have contributed to the lives and identity of Chinese American young adults living in California. These results have shown that the development of self-identity is an ongoing process involving families of origin, culture, values, beliefs, and the ability to resolve differences for ourselves. The participants in this study have addressed the impact of intergenerational congruence on: their family baggage, bicultural membership, and counteractions to conflicts ultimately leading to their journey to constructing an “I”. “I” represents who they are based on all those factors but, also in addition to those factors. How have those factors impacted them? How have they grown from these experiences? Who are they apart from those factors? These are all questions that have been answered in this study.

The process for constructing an “I” in Chinese American young adults is unique due to Chinese culture being more collectivistic in nature. The norm for many youth is to gain individuality and independence which was exhibited in this study of Chinese American young adults, however the roles of culture and family influenced their perception of self and development. The struggles of bicultural membership illustrate the obstacles many Chinese American young adults need to overcome in order to create a sense of individuality because this is not often encouraged within collectivist communities.

Therefore, this present study adds a new perspective on the experiences of Chinese American young adults and their concept of “I” as opposed to “we”. It was seen that Chinese American young adults desire more autonomy and independence but, multiple

factors exist that influence their ability to construct a sense of “I”. The construction of “I” is a fluid process that ranges from being unsure to fully confident. The results of this study helps to shed light on how Chinese American young adults may locate themselves within the larger social cultural context through which they live.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

This present study explored from a symbolic interaction framework the influences of intergenerational congruence in Chinese American young adults and their construction of “I”. On the whole, it was found that Chinese American young adults perceived their relationship as being unequal with their parents and these different interactions helped to construct their sense of “I”. For example, why did the young adults so easily dismiss their Chinese cultural heritage? There is an understanding that the young adults in this study recognized Chinese culture as being more than their parents behaviors but, their need to rebel and not conform superseded their desire to learn more about that culture resulting in a lack of Chinese cultural adherence.

This study responds to a need for research that explores the experiences of Chinese American young adults to gain a deeper understanding of their lives and identity. As well as the impact self development, identity and culture may have on issues pertaining to mental health. This research sought to give voice back to Chinese American young adults as they tested the limits of autonomy and decision making. The researcher explored various contextual and cultural factors that influenced the construction of “I” through experiences of intergenerational congruence. This analysis signifies the clinical importance of understanding how Chinese American young adults have defined their self-identity regarding intergenerational factors to be able to create more effective interventions. This population has historically been less involved in research contributing to the lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding regarding this population.

In reviewing the transcripts, it seemed apparent that in Chinese American families, young adults often feel an imbalance of power with their parents. Three important points were raised in relation to the findings in this study. First, Chinese American young adults have the ability to reframe family experiences into more positive and understanding reflections on their relationship with their parents based on their lived experiences. Second, these participants are driven to create an identity separate from their culture, peers, parents, and family. Finally, Chinese American young adults continue to adjust to different environments in order to achieve greater self-confidence and self-identity. These findings help to create a picture of Chinese American young adults and their struggles with culture and conflicts as they become independent and begin to differentiate themselves from their parents and peers.

First, it could be seen that even though the young adults critiqued their parent's beliefs and values, they did not talk negatively about their experiences. They presented their stories in an understanding and accepting way. Second, these young adults have hinted at the desire for greater freedom and autonomy. They have used remarks about their experiences with their parents to explain or validate their current behaviors and thoughts. As they continue to live apart from their parents, they are testing their own limits to new situations and decision making opportunities. Lastly, these young adults are continuing to grow on their journey to becoming independent and motivated. As they continue to expose themselves to new stimuli and information they reflect back on what it means to them and their identity. From a symbolic interaction perspective, there is an understanding that previous interactions with family, parents, and culture play a role in how we interpret future interactions that continue to define our relationships with our parents.

The results of this present study helped to shed light on how Chinese American young adults transition into adulthood and construct their “I” through their management of family history, culture, and conflicts. This research gives voice to an otherwise overlooked population. Culturally sensitive clinical techniques are needed to be able to build rapport and spread awareness around clinical services for Chinese American families. Minority families are often understudied in research especially Chinese families who do not often participate in research studies. There is not much in the current literature exploring the lives of young adults and their varied experiences. Specifically, literature pertinent to Chinese American young adults regarding issues pertaining to mental health awareness, occurrence, and available resources.

The present study heard from Chinese American young adults and their need to limit their interactions with their parents to avoid confrontation, emotions, and conflict. These young adults have taken their interactions with their parents and transformed them in ways to help them develop more individually, most of the time in reaction or rebellion to parental interactions. These findings both agree and disagree with the current literature on cultural conflicts. Yau and Smetana (2003) found that children are often aware of the need to restrain emotions to achieve family harmony. The researchers found that the children in their study desired more communication to sustain harmony at home and behaved in ways that uphold their family image. The findings in this study agreed that the young adults were aware of the necessary steps to prevent conflicts but, not for the same reasons as in previous research studies. The young adults in this study were not adhering to their parents’ values above their own but, rather chose not to confront their parents over cultural differences. In some ways, they may have been trying to maintain harmony at



home but, not for the sake of family image. They behaved in such ways that suggests their judgments were a reaction and response to their parents' beliefs and an aversion to conflict, tensions, and emotion.

The findings in this study suggest that Chinese American young adults are seeking to be more individualistic in their cultural and social orientations. These young adults are aware of parental expectations and differences only as a way to monitor their own reactions and level of comfort. They are beginning to exercise their autonomy and use their upbringing as a frame of reference for future decision making.

In previous research, Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) found that parenting styles (warm, controlling, etc.) influenced how children evaluate their culture or ethnicity but, does not influence their engagement in cultural behaviors. However, they continued to note the presence of other variables which help to explain how children respond to culture and their readiness to accept parental views, beliefs, and values. This was true in the current study, as the young adults attributed culture with their parent's identity and behaviors and either chose to conform or rebel against their culture. The young adults mostly rebelled and rejected their culture because they evaluated it negatively depending on how their parents behaved towards them. The young adults interpreted their parent's values and beliefs in association with Chinese culture negatively, resulting in their limited engagement with Chinese culture.

Research (Gross & John, 2003; Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006) on emotions has shown that suppressing emotions has a negative impact on mental health. Even though these emotions are not expressed outwardly they are still experienced internally often resulting in inconsistencies with experience and emotions. Chinese

Americans are known to suppress outward emotions and practice restraint due to cultural stereotypes and expectations. Research (Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Muñoz, 1995) has shown that the ability to regulate emotions has an impact on psychological adjustments and overall mental health. This adds to the need for greater awareness for this population to address such concerns and promote mental health resources and interventions.

Moreover, in reviewing the literature, it was found that only a limited number of studies in the current literature involved a sample of Chinese American young adults with many of the studies being quantitative measures. The findings of this study are unique in exploring the experiences of Chinese American young adults and their construction of “I” from their lived experiences. This study analyzes the contribution of multiple variables and their influence on constructing “I” as a result of intergenerational congruence.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are a number of strengths and limitations present in this study. One of the most evident limitations of this study is the location of participants. All of the Chinese American young adults interviewed live solely in California, an area of the country with a large Asian population, which may influence the findings. Participants were limited to young adults between the ages of 18-24 currently enrolled in four year universities, which excludes the working young adults who may have similar or unique experiences. Time restraints for this study may have impacted how interpretations and experiences of young adults may change over time. The participants were gained through snowball sampling which may have made the sample more homogenous.

Another limitation of this study is the lack multiple methods of triangulation during data analysis, although the process of coding included constant comparison and analytical memos. The addition of a focus group could have helped to further develop and identify emerging themes from the data. This data collection process only used one interview from each participant. Additionally interviews conducted over time may help to clarify these themes.

Due to the limitations of the current study, the generalizability of the research findings is limited. It should be noted that the purpose of this study was for exploration and understanding not to predict the behaviors of a large population. This purpose of this study was to gain a deeper and more enriched perspective into the lived experiences of young adults with immigrant parents. The struggles and conflicts that are often experienced have been understudied in the literature.

Considering the findings of this study, it should first be noted that this study did not incorporate interviews with the parents which is a limitation. Due to the ever changing reality of young adults, future research may consider how perspectives change over time regarding parental relationships. One area, that would be worthy for future research is looking to understand how parents perceive young adult's perceptions of intergenerational congruence.

Using a qualitative approach in this study allowed theory to develop from the data. These theories offer some insight into the experiences of intergenerational congruence of Chinese American young adults. The development of these theories from the experiences of Chinese American young adults, emphasize the need for further exploration of parent-youth relationships and family functioning in Chinese American families.

Additionally, using quotes from the data in the results section helped to emphasize and illustrate the research findings from the participants' voice. Theoretical saturation was achieved in this study implying that no new insights emerged from the data after the sample size of thirty one was reached in this study.

Despite the limitations discussed, this study contributes to the current literature on intergenerational congruence in Chinese American young adults as well as the construction of "I". This study provides greater insight and discovery into an understudied aspect of Chinese American young adults. Minority children are not often studied from this perspective by trying to understand their experience with their parents. This study also offers some important implications for future directions in research and practice.

### **Implications for Practice**

Many of the previous studies in the current literature looked to understand these issues from a single focus, neglecting multiple external variables. This study has clinical implications for family intervention work with Chinese American families. The ever growing Asian American population will greatly benefit from more culturally relevant family systems interventions. Family therapists may find some important tips for working with these family experiences.

Moreover, the issues that were raised and heard from this population, lends itself to Chinese American young adults' vulnerability to developing future mental disorders or negative psychological implications. This research has helped guide the focus to addressing the struggles these young adults have with culture. However, it should be noted that there is need for further investigation into the factors that uniquely impact each

individual. Not all these experiences will be the same, but there exists a common theme for self-exploration and discovery.

Cross-cultural issues involved in immigrant families presents unique challenges for many family therapists as they struggle to navigate the many perspectives and factors involved within multicultural families. One reason is due to strong American and Chinese cultural influences on self-development. These young adults struggle to maintain their bicultural memberships. The ever changing cultural and ethnic landscapes of the United States will continue to evolve and impact research and family therapy. It is important for family therapists to be able to build rapport and respond to the experiences of Chinese American young adults and their families. Understanding how these individuals create individual identities against a more collectivist background lends itself to more effective interventions.

Clinical implications of this study relate to the need for more culturally sensitive therapy practices, approaches, and interventions. There cannot be clear assumptions when working with minority families due to the variety of experiences and factors that comprise individual stories. Family therapist need to be more cautious and aware when working with Chinese American families. It should also be noted that Chinese Americans represent a broad population and that these experiences may be experienced differently. Therefore, it is important to listen to individual stories to gain a better contextual framework for therapy. It is important to understand perspectives and locate unique experiences within the bigger cultural and societal context. Family therapists and researchers should be thinking about the ways in which they could relate to multicultural identities and the integration of these identities into therapy.

## **Future Directions**

While much information has been gained in this present study, it will be important to continue to build upon the concepts developed to further understand how these concepts evolve and develop over time. In evaluating the findings of this study, some assumptions have been made about the parent's perspective on issues of intergenerational congruence. The researcher has inferred that parents' attitudes and beliefs are more closely tied to their country of origin and traditional values and practices. The researcher speculates that the parental behaviors and beliefs are attributed to their cultural membership. It is important in future research to test these and other assumptions by conducting interviews of the parents. The link between parenting styles, parent-child relationships, and culture warrants more in-depth analysis and examination.

Moreover, this study was comprised of a group of students currently enrolled in universities across California. It might be useful to interview student from other parts of the country to compare whether geography impacts the results of this study. Or include young adults in the workforce to explore different life stages and their impact on self-development. Examining college graduated young adults further down the time line would be important to determine how different life stages continue to impact the construction of "I" and compare their reflections of intergenerational congruence as they grow older and more independent.

## **Conclusion**

This study helped to give voice back to a population that is not often studied nor participates in research. What are the ways in which we can encourage them to share their

experiences? How can we connect with this population more in order to illicit greater stories and in-depth understanding? This study is meant to be exploratory in learning about the experience of intergenerational congruence and drawing from the participant's experiences to create theories. The construction of "I" is a new concept within Chinese American families as the focus has traditionally been on culture, community, and family. Chinese American young adults are encouraged to excel academically and be independent but within the limits set forth by the family. This has created a difficult situation for young adults as they desire to move away from the family but invisible strings prevent them from fully becoming independent. In summary, I end by leaving this thought. How can young adults transition into adulthood when they are unable to remove the training wheels? There may not be an "I" in team, but there is an "I" in family.

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## APPENDIX A

### DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender (circle one):
  - A. Female
  - B. Male
2. Age at last birthday: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Choose one below for your present status in college:
  - A. Freshman
  - B. Sophomore
  - C. Junior
  - D. Senior
  - E. Graduate
  - F. Other
4. Do you fully identify as being Chinese?
  - A. No
  - B. Yes
5. Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. Decline to answer
6. If YES, Please indicate what religion(s) you are affiliated with:
  - A. Christian/Catholic
  - B. Christian/Non-Catholic
  - C. Jewish
  - D. Muslim
  - E. Judaism
  - F. Buddhism
  - G. Islam
  - H. Atheist
  - I. Other:
  - J. Decline to answer
7. Marital status of parents:
  - A. Married
  - B. Separated
  - C. Divorced
  - D. Never married
8. In terms of income, would you say your parents are:
  - A. Upper class
  - B. Upper-middle class
  - C. Middle class
  - D. Lower- middle class
  - E. Lower class
  - F. Working class
9. Annual household income:
  - A. <\$10,000
  - B. \$10,000-\$20,000
  - C. \$21,000-\$30,000
  - D. \$31,000-\$40,000
  - E. \$41,000-\$50,000
  - F. \$51,000-\$80,000
  - G. > \$80,000
9. Highest level of education your parents completed:
  - A. High School
  - B. Some College or Vocational School
  - C. College Graduate
  - D. Graduate School and beyond
10. How many years ago did your family immigrate to the United States?
  - A. <5 years
  - B. 5-10 years
  - C. 10-15 years
  - D. >15 years

11. How often do you attend religious services?
- A. Less than Twice a month
  - B. Twice a month
  - C. 4 times a month
  - D. Weekly
  - E. More than once a week
12. How active are you in your religious practices?
- A. Not at all
  - B. Somewhat Active
  - C. Moderate
  - D. Very active
13. How important is your religious faith to you?
- A. Not very important
  - B. Somewhat important
  - C. Very important



## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

This is a study that will help us learn more about you and your family's experience with intergenerational relationships. Each interview would address a number of related questions that may be followed by probes to expand or clarify meaning or pursue topics raised by respondents. We are interested in learning about your sense of these questions: your opinions, experiences, and your unique ideas. It may be helpful to view this as a conversation that we are having. Please take as much time as you might think necessary in answering these questions.

#### **Getting Started**

- A. Begin with “small talk” to engage the participants and help them feel comfortable. Use observations from the surroundings to connect with them in a personal way or ask about their day or their drive.
- B. Review the purpose of the study with the participants. Go over the informed consent documents, emphasizing confidentiality and address their questions. Obtain informed consent form each participant.
- C. Tell participants that they are participating in a directed conversation, that you are interested in how they think about their relationship with their family members, that you are not judging them, but learning about their experiences. Remind them that they may decline to answer any questions or request to stop the audio recording or conclude the interview at any time. Ask if there are other questions.
- D. Complete the demographics questionnaire sheet.

### **Brief History of the Family**

1. Begin by sharing your family “story.” As best as you know it, what is the story about how your family immigrated to the United States of America?
  - Probes: When did they immigrate? Do you know the reasons behind your family deciding to immigrate? What was the transition like for your family?

### **Family Ideology**

2. Please tell me, what was your experience like while growing up with your parents over the years?
  - Probes: How would you describe your relationship with your mother? With your father?
3. Please share some details with me about your relationship with your siblings and/or close family members.
  - Probes: how many siblings do you have? What kinds of joys and challenges did you have with them in growing up over the years?
4. Please tell me something about what it was like growing up in your household. How do you describe your household composition?
  - Probes: extended family?
5. What is your family like in terms of how they spend time together?
  - Probes: How has this changed over time?

### **Socio-Cultural Factors**

6. I may assume that you are aware of the differences between the culture in the United States and in China. How do you think the cultural experience of

American life influence how you now relate to your parents? Other family members?

- In what way does culture influence your relationship with your parents?
  - If relevant, how has your religious/spiritual beliefs influenced this?
7. In what ways have social and cultural values, beliefs, or practices played a role in your relationship with your parents?
- Probes: How have society and culture influenced your self-identity?

### **Intergenerational Congruence**

8. I want to ask about your cultural identity as an Asian American. How do you identify with 2 cultures? Do you identify with one more than the other?
- Probes: What has been your experience living between 2 cultures? Do you feel like you are?
9. As second generation young adults, we often feel a sense of responsibility to respect our immigrant parents and adhere to their beliefs and traditional values. What are the ways in which this may be true in your own experience?
- Probes: How does respect play a part in how you manage your relationship with your parents?
10. The second part to this question is that we often feel conflicted between our parents' views as compared to the American values through which we are raised. Are there any specific generational or cultural differences you experiences between you and your parents?
- Probes: What do you feel has caused these differences? In what area do you feel these differences the most?

11. How have you been able to distance yourself from close ties to your parents and family typical in Asian culture to accept American values? Well, what is that experience like for you?
12. What do you think your parents would say about these things? What would they say about the experience of intergenerational congruence?

### **Conflict Resolution**

13. Think of some times when there was a conflict with your parents. What is your memory as to how you were able to resolve these conflicts with them?
14. How do you deal with the struggles you have with your parents and family members? Who do you turn to for advice?
  - a. What have been helpful about talking with others?
  - b. What have not been helpful about talking with others?
15. How have your own experiences of intergenerational congruence impacted your self-identity?
16. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us that we did not ask regarding your relationship with your parents over time?

### **Ask for permission to re-contact**

After the interview is completed, thank participants for their time and tell them that you may want to re-contact them for a follow-up interview or future studies. Clarify that this would mean that even though their names have been deleted from the transcript of the interview, their contact information will be kept in a separate file. Have all participants indicate when on the informed consent form whether or not they wish to be re-contacted.

**APPENDIX C**

**INFORMED CONSENT**



**LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY**  
**School of Behavioral Health**

**Informed Consent**

(Please write your initials and the date at the bottom of each page)

**INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS IN  
CHINESE AMERICAN FAMILIES**

***Purpose and Procedures***

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled “Intergenerational Relationships and Conflicts in Chinese American Families.”

The purpose of this proposed dissertation study is to examine the impact of intergenerational relationships between parents and children in Chinese American families. This study is being conducted by Dr. Curtis A. Fox, Ph.D and Ms. Kimberly Doe, M.S of Loma Linda University, Department of Counseling and Family Science in the hope of making a significant contribution to our understanding of the varied experiences of Chinese American families living in the United States.

If you would like to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in either an in-person or telephone interview with Ms. Doe that will last between 60 – 70 minutes.

Please read this informed consent carefully and sign or initial as indicated and return in-person at the time of the interview or email with a statement agreeing to participate. Once

your signed consent is received, you will be contacted by telephone to arrange a mutually acceptable time for the interview.

Your consent is required to record your responses during the interview. The conversation will be digitally recorded and transcribed into a written document. If needed the investigators may need to recontact you for clarification during this process. The audio files will then be erased after the study has been completed. All references to names, places, people, and in some cases, occupation, will be changed or removed in order to decrease the likelihood that you could be identified based on your comments. Your interview will be added to a group of other interviews and analyzed collectively. Study findings will be used for professional training and future scholarly publications

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 3

***Risks***

Although it is unlikely, the participant in the study may experience feelings of anger or frustration during or after the interview due to discussion of family conflicts and relationships. The researcher will speak to all participants beforehand to describe that the interview will ask questions about your family which can be stressful and emotional. The researcher will be aware of such responses and emotions and will stop the interview to address these issues as they arise. You will have the opportunity to stop the interview at any point or have the option not to answer certain questions.

### ***Benefits***

Participation in the study will help health care professionals understand previously understudied experiences and challenges which Chinese American young adults face. You might find it interesting and helpful to you to talk to a nonjudgmental interviewer about your private experiences.

### ***Participants Rights***

Your participation is completely voluntary. Should you decline to be interviewed there are no negative consequences and no ill will on the part of the investigators.

### ***Confidentiality***

The investigators will not tell anyone that you have participated in this study. Additionally, all personal information you share during your participation in the study will be held in strict confidence. Identifying material such as names, places, occupation, or anything that will allow people to know of your identity will not be used in presentations or publications of study results. The tape transcriptions and all materials associated with this study will be stored in a secure location.

### ***Costs***

There is no cost to you for participating in the study.

### ***Reimbursement***

You will not be paid for participating in the study.

### ***Referrals***

Referrals can be provided for you to the counseling center at your university or to professionals located nearby. All services will be at your own cost.

***Impartial Third Party Contact***

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any question or complaint you may have about the study, you may contact the Office of Research affairs , Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909)558-8544 for information and assistance.

.....  
Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 3

***Informed Consent Statement***

I have read the contents of the consent form. I hereby give voluntary consent to be interviewed. Signing this consent document does not waive my rights nor does it release the investigators or institution from their responsibilities. I may call Ms. Kimberly Doe at (510) 854-6363 or her supervisor Dr. Fox at (909) 238-9139 if I have additional questions or concerns.

Note to emailed participants: Please email the investigators attesting that you have read all 3 pages of the informed consent document and include a statement agree to participate in this study as the terms describe.

The interviewer(s) will review this consent with you at the time of the interview and will answer any questions you may have about your participation. If, after you sign this consent and discuss the study with Ms. Doe, you choose not to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

---

Print your name here



---

Sign your name here

---

Date

Please list a telephone number at which the researcher may call you to arrange a convenient time for your interview. If there is a time of day that you prefer to be called, please indicate this as well.

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Times: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like a copy of this consent form mailed to you, please give your address here:

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I have reviewed the contents of the consent form with the person signing above. I have explained potential risks and benefits of the study.

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Signature of Investigator

---

Phone Number

---

Date

## APPENDIX D

### SCRIPT A: NOTICE TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS (FLYER OR EMAIL RECRUITMENT TO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS)

A dissertation research study at Loma Linda University is seeking Chinese American students to participate in an interview over the telephone or in person. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of intergenerational congruence on parent-child relationships in Chinese American families.

- This project is being conducted by Curtis Fox, Ph.D and Ms. Kimberly Doe, M.S of Loma Linda University.
- Chinese American young adults born in the United States with 2 Chinese immigrant parents between the ages of 18-25 are needed in this study.
- The researcher will ask about personal, educational, and professional background, but are most interested in understanding how their experiences of intergenerational congruence impacts their relationship with their parents.
- The interviews will last between 60 – 90 minutes, depending on how much the participants decide to share with the researchers.
- The names of individuals who choose to participate will remain confidential and will not be divulged to anyone outside of the research team.
- The interview will be digitally recorded and written down. Anything that might identify the interviewee will be removed or changed (names, places, ages, etc.) so that no one will be able to recognize anyone who has shared their story.
- Participants will not be paid for participating in the study.
- Participation is voluntary.

- This research will be used to help family therapists and other health care professionals understand the experience of Asian American young adults more fully.

Are you willing to participate in this project?

Do you have any questions?

If you need more information, you may call Kimberly Doe at (510) 854-6363 or her supervisor Dr. Fox at (909) 238-9139.

**APPENDIX E**  
**PHONE SCRIPT**

Hello, my name is Curtis Fox/Kimberly Doe from the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences at Loma Linda University. May I speak to \_\_\_\_\_? I would like to tell you about a research study that I am conducting. You indicated that you were interested in participating and I was given your information by (student organization/contact person). I was wondering if this is a convenient for me to talk to you about this study at this time. (If not, when might be a good time for me to speak with you again?) The purpose of this study is to understand from your experiences intergenerational relationships and conflicts in your family. We are seeking participants that are Chinese American students born in the US to 2 Chinese immigrant parents between the ages of 18-25. Do you fit these criteria? Those who agree to participate will be asked a series of questions about their personal experiences growing up in their family. The interview will take 1 hour of your time. There is no monetary incentive for participation. While you may not benefit directly from this study, we hope the results of this study will help health care providers create more effective interventions. Your participation is voluntary and I am hoping you would agree to do so. If you agree to do the interview by phone then I will need to send you the informed consent by mail or email. You will be asked to sign and return this form to me before conducting the interview. If you agree to meet with me in person then I can give the form to you when we meet. It was a pleasure talking with you. If you do not mind I will like to make an appointment with you to spend 1 hour talking with you about the questions. Do you have any questions? Would you like to participate in this study? Thank you for your time.