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The psychology of Vietnamese tiger mothers: Qualitative insights into the parenting beliefs and practices of Vietnamese-Australian mothers

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Abstract: *To remedy the obscurity in perceptions linked with the Tiger mother phenomenon, and the dearth of research within immigrant-Asian subgroups, we attempted to provide an exploratory analysis on the parenting beliefs and practices of Vietnamese mothers. The voices of seven immigrant Vietnamese-Australian mothers from Western Australia were presented through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. The emergent themes revealed the development of a bi-cultural identity, education, respect, and parental control. Moreover, we found that many beliefs and practices hinge upon the cultural concepts of filial piety and Confucianism. Our findings also support the growing concern which suggest that parenting styles under Baumrind's (1971) typology are inaccurate for cross-cultural populations. Implications pertaining to culturally competent practice and directions for future research are discussed.*

Keywords: parenting styles, parenting practices, Vietnamese immigrants, filial piety, Tiger Mothers

Recently, the concept of the *Tiger Mother* has been popularized within public discourse in an ongoing debate over the superiority of parenting approaches. By definition, Tiger Mothers champion the use of a strict parenting philosophy that incorporates firm parental control and high standards for excellence, as a determinant of academic success (Chua, 2011). To outsiders, Tiger Mothers are viewed as non-democratic, brazen, and less affectionate toward their children. These characteristics are exemplified by Amy Chua, a professor at Yale Law School who recently released a memoir named *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Central to Chua's thesis is the notion that Chinese, or strict parenting is the key to successful child-rearing. Accordingly, Chua advocates a hardened approach in which ridicule, close monitoring, and behavioral restrictions are common practice. Whilst the debate over the superior parenting approach (e.g., East versus West) rages on, there is a potential danger of over-generalization and obscurement with regard to the parenting beliefs and practices of related sub-ethnicities, such as the Vietnamese (Guo, 2013). What defines a Tiger Mother? Are all immigrant-Asian mothers Tiger mothers? Is there a difference between a Vietnamese and Chinese Tiger Mother? When turning to the academic literature to answer these questions, we found a dearth of research and a lack of nuance. Indeed, studies of Asian immigrants are scarce (Chao & Sue, 1996; Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008), and sub-group specific populations, such as the Vietnamese are scarcer still.

Family relationships play a crucial role in an individual's psychological development; understanding the nuanced family dynamics of under-researched immigrant families is therefore an important area of research. Hence, the stereotypic implications of the Tiger Mother persona, coupled with a lack of research on the Vietnamese was the impetus for examination. Through a qualitative, exploratory study, a deeper understanding of the parenting attitudes and practices of the immigrant Vietnamese population was thus sought. Such endeavors are essential for ensuring culturally competent practice for health practitioners, and can have far reaching implications for research and policy (Tajima & Harachi, 2010).

Raising a child is a complex and daunting task; it is a process that encompasses both tradition and the contemporary zeitgeist. Thus, to

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accurately portray the phenomena of Vietnamese parenting, it is necessary to provide both a comprehensive background of psycho-social studies that pertain to this population, and to provide a detailed account of the related cultural beliefs that are grounded within history and tradition. The literature we present is organized under two headings; *ideals* versus *realties.* By ideal, we refer to the cultural traditions (e.g., Confucianism) that pertain to parenting beliefs and practices. By reality, we refer to experiences of immigration, which entails aspirations for a better life, stress, and the quality of the parent–child relationship. These dimensions are also linked with parenting practices (see Guo, 2013 for a discussion).

Cultural ideals

The Vietnamese culture, similar to the Chinese culture, is collectivist and communal in nature, where family interests often take precedence over personal concerns, and one's duty is service to the family lineage (Nguyen & Williams, 1989).[3] For instance, a collectivist culture defines identity by group membership and emphasizes the internalization of group values (e.g., respect for elders and their authority), and the transmission of a sense of belonging to a cultural group. This cultural perspective places high value on achieving a state of psychological equilibrium with the family, and the community at large (Dao, 2002). Indeed, the Vietnamese family has been described as a 'super-organic unit existing across generations; past and future,' which captures how the behavior of one individual reflects the entire family (Nguyen, 1985). With regard to cultural family dynamics, the traditional Vietnamese family is generally large, and has extended members including married sons, daughter-in-laws, and grandchildren under the same roof. Another defining feature of the Vietnamese family lies within the patriarchal system, where power and status revolve around the father as an undisputed head of the family (Dinh, Sarason, & Sarason, 1994). This gender dynamic also translates to gender-specific expectations of children. For example, in traditional Vietnamese culture, sons are expected to be educated whilst daughters are domesticated, to ensure that the male in the family is dominant (Nghe, Mahalik, & Lowe, 2003). Moreover, parent–child relationships are formal and hierarchical with clearly defined roles and behavioral expectations.

Parenting ideals

Relative to parenting, collectivism and interdependency (Chao & Tseng, 2002) is emphasized to children through socialization. For example, collectivism is reflected in the tendency to teach children to place family as the focal point in one's life (Chao & Tseng, 2002). These experiences are grounded in a Confucian belief system,[4] which are essential for understanding the parenting beliefs and practices of Asian immigrants who have been traditionally associated with this philosophy (Suzuki, 1980). Confucianism, as it pertains to parenting ideals advocates deference to parental authority. This cultural expectation is codified within Confucian literature as *filial piety,* which is loosely translated to describe children's obligations to honor parents through displays of obedience. Moreover, these obligations are enforced at an early age and are maintained throughout adulthood.

Central to Confucianism is a belief in human malleability; a notion which contends that through diligent cultivation or disciplined training, an individual can be molded into an exemplary human being (Lieu, 2011). This concept is also analogous to Locke's (1689) notion of the *tabula rasa,* or blank slate. This blank slate, together with the assumption that parents must provide a child with proper training and education proposes that children are not born with innate characteristics, but rather learn to become who they are through life experiences,

[3] Collectivism and individualism, as defined by Hofstede (2001), are used as higher-order concepts which explains cultural disparities within different situations.

[4] Confucianism is a school of thought dedicated to secular ethics and morality. Within Confucianism, the concept of filial piety provides a framework for socio-cultural beliefs and behaviors in many Asian societies (Papps, Walker, Trimboli, & Trimboli, 1995).

and through the teachings of their elders (Chao & Tseng, 2002). Moreover, Confucian philosophy has a strong emphasis on intellectual prowess and a desire for learning in general. Academic success is thus the quintessential outcome desired by all parents (Lieu, 2011). Together these cultural-familial ideals serve as the bedrock for parent–child interactions and exist as powerful motivations for child-rearing behaviors.

Realities of Vietnamese parenting

Immigration and acculturation

After the Vietnam War in 1975, many Vietnamese people left their country to settle in countries such as Australia and the United States (Dinh et al., 1994). As a consequence, many Vietnamese families face economic, political and psycho-social changes through intercultural contact within their new host country. According to Berry (1997, 2008), this adaptive process is defined as acculturation, and occurs on both an individual and group level. In this model, individuals choose one of four strategies: Assimilation (accept the dominant culture), integration (adopt both cultures), separation (accept native culture), or marginalization (reject both cultures; Berry, 2008).[5] The acculturation profile that an individual adopts reflect these strategies, and the individual's orientation to inter-cultural issues such as cultural identity, language use and proficiency, and peer relations (for a review, see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In relation to parenting, acculturation levels serve as an important predictor of many familial variables such as a mother's developmental expectations, levels of interaction with children (Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995), identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), and parenting styles.

Parenting styles and practices

Within the academic literature, parenting is often discussed in terms of styles (e.g., Baumrind, 1971) and practices. To clarify this distinction, Darling and Steinberg (1993) assert that parenting styles are a steady composite of beliefs and attitudes that provide context for parental behavior. In contrast, parenting practices include 'specific goal-directed behaviors through which parents perform their parental duties'. That is, parenting practices involve goal-directed behaviors, whereas parenting styles are global attitudes, because are not bound to a particular disciplinary outcome. Distinguishing between parenting style and practice also has methodological implications, especially when measuring parental influence. We approach parenting styles through the investigation of parenting beliefs, which are rooted in cultural traditions and shaped through acculturative forces.

With regard to parenting style, Baumrind's (1971) definition has been extensively researched and applied. According to Baumrind (1971), parenting styles falls under three distinct typologies which reflect the dimensions of responsiveness (support) and demandingness (control). Parents who are high on both dimensions of demand and responsiveness are described as authoritative whereas those high on demands and low on responsiveness are authoritarian. Permissive parents are low on both dimensions of responsiveness and demand (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Research illustrates that children who experience authoritative parenting style are well-adjusted, cheerful, socially responsible, cooperative, self-reliant, responsible, and achievement oriented, and that this is therefore the ideal parenting style (Driscoll, Russell, & Crockett, 2008; Sigelman & Rider, 2003).

However, despite the utility of parenting styles, researchers have argued that there is considerable fluidity in how parents actually behave toward their children (cf. Chan, Bowes, & Wyver, 2009). In addition, many parents do

[5] Berry's model incorporates a bi-directional framework that can assess an individual's cultural identity with the majority group and with one's own cultural group (Berry, 2008). Berry argues that individuals and groups use different acculturation strategies based on their orientation to two central attitudinal dimensions. These dimensions focus on the cultural maintenance of the individual's own group and the level of desirability pertaining to inter-group contact.

not use a 'one size fits all' approach but are flexible in their child-rearing approaches (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994), suggesting that any one style does not determine a fixed approach. Indeed, both authoritarian and authoritative parents may vary in their interpretation of the salience and meaning of child-rearing situations, to the extent that differences in their evaluation may be greater or smaller, depending on the situation (Coplan, Hastings, Lagace-Seguin, & Moulton, 2002; Smetana, 1995). For example, restrictiveness (a characteristic of authoritarian parenting style) may be the result of parent's responses to negative social environments, rather than as a desire to subjugate children (Gorman, 1998).

The different interpretations of meaning holds true in Eastern-collectivist cultures such as China, Japan, and Korea where parents practice authoritarian parenting without espousing beliefs or attitudes that are typical of the Western conception of authoritarian parents (e.g., dominance and subjugation; Baumrind, 1971; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Indeed, the literature suggests that the negative effects of authoritarian parenting on academic achievement found among mainstream Caucasian populations do not directly generalize to Asian youth (Chao, 1994; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). For example, Chinese parents have been described as authoritarian and typically, this style of parenting has been linked with poor academic achievement among European-Americans. However, Leung, Lau, and Lam (1998) examined the effect of parenting styles on children's academic achievement in four countries (United States, China, Australia, and Hong Kong) and found that authoritarian parenting was negatively related to academic achievement in all countries except for Hong Kong.

In response to these paradoxical findings, Chao (1994, 2001) has argued that parenting styles that have been developed within North American samples should not be directly applied to other cultures, but must instead reflect their socio-cultural contexts. Based on the concept of *guan*,[6] (loosely translated to mean governance, interference and control, yet also implies parental care, support and concern), Chao proposed an alternative parenting style that is practiced by Asian-American immigrant parents called *chiao shun*, or *training*. Training incorporates the Confucian belief of development through guidance, parental involvement, concern, support and the monitoring of behaviors.[7] Significantly, this line of research identifies cultural values as a determinant of the parenting beliefs and practices of immigrant-Asian populations, and hence, serves as a useful conceptual lens. Although training has been invoked within studies of immigrant Chinese parents (e.g., Xu et al., 2005), it has not been established within Vietnamese populations.

Parent–child relationship

Parenting practices also affects family (e.g., parent–child relationship) and child (e.g., depression, self-esteem) outcomes. For example, Nguyen (2008) surveyed 290 Vietnamese-American adolescents in the United States to examine the relationship between self-esteem, depression, parenting styles and acculturation levels. Findings indicated that a majority of adolescents perceived that their fathers had not been acculturated, and practiced authoritarian parenting (even when length of stay was controlled for). Moreover, the authors found that authoritarian parenting style was significantly associated with adolescents' reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher depression scores.

[6] *Guan* has positive connotations of parental control which is qualitatively different to the European-American definition. European-Americans may view excessive parental control as intrusion on their children's autonomy (Chao & Aque, 2009).

[7] Training qualitative differs in how these dimensions are defined. For example, in Western cultures, demandingness is characterized by restriction or domination of the child, which is not a part of the concept of training (Chao, 2001). Training is characterized by high levels of parental involvement, continuous monitoring and guidance of children to promote positive development and prevention of inappropriate behavior.

More recently still, Ho (2010), found that family cohesion and satisfaction were predicted by gaps in acculturation within immigrant Vietnamese families. However, despite what appears to be a poorer parent–child relationship, the connection between acculturation gaps, parenting styles, and youth distress remains mixed (cf. Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2008). Given that the quality of the parent–child relationship is an important buffer for acculturative stress and adjustment (Chieu, Feldman, & Rosenthal, 1992), the unclear nature of the academic literature serves as a powerful rational for further research.

Rationale and current study

Little is known about sub-group differences in parental involvement practices including levels of acculturation, language proficiency and socio-economic status (SES) (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Nguyen, 2008). This concern is exacerbated within the Vietnamese population, which have been under-researched. Further, the extant literature has also collated information regarding broad ethnic groups, which has obscured the inter-cultural diversity of research (Liu, Pope-Davis, Nevvit, & Topotek, 1999). Indeed, much of what is known about the Vietnamese has been from extrapolations of 'Southeast Asians' or have been generalized from aggregate data from 'Asian' studies (Choi et al., 2008; Dinh et al., 1994; Matsuoka & Ryuin, 1989). Razack (1998) proposed that this type of approach results in stereotypical views of members of diverse cultural groups, leading to problematic generalizations. Similarly, Bornstein and Cote (2004) have posited that there are no uniform pattern of acculturation for cognitions and behaviors, and urged further study of parenting beliefs and practices of ethnically diverse immigrant groups. Finally, within parenting styles and practices, the majority of research has been quantitatively studied with very few idiographic accounts, and this is particularly true of Vietnamese immigrants (Driscoll et al., 2008; Nguyen, 2008; Spera, 2005). We scanned the literature and found no qualitative studies on the parenting attitudes and practices of immigrant Vietnamese parents. Given their role as the primary caregiver, mothers and mother–child interactions are important topics for research and inquiry.

We sought to address these gaps by providing a voice for Vietnamese mothers through an inductive, qualitative, and phenomenological approach. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was specifically chosen for this study as it allows the researcher to understand how individuals experience and ascribe meaning to the events in their lives (Eatough & Smith, 2006). IPA recognizes that an individual's experience is bound by society and historical contingencies, and proposes that a phenomenon can only be understood by examining the way in which it is experienced, and how individuals attach meanings to those experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2006). IPA also acknowledges that it is not possible to access an individual's world directly because there is no clear and unmediated window into that life. Thus, investigating how events are experienced and given meaning requires interpretive activity on the part of the participant and researcher. This 'double hermeneutic' is described as a dual process where participants try to make sense of their world, and the researcher tries to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world. A core feature associated with IPA is the idiographic emphasis, which has implications on the sample size. This idiographic emphasis is evidenced by many studies that have opted for a smaller sample size as the norm, whilst still achieving rich and generative data (e.g., Eatough & Smith, 2006). IPA is also useful where the topic under study is dynamic, subjective, relatively under-studied, and where issues relating to identity are important. Such applications include the psychological impact of chronic back pain (Smith & Osborn, 2007), and migration and threat to identity (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000). IPA is employed in the present study to explore how Vietnamese mothers experience their world in order to explore their subjective cognitions. Hence, this approach enables an insider's perspective of the topic under study. Through this exploratory, idiographic study, we asked the question: What are the parenting beliefs and practices of Vietnamese-Australian mothers?

Methodology

Participants

The current study recruited a sample of seven Vietnamese mothers within the Perth Metropolitan area. In order to maintain confidentiality,

pseudonyms were given to participants. Our sample was relatively homogenous in terms of marital status, with most participants married, however, income levels (of working spouse), age and length of stay were varied (see Table 1).

Procedure

After local ethics approval had been secured, research flyers were placed around local university campuses, and throughout Catholic churches and Buddhist temples within the Perth metropolitan area. We used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Emails were also sent out to local Asian communities such as the Asian Association of Western Australia. In addition, the interviewer's acquaintances that met the selection criteria were also asked to participate. Interviews took place in the participant's homes and were conducted in English. When participants struggled to discuss matters in English, Vietnamese words were substituted. Prior to the interview, participants were given an opportunity to discuss the study with the researcher. During this process, participants were notified that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured format with a broad focus on their parenting attitudes (e.g., How do you define parenting?) and practices (e.g., Can you describe your approach to parenting?). All interviews were recorded via a digital voice recorder application on the principal researcher's smart-phone, and were transcribed verbatim. Interviews ranged between 25 and 80 minutes.

Rigor

Several strategies pertaining to the credibility, conformability, dependability and transferability of the research were adhered to (Patton, 2002). In the present study, primary (one-on-one interviews) and secondary sources (field notes and observations) of data were integrated to reach a triangulated extraction of meaning. Further, in accordance with IPA, an in-depth review of the literature was preceded by the initial stages of data analysis. An audit trail was also established via a reflective journal whereby summaries of the interviews were documented in the reflective journal. During the interviews, field notes were taken to formulate an audit trail, and to acknowledge the reflexive process. Throughout the process, a reflective journal was kept to highlight additional observations and further topics of inquiry. Regarding the translation of Vietnamese words; although the interviewer is fluent in Vietnamese, the meanings of each translated word or phrases were reassessed by an independent coder to ensure accuracy. Finally, member checking was utilized to give participants the opportunity to review the drafted findings and interpretations to ensure that it was representative of their experiences (Crotty, 1998).

Data analysis

Transcripts were analyzed manually for recurrent themes using IPA by the first author (Eatough & Smith, 2006). Emergent themes within individual transcripts were marked and when the same themes appeared in at least half of the other

Table 1: Demographics of Vietnamese mothers

Participant	Age	Length of stay (years)	Number of children	Age of children (respectively)	Employment	Annual income of spouse (thousand)	Relationship status	Religious affiliation
Maria	30	8	1 F, 1 M	F 7, M 12	–	–	Married	Buddhist
Amanda	52	15	2 M, 1 F	M 9, M 11,14 F	PT	–	Married	Buddhist
Eva	47	27	2 M	M 10, M 13	PT	35	Married	Catholic
Jenny	37	13	1 M, 1 F	M 6, F 15	–	65	Married	Buddhist
Sally	40	14	2 M	M 8, M 14	FT	–	Married	Buddhist
Kylie	46	18	2 F	F 11, F 14	–	90	Married	Catholic
Sylvie	44	14	1 M, 1 F	8 M, 11 F	–	–	Divorced	Buddhist

Length of stay = time spent in Australia. M, male; F, female; PT, part time; FT, full time.

transcripts, they were categorized as recurrent. This was to promote an idiographic perspective and at the same time, to counterbalance the perspective with more generic accounts across transcripts (Eatough & Smith, 2006). The analysis comprised of four different stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). First, transcripts were individually read and reread to promote immersion with the data. In this phase, key words, statements or phrases that were descriptive or evaluative were identified and highlighted. Ideas and possible coding schemes were recorded during all stages in order to understand the patterns and explanations present within the data. These comments and ideas were noted on the left side margin of the transcripts. Second, the transcript was revisited to organize notes into meaningful clusters, and the identification of these coding groups described what was meaningful about the participant's experience. Third, initial codes and statements were extracted and assembled into a table which allowed for common data extractions to be classified into themes. The table shows the structure of the identified themes and an illustrative data extract is presented alongside each theme, followed by the line number (to re-check the extract in context). Smith and Osborn (2007) suggest that, 'for the researcher, this table is the outcome of an iterative process in which he/she has moved back and forth between the various analytic stages ensuring that the integrity of what participants said had been preserved as far as possible. If the researcher has been successful, then it should be possible for someone else to track the analytic journey from the raw data to the end table.' This table of themes provided the basis for constructing a narrative account of the interplay between the participant's responses of their experiences and the interpretive activity of the researcher. Finally, the themes were reviewed, refined and collapsed or broken down and verified within the data to determine whether the themes were an accurate reflection. The quotes presented below were selected because they presented the essence of the recurrent themes or because they provided the most powerful expressions of any given recurrent theme (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

Results

Four themes and two sub-themes are presented. These themes provide a rich descriptive account of the dynamic experience of parenting in a new context. They are described in more detail below, along with verbatim quotes to exemplify the interpretive process. Generally, participants described their parenting approach as a harmony between East and West where both Vietnamese and Australian methods were adopted. For many participants, their own child-rearing experience was characterized by absolute obedience and rigid control, where children were expected to fulfill their parents' wishes and to behave in accordance with parental expectations:

> … in Vietnam, when I was growing up, the kid have to obey the parent. They can't even talk back to the parent. Even if the parent is wrong, the kid must obey and listen. Growing up was very hard that way. Not much freedom. I think it is in the culture … I take a half and half approach. Half here and half from Vietnam. I know what a typical Vietnamese would do and what someone over here would choose the best way for each situation to teach them. (Eva)

Eva and the majority of other mothers also expressed a desire to build a closer connection with their children and highlighted how their traditional ways of parenting were at odds with such goals. In some of the responses of these participants, successful outcomes of parenting are possible when parents are involved and firm boundaries exist. These accounts reflect an internal struggle between how they have been raised themselves and the social-cultural norms of their current environment, and describe an ongoing battle to find harmony in how best to parent their own children.

Cultural identity

Participants had a strong sense of cultural identity and wanted to ensure that the essence of 'being Vietnamese' was taught. For many, being Vietnamese is reflected in the adherence to cultural values and customs and therefore, a central goal was the intergenerational transmission of culture and the associated cultural values (e.g., displays of respect to elders). Examples include the participation in cultural activities such as Chinese New

Year and the Moon festival, and the retention of the Vietnamese language. Specifically, a mother describes the value of this cultural preservation:

> I am also exposing them to our traditions such as celebrating the *Tet* [Chinese New Year] and *Trung Thu* [Moon festival]. I think these events have good cultural atmosphere. It's nice to see everyone doing their part to honor our traditions. Letting my children experience that is one of the ways that I would teach them about our culture. I try to remind them of why things are done the way they are, like the olden days (Jenny).

Participants also spoke of the 'cultural learning' through interaction with elders, 'Talking to elders is valuable to education for these kids. They learn so much more here than a history class' (Julie). These active efforts to immerse children within cultural events was portrayed as an important parenting duty; to appreciate the cultural and historical aspects of Vietnamese culture, and to develop a Vietnamese identity. Whilst the Vietnamese identity was fostered through the activities above, parents also encouraged children to participate in more Australian activities. For sons, engaging in sporting activities such as surfing or joining football clubs was encouraged. In this way, their cultural education would be balanced, allowing them to navigate through both cultures. However, with regard to daughters, the same encouragement was not explicitly reported. For example, when participants were asked how they developed children's cultural identity, all examples were made in reference to sons.

Language and access to resources

Cultural continuity diverged from developing a bi-cultural identity to the active development and retention of the Vietnamese language, for the sake of social cohesion. Hence, maintaining the Vietnamese language served the dual purpose of retaining the Vietnamese identity, and as a means of keeping connected with extended family members. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

> My kids still go to Vietnamese school every Saturday for four years now, for three and a half hours. Although my son is behind in everything, and everyone was saying that I should drop the Vietnamese, because my son couldn't catch up … but even then, I didn't want him to lose that (Maria).

and

> My sister helps me raise my kids and I help her out with hers. I don't know what I would do without her. She is a lot older than me and she can't speak English well, so it's important that my kid can still speak Vietnamese to her. Otherwise he can't obey her instructions (Eva).

In Maria's account, the desire to retain the Vietnamese language persisted, even when her child was experiencing academic difficulties, suggesting that retaining language was a high priority. Moreover, promoting the retention of language also had implications for additional resources from members of the extended family. In our sample, most of the mothers had siblings within Australia and relied on their assistance in child-rearing (for babysitting and teaching). Ensuring that children retain their fluency in Vietnamese also allows them to keep in contact with over-seas relatives who speak Vietnamese exclusively, as one mother describes, 'Keeping language is really important. If they don't speak Vietnamese, their grandparents will be strangers to them' (Jenny). Hence, for the mothers in our study, teaching and maintaining the Vietnamese language serves several purposes and is considered of high priority.

Education

Education emerged as an important goal for all participants. At different points in the interviews, mothers expressed the importance of education as a means of attaining status, financial security and honor. Common to all mothers was the idea that their primary responsibility as a parent was to 'enforce learning.' For example, in regard to their future, 'it provides for a means of reaching one's potentials through opening up opportunities in their life' (Amanda). And to realizing one's potential, 'My concerns about my children's academic performances are if they have maxed out their potentials. Education is very important as it gives them better opportunities in life' (Eva). Educational expectations deviated from a general hope of attaining a better future to serving as a

means of bringing honor to the family. A quote by Stephanie is representative in this regard:

> We all want our children to achieve something big in life. Mediocre is not acceptable in our culture and family. To be a useful person in the society and make the family proud. We do believe our children will do better than the older generation and go on to surpass us.

Here, education is described as intrinsically linked with achievement, and failure to meet such expectations is not 'tolerated.' There is a pressure placed on children to surpass the previous generation which appears to hinge on cultural expectations of academic excellence. In other words, children are expected to 'go further' than their parents and academic prowess is the means by which is this achieved. For example, 'I tell my kids … you have everything so easy so you have to try hard and learn, do get a degree, to get an easy life. Not like us, still old and working' (Eva). Here, motivation for educational achievement is seen as a way to positively reflect on the family name. The sentiment that is expressed here one of reciprocation; because parents endure hardships to ensure that their child has the best opportunities in life, children are expected to 'fulfill their end of the bargain' by making their parents proud through academic achievement.

Educational goals diverged from creating a stable financial future and making parents proud to the formation of 'character,' as defined by a strong work ethic. In the view of these mothers, education allows for a means of training discipline, which translates to a strong work ethic in later life. For example, 'Education helps kids develops a strong work ethic that helps them in everything they do' (Sylvie), and, 'education builds character. Doing well in school teaches the kids how to work hard' (Jenny). These accounts reveal that education, or more specifically, academic achievement as not only the end-goal, but also as part of the development of 'character.'

Parental involvement

As distinct from the education ideals highlighted above, this section highlights the level of involvement and delineates the means through which parents become involved. For the mothers in our study, education was intrinsically linked with parental involvement. Being 'involved' translated to close monitoring and guidance toward academic achievement. For example, a common strategy was the close monitoring of children's homework or through financially supporting their academic endeavors. This is described in the following quote:

> I would check up on their progress with their school work. If it seems like they're struggling, I will devote more of my time to help them with my homework. If the problem persists, I look for outside help, for example, a tutor or something. As I said, education is important to their future and I want to do everything I can to help them with that (Jenny).

A common barrier that was pervasive to all participants was the difficulty in understanding English. This barrier was overcome through different ways:

> I try to help my daughter with her homework when I can. Math problem are usually okay but problems with lot of English is really hard for me … so I feel a bit helpless in that area. My daughter is okay but my son was really struggling to do his English essays. I try to convince my husband to pay for extra tutoring so he doesn't fall behind. I try to provide them with all the books and things he needs for school as well. If we are saving to buy something else and my children needed the money for books, I don't think twice in using that money for them (Sylvie).

Sylvie's quote reflects some of the difficulties in child-rearing in a new culture. In order to adjust, Sylvie, like most mothers used external tutors as a form of extra support when school work was perceived to be beyond their capabilities. Another way of adjusting was to focus on non-English, or math homework. This finding reveals how tutors, in conjunction with close monitoring of academic progress fosters the creation of a stimulating home environment where educational success is encouraged.

Respect

The teaching and display of respect also emerged as a cultural-parenting ideal. Respect extended across all levels of interaction from one's own parents to other members of society. Such sentiments are captured in quotes like, 'if you respect your peers, you learn to respect the system' (Sally), and:

> The most important cultural value to me is how youngsters show their respect to elders in their daily greetings and conversations. You know how Vietnamese language can differentiate the elders from the youngsters just by a title that goes in front of a name? You're Vietnamese, right? You know what I mean. Saying *chu* [uncle] or *bac* [aunty] and bowing is a small act but it means so much (Maria).

Respect is also displayed through overt actions:

> From a young age, they are reminded to greet and bow courteously towards their grandparents and uncles and aunties on their regular visits to show respect. I try to teach them this when they are very young so that it becomes a part of who they are (Amanda).

For the majority of participants, respect was considered part of the Asian cultural teaching, and considered themselves responsible for instilling these same views in their children. Here, respect is conveyed through an emphasis on using the correct prefix when addressing elders, and display of appropriate behaviors such as bowing. This relational conduct reveals filially pious ways of demonstrating respect and signifies the importance of this cultural value. It is asserted that the way in which children address parents, through acts of bowing and use of proper titles, reflects both their understanding of respect, and how 'mature' the child is. Respect extends from physically bowing to unquestionable obedience and deference to elders. This deference to authority is encapsulated in the following excerpt, 'even if the parent is wrong, the kid can't talk back to the elder. It is very important in our culture' (Kylie). Here, Kylie highlights that respecting an elder means not talking back, even if a child has the facts. Participants also mentioned that this aspect of respect was difficult to teach because Anglo-Australians tend to have a more open dialog between parent and child. This disparity is lamented in the following quote:

> If the parent and kid are friends, you will not be able to teach them (Sally), and:

> In Vietnam, it is too strict, the parent is very discipline towards everything and you can't do anything. Over here there's a lot of freedom and I think it's good for the child. But kids here disrespect their parents so I think you can go too far by giving them a lot of freedom. (Eva).

These findings highlight the value placed on respect and reveal how cultural-familial traditions influence parent–child interactions.

Parental control

Another theme that emerged is the use of prescriptive rules as a means of behavioral control. These rules varied from household protocols, including assisting with household chores to temporal allocations on activities and homework protocol. An example by Sally is representative in this regard:

> I make sure they finish all their homework before they can play or watch TV. I also limit television and game time to one hour a day and encourage them to read for at least 30 minutes every day. I don't let them have sleepovers either, and they have to be in bed by eight on weeknights (Sally).

For Sally, rules were a formal guideline that allows her to control her children. In her view, these rules serve as a checklist of duties that her child must perform before leisurely activities are permitted. A majority of participant also described the use of rules as a way of keeping their children in check. Sylvie's account is exemplary in this regard:

> I make them do my own daily homework that I set, in addition to the school assignment. If he does well, I praise him and give good encouragement. If not up to standard, then no TV or hang out with friends until it's improved. It may sound harsh, but it's necessary for him to have a successful future … I think children will be become lazy if they aren't pushed (Sylvie).

Here, these rules were more than a checklist of duties; they acted as a gateway to attaining praise and affection. Sylvie's stance on the quality of work highlighted the high standard of expectation that her children had to attain. Tasks and duties needed to be completed beyond sufficiency, they had to be of high standards or they were considered incomplete. Another assumption common to most mothers was the idea that children would be inherently lazy if left alone, and they need to be constantly pushed. Thus, in addition to allow for control, close adherence to rules served as a means of keeping children in check from the harmful effects of laziness. Although all mothers had a list of rules for each situation (e.g., sleep-overs, time allowed for leisure activities), there was an

interesting divergence in the data regarding the malleability of these rules. That is, whilst there was an emphasis on enforcing these rules, some participants reported that they made efforts to compromise and involve their children in the process. For example, 'if they do all their homework first, then I let them do what they want' (Maria). This findings illustrate variance in the malleability of rules and reveal a democratic process whereby such rules are reasoned and discussed.

Discussion

This study presented the voices of seven Vietnamese immigrant mothers from Western Australia. We attempted to provide a rich qualitative understanding of the parenting experiences this under-researched population, through an interpretive phenomenological analytic approach. The use of IPA provided insightful and experiential accounts, prioritized by the participants themselves. Acculturation and parenting are dynamic processes which evolve over time (Berry, 2008). Research on parenting within immigrant populations suggest that these families increasingly adopt the attitudes and practices of the dominant culture as they become acculturated (Lin & Fu, 1990). Consistent the extant literature (e.g., Maiter & George, 2003; Marks & Nesteruk, 2011; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008), mothers in our study explicated a balance between Eastern and Western culture where some new parenting practices were adopted, and others rejected. The identified themes are discussed in relation to the academic literature in the following section.

Cultural continuity

Participants were aware of their children's dual-socialization process and were active in the development of a bi-cultural identity. A bi-cultural identity, as a theoretical construct that denotes the extent to which an individual perceives their mainstream and ethnic cultural identities, in relation to the host culture (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Our findings reveal the development of a bi-cultural identity as a core parenting ideal and the specific means through which this ideal is exacted (e.g., cultural festivals and maintaining the Vietnamese dialect). Specifically, we found that the traditional Vietnamese gender view (e.g., that men have a higher status then women and that the husband should be higher than the wife on all levels) translates to mothers prioritizing the development of their son's bi-cultural identity. Put differently, the traditional expectation that boys are socialized to be educated, whilst girls are socialized to be domesticated (so that the husband is of higher status than the wife on all levels) was evidenced in the exclusive reference to sons, when referring to bi-cultural identity (Nghe et al., 2003). Given our qualitative endeavor, it is difficult to establish whether this gender bias was a product of the variation in acculturation levels (e.g., more acculturated participants may not share this view), or was unique in our sample. Nonetheless, this finding reveals a potential relationship between acculturation levels and gender-role expectations. These findings are similar to the beliefs of South Asian mothers (Maiter & George, 2003) in the sense mothers wanted their children to be integrated (through developing a bi-cultural identity), rather than assimilated. However, these findings differ from Chinese mothers with regard to concerns of cultural identity. For example, Gorman (1998) found that American Chinese immigrant mothers were not concerned about raising their children to 'be Chinese,' whilst mothers in our sample were explicitly concerned with encouraging children to retain their Vietnamese cultural identity. Hence, our qualitative account of the development of a bi-cultural identity converges with South Asian populations, yet differs from Chinese populations. Our findings also highlight the strategies that immigrant parents adopt in order to ensure that their children are equipped at navigating through their new environment.

Retaining language served the dual functions of preserving cultural identity, as well as promoting cohesiveness with the extended family (through maintaining mutual dialog). In this way, the extended family serves as a resource for adaptation in the face of acculturative forces (e.g., acculturative stress; Chieu et al., 1992), and allows for continued accessibility to practical, social, and emotional support (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Kana'Iaupuni, Donato, Thompson-Colon,

& Stainback, 2005). In turn, this continued support from the extended family promoted children's educational and personal growth. Thus, in addition to preserving a cultural identity (Maiter & George, 2003), our findings converge with the literature on Vietnamese refugee populations with respect to the reliance on the extended family. For example, studies of Vietnamese refugees in exile have emphasized the importance of relying on the extended family for support (Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, & Middelthon, 2012). Specifically, the authors found that aunties and uncles were expected to be involved in raising children, and that this support facilitated adaptation within a new environment. Collectively, these findings echo the notion that collectivistic societies emphasize having stronger family relations, and as a unique contribution, our findings are comparable to refugee populations.

Education

Participants explained that their primary responsibility as a parent was to ensure that their children had the best opportunities for academic success. These education-centric ideals appear to hinge on cultural Confucian-collectivistic values of honor, the reality of adjusting to a new environment, and the view that education is a vehicle for social mobility and financial happiness. In essence, these ideals, coupled with the reality produced by immigration manifests in a child-rearing approach that places educational prowess center stage of child development. This was evidenced by how pervasive and robust our education theme was. For instance, education was emphasized as a tool for promoting a positive work ethic (through persistently working on school-work several hours a night), as a means of respecting parents (because the actions and achievements of a family member reflect the entire family), and simply as a way of attaining financial freedom and happiness.

Our findings revealed that Vietnamese parents are involved in their children's lives through engagement with school assigned home-work. In our study, parental involvement was intrinsically linked with the limitations that come with adapting to a new culture. For example, the cultural and linguistic barriers that these participants faced largely determines their way of engaging with children. Specifically, mothers, responded by assisting with non-English homework and by providing a nurturing home environment through financial and educational supports such as tutors, as opposed to interacting with schools. This monitoring and supervision bears resemblance to Confucian-oriented values such as emphasis on hard work and high academic achievement, and the notion of 'training' described by Chao (1994). Confucian philosophy emphasizes the value of one's effort as being the route to self-improvement (Chao & Tseng, 2002). Confucianism is also grounded in high standards, strict discipline and a high level of directedness where parental care and concern is implied (as opposed to physical affection or praise). Similarly, training is characterized by guidance, support and the monitoring of behaviors. Together, these two concepts possibly why these parents enhance their children's cognitive and educational progress by emphasizing the importance of wilful effort and close involvement (Chao & Tseng, 2002). This outcome also converges with the reality that people immigrate to other countries in hope for a better life, and together, provides a powerful incentive for parents to hold academic achievement as the epitome of success (Guo, 2013). These academic expectations are reflected in the literature with respect to Vietnamese populations. For example, Dinh et al. (1994) reported that Vietnamese students had a significantly higher grade point average, relative to American-born students. These academic expectations (e.g., high standards, close monitoring) are also consistent with other Asian groups such as Chinese (Gorman, 1998) and South Asian (Maiter & George, 2003), and supports the view that educational achievement has both a unique meaning and is in a unique position within Confucian-oriented families, culture, and history (Chao, 2001; Lim & Lim, 2004). These findings portend the enduring nature of Confucian-oriented parenting ideals (e.g., education taking center stage), and show and how immigration and acculturation processes transform realities to ultimately shape parenting practices.

Respect

Respect, as a function of filial piety also emerged as a theme. Filial piety, as we have described previously, refers to the cultural expectation of obedience and deference to elders. With reference to the Vietnamese population, Nidorf (1985) has asserted that, 'filial piety is the single most important construct binding and organizing the psychological experience and social reality of Vietnamese people' (as cited in Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999). Our findings validate these claims to an extent, and moreover, are consistent with findings by Lieber, Nihira, and Mink's (2004) data-driven factors pertaining to filial piety; specifically the factors pertaining to respect and karma. In our study, participants expected their children to fulfill their role by demonstrating deference and absolute obedience through actions that contribute to the parents' material and emotional comfort. Specifically, children were expected to physically display their respect through bowing, and through honoring their parents through academic achievement. We also identified the difficulty in teaching this concept because it clashed with the more 'Western' norm of open dialog between parent and child. Although researchers have identified that there exists an acculturation gap or 'cultural dissonance' (e.g., Ho, 2010), we have uniquely identified respect as a specific cultural ideal that is intertwined with filial piety. These findings imply that respect, as a function of filial piety, may be a contributing factor against a positive of parent–child relationship. For example, Choi et al. (2008) found that intergenerational conflict (a clash between parent and child over cultural values) predicted problem behaviors by increasing parent–child conflict, which subsequently weakens parent–child bonding. Our findings highlight the enduring nature of filial piety within Vietnamese families and potentially reveal filial piety as a source of cultural dissonance. More broadly still, the enduring nature of filial piety shows that Confucianism, as a form of cultural meta-cognition that guides beliefs and behavior (Lieber et al., 2004; Tsai, 1999).

Parental control

Participants reported the use of rules as a means of behavioral control. On the surface, the use of such rules implied a sense of restrictiveness and control, which may appear to be consistent with an authoritarian parenting style. However, the motivations for these rules were indicative of concern for personal development through education and training. Interestingly, rules surrounding education were immutable, whilst non-educational rules were negotiable. Seemingly, these findings appear contradictory to the cultural concept of training and moreover, to the hierarchical family dynamics and the authoritative parenting style associated within the Vietnamese population (Dinh et al., 1994; Nguyen, 2008), and to the broader notions of Confucianism. Instead, these findings reflect the acculturative forces that are at work by showing how individuals actively adjust to their current environment.

It is plausible to assert that, given the adherence to these rules, parents would rate highly on the control dimension of Baumrind's (1971) typology. However, it is equally plausible to assume that participants would rate highly on the responsiveness dimensions, as evidenced by the motivational components (e.g., family honor and achieving a better life than parents) in our exerpts. This dual expression of high control and support culminates in a 'tough love' approach to parenting which mirrors Chao's (1994) concept of *guan* and training and reveals how some Confucian-Chinese concepts transfer to Vietnamese populations. For example, Chao (1994, 2001) and Gorman (1998), in their respective studies of immigrant Chinese mothers found the same pattern of concurrent warmth and control. A possible explanation for this reality could be that through the process of adaptation, these parents may have shifted toward control-oriented practices (e.g., strict rules to keep children out of trouble), while still adhering to the cultural beliefs of Confucianism (Chao & Aque, 2009). In other words, the demand to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment leads parents to become more controlling (to push children to succeed), but is moderated by a grounding of collectivistic-Confucian beliefs

which emphasize cultivation through training and close guidance, and parental warmth. The end result is a style that is unclassifiable by existing parenting measures. Given the emphasis on control, it is not surprising Vietnamese parents have been reported as being authoritarian, under Baumrind's parenting styles (e.g., Nguyen, 2008). In light of our findings, it would not be correct to classify Vietnamese mothers as authoritarian, because warmth, concern, and support are clearly evident. This finding support the growing body of literature (cf. Lim & Lim, 2004) which suggest that traditional parenting styles under Baumrind's (1971) classification may not be valid within ethnic Asian groups.

Limitations

Our findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the reflective accounts of these parents are retrospective in nature. Therefore, the salience of particular events is likely to be skewed by biases in memory (Loftus, 2003). Due to the time constraints of the study, long-term follow-ups were not feasible. Second, this study did not account for factors such as SES, and reasons for migration which may affect the quality of the parent–child relationship. Although financial status was sought out in the interview, not all participants were willing to disclose this information. Third, there were problems pertaining to the sample size of the current study. Although only having seven mothers is not detrimental to the aims of our paper (e.g., for exploratory purposes), or to the methodology, our findings are limited to the experiences of our sample, and cannot be directly generalized or transferred to all Vietnamese immigrants. Fourth, a potential limitation in sampling may have confounded this study, as this study was advertised in English. Although the researcher's cultural heritage and linguistic proficiency in Vietnamese was explicated on the research flyer, it is possible that the study may have attracted participants whom are comfortable with expressing their views in English. As a consequence, it is possible that the sample may not be completely representative of an immigrant Vietnamese-Australian parent population. Finally, as this study focused on mothers' perspectives, the voices and perspectives of immigrant Vietnamese fathers and children were not examined.

Future directions

Earlier findings by Matsuoka and Ryuin (1989) and Nguyen and Williams (1989) conclude that Vietnamese parents appear to retain their traditional cultural values. Our findings add to the literature by providing a detailed description and interpretation of what aspects of these values were enforce, and how filial piety plays an important role in immigrant Vietnamese families. However, the adherence to the Confucian heritage, although beneficial for academic excellence, may have come at the cost of the quality in psychological health (Lim & Lim, 2004). Given that Vietnamese families report a lower quality of family relationships (e.g., Dinh et al., 1994), have larger generational gaps relative to non-immigrants (e.g., Nguyen & Williams, 1989), and appear to have poor parent–child relationships (Ho, 2010), this line of inquiry could be extended by qualitatively examining the experience of being raised by immigrant Vietnamese parents. Such endeavors would validate our themes and could together suggest that filial piety is a fruitful area for future research as a potential barrier against a positive parent–child relationship (e.g., by including filial piety measures as a moderator of familial functions or parent–child relationships; Lieber et al., 2004). Our findings also echo the notion of parental warmth as a trans-contextually valid construct, despite qualitative differences between cultures in parenting dimensions (Lim & Lim, 2004). For example, parenting warmth is positively related to developmental variables across different cultures (e.g., emotional adjustment and school and social achievement; Chen, Liu, & Li, 2000). Future cross-cultural research would therefore benefit from examining control and warmth as salient parenting variables, rather than parenting styles.

Implications for practice

The family unit is widely accepted as the primary vehicle for human development (Bronfenbrenner,

1986; Cassoni & Caldana, 2012). Therefore, understanding the Confucian-collectivist ideals of respect, group membership, and the education-centric child-rearing approach has implications for both theory and practice. For example, our participants expressed that they attempted to find a compromise between Eastern and Western methods of parenting, which suggests a degree of openness to different methods of child-rearing. The findings in the present study imply that clinicians can engage with mothers to understand their parenting concerns to discuss a range of alternative parenting practices. For instance, if cultural norms appear to be getting in the way of parenting, clinicians can explore this issue further in relation to the parent's dual-socialization goals, as opposed to simply judging that the mother and child are at different acculturation levels and are thus experiencing conflict (Maiter & George, 2003). In addition, understanding the collectivistic values that underpin much of the parenting attitudes of Vietnamese parents may be advantageous in establishing cultural competency and in turn, a strong therapeutic alliance. Indeed, Tsang, Bogo, and George (2003) have proposed that cultural competency is the most important variable in fostering a positive therapeutic alliance. Understanding dual-socialization process also extends to mental health service delivery. For example, Ying and Han (2007) found that intergenerational relationship was found to be a direct predictor of depressive symptomatology in youth mental health outcome. In synthesis with our findings, it would be plausible to assert that interventions that target the parent–child relationship will be the most effective. The education-centric view of parenting that Vietnamese immigrant mothers display are also of use to school personnel, including teachers and educators. In particular, school personnel should not interpret the absence of parental participation as uncaring or neglect, and are encouraged to be aware of the involvement through physical and financial support toward education within the home environment. Given the common interest in promoting academic success, schools could also work with families in regards to facilitating and organizing extracurricular tutors.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the limitations above, our findings are noteworthy because we have extended the existing knowledge regarding the parenting beliefs and practices of immigrant Vietnamese mothers. Our idiographic, interpretive approach is a valuable step forward toward the disaggregation of the Asian parenting research literature and has helped generated hypotheses for future research. In general, our findings support the bi-directional nature of acculturative processes and highlights adaptation strategies that individuals adopt in the context of a new culture (Berry, 2008). Our findings are consistent with the parenting literature which suggest that parenting style, as a construct is problematic within cross-cultural research. With regards to the Tiger Mother phenomenon that was prefaced; our findings provide a glimpse of the reality of immigrant Vietnamese mothers, specifically, in their approach to parenting and their views on education. On a surface level, the beliefs and practices of our participants mirror some of the concepts of the typical Tiger Mothers (e.g., strict academic standards and control), yet differ in subtle ways (e.g., greater emphasis on cultural identity, and democracy within applying rules). This study serves as an important step forward in establishing nuance within Asian sub-groups and reveals how the beliefs and practices of Tiger mothers, Chinese mothers, and Vietnamese mothers alike may not be so extreme, when their cultural histories and traditions are understood.

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