Intersectionality of acculturation and friendships in Asian youths: A review of the literature

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Intersectionality of acculturation and friendships in Asian youths: A review of the literature

Abstract
In 2010, approximately 17.3 million people in the United States identified as being full or part Asian, representing the fastest growing race group in the United States from 2000 to 2010. The growing number of Asians living in the United States elicits questions about the daily experiences of these individuals as they navigate the journey of acculturating to a new life in a new country. Thus, acculturation—the process of cultural change resulting from adapting and adjusting to a new culture—earns a spotlight in the literature of cross-cultural psychology. However, much of the acculturation literature lacks depth and breadth of information regarding how acculturation and acculturative stress can impact not just the psychological, but also the social adjustment for many Asian youths. In Westernized societies, adolescence is viewed as a time marked by increasingly important peer relationships. Drawing from the significance of acculturation and social relationships for Asian youths, this paper examines how the nature of peer relationships plays against the backdrop of acculturation. Specifically, it examines the extant literature on acculturation and peer relationships in Asian youths in order to promote meaningful dialogue about the intersectionality between the two domains. Further, gaps in the current landscape of acculturation research are addressed, and future directions to propel research in cross-cultural psychology are proposed.

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INTERSECTIONALITY OF ACCULTURATION
AND FRIENDSHIPS IN ASIAN YOUTHS:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
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HILLSBORO, OREGON

BY
TRINH T. TRAN
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
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APPROVED BY:
Shahana Koslofsky, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

In 2010, approximately 17.3 million people in the United States identified as being full or part Asian, representing the fastest growing race group in the United States from 2000 to 2010. The growing number of Asians living in the United States elicits questions about the daily experiences of these individuals as they navigate the journey of acculturating to a new life in a new country. Thus, acculturation—the process of cultural change resulting from adapting and adjusting to a new culture—earns a spotlight in the literature of cross-cultural psychology. However, much of the acculturation literature lacks depth and breadth of information regarding how acculturation and acculturative stress can impact not just the psychological, but also the social adjustment for many Asian youths. In Westernized societies, adolescence is viewed as a time marked by increasingly important peer relationships. Drawing from the significance of acculturation and social relationships for Asian youths, this paper examines how the nature of peer relationships plays against the backdrop of acculturation. Specifically, it examines the extant literature on acculturation and peer relationships in Asian youths in order to promote meaningful dialogue about the intersectionality between the two domains. Further, gaps in the current landscape of acculturation research are addressed, and future directions to propel research in cross-cultural psychology are proposed.

Keywords: acculturation, peer relationships, Asian youths, acculturative stress
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Introduction

From 2000 to 2010, the Asian population grew more than four times faster than the total United States population, making the Asian population the fastest growing race group out of all other race groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Specifically, the Asian population grew from 10.2 million in 2000 to 14.7 million in 2010, increasing by 43 percent within the first decade of the 21st century. This significant increase in the Asian population, which refers to persons having origins in the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), demonstrates a remarkable population growth in the United States, and therefore, research on the Asian population should also have a significant place in the extant literature of cross-cultural psychology.

Within the pan-ethnic groups in the Asian community, there exist many specific intragroup differences in history, immigration, acculturation, socioeconomic status, and language (Chun & Akutsu, 2003). Yet among various Asian cultural groups, many share similar common values, beliefs, and parenting styles originating from the principles of Confucianism (Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003). Given the limited research in any one specific Asian cultural group, this paper will report empirical findings derived from samples of youths identifying with an Asian background as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Under a similar rationale of limited research, this paper will also report findings derived from samples of Asian youths with varying generational statuses, including those who identify as immigrants and later-generation Asian Americans or Asian Canadians.

A bulk of the acculturation literature highlights how acculturation affects mental health through mediation from acculturative and bicultural stress (Baker, Soto, Perez, & Lee, 2012). Given the numerous studies concentrated on the relation between acculturation and ethnic
minority mental health (e.g., Burnett-Zeigler, Bohnert, & Ilgen, 2013; Myers & Rodriguez, 2003), acculturation plays an important role in the psychological and social adjustment for many Asian youths (Chen & Tse, 2010). Unsurprisingly, acculturation-related factors likely shape the daily experiences for many Asian individuals living in largely Westernized societies, such as the United States and Canada. Similarly, difficulties arising from these acculturation-related factors likely compromise intrapersonal and interpersonal adjustments as well.

In the United States and Canada, adolescence is commonly considered a period where the world of peers become assertively more salient for many youths as they step away from the family and enmesh into their social circles (Brown & Klute, 2003). Here, youths are spending more time with friends and peers, building a social life centered on peer relationships, and deriving emotional and instrumental support from their peers. During this critical period in adolescence, youths often develop a sense of identity in relation to peers, such that social groups may be formed based on obvious commonalities, such as characteristics along racial and ethnic lines (Ecklund & Johnson, 2007).

Considering the importance of acculturation for Asian youths and the importance of social relationships in adolescence, how do the two factors intersect to shape the lives of many Asian youths navigating their daily experiences in a largely Westernized world? In what regards do peer relations affect the mechanism in which acculturation-related factors bring to bear on adolescent adjustment and wellbeing in Asian youths? In fact, has the literature examined the direct effects of acculturation and peer relationships as they apply principally for Asian youths in North America? Unfortunately, the current landscape of the acculturation literature lacks concrete answers to the proposed questions. More research is still needed to examine the intersection between acculturation and peer relations as it relates to Asian youth populations.
Purpose

The extant literature on acculturation places an emphasis on the relationship between acculturation and psychological wellbeing (e.g., Baker, Soto, Perez, & Lee, 2012; Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Chae & Foley, 2010). However, less is known about the specific domains of social and interpersonal functioning embedded within the larger framework of psychosocial functioning. The purpose of this paper is to review existing research relevant to the concepts of acculturation and peer relationships as they function within the scope of Asian youths in North America (i.e., the United States and Canada). With fewer studies examining the direct effects of acculturation on the dynamics of peer functioning in Asian youths, this paper will examine what is known about these two variables and discuss what future researchers can investigate regarding the intersection between acculturation and peer relationships as it functions in the broader process of acculturation for Asian youth groups.

Because the research on acculturation has primarily focused on mental or physical health outcomes (e.g., Balls Organista, Organista, & Kurasaki, 2003), addressing the effects acculturation has beyond minority health can elucidate gaps in the literature that would allow for a better understanding of the acculturation process specifically for Asian youths and their peer relations. As Asian youths learn to live in a predominantly individualistic Western world, the praxis of friendship becomes less predetermined by existing group ties and more dependent on one’s initiation to cultivate friendships (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, this paper will examine relevant social variables that likely play a role in shaping a youth’s friendship decision.

Specifically, this review will first define the concept of acculturation in order to address the implications of acculturation as it applies to Asian cultural context. Further discussions will focus on the relationship of acculturation and stress as it impacts the physical, mental, and
psychological wellbeing of the acculturating Asian individuals. Next, the review will highlight various social variables that serve an instrumental role in the interplay between acculturation and peer relations for Asian youths. Lastly, the review will conclude with a discussion of the bidirectional influences of the examined variables, the role of the receiving context, and suggestions for future research directions in these domains.

**Acculturation**

A quick database search of the terms *acculturation* and *Asian* will assuredly produce a plethora of studies related to how acculturation is implicated in a broad array of diversity related topics specific to the Asian population. Such topics can range from school performance for Asian students (Suinn, 2010) to delinquent behavior in Chinese youths (Wong, 1999) to Asian immigrant mental health (Leu, Walton, & Takeuchi, 2011). The following sections examine a developing conceptualization of acculturation in order to provide a common framework in which to discuss how the process of acculturation plays a significant role in the lives of ethnic minority immigrants and their descendants, specifically as it applies to those who identify a background from Asian descent.

**Definition**

The acculturation literature has defined the term *acculturation* in various ways (e.g., Chae & Foley, 2010; Moyerman & Forman, 1992; Zane & Mak, 2003). Based on the classical definition by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p. 149), “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.” Here, two societal contexts are implicated in the intercultural contact—the society of origin and that of the receiving country (Berry, 1997). Thus, acculturation refers to
the process of change that results from intercultural contact between members from the country of origin and those from the receiving country (Berry, 2003).

From this intercultural contact, change can occur in various domains of life (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Marín & Gamba, 2003). For example, economic changes can occur with loss of previous economic status or gain of new employment opportunities (Berry, 1997). Within the social sphere, change can also involve disrupted family structures or development of new friendships and communities. Perhaps at the core of acculturation research involves examining cultural and psychological changes. Cultural changes can occur in a group’s customs and value systems while psychological changes can involve changes in an individual’s ethnic identity and social behaviors in the receiving country (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney, 2003).

This multidimensional process of change can also be conceptualized under different competing frameworks. One conceptualization views acculturation as a unidimensional approach, whereby the process of acculturation occurs in a linear progression toward complete assimilation into the receiving culture (Gordon, 1964). Viewing acculturation in a unilinear fashion explicity places the acculturating individual on a single continuum where the two ends represent either one who has retained his or her cultural heritage or one who has assimilated into the culture of receiving country. Over time, the acculturating individual travels along this continuum by shedding the practices, values, and identification from his or her national origin while simultaneously absorbing those of the larger culture (Gans, 1979). In fact, this process can continue across generations until the descendants of immigrants are “culturally indistinguishable from the dominant group” (Ryder, Alden, & Paulus, 2000).

In contrast to the unidimensional approach, Berry (1997) proposes a bidimensional model of acculturation where the issues of receiving-culture acquisition and heritage-culture retention
coexist independently of each other. In this framework, an acculturating individual will face two fundamental questions: “To what degree do I maintain my cultural identity, practices, and values?” and “To what degree do I contact and participate in other cultural groups of the receiving country?” The intersection between the issues of cultural maintenance and contact and participation create an acculturation space where there are four posited acculturation strategies—*assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization* (Berry, 1997).

From the perspective of the acculturating individual, *assimilation* refers to when the individual has little interest in maintaining his or her heritage culture while simultaneously wishing to adopt the receiving culture. *Separation* is the opposite orientation whereby the individual wishes to retain to his or her heritage culture and avoid contact with the receiving culture. *Integration* occurs when the individual is equally oriented to both cultures, thus maintaining his or her heritage culture while adopting the receiving culture. This category can also be referred as *biculturalism* (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001). Last, *marginalization* is an option when the individual wishes to neither seek cultural maintenance nor contact with the receiving culture.

An important caveat to this early presentation of Berry’s (1997) model is the assumption that individuals from acculturating groups are free to choose which acculturation strategy to take (Berry, 2003). However, when the freedom of choice does not exist, other terms are applied. For example, *segregation* occurs when the individual are forced to choose the separation option. When an individual chooses to assimilate to the receiving culture, the term *melting pot* is applied; when the situation is forced assimilation, the term *pressure cooker* may be more appropriate. Further, the integration option can only occur when the receiving country is open to a culturally pluralistic society that supports all cultural groups, including those who “freely”
choose multiple cultural identities (Berry, 1997). When an individual purposefully selects which aspects of his or her heritage culture to retain and which aspects of the receiving culture to adopt, then the process of *enculturation* occurs (Weinreich, 2009).

However, Berry’s (1997) four-categorical typology has received criticism, questioning the validity of these strategies (e.g., Rudmin, 2003; Weinreich, 2009). For example, the use of a priori cutoff values to classify acculturating individuals as low or high in a category assumes that all four strategies exist and are equally valid—a “one size fits all” approach (Rudmin, 2003). Therefore, applying Berry’s model may not take into consideration the type of migrants undergoing the process of intercultural contact. For example, a voluntary migrant and a sojourner (i.e., one who briefly resides in a new country with intentions to return to his or her original country; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010) will likely have different reasons for migration that will guide how he or she acculturates and what acculturation options are available to them. Again, the four categories are not necessarily equal. The individual may not freely “choose” which strategy to take, particularly if there exists other external restrictions, such as in communities where discrimination and intolerance remains dominant (Weinreich, 2009).

Despite criticism for Berry’s (1997) model, there is an emerging consensus that cultural orientations towards both the heritage culture and receiving culture can be rendered independently of each other (Dere, Ryder, & Kirmayer, 2010). Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus (2000) conduct three independent studies comparing the unidimensional and bidimensional models of acculturation. Their findings suggest that the bidimensional model provides a deeper and more valid understanding of acculturation, such that individuals, when exposed to two cultures, can develop two coexisting cultural identities. On the other hand, unidimensional
approach may often occlude or misrepresent the process of acculturation, such as for those who stand “in-between” the two ends of the cultural spectrum. Abe-Kim, Okazaki, and Goto (2001) also make similar conclusions that the unidimensional approach offers an inadequate picture of the relationship between acculturation and other cultural indicator variables. As such, the unidimensional model can oversimplify the process as one where acculturation functions through a linear mechanism with assimilation into the receiving culture as the only end outcome.

Viewing acculturation as a multifaceted and multidimensional process is becoming a more widely accepted concept in the prevailing acculturation literature. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) offer a more expanded model of acculturation—one that views the dynamic process on a multidimensional scale where changes occur across multiple interrelated and independent variables of an individual’s cultural practices, values, and identifications. Here, cultural practices may refer to cultural customs and traditions, language use, and food preferences. Cultural values involve belief systems associated with a cultural group, such as the values of individualism in Western societies and collectivism in Eastern societies. Cultural identifications refer to the concept of self that is attached to a cultural group.

In their integrative approach, Schwartz et al. (2010) propose that these components of acculturation derived from both the heritage culture and the receiving culture undergo change during intercultural contact. These changes may occur at different rates or may not occur at all. However, neither change variable is a fair proxy for the complex process of acculturation and the multifaceted changes it can incur. Acculturation should not be viewed as an “all or nothing” process where an individual is considered either “acculturated” or “not acculturated” Schwartz et al. (2010). Nor should acculturation be presented as a single phenomenon that occurs at a single rate because the basis for change in any of the six proposed dimensions can be informed by
individual differences in demographics and contextual variables (Schwartz et al., 2010). In this regard, many factors, such as the characteristics of the migrants, the context of the receiving culture, and the presence of other stressors, will influence the pace or even the presence of change from intercultural contact.

Therefore, the reconceptualization of acculturation from a multidimensional framework emphasizes that the trajectory towards cultural adaptation involves both “a larger, higher order process” and “a set of related but somewhat independent dimensions” (Schwartz et al., 2010). Acculturation is likely neither a single continuum towards complete assimilation into the receiving culture nor a simple intersection between maintenance of the heritage culture and contact with the receiving culture. Rather, the complex process of adapting and adjusting to a new culture involves changes that may occur across various dimensions of one’s cultural practices, values, and identification.

**Asian Culture**

In order to understand the intersection between acculturation and peer functioning and how it functions specifically within the Asian population, a familiarity of Asian cultural practices, values, and identification should be established. The definition of Asian contains a wide array of subgroups, such as those who identify their race as “Asian Indian,” “Chinese,” “Korean,” “Japanese,” and “Vietnamese” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As stated earlier, though there are recognizable and important cultural differences within each unique Asian subgroup, there are also likely cultural similarities across the various Asian contexts (Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003). Though intra-group differences are recognized, this paper will discuss the broader context of cultural values and practices within the larger Asian community.
Embedded in traditional Asian values is a collectivistic orientation and values system where the individual is interconnected within the social context of others (Chang et al., 2011; Ryder et al., 2000). The Asian self-construal is interdependent in nature, such that the individual sees him- or herself in relation to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others (Chang et al., 2011). Hence, connectedness of individuals is often valued over individuality. To maintain group harmony, obedience to parental authority, deference to elders, and conformity to a hierarchical, patrilineal family structure are prioritized in traditional Asian family values (Chun & Akutsu, 2003). The desire to stay in close contact with the family unit may extend beyond living members where deceased ancestors are honored and their graves cared for (Hofstede, 2001). Here, the practice of filial piety carries across generations to parents, grandparents, other elders, and even deceased ancestors.

The cultural values of parental obedience and group harmony can be interwoven in Asian and Asian American families, regardless of acculturation levels. In fact, findings in a study by Yau and Smetana (1993) suggest that Chinese-American adolescents give greater priority to parental expectations than to their own personal desires in situations involving conflicts between parents’ demands for obedience and adolescent’s desires for personal autonomy. The psychological reason for adhering to parental wishes emphasized the concern for harmonious family relationships. The adolescents in the study were concerned in getting along with and avoid upsetting their parents and other Chinese adults.

Asian values also emphasize family recognition through achievement, emotional self-control, and humility (Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999). In fact, the importance of academic excellence has helped propel the myth of the model minority image for Asian Americans (Rothe, Tzuang, & Pumariega, 2010). The stereotype asserts that Asian Americans overcome adversities
through “hard work, uncomplaining perseverance, and quiet accommodation” (Suzuki, 1977, p. 24). The stereotype may also suggest that an individual’s cultural identity as an Asian or Asian American is tied into his or her ability to overcome adversity. However, by holding all Asian Americans to model minority images, such generalization collapses important intracultural differences, obscuring these differences within each unique Asian subgroup and even across different generations of Asian immigrants and Asians Americans.

A hallmark dimension within Asian cultures that has been heavily investigated by the existing literature is the idea of collectivism—a value system that guides normative behaviors and promotes a sense of duty and obligation in order to facilitate collective goals (Heinke & Louis, 2009). In a collectivistic society, members are taught to see themselves as a part of a “we” group, and it is this in-group that an individual derives most of his or her identity (Hofstede, 2001). Because the in-group becomes a major source of norms, identity, and social support, one’s loyalty to his or her in-group is highly valued (Triandis, 1995). Conceptualized in this way, Hofstede (2001) surmise that the dependent relationships between an individual and his or her in-group in collectivistic societies are developed for both practical and psychological reasons. Even after immigration, collectivistic values may not differ significantly across generations, such that those who appear highly acculturated may still retain “traditional” Asian values (Kim et al., 1999).

In contrast, most Western countries (e.g., the United States and Canada) typically value intellectual and affective autonomy (Chang et al., 2011). The Western self-construal is a self that is bounded as an independent and autonomous entity (Ryder et al., 2000). Individualism—the counterpart dimension of collectivism—is often a hallmark component of the Western value system where the emphasis is placed in the individual and independence between people (Heinke
& Louis, 2009). In fact, research delineating differences between East-West cultural values often straddle along the heuristic of collectivism-individualism (Hofstede, 2001). Collectivistic values stress interpersonal connectedness while individualistic values focus on individual needs and personal achievement (Heinke & Louis, 2009). The smallest unit in a collectivist society is the family while the smallest unit in an individualist society is the individual (Hofstede, 2001).

However, an important caveat is that neither the presence of collectivistic values nor the absence of individualistic values is absolute in many Asian American families. Bicultural family values, forming from an integrated value system of both individualistic and collectivistic principles, can and do exist within even traditional Asian families (Chun & Akutsu, 2003). Such a bicultural identity underscores the reality that an individual, whether he or she has assimilated into the receiving country or has maintained his or her ethnic identity, can have both idiocentric (self-oriented) and allocentric (social context-oriented) traits (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995). For example, Chinese child rearing may be an example of collectivistic socialization where the dependence of the child on the parents is often encouraged (Triandis, 1995). However, in a study by Lin and Fu (1990), immigrant Taiwanese and Taiwanese American parents encourage their children to be independent, but they also exert more parental control than do Caucasian-American parents. Thus, even when family interdependence is valued, individual independence may not necessarily be discouraged.

**Acculturative Stress for Asians**

**Definition**

The core values reflected in collectivism and individualism can, at times, represent two different dimensions to describe how an individual relates his- or herself within the greater backdrop of other people. When these two value systems are in contact, such as in situations that many Asian and Asian American individuals face living in a westernized society, dissonance and
conflict from this intercultural contact may arise. In these circumstances, the relationship between acculturation and stress becomes very important in influencing the physical, mental, and psychosocial wellbeing of the acculturating individual.

Here, the term *acculturative stress* describes the phenomenon that occurs when the process of acculturation causes problems for the acculturating groups and individuals (Berry, 2005). In response to the challenges that arise from intercultural contact, an acculturating individual may choose to pursue some kind of adaptation that allows him or her to become a better “fit” in their new receiving society. By adapting, both from a psychological and sociocultural perspective, the acculturating individual can learn to make “behavioral shifts” (Berry, 1997). That is, the individual learns to make changes in his or her behavioral repertoire that is more appropriate for the new receiving context. However, when there are greater levels of cultural conflict, acculturative stress may not be easily surmounted by just simple behavioral adjustments. In this sense, Berry (2005) describes the phenomenon of acculturative stress as a stress reaction to life events that are imbedded in the acculturation process.

How people acculturate, how much stress they experience, and how well they adapt psychologically and socioculturally can differ at both the group level and the individual level (Berry, 2005). In general, pursuit of the integration strategy from the bidimensional acculturation model is the least stressful and results in better adaption, particularly when the receiving context is mutually accommodating for multicultural integration (Berry, 2005; Yoon et al., 2012). On the other hand, pursuit of the marginalization strategy is the most stressful, especially in communities where there is a greater cultural disparity between the two groups (Berry & Annis, 1974). Intermediate levels of stress and adaptation can arise from the pursuit of the other two acculturation strategies of assimilation and separation.
The acculturating individual or groups may feel acculturative stress to not only adopt the receiving culture, but also to maintain their own heritage culture (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Thus, the effect of acculturative stress on psychological functioning has been a heavily researched area in the literature of cross-cultural psychology. For example, Yeh (2003) investigates the association between age, acculturation, cultural adjustment difficulties, and general mental health concerns in a sample of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant students. Her findings demonstrate that acculturative stress has the largest effect on reported general mental health problems, such that experiencing cultural stress may likely lead to mental health issues. In the study’s sample of Asian immigrant youths, age is a significant predictor of mental health problems, such that older students report more mental health concerns. Additionally, Asian youths who are more Asian-identified report more mental health symptoms than those who are more American-identified. Overall, age and acculturative stress can be significant predictors for mental health symptoms across various Asian ethnic adolescent groups.

Conversely, in their cross-sectional study, Choi, Meininger, and Roberts (2006) examine ethnic differences in adolescents on various psychological outcomes, including mental distress, social stress, and resources to cope with stress. In their study, mental distress involves somatic symptoms, depression, and suicidal ideation. Social stress consists of general social stress, process-oriented stress derived from acculturation, and discrimination. Resources to cope with stress refer to coping, self-esteem, family cohesion, and family conflicts. Study participants include adolescents from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Findings indicate that Asian Americans report significantly higher scores on social stress (higher process-oriented stress and discrimination) and mental distress and lower scores on resources (higher family conflicts, lower
self-esteem) than do European Americans. Thus, navigating the assorted challenges due to acculturation can represent a prominent reality for many Asian youths.

The configuration of results suggest that with greater exposure to social stress and scarce resources to effectively cope with these stressors, Asian American adolescents are likely vulnerable to greater risk for mental distress (Choi, Meininger, & Roberts, 2006). In particular, the sample of Asian American adolescents report significantly higher levels of process-oriented stress, which can be derived from adjusting and acculturating to interactions from intercultural contact. As such, the higher levels of process-oriented stress reported in this study’s Asian American adolescent group suggest that social stress due to acculturation and ethnic minority status may be especially salient for the Asian youth community.

Baker, Soto, Perez, and Lee (2012) also note that first-generation ethnic minorities (i.e., those born outside the receiving culture) are likely faced with a number of stressful challenges, such as difficulties understanding cultural norms, changes in social status, and language barriers. Later-generation ethnic minorities (i.e., those born in the receiving culture) may also face bicultural stress derived from conflicting feelings of being a member of two opposing cultures. In their study, Baker and colleagues compare the psychological wellbeing of Asian Americans who are classified into one of three acculturative statuses: Asian-Identified, Western-Identified, and Bicultural-Identified. Results suggest that individuals who are Asian-Identified and Western-Identified are more vulnerable to lower psychological wellbeing, whereas those who are Bicultural-Identified enjoy greater psychological wellbeing. Individuals identified as bicultural show the highest scores on various domains of subjective wellbeing, including environmental mastery, personal growth, and interpersonal relations.
Baker et al. (2012) reason that because bicultural Asian Americans are better able to successfully navigate both cultural contexts, they are more likely to have greater subjective wellbeing than those who have not. For Asian-identified Asian individuals who are largely foreign-born, acculturative stress rooted in difficulties adjusting to American culture, such as learning the local language, may likely have lead to decreased wellbeing. For Western-identified Asian individuals, acculturative stress related to intergenerational differences in acculturation styles amongst family members may lead to decreased wellbeing as well. Therefore, the effects of a bicultural identity likely have positive implications on subjective wellbeing and favorable psychological outcomes.

However, another perspective on bicultural identity involves the potential conflict that may also arise when individuals, particularly second-generation individuals, face two cultural identities. In the study by Baker et al. (2012), the authors conclude that a bicultural identity allows for more successful navigation of the two cultural contexts, thereby promoting a greater sense of subjective wellbeing. In contrast, Stroink and Lalonde (2009) elude a different view about the reality of a bicultural identity. In their study, the authors examine the role of cultural construals, in-group prototypicality, and identity in bicultural conflict with second-generation Asian Canadian undergraduate students. Results suggest that when Asian Canadians construe the two cultures as highly different, then their simultaneous identification with both cultures is lowered. This relationship is likely mediated by the fact that these individuals experience difficulties feeling like they are prototypical and likeable members of both in-groups. Combined, the two studies (Baker et al., 2012; Stroink & Lalonde, 2009) demonstrate that acculturative stress can affect not just acculturating individuals who identify with one culture, but it can also lead to potential conflicts for even those who identify with both cultures.
Because of the large group and individual differences in the ways people pursue acculturation (Berry, 2005), acculturative stress can also be rooted in the differences in acculturation responses within the family. For example, Santisteban and Mitrani (2003) describe a hypothetical, but likely, scenario when acculturative stress is enmeshed by the different acculturation strategies between family members. In their example of a family experiencing the acculturation process, the “separated” father of an immigrant family rejects the “American” ideas of his “assimilated” daughter. Not only do the father and daughter undergoing their own independent process associated with acculturation and adaptation, but their different acculturation responses serve as an additional source of intrafamilial stress. Conflicting levels of acculturation amongst family members can pose as serious threats to family bonds (Rothe, Tzuang, & Pumariega, 2010). Therefore, generational dissonance derived from differing acculturation response styles can likely have a great impact on the family unit.

As suggested earlier, intercultural contact between collectivistic and individualistic value systems may often lead to acculturative stress due to substantial generational gaps amongst many Asian immigrant families (Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003). In such families, the immigrant Asian parents are likely to hold on to more traditional, collectivistic values and lifestyles, such as obedience to parental expectations and conformity to social order and hierarchy. However, the American-born child, trying to find his or her place in society, may likely absorb the culture of the receiving context in order to adjust and adapt. The youth’s value system may include more internalizing ideas of autonomy and independence derived from their new American reality.

This interplay between immigrant parents and second-generation children highlights the idea of “goodness of fit” within the acculturation process (Rothe et al., 2010). Here, generational consonance may occur when parents and children accurate at the same rate, such that cultural
harmony is preserved in the family. However, the counterpart effect, cultural dissonance, may occur when acculturative changes made by immigrants parents neither guide nor accompany those made by their second-generation children. This latter scenario sets up a more challenging acculturative context for the family unit where further acculturative stress and intrafamilial conflicts are likely to arise.

Though the perceptions of acculturative stress may be subjective and vary along different sociocultural variables (e.g., generation status, language preferences), Asian American youths may be more likely to experience certain stressors, such as family stressors, compared to other ethnic groups (Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduña, 2007). In their qualitative content analysis, Choi and Dancy (2009) explore the perceptions of Korean American adolescents and their parents about their experiences with acculturative stress and examine the congruity between their perceptions. Both parents and adolescents report their main sources of stress are rooted in peer relationships, unfair treatment, pressure to excel academically and be successful, and strained parent-child relationships. Regarding peer relationships, Korean American adolescents report difficulties communicating with their American friends, such that their limited English proficiency encourage exclusive friendships with other same-ethnicity peers. Further, parents report they discourage their children from building diverse friendships, creating an additional source of stress for their acculturating children.

Reported differences in cultural norms also make it challenging for Korean American adolescents to “blend in” with their American peers, while perceived discrimination from their American peers seed feelings of being excluded and ignored (Choi & Dancy, 2009). In addition, dynamics within the parent-child relationship, such as parental pressure for academic success, cultural incompatibility, and language barriers, also sponsor another source of acculturative
stress. The qualitative findings from the present study tender a more holistic perspective of acculturative stress as viewed and experienced by Asian adolescents and their parents.

**Summary**

Thus far, we have examined the multidimensionality of acculturation that drives how acculturation can be defined, conceptualized, and experienced by immigrant communities in a new country, specifically relating acculturation in the context of Asian communities in the United States and Canada (Berry, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2010). We have explored the various acculturation strategies that individuals can implement while considering how certain strategies are more viable than others given the multicultural policy of the receiving country (Weinreich, 2009). To understand how the acculturation process expressly impacts the Asian community, we have also discussed the broader cultural values and practices characteristic of many Asian families where collectivism is valued (Chang et al., 2011). Conversely, we have viewed the cultural values and practices characteristic of their receiving context where individualism is prioritized (Heinke & Louis, 2009).

Based on inherent core values of the two cultures, we have deliberated how conflict and stress may arise from intercultural contact between two contrasting value systems. Acculturative stress for Asian youths can have a variety of implications, including those found in psychological outcomes (Baker et al., 2012), intrafamilial conflict (Rothe et al., 2010), and peer functioning (Choi & Dancy, 2009). With the latter, by acknowledging that acculturation can have a great impact on Asian youths’ peer relationships, we have set the stage to discuss the complex constellation between acculturation and peer relationships as it applies to Asian youths living in a largely Westernized context.
Acculturation and Peer Relationships in Asian Youths

In Sodowsky and Lai’s (1997) confirmatory factor analyses, the authors examine how acculturation-impacted variables (e.g., social competence, academic and career competence, and cultural competence) influence the extent to which stress is contributed by other immigrant variables (e.g., age, extent of ethnic friendship networks, perception of prejudice) in a sample of Asian immigrants. Of particular interest is that younger age, which refers to late adolescence and young adulthood, is associated with more acculturative distress and more concerns with intercultural and social competencies, such as navigating “how to be socially competent.” In this sense, younger age groups may be more vulnerable to acculturative stress and cultural adjustment difficulties. Thus, in meaningful ways, acculturation impacts the social experiences from many Asian youths.

In addition, consider that peer relationships in youths represent a dynamic social system organized into different levels of interactions (Brown & Klute, 2003). As the youth become integrated into a nested hierarchy of multiple systems, the network of peers and the complex relationships within peer groups become more elaborate. Adolescence is also a time when peer acceptance becomes an increasingly important goal (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). Children’s social success may be determined by their ability to develop and maintain friendship bonds with their peers. As such, one can argue that peer acceptance may be particularly imperative for ethnic minority youths as they face challenges inherent in their journey to maturation and those more specific to the process of acculturation. Thus, adolescence is marked by expanding social experiences and relationships.

As discussed above, there exists a relationship between younger age and acculturative stress. There also exists a relationship between younger age and peer groups. If we bridge the
transitive link between the intersections of age, peer groups, and acculturation, what are possible influences of acculturation and peer relationships on Asian youths in North American societies? What domains within their peer social networks are impacted by acculturation? Conversely, how do peer groups affect the mechanism in which acculturation impacts Asian youths? The subsequent sections will explore relevant social variables as they relate to peer relationships and Asian youths in order to begin a dialogue about the proposed questions and potential answers.

Social Variables

Intergroup bias. Amassed from three decades of studies, a proposed general truth about friendships states that in a multiethnic environment, youths are most likely to prefer same-race peers in their friendship circles (Brown & Klute, 2003). Intergroup bias refers to the preference of the in-group rather than the out-group along some trait dimension (Park & Judd, 2005). Thus, criteria for in-group membership and friendship similarity may vary along various dimensions, ranging from academic orientation to substance use (Hamm, 2000). Perhaps a salient commonality for ethnic minority adolescents to weigh in their friendship selection is ethnic identity, especially in settings, such as school classrooms, where ethnic composition likely influences who is available to include in one’s friendship circle.

Thus, ethnicity may be a crucial criterion for friendship selection, such that intergroup biases may direct the youth to form social networks consisting of members from the same ethnic group. In a study examining peer group status, Bellmore, Nishina, Witkow, Graham, and Juvonen (2007) survey the link between same-ethnicity preferences in peer nominations and social standing and the effect of the classroom ethnic composition on peer preferences. The term same-ethnicity bias is defined as the reflection of students’ preference for nominating same-ethnicity peers than those of a different ethnicity. The study draws samples of students from
various ethnic backgrounds. Peer nominations are collected by asking the students to nominate peers whom they “like to hang around with” and “do not like to hang around with” and whom they think are “the coolest kids.”

Overall, results demonstrate that same-ethnicity biases exist for all ethnicity groups, including Asian students, which is consistent with other findings suggesting that Asian Americans have friends mostly from a similar ethnic and cultural background as themselves (Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003). Here, perhaps intergroup bias could be considered a social marker for diverse youths with a separation acculturation approach that emphasizes retaining one’s heritage culture while avoiding contact with the receiving culture. However, same-ethnicity biases likely have both benefits and costs, such that they afford the youth with more in-group acceptance and less out-group acceptance (Bellmore et al., 2007). As such, adoption of a separation approach may lead to same-ethnicity biases, which in turn predicts social standing among peers of the same ethnicity and those from different ethnicities. In particular, ethnic biases can afford higher social status in one peer group at the cost of a lower status in others.

Examining the potential costs of positive intergroup biases, Bellmore et al. (2007) propose that in contexts where the in-group is small (i.e., the group constitutes as the numerical minority in the classroom environment), Asian students adopting intergroup biases and same-ethnicity preferences, which are likely results of pursuing a more separated acculturation style, may be placing themselves as greater risk for rejection by their peers. By forming close relationships with only members from their ethnic group, Asians youths may be isolating themselves from the larger peer groups. Thus, by adopting a more selective attitude that distances their contact with other-ethnicity peers—again, an approach consistent with a separation or marginalization style of acculturation (Berry, 1997)—Asian youths may be
furthering their contact with acculturative stressors, such as experiencing rejection from other-ethnicity peers, including members from the dominant culture. In this regard, endorsing intergroup preferences and biases that likely stem from a separation acculturation style may introduce other acculturative stressors from the social environment.

Yet, a notable limitation in the study by Bellmore et al. (2007) is the relatively small representation of Asian youths in the overall sample, with Asian youths constituting only 10 percent of the student participants from which the data was collected and interpreted. Thus, it may be difficult to disentangle the effect of the distinct ethnic composition in the sample and to extend the reported findings equally among the diverse ethnic groups. Consequently, further research is needed in distinguishing the impact of same-ethnicity biases and intergroup preferences as it differentially apply to youths from an Asian background rather than collapsing the effects across a variety of different ethnic minority groups.

Hamm, Brown, and Heck (2005) also examine cross-ethnic peer nominations among students from the United States with various ethnic identities. In contrast, because the authors include parameters in which to interpret the results for each ethnic group in the sample, Hamm and colleagues are able to identify relevant correlates for cross-ethnic friendships in the Asian sample. As such, results illustrate that among the Asian students, length of residence in the United States and English language facility are associated with the likelihood of nominating cross-ethnic friends. That is, students whose families have lived in the United States for a longer length of time and who are more proficient with English tend to nominate more cross-ethnic friends. On the other hand, Asian youths who express a stronger preference for same-ethnic friends (i.e., those who likely endorse greater same-ethnicity biases) had fewer cross-ethnic friend nominations.
First, implications for ethnic biases can highlight how acculturation-related factors, such as immigration status and English language proficiency, may reduce the ability for Asian youths to develop cross-ethnic friendships (Hamm, Brown, & Heck, 2005). Increased length of residence in the receiving culture also relates to greater intercultural contact during which the youth is likely experiencing acculturative stress and challenges enmeshed in the process of acculturation. Second, acculturation style likely plays a role in the type of friendship nomination, such that those pursuing a more assimilated style may likely endorse more cross-ethnic nominations, while those pursuing a more separated style may likely endorse more same-ethnic nominations. Beyond these variables, what other acculturation factors mediate friendship selection amongst Asian youths in North America? Undoubtedly, future research in this area is needed to illuminate a clearer understanding on how acculturation influences whom Asian youths select as friends and under what criteria and circumstances do they make these decisions.

**Delinquency.** It would not be startling to claim that friends influence adolescents, even in the initiation of risk or problem behavior (Brown & Klute, 2003). A prevailing body of research in youth delinquency has illustrated a growing concern about delinquent behaviors in Asian youths, suggesting that Asian adolescents are as likely as their Caucasian peers in engaging in delinquent acts and experiencing behavioral difficulties despite the model minority stereotype (Choi & Lahey, 2006). Studies have also highlighted acculturation and immigration as contributing factors to delinquency and violence in the Asian youth population (Bankston & Caldas, 1995). In general, acculturation-related factors have been hypothesized to impact youth delinquency through mediation of socialization characteristics of family, school, and peers (Le, 2002). Yet, Le and Stockdale (2005) note that previous studies on immigrant youth violence
have focused on the effects of acculturation without consideration for the potential mediation of peer influence.

In response, Le and Stockdale (2005) examine the relationship between acculturation, as measured by endorsement of individualism-collectivism, and delinquency with the purpose of studying the potential mediating role of peer delinquency (i.e., the delinquent conduct of their peers) in the observed relationship. Their cross-sectional design involves a large sample of youths from various Asian cultural groups. Here, individualism is positively related to and collectivism is negatively related to self-reported youth delinquency. This finding suggests that Asian youths are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior and affiliate with deviant peers when they adopt an assimilated acculturation style that is more oriented to individualistic ideas, beliefs, and values. The significant relationship between individualism-collectivism and delinquency suggests that peer influence likely mediates the effect of acculturation on delinquency in Asian youths, such that there exists a complex exchange between the constellation of peer influence and acculturation on youth delinquency.

Wong (1999) also demonstrate similar findings that association with delinquent peers can serve as a strong predictor for adolescent delinquency in Asian youths. Specifically, Wong examine the relationship of acculturation and peer relations to delinquency in a sample of Chinese Canadian youths. He measures acculturation along a behavioral dimension, examining acculturation-related adjustments in the domains of language, customs, habits, lifestyle, and behavior preferences. Overall, behavioral acculturation is related to increased association with delinquent peers and stronger attachment to peers. Therefore, Chinese youths in the sample are more likely to have engaged in delinquent acts and to have committed minor offenses (e.g., truancy, plagiarism) and feel more connected to their peers if they reported greater behavioral
acculturation to North American culture. Together, results implicate that the greater the acculturation, the greater the likelihood of having delinquent friends and feeling more attached to these friends. Again, the type of acculturation style can influence the composition of friendships in Asian youths, such that behavioral acculturation to the receiving culture may predict a social circle comprised of delinquent peers.

Yet contrary to expectations that a more Chinese orientation may mitigate risk for delinquency, stronger association with Chinese friends also significantly predicts greater likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior (Wong, 1999). Perhaps Asian youths who attempt to adopt North American customs and lifestyle (i.e., an assimilation orientation) and those who attempt to maintain cultural ties with Chinese friends (i.e., a separation orientation) are both likely to place themselves at greater risk for delinquency. In response, Wong (1999) argues that Asian youths in North America face a similar predicament for youth delinquency regardless of their cultural/acculturation orientation. This lends support to the hypothesis that individuals who adopt a more integrated, or bicultural, orientation—that is, the youth can navigate and connect with both cultures—fare best (e.g., Baker, Soto, Perez, & Lee, 2012).

Clearly, more research in this domain is needed in order to verify how acculturation impacts the ethnic makeup of peer relationships, and in turn, impacts the development of Asian youth delinquency. Results from the present study (Wong, 1999) and other studies have helped identify the importance of acculturation and peer relations as applied to risk of delinquency. Collecting more research in these domains is needed to paint a clearer picture of the complex interaction between culture and behavior for Asian youths in North America.

**Perceived discrimination.** Perceptions of prejudice, discrimination, and social inequity are outstanding aspects of life for many ethnic minority adolescents (Spencer & Dornbusch,
1990). Particularly, Asian American youths tend to experience higher levels of peer discrimination than do other ethnic minority adolescents (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004), highlighting the need to explore how experiences of discrimination may affect their social functioning and peer relationships.

In their cross-sectional study, Grossman and Liang (2008) investigate the relationship between discrimination distress and social emotional health variables of mental health (e.g., depression) and social competence (e.g., cooperation). Results from a sample of Chinese American youths support a link between discrimination distress, depressive symptoms, and social competence. Thus, stress from discrimination may threaten adolescents’ sense of social belongingness in peer relationships, which may also impact their choice of acculturation orientation. For example, adopting a more separated acculturation style may result in less contact with peers who endorse racial discrimination and intolerance. Likewise, experiencing discrimination distress may encourage a separation approach to avoid further contact with discriminatory peers. However, it is possible that the right peer support can buffer the negative effects of race-related stress, such that having close friendships may bolster prosocial behavior (e.g., cooperation, and social competence; Grossman & Liang, 2008). Concertedly, Grossman and Liang highlighted that interactions between acculturation and peer discrimination have important implications on the study of supportive peer relationships for Asian American youths.

Perceived discrimination not only influences social relationships in Asian youths, but also other acculturation variables, such as their linguistic adaptation of the dominant language in the receiving context. Medvedeva (2010) examines the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-reported English proficiency in a sample of adolescent immigrants from various ethnic identities. Medvedeva concludes that minority adolescents who experience
personal discrimination by school peers are more likely to report lower English proficiency (i.e., report speaking and reading English less than “very well”). Thus, peer discrimination may negatively influence the adolescents’ level of proficiency and/or comfort with the English language. Here, one can imagine the role of English facility in social relationships, such that a youth with limited English skills may be less likely to engage in interactions with more English-competent peers due to the language barrier as well as perceptions of discrimination.

Similarly, Medvedeva (2010) argues that discrimination by school peers likely hinders adolescent immigrants’ improvement in English language skills as well by encouraging social and linguistic avoidance. Perceived discrimination may discourage youths with limited English proficiency to actively engage in English-dominant school activities and social groups. Such avoidant strategies can hinder not only the acquisition of the English language, but also the development of social relationships between Asian adolescents and their more English-competent peers. In this regard, social exclusion and linguistic avoidance can considerably impact the communication between adolescents and their peers, which has further implications on the preference of social relationships as well (Rice, Sell, & Hadley, 1991).

Thus far, we have discussed the influence ethnic identity, perceived discrimination, and language proficiency can exert on various variables of psychosocial wellbeing and adaptation in Asian American youths. Kiang, Peterson, and Thompson (2011) investigate these three variables (i.e., ethnic identity, perceived discrimination, and English proficiency) in a sample of Asian American adolescents to identify their specific influences on friendship choices. Overall, results highlight the relationship between shared culture, ethnic discrimination, and language in shaping ethnic peer preferences. In their study, Asian American adolescents with same-ethnic friends report significantly more perceived discrimination and lower English proficiency. However,
these adolescents also discuss the value of shared culture in influencing their same-ethnic friendships. Considering the salience of ethnic centrality and English proficiency as correlates of adolescents’ ethnic peer preferences, the authors propose that enhancing language commonalities and increasing cultural appreciation across ethnic majority and minority groups may help foster ethnically diverse friendships amongst Asian American adolescents.

Though their findings did not implicate directionality of the observed relationships, Kiang et al. (2011) discuss that there likely exists bidirectional associations between various acculturation factors and peer preferences. For example, though shared culture may initiate peer relationships, cultural exploration amongst friends may also strengthen cultural centrality. Friendships may form after shared experiences of discrimination while same-ethnic friendships may strengthen perceptions of discrimination as well. English proficiency may initiate cross-ethnic friendships though cross-ethnic friendships may also improve adolescents’ English language skills. Thus, experiences of acculturative stress, such as perceived discrimination and language acquisition, and the friendships developed within social circles of Asian youths can have important bidirectional influences in shaping cross-ethnic interactions among adolescents.

**Language proficiency.** As partly discussed earlier, communication skills can constitute a great contributing factor in social interactions among youths, particularly for youths with less competency in the dominant language. For example, children with limited communication skills, such as immigrant youths whose English is a second language, may be less likely to initiate interactions with others and may be more likely to be avoided as recipients of an initiation (Rice, et al., 1991). Thus, children and adolescents may need to adjust their social interactions accordingly based on the relative communication skills of their peers. The effect of language may be more salient for many ethnic minority youths because linguistic distinctions can
contribute to high visibility, setting them apart from their receiving-culture peer counterparts (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990).

To illustrate this relationship, Yeh et al. (2003) interview several Japanese immigrant youths on their personal experiences adjusting to life in the United States, handling discrimination, and coping with acculturation-related challenges. The youths are also questioned about their peer relations. Their unique experiences illustrate the role of English proficiency in the formation and maintenance of friendships between Asian adolescents and their peers. The Japanese students who have greater comfort in their English-speaking abilities tend to have close cross-ethnic friendships. Conversely, the students with limited English tend to have close same-ethnic friendships. Here, language competency played an important role in shaping the friendships of Japanese youths, with the ethnic makeup of their social circles largely influenced by varying English language abilities. The qualitative findings from this study underscore how linguistic acquisition can pose as a considerable barrier to fostering diverse peer relationships for many acculturating Asian youths. Again, one can imagine how linguistic acculturation can impact communication skills, which in turn, affect social relationships.

As noted earlier, language and communication barriers can become specific challenges for many Asian youths in their daily social interactions, particularly for those acquiring proficiency in the dominant language of the receiving culture. In a study by Chen and Tse (2010), English language proficiency is found to be a crucial predictor for positive social and psychological adjustment in elementary school children. In particular, the authors examine the social functioning, peer relationships, social competence, perceived self-worth, and loneliness in a sample of Chinese immigrant and Chinese Canadian children. Relative to their Canadian-born Chinese peers, immigrant Chinese children are viewed as less sociable and cooperative by peers
and teachers, less likely to be accepted in peer groups, and more likely to have social dissatisfaction. The authors propose that these social difficulties may be partly due to language barriers and ineffective communication with peers during social interactions. In fact, immigrant children with greater English language proficiency acquired greater peer acceptance than those with more limited English language abilities.

However, difficulties arising from the relation between acculturation and social adjustment can be mitigated as Asian youths improve their communication skills and actively participate in social and cultural activities (Chen & Tse, 2010). In this regard, participation in social and cultural activities may be beneficial in promoting social competence for many Asian youths as well. Results from the present study highlight not only the significance of procuring mastery of the dominant language in the receiving culture as a paramount part of the acculturation process, the findings also underscore the role of effective communication skills in adaptive social functioning and peer acceptance. Combined, the interplay between linguistic acculturation and peer relationships has a significant facilitatory role in the daily lives of many Asian youths.

**Parental acculturation.** Given the key role parents play in any child’s life, the acculturation status and styles of Asian parents can also have a considerable impact in the acculturation and social adjustment processes for their children. Literature in this domain has studied both the positive and negative effects of parental acculturation on Asian youths’ functioning in various areas, ranging from psychological to social adjustment (Kim, Cain, & McCubbin, 2006).

For example, Pawliuk and Grizenko (1996) examine the acculturation styles of Asian immigrant parents and their children, assessing the relationship between parental acculturation to
the children’s psychological functioning, including social competence as measured by parents’ report on the Revised Child Behavior Profile (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). The sample consists predominantly of Asian immigrants to Canada. In the study, acculturation style is categorized into four groups: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Overall, children of assimilated parents score significantly higher in social competence than do children whose parents adopt other acculturation strategies. Results also indicate that children of fathers who speak the dominant language of the receiving culture well score significantly higher on the Social Competence scale on the child behavior profile than do the other children.

This study illustrates the impact on Asian children’s social functioning when examining their parents’ acculturation style. In general, parental acceptance of the receiving culture, specifically by adopting an assimilated acculturation style, is associated with children having higher levels of social competence. Further, the authors suggest that assimilated parents may have been more likely to enroll their children into social activities and organizations so that their children can have greater opportunity to interact with peers from the receiving culture and thereby, develop greater social competence. The findings concordantly underscore the impact parental acculturation can have on Asian youths’ social functioning, highlighting positive outcomes youths can experience when their immigrant parents accept and participate in the receiving culture.

Considering the key role parents possess in their child’s daily life, family and parent influences have also been implicated in the development of social competence in children (e.g., Hartup & Moore, 1989). Children likely develop social competence through the warm and accepting interactions between child and parent, such that the child learns from the parents the emotional and cognitive resources to explore social environments and function in social settings.
Given this parent-child relationship with social competence, Kim, Han, and McCubbin (2007) examine the role of maternal acculturation in mediating the connection between maternal warmth (i.e., acceptance-rejection) and children’s social competence in a sample of Korean American families. Here, social competence is measured by the child’s positive social behaviors, including frustration, tolerance, and communication skills, while acculturation is categorized into a Korean orientation and an American orientation.

Of particular interest from the findings is that though there is a relationship between the mother’s low acceptance-rejection and her children’s low social competence, the relationship is mitigated when the mothers score high on American orientation (Kim, Han, & McCubbin, 2007). This alleviation indicates that high maternal acculturation may buffer the observed negative effect of low maternal warmth on children’s social competence. Overall, Kim et al. (2007) suggest the important role of maternal acceptance of the receiving culture, such that Korean mothers who actively adopt mainstream American culture may provide a better “child-environment fit” with the receiving culture. When there is a “good” fit between child and environment, the child may be able to function more competently in his or her social environment. Again, the importance of parental acculturation has vast implications on the social development of Asian youths as they learn to traverse the intricacies of their social environments and develop meaningful relationships throughout the process.

Matching of acculturation styles between child and parent can be a correlate for the child’s social competence as well, such that children score higher in social competence when the child adopts the same acculturation style as his or her parents (Pawliuk & Grizenko, 1996). In contrast, parent-child acculturation discrepancy may pose as a risk factor for child maladjustment (Wang, Kim, Anderson, Yan, & Chen, 2012). In the study by Wang, Kim, Anderson, Yan, and
Chen (2012), the authors utilize longitudinal data from Chinese immigrant families to assess the relationship between parent-child acculturation discrepancy and risk for adolescent delinquency. Acculturation is categorized into a Chinese orientation and an American orientation. Results from the study indicate that there is a relationship between parent-child acculturation discrepancies in American orientation and adolescent delinquency.

Furthermore, the link between high level of parent-child acculturation discrepancy and adolescent delinquency is mediated by adolescents’ perceptions of parental knowledge and contact with deviant peers (Wang et al., 2012). Here, Chinese adolescents’ perceptions that their parents lack knowledge about their daily activities are related to adolescents having more contact with deviant peers. Not only did the findings in this study suggest a possible trajectory for delinquency in Asian youths, the results also implicate the type of social relationships the adolescent may likely develop. Specifically, results indicate there is a likelihood of increased interaction with delinquent peers as a potential consequence of perceived lack of parental knowledge, which again can stem from differing acculturation styles between child and parent. Thus, examination of parental acculturation along with the youth’s own acculturation style is needed in order to shed light on the way in which the broader scope of acculturation in Asian families can determine the social relationships and peer group identification in Asian youths.

**Summary**

Chen and French (2008) argue that culture guides a child’s social interactions and peer relationships, such that cultural contexts serve an important mediating role in the development of a child’s social competence. Considering that ethnic minority children tend to show less competence in joining others, making friendships, and forming friendships (Kim et al., 2007), examining the cultural context in which Asian youths develop social behaviors and relationships
may provide a richer and deeper understanding on how acculturation and peer relationships can mutually inform one another.

In summary, the cultural picture we have illustrated so far has examined various domains of the social environment and ways they may be shaped by acculturation-related factors for many Asian youths in North America. For example, Asian youths with more exclusive same-ethnic friendships are more likely to be rejected by other peer groups (Bellmore et al., 2007). Similarly, youths who are more acculturated to the American orientation face greater risk for adolescent delinquency as well (Wong, 1999). Perceived discrimination and English language facility are also strong correlates for Asian youths’ peer functioning, such that youths who experience personal discrimination by school peers are more likely to report lower English proficiency (Medvedeva, 2010). Yet at the same time, parental acculturation may mediate their children’s development of social competence and, subsequently, their success with peer interactions (Kim, et al., 2007).

By examining these social variables within social and cultural contexts, we can consider the intersectionality of acculturation and peer relationships, and how this complex relationship steers the daily experiences of many Asian youths navigating life in the North American world. As we examine how acculturation and peer relationships act as important overlapping backdrops in the lives of many Asian youths, we can gain a more holistic understanding of how acculturation impacts the psychosocial, emotional, and behavioral health of the unique population of Asian youths.
Discussion

Based on the information reviewed from the prevailing literature on acculturation and peer relations for Asian youths, this conclusion section will discuss the intersection of the two variables and the role of the receiving culture in this interplay. Though there is a paucity of studies systematically examining the two variables in conjunction with an Asian youth population, it is likely that the two factors coexist in an intricately delicate relationship. In addition, the following section will offer suggestions for future research in these domains to address gaps in the current literature. By having these kinds of meaningful dialogue, we can magnify our understanding on how the complex process of acculturation and the increasing importance of social relationships in adolescence shape the daily experiences in a growing population of Asian individuals living in a North American world.

Intersection of Acculturation and Peer Relationships

Bidirectional influence. Because causality is difficult to prove, it may be more appropriate to discuss the bidirectional associations that likely exist between acculturation and peer relationships as they apply to Asian youths in North America. Imaginably, close and supportive friendships can have beneficial effects on an adolescent’s psychological and social adjustment (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990), while better-adjusted adolescents are likely more successful in forming and maintaining friendships (Way & Chen, 2000). From a bidirectional perspective, the level of acculturation and the nature of peer relationships likely influence and reinforce one another, helping to structure the everyday lives for many Asian youths. As such, it is likely that the social variables reviewed in the earlier sections are interlaced, such that they interact to either encourage or discourage adoption of certain adaptation styles, making some acculturation strategies more viable or available than are others.
For example, it may be expected that an Asian youth adopting an acculturation style consistent with a separation or marginalization approach would have less contact with members from the receiving culture. Such a situation may likely foster intergroup ethnic biases where the youth would express a preference for other Asian peers, thus possibly limiting his or her friendship selection to only same-ethnicity peers. Yet, research has shown that pursuing diverse peer relationships among Asian American youths leads to greater bicultural competence by virtue of enhancing communication abilities and fostering social support from both cultures (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Expectedly, these adaptive skills in communication and social support predict better psychological health as well. As Feliciano (2001, p. 865) noted, “bicultural youths who can draw resources from both the immigrant community and mainstream society are best situated to enjoy success.”

As highlighted in the study by Kiang, Peterson, and Thompson (2011), Asian American youths who have mostly same-ethnic friends report having both lower English proficiency and greater incidences of discrimination. Here, personal experiences of perceived discrimination may likely dissuade Asian youths from seeking friendships with other-ethnicity school peers. Limited English language skills may also hinder effective communication and interaction between Asian youths and more English-proficient peers. Consequently, the function of perceived discrimination and English proficiency can cultivate an attitude that avoids contact with members of the receiving culture for a variety of reasons, such as reducing interactions with discriminating peers or avoiding embarrassment from speaking English in social situations. In return, the combination of social exclusion and avoidance may result in fewer opportunities for Asian youths to develop a more integrated acculturation style—a premise consistent with
findings that immigrant youths with a more integrated acculturation profile experience significantly less discrimination (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

Again, recall that not every acculturation strategy is a viable or available option for an acculturating individual to “freely choose” from (Berry, 2003; Rudmin, 2003). There may be external restrictions, such as the type of communities where one lives, that may cause one acculturation strategy to be less accessible than others. We have alluded that racial tension and discrimination can motivate relationships, steering Asian youths to create same-ethnicity friendships as a possible way to cope with acculturative stress. For example, an integration or assimilation acculturation style may be a less attainable goal in communities where discrimination and intolerance remains dominant and pervasive (Weinreich, 2009).

Unfortunately, we have only scratched the surface on the bidirectional interplay between acculturation and peer relationships. Indeed, there is ample room in the current landscape of acculturation and cross-cultural literature to craft a brighter illustration of the intersection between two key sociocultural variables in the lives of many Asian youths—lives that are immersed in the process of acculturation and the development of social relationships.

**The receiving context.** Place of settlement can also create distinct experiences and influences on the social development of ethnic minority youths (Kiang, Peterson, & Thompson, 2011). The studies reported in this literature review have notably been derived from samples of Asian individuals who immigrated to or are born in the United States and Canada. Both North American contexts are characteristically marked by large immigrant populations, and thus, they have become culturally pluralistic societies; that is, people from many different backgrounds reside in these countries to form a culturally diverse society (Berry, 1997).
However, it is important to discuss the context of these two receiving cultures and the type of cultural pluralism that exists within each different society. The multiculturalism policies enacted in the receiving culture can have pervasive effects on how youths realistically approach their own acculturation process. Gutmann (1994, p. 8) argues that recognition for cultural tolerance involves “…respect for the unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, and…respect for those activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world….” Therefore, the type of tolerance allotted for enhancing language commonalities and appreciating all diverse cultures can set the stage for greater freedom and mobility towards a more integration style of acculturation.

One notable aspect that is emphasized across various studies conducted specifically with a Canadian sample of Asian youths is the country’s multicultural environment (e.g., Chen & Tse, 2010; Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). In a society that actively supports cultural pluralism and diversity, there stands a positive receiving context in which acculturating individuals are less likely segregated from or pressured to assimilate to the receiving culture (Berry, 1997). Because the official multicultural policy in Canada supports and values the maintenance of diverse ethnic traditions, cultures, and lifestyles, adoption of an integrated, bicultural acculturation style is a much more reachable goal for many acculturating individuals or groups residing in Canada.

Given that the pursuit of the integration strategy leads to better long-term adaption (Berry, 2003), multiculturalism policies in Canada allows for greater freedom for Asian youths to maintain their heritage culture while simultaneously be in contact with the receiving culture. Thus, Canada supports the maintenance and expression of ethnocultural diversity (Maharaj & Connolly, 1994). Such cultural mobility provides a number of different possible acculturation styles that helps foster more positive psychosocial outcomes and encourages greater cross-ethnic
interactions amongst Asian youths and peers from other ethnic backgrounds. In fact, racial segregation in adolescent peer relationships is less common in Canada than in the United States, possibly as a result of the greater support for multicultural tolerance, integration, and education in Canada (Maharaj & Connolly, 1994).

In contrast, the broader cultural context in the United States places a greater emphasis for immigrants to assimilate into the dominant American culture (Chen & Tse, 2010; Maharaj & Connolly, 1994). Public institutions in the United States have been criticized for failing to recognize or respect the cultural identities of many citizens, including controversy about addressing the needs of the Asian American community (Gutmann, 1994). Contained within a more limited sociocultural environment is the possibility that Asian youths who retain their cultural ties, and consequently experience less contact with the American culture, are more likely to face greater difficulties in the United States—a sentiment consistent with other findings that the U.S. population has been generally less than receptive to ethnic minorities (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). These difficulties can range from struggling with the English language to perceiving and/or experiencing greater levels of discrimination.

Though both the United States and Canada represent culturally diverse societies, the degree of cultural pluralism allotted in the American context may augment the acculturative stress experienced by many Asian American youths. A less-than-favorable context of reception by the receiving society may even direct Asian youths towards one acculturation strategy over another as ways of coping. In such a situation, adopting an assimilation approach may be a more appropriate strategy, such that by embracing the dominant culture, the youth alleviates some source of acculturative stress (e.g., stress related to peer discrimination). Adopting a separation orientation may be another realistic strategy because such an approach could, at the very least,
help the youth avoid contact with discriminatory peers and strengthen relationships with same-ethnicity peers. The least favorable outcome would be an adoption of a marginalization strategy, where the youth relinquishes ties from both the heritage culture and the receiving culture because the former identifies the youth as the “other” while the latter rejects the youth for being “other.”

So far, we have discussed the implications of the receiving context on a national scale, such that the reception of the place of settlement determines what acculturation options can be realistically available for many Asian youths. Again, with a more receptive pluralistic society, like Canada, the option of integration is likely more feasible. With a less tolerant society, like the United States, the option of assimilation may be more alluring, though experiences of separation and marginalization may be more grounded in their realities.

Now, let us also consider the implications of the receiving context on a more local scale. Ethnic enclaves are described as areas with high density of residents from the same ethnic group (Schwartz et al., 2010). In these ethnically homogeneous areas, retention of the heritage culture and avoidance of the receiving culture can be a much more possible daily experience for ethnic minority individuals. By living in ethnic enclaves comprising of Asian communities, many Asian youths have the presence of a large heritage-culture community to help retain the practices and values of and identification with their Asian culture. As such, acculturation, especially the pursuit of a more separated acculturation style, can develop differently in ethnic enclaves despite the reality of a nationally unfavorable receiving context.

Summary

Earlier, we have discussed the bidirectional influence between acculturation-related factors and peer functioning in Asian youths both within intrapersonal and interpersonal social domains. Clearly, the attitudes and behaviors of the acculturating individual help determine the
style of acculturation the youth can and will adopt. However, the dominant attitudes and behaviors in the youth’s social environment (e.g., attitudes and behaviors from peers) can also serve a mediating role during the acculturation process. Thus, attitudes of the receiving-culture members towards immigrants and their expectations on how immigrants should acculturate may very well interact with immigrants’ own acculturation patterns (Berry, 2006). In this regard, there is a principle of a “goodness-of-fit” between the acculturating youth and his or her receiving context (Schwartz et al., 2010). In summary, the ethnocultural reception of certain communities, which includes their attitudes and behaviors toward ethnic minorities, may provide a greater fit for Asian youths to develop bicultural competence and help smooth their navigation of the acculturation process as well as the complex social realm of peer relations.

**Future Research**

Given the limited available research expressly investigating the intersections between acculturation and peer relationships as applied specifically to Asian youth populations, there is ample room for future research in this area. As noted by Lorenzo, Frost, and Reinherz (2000), future research needs to identify and investigate what social, familial, and environmental factors are associated with positive psychosocial functioning so that prevention and early intervention services can begin to target relevant family or peer factors in Asian families. As such, future research also needs to investigate how the cultural context can affect the developmental significance of children’s experiences in peer relationships (Chen & French, 2008). By examining the various systems within a child’s intricate life network, from their social to cultural contexts, future researchers can provide valuable information to the growing literature on how diverse youths experience and interact with their world.
In this literature review, we have examined studies using samples of Asian youths from different Asian subgroups (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean) and with different generational statuses (e.g., immigrants, first-generation Asian Americans) due to limited research with Asian populations in any one specific demographic variable. However, we recognize there is considerable variability amongst different subgroups of Asian populations and generational statuses. These important intragroup variances may have profound effects on how the mechanisms of acculturation and peer relationships operate to affect the youth along different cultural and social dimensions. Thus, future research would benefit from focusing with one specific Asian subgroup or a discrete generation status in order to procure valid findings for that unique Asian sample, rather than overgeneralizing findings that may or may not apply to any one Asian group.

Using an overarching demographic variable, such as the term Asian, to describe study participants in order to generalize certain conclusions does not properly recognize the inherent intragroup differences in the pan-ethnic, heterogeneous Asian community. As such, researchers should, at the very least, report the ethnic composition of their sample participants in order to break down any significant relationships reported from the analyses and to produce the most valid interpretations of the findings as accurately applied to specific Asian subgroups.

In addition, we have noted that multiculturalism in the receiving context can influence the experience of developing peer relationships for many Asian youths, such that the reception of the place of settlement will encourage certain types of acculturation styles, and thereby, certain types of social relationships. Therefore, it would also be important for future researchers to examine how multicultural policies in the United States and Canada operate to activate the kinds of peer relationships and social circles that Asian youths tend to secure and develop.
By doing considering the role of the receiving context, we can gain a greater understanding on how the sociopolitical ideologies of a country can have large cascading effects into the multifaceted domains of its increasingly more diverse citizens. For example, examining the nuanced processes of acculturation and peer relationships in Asian youths in culturally pluralistic societies can be facilitated by examining these mechanisms within the framework of the social variables reviewed in earlier sections (i.e., intergroup bias, delinquency, perceived discrimination, language proficiency, and parental acculturation). However, this list is not exhaustive of the types of variables that can be incorporated into our model of how acculturation and peer relationships impact Asian youths.

From a clinical perspective, by expanding our knowledge of how acculturation and peer relationships interact to shape the day-to-day experiences of Asian youths, we can use this information to develop more effective minority mental health prevention and intervention services with appropriate cultural adaptations. The reviewed cultural and social variables can become key targets to consider in culturally adapted intervention work with youths from Asian backgrounds. This need for culturally appropriate mental health services is paramount as the population of Asian individuals continues to grow exceedingly in the next few decades. As we continue to explore the intersectionality between acculturation and friendships, we fill the paucity in the extant literature, painting a fuller and richer picture of how Asian youths navigate the cultural and social dimensions of a North American world.
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