

The Relationships Between Immigrant Korean-American Parents' Aspirations for Children's Educational Attainment and Their Parenting Styles*

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Abstract : The purpose of this study was to examine how immigrant Korean American parents' aspirations for children's educational attainment are related to their childrearing behavior, their beliefs about the nature of children's intelligence, their level of acculturation, and their beliefs about achievement. One hundred and twenty five immigrant Korean mothers in the United States participated in the study. The present study found that parental expectation for a daughter's educational attainment was significantly related to the mother's educational level. The results of regression analysis also indicated that for daughters, the significant predictors for parents' aspirations for children's educational attainment were the mothers' educational level and parental beliefs about achievement; for sons, significant predictors were the mothers' educational level and parental nurturance.

Key Words : children's educational attainment, parenting styles, Korean-American parents

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of parenting is addressed in relation to children's outcomes. It was hypothesized that parental goals for children would characterize the direction of development and that their expectations for their children would control children's behavior (Grusec, Rudy & Martin; 1997). The association between parenting characteristics in child rearing and parental expectations of children's educational accomplishment have been the focus of an extensive body of research on parenting processes for children's

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education (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Mantzicopoulos & Oh-Hwang, 1998; Wentzel, 1998; Leung & Kwan, 1998; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998).

The association between parenting style and parental goals for academic success is important because differences in parenting style were predictive of academic achievement in young children. Baumrind's conceptualization of parental style has produced a good understanding of parenting differences and their impact on children's academic achievement. According to Baumrind (1966), control had been defined as parents' willingness to integrate the child into the family and society by demanding behavioral compliance (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Nurturant parenting included emotional support and bidirectional communication with love.

Research in parenting style demonstrated that parents' expectations of children's educational accomplishments were related to parental beliefs about intelligence, emphasis on educational achievement, socioeconomic status variables (Wentzel, 1998; Chapell & Overton, 1998), academic achievement (Fuligni, 1997; Chao, 1996), and parenting style (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

The literature reviewed emphasized the need to investigate the relationship between parenting and parental expectations for children's educational accomplishments. Interpersonal factors such as parental beliefs about intelligence, acculturation process, and educational achievement were assumed to be related to parental expectations of children's educational accomplishment. Since culture may shape parenting practice (Bornstein, Tal & Tamis-Lemonda, 1991; Gorman, 1998), it is believed that parents in Asian cultures may tend to develop authoritarian parenting styles. However, when Asian parents immigrate to a new country, they confront new parenting behaviors. Thus, an important area of inquiry in the Asian immigrant family is change of parenting style (Gorman, 1998). Based on this, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between Korean-American parenting style and expectations of children's educational accomplishments. Two research questions were addressed in this study. First, are parents' demographic variables related to interpersonal factors which explain parenting characteristics? Second, are there relationships between parenting styles and parental expectations of children's educational accomplishments?

II. METHODS

1. Participant

A total of 125 Korean mothers who immigrated to the United States participated in the study(see Table 1). Mothers were recruited from Korean Saturday schools in California, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Alabama. A questionnaire was sent home with all children who registered in Korean Saturday schools. All of the information about the children's fathers was obtained through the mothers.

As can be seen in Table 1, 77.1% of the 118 Korean-American mothers were under age 40, and the age of mothers ranged from 28 to 58 years (M=37.6). Of the fathers, 65.2% were under 40, and the age of fathers ranged from 29 to 61 years (M=40.4). The majority of mothers (81.4%) and fathers (90.9%) had a bachelor's degree. Of the 122 mothers, 70.3% had no educational experience in the United States while 42.5% of the fathers had no educational experience in the United States. Of the 89 families (36 families did not provide the

Table 1. Participants

Variables		Frequency(%)	
		Mothers	Fathers
Age	<34	45 (38.1)	24 (20.9)
	35-39	46 (39.0)	39 (44.3)
	>40	27 (22.9)	40 (34.8)
Education	High school graduate	22 (18.6)	11 (9.1)
	College graduate	96 (81.4)	110 (90.9)
Educational experience in the United States	No	83 (70.3)	51 (42.5)
	Yes	35 (29.7)	69 (57.5)
Length of residence in the United States	<10 years	63 (53.4)	38 (47.0)
	>10 years	55 (46.6)	61 (53.0)
Father's birth order	First		50 (46.3)
	Not first		58 (53.7)
Family income	<\$60,000	32 (40.5)	
	>\$60,000	47 (59.5)	

information), 29.2% reported an income between \$3,000 and \$40,000; 38.2% between \$40,000 and \$80,000; and 16.9% between \$80,000 and \$100,000. The average length of residence in the United States of mothers and fathers was 10.6 and 13.3 years respectively.

III. MEASURES

1. Parental expectations of children's educational accomplishments.

To assess parental expectations of children's educational outcomes, the question used in Wentzel's (1998) study was : "How much schooling would you like your children in the school to receive?" Possible responses for the parents included high school, two-year college, undergraduate, master's degree, and Ph.D. The responses were coded into a five-point scale: 1 = complete high school education to 5 = obtain a Ph.D.

2. Parenting style

The Korean Parenting Index (Cho, Lee, Lee & Kwon, 1999) was used to measure parenting style with a five response Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree ; 5 = strongly agree). KPI was composed of 33 items concerning parental nurturance and control. It was developed based on Baumrind's theoretical assumptions. The inter-tem reliabilities for the scale were satisfactory ($\alpha = .85$ and $.71$).

3. Acculturation

Items measuring acculturation were adapted and modified from Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SC-ASIA: Suinn et, al., 1987). Three questionnaires that covered language were asked. A final acculturation score was obtained by summing across the responses. A score could range from 1.00 (low acculturation) to 9.00 (high acculturation). The scale's reported Cronbach's alpha was .91.

4. Beliefs about intelligence

Three items were adapted from Wentzel's (1988) research to refer to beliefs about children's intelligence. Items were rated with a five-point Likert scale where a low score indicated that intelligence was not changeable.

5. Parental beliefs about educational achievement

Items measuring parental beliefs about educational achievement were adapted from McNally, Eisenberg, and Harris (1991). The items referred to parents' values and beliefs about their children's educational achievement. Responses were assessed with a five-point Likert scale. High scores reflected more emphasis on achievement.

IV. RESULTS

Most of the mothers reported that they spoke Korean in combination with English at home. This may suggest that parents acculturated slowly to their host culture. As can be seen in Table 2, parents who had lived 10 years or more in the United States were more acculturated in English usage than parents who had lived in the United States less than 10 years ($t=-3.08, p<.001$). Naturally, parents who had lived longer in the United States provided their children with more American cultural experiences than those who had lived less time in the United States. Parents who had no educational experience in the United States were less acculturated than parents who had educational experience in the United States ($t=-4.15, p<.01$). This also implied that parents who had educational experience in the United States provided more American cultural experiences for their children than parents who had no educational experience in the United States.

Korean mothers did not appear to be authoritarian in parenting practices, given that the results showed high parental control ($M= 4.13$) and high parental nurturance ($M=4.07$). Rather, they might be characterized as using an authoritative parenting style. Parents who

Table 2. Beliefs About Intelligence, Beliefs About Achievement, Acculturation, and Parenting Style by Demographic Variables

Variables		Beliefs about intelligence	Beliefs about achievement	Acculturation	Parental Control	Parental nurturance
Educational level	Under college(n=22)	2.44	3.72	7.14	4.02	3.94
	Over college(n=96)	2.38	3.90	7.18	4.14	4.10
	t-value	.28	-1.44	-.09	-1.32	-1.27
Educational experience in the United States	No experience(n=83)	2.46	3.86	6.70	4.10	3.96
	Experience(n=37)	2.24	3.86	8.29	4.18	4.31
	t-value	1.17	-.80	-4.15**	-1.00	-3.42**
Length of residence in the United States	Less than 10 years(n=63)	2.39	3.87	6.65	4.14	4.04
	Longer than 10 years(n=55)	2.40	3.85	7.78	4.11	4.09
	t-value	-.90	.16	-3.08**	.38	-.52

** p< .01

had educational experience in the United States reported a more nurturant parenting style than parents who had no educational experience. High control did not show any contribution to children's educational attainments. A recent study (Leung & Kwan, 1998) reported the same conclusion. However, it should also be noted that there was no significant difference in outcome variables by mothers' educational level.

Parental expectations of children's educational accomplishment did not significantly differ according to the child's sex (son=4.39; daughter=4.20). Parents wanted their children to get at least a master's degree. These results were consistent with a recent study (Okagaki & Fransch, 1998) suggesting that Asian-American parents had higher expectations for their children than American parents. It supports the notion that Korean society emphasizes education as the avenue to social mobility which is similar to Chinese and Japanese societies. A series of t-tests were conducted to examine the differences in each of the outcome variables by parental education level, parental educational experience in the United States, and length of residence in the United States.

Table 3 displays the means for expectations of children's educational attainment by parental demographic variables. Contrary to this study's hypothesis, there were no

Table 3. Expectations of Children's Educational Attainment According to Parent's Demographic Variable.

Variables		Expectations of educational attainment for son	Expectations of educational attainment for daughter
Mother's age	<34	4.45	4.29
	35-39	4.46	4.09
	>40	4.26	4.21
	F-value	.50	.45
Mother's educational level	High-school graduate	3.88	3.79
	College graduate	4.57	4.32
	t-value	-3.43**	-1.67
Mother's educational experience in the United States	No experience	4.38	4.10
	Experience	4.47	4.42
	t-value	-.48	-1.45
Mother's length of residence in the United States	<10 years	4.54	4.10
	>10 years	4.28	4.20
	t-value	1.60	-.79
Father's birth order	First	4.44	4.09
	Not first	4.35	4.29
	t-value	.48	-1.06

* Educational attainment :

1= High-school graduate, 2= 4-years college, 3= Undergraduate, 4= Master's degree, 5= Ph. D

** p< .01

significant differences between expectations for sons or daughters. However, mothers who had a college education differed from mothers who had only a high school education ($t = -3.43, p < .01$) in their educational expectations for sons. The intercorrelations among parenting characteristics and educational expectations are presented in Table 4. These were found to be moderately correlated with each other. However, high control had a significant correlation with high nurturance which suggests that parental control stems from love and concern.

Parents' educational expectations for daughters were found to be significantly related to beliefs about achievement ($r = .27, p < .01$). However, their expectations for sons were significantly related to beliefs about achievement ($r = .27, p < .01$) and parental nurturance ($r = .39, p < .01$). Contrary to previous research, parental control was not related to parent's expectations

Table 4. Intercorrelations Among Parenting Characteristics and Their Aspiration to Their Children's Educational Accomplishment

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Beliefs about intelligence						
2. Beliefs about achievement	.13					
3. Parental control	-.03	.32**				
4. Parental nurturance	-.22	.25	.59**			
5. Acculturation	-.05	.17	.21*	.36**		
6. Expectation to daughter's educational accomplishment	-.01	.27*	.06	.21	.21	
7. Expectation to son's educational accomplishment	-.01	.27**	.19	.39**	.27*	.80**

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table 5. Regression Results for Parent's Expectations Toward Children's Educational Accomplishment Regressed on All Predictor Variable.

Variables	Daughter	Son
	β	β
Mother's educational level	.41***	.21*
Educational experience in the United States	.01	.04
Length of residence in the United States	-.14	.06
Beliefs about intelligence	-.05	.09
Beliefs about achievement	.21*	.02
Parental control	-.08	-.04
Parental nurturance	.13	.30*
Acculturation	.12	.12
Coefficient	2.14	.94
	F=2.28***	F=1.99**
	R ² =.31	R ² =.27

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

both for sons and daughters. This might be explained by other research postulating that authoritarian parenting has not been found to be associated with poor academic achievement among Asian families (Gorman, 1998; Chao, 1996; Leung, Lau & Lam, 1998)

Two separate regression analyses were used to test which variables were predictive for sons and daughters. For sons and daughters both, mother's educational level was found to

be the most predictive variable for parental expectations of educational achievement. For daughters, educational expectation was significantly predicted by mother's education level and beliefs about achievement, but mother's educational level and parental nurturance were significant variables for sons. The present results indicate that mother's education would become a major factor in determining educational expectations for her children.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationships between Korean-American parenting characteristics (acculturation, beliefs about intelligence, beliefs about educational achievement, and parenting style) and their beliefs about their children's educational accomplishment. When considering the relative importance of parenting characteristics on parental expectations of educational attainment for children, the results of this study are consistent with previous research (Wentzel & Feldman, 1993; Wenzel, 1998). This study suggested that parental emphasis on academic achievement and parental nurturance were the significant elements that connected to the parents' educational goals for their children. With respect to parenting characteristics, the results of the present study indicated that parental expectations of children's educational accomplishment were linked to emphasis on educational achievement for daughters while nurturant parenting style related to parental expectations of educational accomplishment for sons.

Unlike the United States, parental control or parental authoritarianism is hypothesized to be related to academic achievement in Asian countries (Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Chao, 1996). Chao (1996) argued that Asian parents emphasize obedience and push their children toward educational success. Although the correlational analyses revealed some mild correlations between parenting style and educational expectations, subsequent regression analysis showed that parenting had no direct effect on expectations. In other words, this study indicated that the direct effect of parental control on educational expectation was weak when mothers' education was not controlled. Further research might take into account the influence of parental style and relevant demographic variables.

As expected, length of residence in the United States and parental education experiences in the United States related to acculturation. Also, parents who had education experience in the United States exhibited more nurturant parenting. But these variables did not show a relative relationship to parental expectations for children's education. This could occur because the values Korean-America parents place on children's academic attainment lessen as they live longer in the United States. It also indicates that parents who have more opportunities to absorb American culture might change goals for their children's education.

This study had some limitations. Although the study demonstrated that parental characteristics are useful in understanding Korean-American parental educational goals for their children, this investigation did not provide information about whether parenting style had a direct relationship on children's educational success in the United States. By applying qualitative research, it is possible to understand the way Korean-American parents change their beliefs about educational outcomes for their children.

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