

Cultural Implications in Parenting Practices and Values:

Further Examination of Asian Parenting Style

By

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A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Doctor of Psychology in the  
Department of Psychology at Pace University

New York

2022

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	4
ABSTRACT	5
INTRODUCTION	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
HYPOTHESES	20
METHODS	22
RESULTS	24
DISCUSSION	33
REFERENCES	39

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Variables by Race/Ethnicity	25
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Independent-Samples t-Tests for Discipline, Education, and General Welfare and Protection by Race	26
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Within-Subjects Analysis of Variance	27
Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Analyses of Variance for Bonding, Responsivity, and Sensitivity by Age Group	28
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics and Independent-Samples t-Tests for Bonding, Responsivity, and Sensitivity by Parent Gender	29
Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations for Discipline Subscale T Scores by Gender and Race	31
Table 7. $2 \times 2$ Factorial Analysis of Variance for Discipline Subscale T Scores by Gender and Race	31
Figure 1. The Effect of Race/Ethnicity on Discipline Subscale Scores by Child Gender	32

## ABSTRACT

Previous research has examined the critically important role that parents have as well as how the cultural and ethnic background of the parent has implications for the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that influence parenting style. Literature indicates that the parenting style of Asian and Asian-American parents is associated with the western ideology of authoritarian style, which is described to be harsh, demanding, and with low levels of emotional attunement. However, this notion has been challenged by researchers that argue that the customs and behaviors that may be valued in one culture may be differently regarded in another. Therefore, this study will further examine how culture and ethnicity impact parenting practices, utilizing Mowder's (2005) Parent Development Theory as the theoretical basis to appreciate the parent role.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine how culture influences parenting behaviors. More specifically, this study explores the value that parents of Asian descent place on specific parenting behaviors, compared to parents of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, this study explores if there are patterns of the value placed on parenting behaviors, based on factors such as parent gender, child gender, or child age. The findings of this research may be utilized by clinicians and practitioners to appreciate the parenting practices and values that parents integrate into their parenting. The possible patterns that emerge may facilitate conversations between professional practitioners and parents, to increase reflective capacities in their parenting within a larger socio-cultural context.

### Research Questions

This research investigates how parents of Asian descent place value on specific parenting behaviors. The overarching research question is: do parents of self-identified Asian descent place greater value on discipline, education, and general welfare and protection than bonding, responsiveness, and sensitivity? Additionally, do parents of self-identified Asian descent place greater value on discipline, education, and general welfare and protection than parents who identify with other racial/ethnic groups? Furthermore, this study explores if there are patterns of the valued parenting behaviors, based on factors such as parent gender, child gender, or child age.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Parenting

Parenting encompasses several different social contexts, that of the values within cultural identities and of the socialization processes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Psychological research has focused on the various dimensions of parenting, including, for example, defining parenting styles, understanding parent behavior, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and the impact of parenting on child development variables (e.g., academic achievement, cognitive development, social-emotional skills and behavior).

Contemporary research has focused on further understanding the role of a parent and parenting styles. One of the most well-known researchers, Diana Baumrind (1966; 1967; 1991), posited that there are three distinct parenting styles- 1) permissive, 2) authoritarian, and 3) authoritative, and later posited a fourth, neglectful. These parenting styles emerge based on a continuum of two broad domains of parenting behavior, control and warmth. Baumrind sought to differentiate parenting behaviors from characteristics of the child and the parent-child relationship (1967; 1971a; 1989).

Another well-known theory regarding dimensions of parenting from Maccoby and Martin's (1983) posits that a particular parenting style emerges based on a balance or an imbalance of demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness is defined as the expectations outlined for children by the parents and the degree of control and supervision. Responsiveness is defined as the parents' degree of communication and connectedness to their children. Maccoby and Martin integrated Baumrind's conceptualization with theirs so that an additional parenting style was developed- neglectful parenting. Therefore, 1) permissive parenting is associated with low demandingness and high responsiveness; 2) authoritarian parenting is associated with high

demandingness and low responsiveness; 3) authoritative parenting is associated with high demandingness and high responsiveness; and 4) neglectful parenting is associated with low demandingness and low responsiveness.

Both Baumrind and Maccoby and Martin's models of parenting style are influenced by social learning theory. Parenting styles are important to define and understand, especially as research has indicated that a particular parenting style can influence outcomes for the child in important domains of functioning, including social-emotional development, self-perception, and academic functioning (Smetana, 2017). The various parenting styles have been widely examined, particularly for cultural associations and mental health outcomes for children. Broadly, authoritative parenting is viewed as ideal, with such parents being responsive to their children's needs while able to set appropriate limits and set reasonable expectations. This balanced formula was concluded to be most beneficial in fostering positive developmental outcomes for children. Authoritarian parenting, captured by a punitive, highly demanding, and restrictive style of parenting, is associated with negative developmental outcomes for children. Children raised by authoritarian parents were found to have significantly more internalizing and externalizing problem behavior, less prosocial behavior, and poor self-regulation (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Shen, Cheah, & Yu, 2018). Authoritarian parenting is associated with poor academic achievement (Xia et al., 2015; Pong et al., 2010). These findings have generally been replicated in studies with families across ethnicities and social class (Power, 2013). However, there also have been findings that uncovered discrepancies in these associations, especially as related to ethnic background (Ang & Goh, 2006; Choi et al., 2013). Therefore, this has led psychologists and researchers to further examine how cultural and social contexts influence the process from parenting behaviors, to learning and integration, and eventually child developmental outcomes.



### ***Parent Development Theory***

To further expand upon parenting, from broad domains of constructs and styles, there has been much research conducted to discern important parent-specific behaviors. The Parent Development Theory (PDT), featuring concepts from social learning and cognitive developmental theories, posits that parenting is a social role (Mowder, 2005). Within this theory, there are several specific parent role characteristics and behaviors that are outlined. Bonding is affection, love, and concern that parents feel and display toward their children. Discipline reflects limit-setting from the parents and ensuring that limits are understood and respected by the children. Education is the transmission of information from parents to children, to educate, guide, and teach. General Welfare and Protection is ensuring that children are protected and that their general needs (e.g., clothing, food, shelter) are met by the parents. Responsivity is how parents respond to their children's communications and needs. Sensitivity is the parent's ability to perceive and understand their children's communications and needs and appropriately attend to them.

### **Cultural Implications in Parenting Practices**

Within the literature, the notion that cultural influence plays a large role in defining and understanding the parent role is well appreciated. Culture is generally defined as the customs, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors characteristic of a particular nation, people, or social group (Bornstein, 2012). These beliefs and behaviors will guide how parents, of a group, tend to raise their children. This socialization process helps to facilitate the passing down of important beliefs, behaviors, and traditions that are valued and respected by the group to subsequent generations. This social act of raising children will also teach them to become culturally competent members of their society (Bornstein, 2012).

There are culture-common and culture-specific modes of parenting (Bornstein, 2012). The culture-common values and behaviors are likely to ensure the health and safety of children, which constitute as necessary demands of parenting. Culture-specific values and behaviors will have more variability, depending on the particular values of the group. Values that may be fostered by a particular group may not have the same meaning for another. There have been different child-related outcomes when applying the norms that are more typically valued in one culture to another. Baumrind (1972) found that when authoritarian practices, by Caucasian standards, were found to be applied by Black parents, their children developed in ways that they were perceived to be assertive and independent. In this study and with this finding, Baumrind posited that Black children, rather than finding these authoritarian practices rejecting, perceived such practices to be nurturing forms of care-taking.

### ***Parenting in Asian Families***

One should take caution when examining Asian parents as a group, since there is such a large range of ethnic groups that are encompassed within the racial category of Asian. There are more than 20 countries in East and Southeast Asia and in India (Pew Research, 2021). In the United States, there are even more variations, when considering the degree to which the Asian-American individual or family has assimilated into the Western culture. With assimilation and acculturation, there is often a shift or a combination, to varying degrees, of the values of one's home country and new country. The vast extent that encompasses the Asian ethnic group makes this research more challenging, yet also signals its great importance.

### ***Traditional Asian Values***

To further understand the values of a social group or society, one can examine how children are reared and what behaviors are elicited and favored in children. Certain social