Extending Research on the Consequences of Parenting Style for Chinese Americans and European Americans

Ruth K. Chao

This study examined the effects of parent–adolescent relationships on school performance to provide a clearer understanding of why authoritative parenting does not have as beneficial effects for Asian Americans as it does for European Americans. Over 500 adolescents of Chinese- (148 first and 176 second generation) and European-descent (208 primarily third generation or more) families from seven different high schools completed measures of (1) parenting style, (2) parent–adolescent closeness (cohesion subscale from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Environment Scales II and relationship satisfaction), and (3) school performance. Positive effects of both authoritative parenting and relationship closeness on school performance were found for European Americans and, to some extent, second-generation Chinese, but not first-generation Chinese. These effects were also stronger for European Americans than first-generation Chinese. Through examination of the mediating role of parent–adolescent relationships, this study also found that among European American families, the beneficial effects of authoritative parenting are explained through relationship closeness.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the parenting style constructs developed by Diana Baumrind (1971), the beneficial effects of authoritative parenting have been consistently demonstrated for European American youth. This research has been so widely accepted and influential that the authoritative style has become the prototype for appropriate parenting. Such acceptance has lead to the promotion of these qualities in intervention programs, books, and other literature for parents. More recently, however, there has been debate about whether these parenting styles have the same consequences for children who are not of European decent. Although the authoritative style has been found to have beneficial effects for European Americans, this has not always been found for Asian Americans, especially recent immigrants. These ethnic differences in the effects of parenting style may be due to the way that parenting style has been conceived.

Researchers have typically described parenting style as a reflection of the parent–child relationship (i.e., relational qualities between parents and their children; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). This view of parenting style may help to elucidate the argument I had proposed (Chao, 1994) that parenting style may have different meanings for different ethnic groups. Typical styles of how parents and children relate to or interact with each other are certainly influenced by cultural factors. Although relationship closeness and intimacy with parents may be valued by Asian American youth, these qualities may not be important in fostering their school achievement, or other highly valued parental goals. Asian American parents attempt to foster school achievement in their children through a parenting style identified as “training,” emphasizing the importance of hard work, self-discipline, and obedience (Chao, 1994). This parenting style may reflect relationship qualities that emphasize parental respect more than closeness and intimacy.

One way of demonstrating these differences in the meaning of both parenting style and parent–adolescent relationships is by examining ethnic group differences in the effects of each. Whereas relationship qualities of closeness and intimacy, similar to authoritative parenting, may be influential in the school success of European American youth, these qualities may not be predictive of the school success of Asian American youth, especially recent immigrants. This study examined the effects of parenting style and parent–adolescent relationships to determine whether the effects of both differ across European Americans and Asian immigrants. Additionally, authoritative parenting may have beneficial effects for European American youth because such parenting promotes close, intimate relationships between parents and youth. Thus, this study also examined whether, for European Americans, parent–adolescent closeness mediated the effects of authoritative parenting on school performance.

Studies of Parenting Style Focusing on Asians

Only a few studies have examined the effects of authoritative parenting on child or adolescent outcomes
for Asian Americans and European Americans, and the findings for Asian Americans have been mixed. In one study, although authoritative parenting style was consistently and positively related to the school grades of European American students, this style was unrelated to the school grades of Asian Americans (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Another study by Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992) found that for both European Americans and Asian Americans, authoritative parenting had positive effects on adolescent’s school performance. Although not their primary focus, in another study, Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, and Dornbusch, (1994) specifically tested whether there were ethnic group differences in the effects of parenting style by estimating interaction terms for ethnicity and parenting style. They noted that authoritative parenting was relatively more advantageous for European American youth than it was for Asian American youth, whereas authoritarian parenting was relatively more advantageous for Asian American youth. These studies indicate that parenting style is not consistently associated with the school performance of Asian American adolescents.

Studies of Chinese families in Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.) have also found differing results for the effects of parenting style on school performance. Using Dornbusch et al.’s (1987) measures of parenting style, Leung, Lau, and Lam (1998) conducted a study of Chinese high school students in Hong Kong, as well as European American and Australian high school students. They found that the authoritative style was unrelated to the grades of Hong Kong Chinese, but positively related to the grades of European Americans and Australians. Surprisingly, they also found that authoritarian parenting was positively related to the grades of Hong Kong Chinese. In another study of Hong Kong Chinese, McBride-Chang and Chang (1998) found results for authoritative parenting similar to those of Leung, Lau, and Lam. Based on parent self-report, both the authoritative and authoritarian styles were unrelated to adolescents’ achievement test scores. Surprisingly, they also found that parents who were more authoritative were less encouraging of their adolescent’s autonomy. Thus, even with outcomes other than school performance, the effects of authoritative parenting for Chinese were not consistent with what has been found for European Americans.

In contrast, Chen, Dong, and Zhou (1997), examined Chinese families in Beijing and found that the authoritative style was positively related to children’s school achievement, whereas the authoritarian style was negatively related to school achievement. This study, however, involved much younger children (i.e., second graders) than the studies cited above. Additionally, there may have been important differences in parenting between Chinese from Hong Kong and those from Beijing.

Important Differences among Asian Americans

No studies have tried to explain the inconsistencies in the effects of parenting style that may be due to differences across Asian American subgroups. One study by Kim (1996) focused on one Asian American ethnic subgroup—Korean immigrants—and found that parenting style was unrelated to their school performance. Another study by Blair and Qian (1998) examined the association between parental control (i.e., parental decision making) and school performance for adolescents of Filipino and Chinese descent. They found that control was positively related to the school performance of Chinese adolescents, but not to that of Filipino adolescents. Thus, there are some differences among subgroups of Asian Americans in the associations between school performance and parenting.

Explanations for the Effects of Parenting Style

Because parenting style may be reflective of the type of relationships that parents foster with their adolescents, parenting style may influence adolescent well-being through its effect on the parent–adolescent relationship. In fact, parenting style has often been regarded as the emotional climate between parents and children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Darling and Steinberg have defined parenting style as a global construct reflecting the overall emotional tone of the parent–child relationship. Parenting style is thus defined as a global relationship construct that is explained by specific relationship qualities. Youth may benefit from authoritative parenting due to the type of relationship that authoritative parents foster (i.e., closeness and emotional intimacy), suggesting that closeness mediates the effects of authoritative parenting. If this mediating model is correct, then specific relationship qualities cannot be explained by the global construct of parenting style. Examining the linkages between parenting style, parent–adolescent relationships, and school performance may provide a more complete understanding of how parenting style has effects for some ethnic groups, such as European Americans, but not others.

Because the typical ways in which family members relate to each other are primarily a reflection of culture, parenting style then can also be seen as a reflection of culture, as I previously demonstrated in another
study (Chao, 1994). In that study, I described another style of parenting for immigrant Chinese labeled “training.” Training centrally emphasizes the importance of parental control in instilling the need to work hard, be self-disciplined, and do well in school. Training also distinguishes a type of parental responsiveness that includes an investment, involvement, and support of children, rather than just the emotional demonstrativeness (e.g., praising, kissing, hugging) that is assessed in most measures of parental responsiveness. These notions of training imply that immigrant Chinese parents may imbue additional qualities in their relationships with children other than just qualities of closeness or emotional intimacy. In European Americans, parental responsiveness is shown more through emotional demonstrativeness, as discussed above. Consistent with this notion of parental responsiveness, European American parents particularly try to foster relationships with their adolescents that are mutually satisfying, and open and intimate (i.e., adolescents and parents talk to each other and share experiences together).

These qualities of closeness and emotional intimacy have been studied in association with school performance. Studies have found positive associations between closeness (as measured by the cohesion subscale of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Environment Scales II [FACES II]; (Olsen, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979) and school performance (Hein & Lewko, 1994; King, 1998; Masselam, Marcus, & Stunkard, 1990; Ohannessian, 1993; Thornbrough, 1983). One study, however, found no association between relationship cohesion or closeness and school grades for ninth-grade African American students (Weist, Freedman, Paskewitz, Proeschel, & Flagerty, 1995). These findings for African Americans may also apply to Asian Americans. Just as the authoritative and authoritarian constructs may not be predictive of the school success of Asian Americans, relationship qualities described by cohesion or closeness may also not be predictive of their school performance. How close adolescents feel to their parents in terms of discussing problems with parents and doing things together may be just as important to Asian American adolescents as it is to European American adolescents, because both groups of youngsters similarly endorse these qualities of closeness (Fuligni, 1998). These qualities, however, may not be as predictive of the school success or failure of Asian Americans as they are of the school success or failure of European Americans.

The purpose of this study was to first examine the effects of parenting style on school performance to determine whether authoritative parenting would have beneficial effects for European Americans but not for Asian Americans, and whether these effects differed across ethnic groups. The effects of both authoritative and authoritarian parenting were determined by examining one style relative to the other (i.e., whether there were differences between authoritative and authoritarian parenting), because of the inconsistent findings reported in prior research for Asian Americans regarding both styles. In addition, adolescents’ reports of parenting were assessed to capture how they interpret or make sense of parents’ practices. Adolescent perceptions of parenting provide an important understanding of the meaning attributed to parenting, as well as a more powerful method of explaining or predicting adolescent outcomes than parents’ perspectives. This study’s reliance on adolescent reports of parenting also linked the results to prior research with Asian Americans that also relied on adolescent reports.

This study also examined the effect of parent–adolescent relationships on adolescents’ school performance to determine whether parent–adolescent “closeness” had beneficial effects for European Americans but not for Asian Americans, and whether these effects differed across these groups. A mediating model was also examined to determine whether parenting style influenced school performance via its effects on parent–adolescent closeness. Because of the diversity among Asian Americans, this study focused on only one ethnic subgroup, Chinese, across two generations of immigrants.

This study first addressed hypotheses involving differences in the levels of all the variables across the ethnic-generational groups. Studies have found that Chinese Americans often outperform European Americans on a number of school performance indicators, and, with the exception of reading achievement, first-generational Chinese often outperform second and later generations (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Mau, 1997). Chinese Americans have also been found to have higher levels of authoritarian parenting and strictness compared with European Americans (Chao, 1994, 2000; Chiu, 1987; Kriger & Kroes, 1972; Lin & Fu, 1990; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990), whereas Fuligni (1998) found that Chinese Americans reported levels of relationship cohesion similar to those of European Americans.

The following hypotheses for differences in levels were tested: (1) First-generational Chinese would have the highest grades and levels of school effort compared with second-generational Chinese and European Americans, and both generations would have higher levels than European Americans; (2) compared with European Americans, first- and second-generational Chinese would report higher proportions of authoritarian parents; and (3) first- and second-generational
Chinese would report levels of closeness with their parents similar to those of European Americans.

The following hypotheses were proposed for the effects of parenting style and closeness on school performance: (1) Parenting style (authoritative relative to authoritarian), and (2) parent-adolescent closeness would have positive effects on the school performance of European Americans, but not the performance of first-generation Chinese, and these effects would be more positive for European Americans than for first-generation, and to some extent, second-generation Chinese; and (3) closeness would also mediate much of the effect of parenting style on school performance for European Americans.

**METHOD**

Sample

Samples of 324 Chinese Americans (148 first generation and 176 second generation), and 208 European Americans (primarily third or later generations) were drawn from a larger sample of 1,755 adolescents in the ninth through twelfth grades. The samples were drawn from seven different high schools in the greater Los Angeles area. With the exception of one high school in which all adolescents in the school were included, adolescents were recruited from required courses only (e.g., English, Social Studies, or U.S. History). From these required courses, a total of 9 to 12 classes were selected from each high school. Of all adolescents eligible to participate, less than 24% either refused to participate or their parents denied consent; another 10% were either absent on the day of the study or did not receive their parental consent forms.

Of the first-generation Chinese adolescents, about 11% had lived in the United States for 2 years or less and another 25% had lived in the United States for more than 2 years but less than 5 years. Sixty-nine (47%) of these immigrants were from Taiwan, 48 (33%) were from the P.R.C., 19 (13%) were from Hong Kong, and 9 (8%) were from other parts of Asia (3 immigrants did not report their country of origin). The European American adolescents were all born in the United States, and primarily were at least of third-generation descent (i.e., adolescents and parents were both born in the United States).

There was a total of 247 male and 282 female students (3 students did not report their gender). Among the first-generation Chinese, there were 72 males and 76 females (49% and 51%, respectively); among the second-generation Chinese there were 76 males and 99 females (approximately 43% and 56%, respectively, with 1 missing); and among the European Americans, there were 99 males and 107 females (48% and 51%, respectively, with 2 missing).

In analyses of variance conducted with the three groups on parental education (the average of the mother’s and father’s education), there was an overall significant difference between groups, \( F(2, 531) = 18.135, p = .001 \). The European American parents had significantly higher levels of education (\( M = 17.369, SD = 1.402 \)) than first-generation Chinese (\( M = 16.529, SD = 2.923 \)) \( p = .030 \), and second-generation Chinese (\( M = 15.559, SD = 4.065 \)), \( p = .001 \) (with a score of 16 being “some college or vocational training” and 17 being “finished 2-year community college degree”). Additionally, first-generation Chinese parents had significantly higher levels of education than second-generation Chinese parents, \( p = .013 \).

Analyses of variance were also conducted among the first-generation immigrants to determine whether there were differences in levels of parental education according to their country of origin. Indeed, a significant difference was found, \( F(3, 147) = 8.984, p = .001 \). Based on an \( \alpha \) level of .05, both the immigrants from the P.R.C. (\( M = 17.304, SD = 1.911 \)) and Taiwan (\( M = 16.989, SD = 2.126 \)) had significantly higher levels of parental education than immigrants from Hong Kong (\( M = 14.433, SD = 4.090 \)) and immigrants from other countries in Asia (\( M = 14.096, SD = 5.028 \)).

Consent, Measures, and Procedures

A passive consent procedure was used to acquire adolescents’ participation from parents. Passive consent requires that parents respond, or send back the consent forms only if they do not wish their child to participate. All parents received copies of the consent letter in English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Adolescents were given 50 min (the whole class period) to complete paper-and-pencil surveys that included the following measures.

**Parenting style measures.** Parenting style was assessed according to the same measures and scoring procedures used by Steinberg et al. (1992, 1994). Three separate subscales comprise the measures of parenting style: involvement/acceptance, strictness/supervision, and autonomy granting. The subscale for involvement/acceptance consists of nine items that assess the degree to which adolescents perceive their parents as responsible, caring, and involved (e.g., “I can count on my parents to help me out if I have some kind of problem.”). Responses for both the involvement and autonomy-granting dimensions were coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The strictness/supervision subscale consists of eight items that assess the degree to which the adoles-
cients’ parents regulate and monitor their behavior and whereabouts (e.g., “How much do your parents try to know . . . where you go out at night/where you are most afternoons after school?”). Response scales for six of the strictness items were coded on a 3-point scale from 1 (don’t know) to 3 (knows a lot); the remaining two items were coded on a 7-point scale that corresponds to how late the adolescent is allowed to stay out, ranging from 1 (as late as I want) to 7 (I am not allowed out). The psychological autonomy subscale consists of nine items that assess the degree to which parents use non-coercive and democratic discipline that allows for adolescents’ expression of their individuality (e.g., reverse scored, “My parents say I shouldn’t argue with adults.”).

To classify adolescents’ parents into the four parenting typologies, the method used by Steinberg et al. (1992) was also used in this study. Specifically, for each of the dimensions, the median was used to divide the overall sample into those that scored above the median and those that scored below the median. The dimension of autonomy granting was not included, however, because a number of parents would have been dropped from the study due to there being more categories than parenting typologies (i.e., eight possible categories in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ classification system). Therefore, only the two dimensions of strictness/supervision and involvement/acceptance were used to classify parents into one of the four parenting typologies. Baumrind (1991) has also used these two primary dimensions for categorizing parents into the four typologies. Specifically, parents who were above the median on both the strictness/supervision and involvement/acceptance dimensions were coded as authoritative, parents who were above the median on strictness/supervision but below the median on involvement/acceptance were coded as authoritarian, parents who were below the median on strictness/supervision but above on involvement/acceptance were coded as indulgent, and parents who were below the median on both the strictness/supervision and involvement/acceptance subscales were coded as neglectful.

*Relationship closeness.* The relationship closeness measure was comprised of two scales, the cohesion subscale of the FACES II (Olson, Sprengle, & Russell, 1979), and three items derived for this study that captured adolescents’ satisfaction with their relationships with parents. The FACES II subscale consists of 10 items each for mothers and fathers (e.g., “My parent and I are supportive of each other during difficult times.”). Responses were coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Fuligni (1998) has used this subscale with Chinese American and European American adolescents and reported good overall interitem reliability, ranges = .82–.88 for mothers and fathers separately. The satisfaction items assessed relationship quality separately for mothers and fathers (e.g., “Overall, how would you rate the quality of the relationship you have with this parent?”). Responses were coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very poor/unhappy) to 5 (very good/very happy). The three satisfaction items and the eight items from the cohesion subscale were then combined into one scale, labeled “closeness,” which is described below.

All of the items for all the measures were first standardized, and then three separate scale scores were derived by using the mean or average of all the standardized items for each of the subscales of strictness/supervision and involvement/acceptance, and for relationship closeness. Additionally, with the parent–adolescent relationship scales, standardized scale scores for mothers and fathers were also averaged together. Internal consistency reliabilities of the scales were estimated using Chronbach’s $\alpha$. Most of the scales possessed good internal consistencies for all three groups of adolescents: With regard to the parenting style subscales, the $\alpha$s for strictness/supervision were .73 for the overall sample, .72 for first-generation Chinese, .75 for second-generation Chinese, and .71 for European Americans; the $\alpha$s for involvement/acceptance were .81 for the overall sample, .78 for first-generation Chinese, .83 for second-generation Chinese, and .78 for European Americans. With regard to the parent–adolescent relationship scale of closeness, the $\alpha$s were .95 for the overall sample, and .95 for first-and second-generation Chinese and European Americans.

*School performance outcomes.* Adolescents’ school grades were assessed through self-report of their cumulative grade point average (GPA) during high school. Adolescents’ school effort was assessed using a scale by Steinberg et al. (1992) that consists of four items asking the number of hours they spend studying per week, and how often they completed assignments, studied before an exam, and were attentive in class. Responses to the latter three items were coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (seldom, if ever [0–10% of the time]) to 5 (always or almost always [90–100% of the time]). All four items were first standardized, and then scale scores were derived by using the mean or average of the four standardized items. The interitem consistency of the scales was also computed for school effort. The $\alpha$s were quite low for the Chinese, and were somewhat low for European Americans (.53 for the whole sample, and .48, .46, and .60, respectively for first-generation Chinese, second-generation Chinese, and European Americans).
RESULTS

Differences in Mean Levels/Proportions

Initial analyses of mean differences across the groups were first examined for all the variables in the study. Separate multiple regression analyses were conducted on adolescents’ high school GPAs and school effort. Also, logistic regression analyses were conducted for parenting style, and ordinary least squares regression analyses were conducted for relationship closeness. All analyses included covariates for the adolescent’s gender, school, and parental education. The adjusted means (i.e., with the covariates set to the mean) and SEs are displayed in Table 1. Although the findings consistently supported the predictions involving the associations among the variables, described below, the distribution of the school performance data was very negatively skewed and the variances across groups were not equal (due to the highly restricted range of scores among first-generation Chinese). Thus, GPAs were transformed by squaring the scores to equalize the variances across the groups, whereas the standardized scores for school effort were not transformed because various transformations did not yield equal variances across the groups. After the transformations (squared) on school grades were conducted, there were no longer significant differences across the groups in the variances on school grades, p = .218.

School outcomes. For high school grades, both first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents had significantly higher grades than European American adolescents, respectively, t(514) = 8.730, p = .001, and t(514) = 6.239, p = .001. In addition, first-generation Chinese adolescents had significantly higher grades than second-generation Chinese adolescents, t(514) = 2.780, p = .006. For school effort, once again, both first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents reported higher levels of school effort than European American adolescents, respectively, t(511) = 5.207, p = .001, and t(511) = 4.527, p = .001, but there were no differences between first- and second-generation Chinese in their levels of school effort, p = .383.

Parenting style. Although a greater proportion of European American adolescents rated their parents as authoritative, there were no significant differences in these proportions between European Americans and first-generation Chinese, p = .951, European Americans and second-generation Chinese, p = .322, or first- and second-generation Chinese, p = .321. However, significantly greater proportions of first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents rated their parents as authoritarian compared with European American adolescents, χ²(1, N = 526) = 5.959, p = .015, and χ²(1, N = 526) = 6.565, p = .010, respectively, whereas no differences in these proportions were found between first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents, p = .962.

Relationship closeness. There were no significant differences in the degree of relationship closeness reported by first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents compared with European American adolescents, p = .264, and p = .461, respectively. Interestingly, however, there was a marginally significant difference in the levels of closeness reported between the two generations of Chinese adolescents, t(514) = 1.852, p = .065. First-generation Chinese adolescents reported the highest degree of closeness with their parents of all three groups.

Effects of Parenting Style & Closeness on School Outcomes (Model 1)

Bivariate Pearson’s correlations for all the variables were first calculated for the whole sample and for each ethnic-generational group. These correlations are presented in Table 2. Based on an α level of .05, the correlations indicate that school grades and school effort were significantly and positively related

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade Point Average (Squared)</th>
<th>School Effort (Standardized)</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Closeness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation Chinese</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>12.745** (.261)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>.258** (.077)</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-generation Chinese</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>11.773** (.241)</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>.168** (.071)</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Americans</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>9.642 (.227)</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>−.291 (.068)</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values in parentheses represent standard errors.
* Coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (p < .05); ** coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (p < .01).
to authoritative parenting and relationship closeness for European Americans and second-generation Chinese, but not for first-generation Chinese adolescents. Turning to the associations between parenting style and relationship closeness, authoritative parenting was positively related to closeness for all three groups, whereas authoritarian parenting was negatively related to closeness only among the European Americans. These same bivariate correlations were also examined among the first-generation Chinese from the P.R.C. and Taiwan. Immigrants from Hong Kong and “other Asia” were excluded from this subanalysis because of the small numbers of adolescents from these countries. No associations were found for parenting style and school performance for any of the groups; whereas for immigrants from the P.R.C. only, a significant positive relationship was found between closeness and school effort, \( r(46) = .348, p = .015 \).

The next set of analyses addressed the hypotheses that (1) authoritative parenting and (2) relationship closeness have more beneficial consequences for European Americans than for first-generation Chinese, and to some extent, second-generation Chinese. Multiple regression models were estimated for each school performance variable. For the analyses involving parenting style, 12 (4 \( \times \) 3) dummy variables for each parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful) in combination with each ethnic-generational status group (i.e., first-generation Chinese, second-generation Chinese, and European Americans) were created. Each regression model included 11 of these dummy variables (with the authoritarian group as the omitted category) and controls for adolescent’s gender, school, and parental education. When the effects of the controls differed across the groups, the interaction terms between these controls and each ethnic-generational group were included in the models. Separate multiple regression analyses were conducted for relationship closeness, with each school outcome modeled as a function of ethnic-generational status, closeness, the interaction of closeness and ethnic-generational status, and the same controls as described above. Multiple regression analyses were also conducted to determine whether there were gender differences in the effects of parenting style and relationship closeness for each ethnic-generational group, but none were found. Finally, Wald tests (Judge, Griffiths, Hill, Lutlepeohl, & Lee, 1985) were computed to compare differences across each ethnic-generational group in the effects of (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Correlations among All Variables for the Whole Sample, and First-Generation Chinese, Second-Generation Chinese, and European Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Grades</td>
<td>.500**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effort</td>
<td>.139** .200**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Authoritative</td>
<td>.130** .228** .485** -.147**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Authoritarian</td>
<td>.130** .228** .485** -.147**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Closeness</td>
<td>.130** .228** .485** -.147**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation Chinese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Grades</td>
<td>.363**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effort</td>
<td>.199** .283**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Authoritative</td>
<td>-.016 -.042 -.322**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Authoritarian</td>
<td>.155* .224** .488** -.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Closeness</td>
<td>.155* .224** .488** -.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-generation Chinese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Grades</td>
<td>.480**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effort</td>
<td>.249** .246**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Authoritative</td>
<td>-.136 -.154* -.284**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Authoritarian</td>
<td>.186** .347** .469** -.195*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (\( p < .05 \)); ** coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (\( p < .01 \)).
Table 3  Unstandardized Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Significance Levels for Effects of Authoritative Parenting and Closeness on School Performance for Model I and Model II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model II</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade Point Average (Squared)</td>
<td>School Effort (Standardized)</td>
<td>Grade Point Average (Squared)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative (Authoritarian omitted)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation Chinese</td>
<td>.127*</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-generation Chinese</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation Chinese</td>
<td>.730</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-generation Chinese</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Americans</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All analyses included controls for adolescents’ gender and school, and parents’ educational level. The significance (sig.) levels reported in columns 3, 6, 9, and 12 come from tests of whether the coefficients are statistically different from 0.

* Separate models were estimated for authoritative and closeness.

** A single model was estimated that included the effects of both authoritative and closeness.

*Coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (p < .05); * coefficient is significantly different from coefficient for European Americans (p < .10).

Authoritative relative to authoritarian parenting, and (2) relationship closeness. The unstandardized coefficients, SEs, and significance levels for parenting style and closeness are presented in Table 3, under Model 1. The coefficients in Model I represent the gross or separate effects of parenting style and relationship closeness within each ethnic group.

Parenting style. For school grades, European American adolescents from authoritative families had significantly higher school grades than their counterparts from authoritarian families. These beneficial effects for authoritative parenting relative to authoritarian, however, were not found for first- and second-generation Chinese adolescents. For these groups, adolescents in authoritative and authoritarian families did not significantly differ on school grades. Additional tests for whether these effects differed across ethnic group indicated significant differences between first-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( F(1, 494) = 4.530, p = .034 \), but not between second-generation Chinese and European American adolescents, \( p = .155 \). Thus, the effect of authoritative parenting relative to authoritarian parenting on school grades was more positive for European Americans than first-generation Chinese only. Also, no differences in these effects across the two generations of Chinese were found, \( p = .453 \). For school effort, among European Americans and second-generation Chinese, adolescents from authoritative families reported significantly higher school effort than their counterparts from authoritarian families; whereas among first-generation Chinese, adolescents in authoritative and authoritarian families did not differ significantly on school effort. The effects were statistically different for first-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( F(1, 493) = 5.070, p = .025 \), but not for second-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( p = .271 \). There were also no significant differences in these effects between first- and second-generation Chinese, \( p = .223 \). Thus, the effect of authoritative parenting on school effort was more positive for European Americans than it was for first-generation Chinese only.

Relationship closeness. A significant positive effect of closeness on school grades was found for European Americans, whereas no effect was found for second-generation Chinese, and only a marginally significant effect was found for first-generation Chinese. In the tests across groups, however, no significant differences were found between first-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( p = .645 \), second-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( p = .358 \), or first- and second-generation Chinese, \( p = .732 \). For the effects of closeness on school effort, there was a significant positive effect for European Americans as well as for second-generation Chinese, but no effect was found for first-generation Chinese. Additionally, there was a significant difference in these effects between first-generation Chinese and European Americans, \( F(1, 499) = 6.100, p = .014 \), and a marginally significant
difference between second-generation Chinese and European Americans, $F(1, 499) = 3.090, p = .080$. No significant differences were found between first- and second-generation Chinese, $p = .402$. Thus, similar to the findings for parenting style, closeness had positive effects on school grades and effort for European Americans, but not for first-generation Chinese.

Mediating Effects of Parent–Adolescent Closeness

To address the hypothesis of whether the effects of parenting style were mediated by the effects of relationship closeness, another set of regression analyses was conducted, similar to the models above, except that the effects for both parenting style (authoritative relative to authoritarian) and relationship closeness were included in the same model. The unstandardized coefficients, $SE$s, and significance levels are presented in Table 3, under Model II. The results under Model II show the effects of parenting style and relationship closeness net of each other within each ethnic group. In all analyses, the significance level used was .05. Because relationship closeness was included in Model II, but not in Model I, a comparison of the authoritative parenting coefficients in Model I and Model II would show how much of the total effect of authoritative parenting could be attributed to relationship closeness. If authoritative parenting affected adolescents’ school performance primarily because of the closeness between adolescents and parents, the coefficients for authoritative parenting would be smaller in Model II than in Model I.

Indeed, the comparisons between Models I and II suggest that relationship closeness accounts for some of the association between authoritative parenting and school performance. For European Americans, the effect of authoritative parenting on school grades was reduced by 30%, and on school effort by 49%, after controlling for relationship closeness. Because both authoritative parenting and relationship closeness also had significant positive effects on the school effort of second-generation Chinese in Model I, the predictions for the mediating effects of relationship closeness could also be examined for this group. The comparisons between Models I and II suggest that closeness did not account for as much of the association between authoritative parenting and school effort for second-generation Chinese as it did for European Americans. That is, for second-generation Chinese, the effects of authoritative parenting on school effort were reduced by only 21%, after controlling for relationship closeness.

Looking at this another way, the effects of relationship closeness on school performance could also be accounted for by parenting style. If this alternative is correct, the coefficients for closeness would be smaller in Model II than in Model I, because the effects of parenting style were also included in Model II. For European Americans, after controlling for parenting style, the effects of relationship closeness on school grades and school effort declined by 20% and 8%, respectively. These declines were not as large as those found for authoritative parenting once relationship closeness was accounted for. This comparison between Models I and II for the effect of relationship closeness on school effort could again be performed for the second-generation Chinese. For this group, the decline in the effect of closeness on school effort was much larger (54%) than the decline found for authoritative parenting on school effort. Additionally, this decline in the effect of closeness on school effort was much larger for second-generation Chinese than that found for European Americans. Thus, for European Americans, the proposed mediating model, which holds that the effect of authoritative parenting on school performance is explained by the effect of parent–adolescent closeness, appears to be more plausible than the alternative (i.e., authoritative parenting accounts for the effect of closeness on school performance). This model, however, does not appear to be as plausible for second-generation Chinese with the outcome of school effort.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to examine differences in the effects of parenting style and parent–adolescent relationships on the school performance of first- and second-generation Chinese American and European American adolescents. By examining differences in the effects of parenting style and parent–adolescent relationships in a single analysis, this study provided insight into how and why parenting style has different consequences for the school performance of youth from different ethnic groups, and how the meaning of parenting style is culturally specific. Authoritative parenting may have beneficial consequences for some groups and not others, because of the type of relationship that authoritative parents foster with their adolescents.

As predicted, this study found that first-generation Chinese youth from authoritative families were not better off in school than those Chinese youth from authoritarian families, whereas European American adolescents from authoritative families did perform better in school than those European American youth from authoritarian families. Additionally, authoritative parenting had consistently more positive effects on both school grades and school effort for European Americans.
Americans compared with first-generation Chinese. Recognition of these findings should help researchers, practitioners, and educators to rethink typical advice given to parents for promoting the development of youth. Authoritative parenting should not be treated as the prototype for some Asian American groups. By directly comparing the effects of the authoritative to the authoritarian style, this study was able to show that the authoritative style was no better than the authoritarian style for predicting the school performance of Chinese American youth. Whether these findings also extend to other outcomes or areas of development besides school performance remains to be tested. Nonetheless, school performance is a very important outcome to examine, because it is a highly valued goal for Asian American parents. Efficacy in parenting, especially among Chinese, is often judged by how well their children do in school. Thus, school performance is a particularly relevant outcome for this group.

This study also demonstrated that the pattern of findings for the effects of relationship closeness on school performance was similar to the pattern found for parenting style. Relationship closeness has positive effects on both school grades and effort for European Americans, but not for first-generation Chinese. Differences in the effects for closeness on school grades were not found across the groups, although differences in effects of closeness on school effort were found between first-generation Chinese and European Americans, and to some extent between second-generation Chinese and European Americans.

This study is unique in that it provides a detailed examination of first-generation Chinese immigrants from different countries of origin. Different patterns of associations were found among Chinese immigrants from Taiwan and the P.R.C. For Taiwanese immigrants, both parenting style and relationship closeness were unrelated to school performance, whereas positive associations were found between closeness and school effort among the P.R.C. immigrants. Although this study did not find a positive association between parenting style and school performance among any of the immigrant groups, among immigrants from the P.R.C. the positive association found between closeness and school effort was somewhat consistent with Chen et al.’s (1997) findings for Chinese from Beijing. These researchers found positive relationships between authoritative parenting and the school performance of children in the second grade. Perhaps U.S.-based models of parenting may have more explanatory power in the P.R.C., especially for families residing in large cities like Beijing, than in other Asian countries such as Taiwan. On the other hand, the study by Chen, Dong, and Zhou also involved much younger children. These issues require further study with larger samples of immigrants from these countries and with comparisons of different age groups of children.

This study was also unique in that it demonstrated that much of the beneficial effect of authoritative parenting on the school performance of European Americans was explained through their relationship closeness. For both outcomes of school grades and effort, among European Americans, parent–adolescent closeness accounted for a third to almost a half of the effects of authoritative parenting. This mediational model was also examined for second-generation Chinese with the outcome of school effort. For this group, however, authoritative parenting seemed to account for the effects of closeness on school effort more than closeness accounted for the effects of authoritative parenting.

Because parenting style has often been defined as a construct that reflects relationship qualities such as emotional tone or affect between parent and child, these beneficial effects for closeness offer an understanding of how parenting style affects the school performance of European Americans. Relationship qualities of closeness and intimacy tap into important features of an authoritative parent. Authoritative parents may be more effective simply because they foster close and mutually satisfying relationships with their children. Because the effects of relationship closeness may not be as positive for some groups as others, however, particularly for more recent generations of Asian immigrants compared with European Americans, authoritative parenting may also have less beneficial consequences for Asian immigrants than for European Americans. This is precisely what this study demonstrated.

Ultimately though, alternative models must be explored for explaining the effects of other, more relevant constructs for parenting style and parent–adolescent relationships on the school performance of Asian Americans. Other relationship qualities need to be investigated for Chinese that may be more strongly associated with school performance than with qualities of closeness. Qualities such as respecting parents may be more important for explaining the school success or failure of Asian American adolescents.

In a previous study (Chao, 1995) involving immigrant Chinese mothers, I found that they stressed as one of their top three childrearing goals the importance of children respecting and obeying parents and other adults such as grandparents and teachers. These values for parental respect also extend specifically to the domain of the child’s schooling (Chao, 1996). In their explanations of why Chinese children often do well in school, almost 30% of the immigrant Chinese parents mentioned that children’s school success is often due to the regard and respect that
children have for the family. As one parent explained (Chao, 1996, p. 412),

In Chinese families, the child’s personal academic achievement is the value and honor of the whole family. If you fail in school, you bring embarrassment to the family and lose face. If you do good, you bring honor to the family and do not lose face. A lot of value is placed on the child to do well for the family.

These notions of parental respect must also be included in studies that examine the effects of parent–adolescent relationships on the school performance of Asian American immigrants.

This study also provided some clarification of the inconsistencies that have been found across prior studies that have examined the effects of parenting style on school performance among Asian Americans as a whole. I proposed that these inconsistencies may be due to important differences among this group in their sub-ethnicities (e.g., Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans) and immigrant status. Because many studies had not identified the ethnic and generational composition of their samples of Asian Americans, it is not possible to know whether their different findings may be due to the fact that their samples differed on these factors. This study has shown that differences in generational status may be important to consider in examining the effects of parenting among Asian Americans. Although generational differences in the effects of parenting style and relationship closeness were not found, their differences relative to European Americans are important. First-generation Chinese adolescents more consistently differed from European Americans in the effects of authoritative parenting and closeness than did second-generation Chinese adolescents. Also, the effects for second-generation Chinese primarily ranked between those of first-generation Chinese and those of European Americans, indicating that they may be more similar to European Americans than are first-generation Chinese. This is consistent with a cultural explanation, because first-generation immigrants have had more exposure to Chinese society and culture than second-generation immigrants who have spent all their lives in the United States.

Additionally, differences in levels of some of the variables were found across the two generations of Chinese. First-generation Chinese had higher school grades, but not higher school effort, than second-generation Chinese, and both Chinese groups were higher than European Americans on these school outcomes. Similar proportions of both generations reported that their parents were authoritative as well as authoritarian, but both had reported higher proportions of authoritarian parents than European Americans. Interestingly, first-generation Chinese reported somewhat more closeness with their parents than second-generation Chinese. Both generations of Chinese adolescents, however, were similar to European American adolescents in their reports of closeness with parents. Fuligni (1998) found no overall differences across generation on closeness, but his analyses did not include generational differences by ethnic group.

Thus, important differences in adolescents’ perceptions of their closeness with parents are apparent between first-generation Chinese immigrants and those born in the United States with foreign-born parents. This latter group of adolescents may be experiencing more emotional distance in their relationships with their parents than first-generation immigrant adolescents. This greater distance may perhaps be due to greater differences in acculturation between themselves and their parents.

This study has been able to offer an explanation as to why the effects of parenting style on adolescents’ school performance may differ between Chinese Americans and European Americans by focusing on how the relationship quality between parents and adolescents influences adolescents’ school performance. Examinations of parent–adolescent relationships offer a more direct way of studying the influence that parenting style may or may not have on adolescents. This study provided a unique extension of prior work suggesting that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles have different meanings for Asian American families than is the case for European American families. By including relationship qualities that reflect aspects of an authoritative parent, this study was able to demonstrate similar effects of both authoritative parenting and closeness on the school performance of European Americans, and a lack of effects of both on the school performance of first-generation and, in some cases, second-generation Chinese.

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