Intergenerational Cultural Conflict, Assertiveness, and Adjustment among Asian Americans

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Abstract

According to acculturation gap-distress theory, intergenerational cultural conflict stems from parent-offspring acculturation mismatch. Acculturation-based family conflict has been linked to poorer psychological adjustment among Asian American offspring, especially emerging adults. Whereas trait assertiveness often is shown to buffer the relation between interpersonal conflict and psychological distress among Euro Americans, it remains unknown how assertiveness contributes to Asian Americans' psychological adjustment both directly and jointly with intergenerational cultural conflict. Considering Asian cultural values of filial piety and obedience, high levels of assertiveness—a set of intrapersonal characteristics that prioritizes individualistic needs over family harmony and group needs—may intensify the relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and adjustment outcomes. Asian American college students ($N = 141$, 58.2% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.86$) completed surveys assessing their levels of intergenerational cultural conflict, assertiveness, and three psychological adjustment outcomes (depressive symptoms, negative affect, and subjective well-being). Intergenerational cultural conflict was positively associated with depressive symptoms. Assertiveness was correlated with negative affect and depressive symptoms negatively, and with subjective well-being positively. Contrary to hypothesis, assertiveness did not moderate the relation between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment. Whereas trait assertiveness can be promotive of psychological adjustment outcomes among Asian Americans, it may not affect the degree to which intergenerational cultural conflict is linked to offspring adjustment outcomes.

Keywords: acculturation; assertiveness; collectivism; family; personality

Public Significance Statement: Intergenerational cultural conflict involves challenges that stem from acculturation mismatch between parents and offspring. These challenges are common in

immigrant families, and have been linked to psychological maladjustment among Asian Americans. Whereas assertiveness is associated with greater subjective well-being and lower levels of depressive symptoms and negative affect, individual differences in assertiveness likely do not intensify nor buffer adjustment problems that are associated with intergenerational cultural conflict.

Intergenerational Cultural Conflict, Assertiveness, and Adjustment among Asian Americans

Individuals may experience changes in their behavioral repertoires, values, and ethnic identification when adjusting to a host cultural context that is different from their ethnic heritage cultural context (Berry & Sam, 1997). When the demand to make this intercultural adjustment is greater than their resources to cope, individuals may experience acculturative stress (Smart & Smart, 1995). Acculturative stress also can manifest at the family level; members within the same family may experience or approach intercultural adjustment differently in terms of their strategies or speed of acculturation. Hence, intergenerational cultural conflict is one of the acculturation-related challenges commonly experienced by individuals in immigrant families (Choi et al., 2008). According to acculturation gap-distress theory, intergenerational cultural conflict is defined as disagreements that arise from acculturation discrepancies between parents and their offspring (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). Greater frequency and/or intensity of these acculturation discrepancies and intergenerational conflict have been linked to poorer psychological adjustment among Asian American offspring (see Lui, 2015; Telzer, 2010 for review). Much variability remains in the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment. Such cross-sample variability can be attributed to demographic differences including gender and age cohort (Lui, 2015). In addition, personality characteristics including trait assertiveness may be critical in explaining between-person variability.

Predominantly among Euro Americans, research has linked trait assertiveness to individuals' successful navigation of personal differences and interpersonal conflicts (Volkema & Bergmann, 1995; Wood & Bell, 2008). Assertiveness skills are commonly taught and reinforced in psychotherapy as a tool to reduce symptoms of psychopathology and to manage interpersonal conflict (Hays, 2014; Linehan, 2014; Muñoz & Miranda, 2000). Despite culture-

general findings and clinical implications, assertiveness may be incongruent with collectivistic values that are reinforced in Asian cultures (Ho et al., 2001). Assertiveness typically connotes the promotion of individual self-interest and self-expression; therefore, assertiveness inherently is consistent with individualistic cultural values. By contrast, in collectivistic—such as Asian—societies, assertive behaviors may go against culturally sanctioned behaviors and values (e.g., obliging with parental expectations and placing family interests above personal interests; Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983; Singhal & Nagao, 1993). Thus, it is reasonable to expect assertiveness to disrupt harmony and hierarchies in Asian families. In turn, assertiveness not only can pose risk for psychological maladjustment but also intensify the negative relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment among Asian Americans. Hence, we aimed to examine the associations among intergenerational cultural conflict, assertiveness, and psychological adjustment in a sample of college-aged Asian American men and women.

Intergenerational Cultural Conflict and Psychological Adjustment

According to acculturation gap-distress theory and supported by empirical evidence, acculturation mismatch and intergenerational cultural conflict are shown to be culturally distinct risk factors to psychological adjustment among Asian American offspring (Lau et al., 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). Considering differences in the rates and strategies by which individuals acculturate to the mainstream U.S. culture and enculturate to Asian ethnic societies, parents and offspring within the same family may show discrepant patterns of behavioral repertoires and cultural values. In terms of cultural values, parents and offspring typically disagree on traditional values that emphasize filial piety, academic achievement, parental authority, and a hierarchical structure within the family (Ahn et al., 2008; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). Parent-offspring acculturation mismatch can manifest in at least

four profiles: the offspring may be more acculturated to the host society than the parent; the offspring may be less acculturated to the host society than the parent; the offspring may be more enculturated to the heritage society than the parent; and the offspring may be less enculturated to the heritage society than the parent (Telzer, 2010). These four profiles may be differentially associated with offspring's psychological adjustment outcomes. For example, across all four profiles of acculturation mismatch, higher levels of family conflict and offspring behavioral problems were reported by offspring who were less acculturated to host culture and more enculturated to the heritage society than their parents (Telzer, 2010). Regardless of the profile of acculturation mismatch, any perceived parent-offspring discrepancies can influence offspring's psychological adjustment outcomes through the effects of family conflict, emotional distancing, and lowered quality of parenting (Hwang & Wood, 2008; Kim & Park, 2011). In fact, research has shown intergenerational cultural conflict to be more closely linked to offspring adjustment outcomes than acculturation mismatch alone (Lim et al., 2009; Marsiglia et al., 2009; Wang-Schweig & Miller, 2018; see Lui, 2015 for review), making family conflict an important determinant of offspring adjustment.

Experiences in Emerging Adulthood

Intergenerational cultural conflict is especially relevant for scientific understanding of the psychological adjustment of Asian Americans in emerging adulthood for three reasons. First, college years mark a critical period during which more people experience the first onset of psychological disorders (Kessler et al., 2007). This incidence rate corresponds to heightened levels of stress reported by many emerging adults (Blanco et al., 2008; Pedrelli et al., 2015; Zivin et al., 2009). Second, parent-offspring conflict is a common source of distress among emerging adults who seek professional services at college counseling centers (Arria et al., 2009). Research

has shown that parent-offspring conflict predicts emerging adults' adjustment outcomes above and beyond peer relationships (Collins et al., 1997). Third, for many Asian Americans attending college, they are exposed to a new set of sociocultural influences from the mainstream U.S. society. The new influences may challenge the norms, values, and beliefs that have been socialized in their Asian families, including sacrificing personal interests over family interests, emphasizing academic achievement, and dating and marrying within their same ethnic group (Juang et al., 2012; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). To the extent that many content areas underlying intergenerational cultural conflict are tied to developmental tasks that emerging adults are expected to master, acculturation-based family conflict likely is particularly distressing to college students as they navigate greater independence and new relationships (Marcoen, 2005).

Variability in the Associations between Intergenerational Cultural Conflict and Psychological Adjustment

Whereas research has demonstrated associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment among emerging adults (e.g., Lee & Liu, 2001; Lee et al., 2005), there are between-person and between-study variabilities in the strength of the effect sizes. These variabilities can be accounted for by individual difference factors and demographic variables (e.g., Chung, 2001; Lui, 2015).

Individual difference in assertiveness

Trait assertiveness is one key individual difference factor to consider in the relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment. Assertiveness is defined as being able to act in one's best interest, stand up for oneself without undue anxiety, and express one's rights without disrespecting others (Alberti & Emmons, 1974). As characterized in

the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule, the most commonly used measure of trait assertiveness, assertiveness can manifest across a broad range of contexts and situations (Rathus, 1973). Specifically, these behaviors include asserting one's needs in classrooms and school environments, customer service settings, and interpersonal relationships. Whereas assertiveness is robustly linked to psychological adjustment among Euro Americans, the same relations are less understood among Asian Americans. This research gap is critical for two reasons. First, findings with Euro Americans may not generalize to Asian Americans because assertiveness may be incongruent with Asian cultural values that emphasize group harmony. Second, assertive communication is commonly recommended for coping with interpersonal conflict (e.g., Rhee et al., 2003); however, this recommendation may be misguided without strong empirical evidence with Asian Americans and in the context of intergenerational cultural conflict.

Assertiveness and psychological adjustment. In samples with predominantly Euro Americans across basic and applied research, trait assertiveness has been shown to be a promotive agent for psychological adjustment. First, assertiveness is linked robustly to adjustment outcomes including subjective well-being and depression symptoms (Anglim & Grant, 2016; Langone, 1979; Lea & Paquin, 1981; Speed et al., 2017). These patterns are consistent with an individualistic cultural orientation: being able to articulate and advocate for one's beliefs, needs, and preferences directly and explicitly can reinforce one's self-worth and promotes one's general self-efficacy (Lorr & More, 1980; Peneva & Mavrodiev, 2013). Second, as a core element in many evidenced-based interventions for various psychological disorders, assertiveness training is recommended to help reduce distress associated with interpersonal difficulties (Forman, 1993; Linehan, 2014; Yucel et al., 2002). In the context of friendships and in workplace relationships, trait assertiveness has been shown to buffer the relation between

psychological maladjustment and interpersonal conflicts (Lavin, 1990; Pourjali & Zarnagash, 2010). Because assertiveness manifests in open and constructive communication, individuals who score high on this trait likely can manage and mitigate the negative psychological effects of interpersonal conflict effectively (Sportsman & Hamilton, 2007; Walczak & Absolon, 2001).

Cultural differences in the roles of assertiveness. Contrary to findings with Euro Americans, assertiveness may have a negative impact on psychological adjustment and intensify the negative effects of interpersonal conflict among Asian Americans. Because the goals of assertive behaviors are to prioritize personal interests over other people's interests, the underlying assumption is that being more assertive allows people to pursue their wants and needs. In turn, being assertive can also enhance one's self-worth without threatening the rights of others (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). Considering traditional Asian cultural values, however, conformity to the norm, obedience and deference to hierarchies and authority figures, and filial piety are all central to how individuals construct their self-identity and how they relate to others (Ho et al., 2001). To the extent that Asian Americans' self-concept is embedded within family relationships, assertiveness tends to be incongruent with traditional cultural expectations and thus may be discouraged (Hoy & Stone, 1993). For example, compared to Euro Americans, recent research shows that trait assertiveness was not indicative of individual differences in extraversion among Asian Americans (Lui et al., 2019). When these assertive behaviors are discouraged, individuals may experience criticism from family members and hence, experience psychological distress (Rosenthal et al., 2006).

In the contexts of interpersonal relationships, assertiveness may intensify the relation between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological maladjustment. Specifically, individuals of Asian backgrounds likely find interpersonal conflicts to be particularly distressing

(Hashimoto et al., 2012). Individuals are encouraged to consider family honor and shame and refrain from disrupting interpersonal harmony by avoiding conflicts (Campos & Kim, 2017; Lui & Rollock, 2018). Attempting to resolve parent-offspring conflict with assertiveness may place an even greater strain on the relationship because Asian American parents may be more likely to perceive their offspring's assertiveness as a sign of disobedience than Euro American parents (Rhee et al., 2003). As a result, offspring's trait assertiveness could exacerbate the negative psychological impact of intergenerational cultural conflict among Asian Americans.

Gender

Gender is a key demographic factor that has shown mixed results regarding the experiences of intergenerational cultural conflict and their relations with psychological adjustment. Acculturation gap-distress and intergenerational cultural conflict reflect parent-offspring differences in expectations, values, and behavioral repertoires. Hence, compared to their men counterparts, women offspring who are more acculturated to the U.S. and less enculturated to their heritage culture may see greater discrepancies and more conflict with their parents (Suarez-Orozco & Chin, 2006). For example, it is more common to expect Asian American women than men to date and marry within the same ethnic group; it also is more common for Asian American women than men to face greater restrictions on their sexual behaviors (Hahm et al., 2006; Lee & Yamanaka, 1990). These culturally sanctioned gender expectations may explain why some studies have shown gender differences in mean levels of intergenerational cultural conflict. Specifically, when domains of intergenerational cultural conflict are identified and differentiated into areas such as dating and marriage, education and career, research show higher mean levels of intergenerational cultural conflict among Asian American women than men in the context of dating and marriage (Chung, 2001). Relatedly,

research also shows stronger bivariate associations between dating and marriage conflict and psychological adjustment among women than men (Chung, 2001).

In contrast to evidence demonstrating that women experience intergenerational cultural conflict more frequently and are more negatively affected by this family conflict than men, some studies have shown nonsignificant gender differences. In research that focuses on overall levels of intergenerational cultural conflict, data show no gender differences in the frequency of the conflict (Ahn et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2005; Su et al., 2005) nor in the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment outcomes (Lui, 2019). Perhaps, gender similarities in global levels of intergenerational cultural conflict are observed because traditional gender role expectations do not differ in most areas of intergenerational cultural conflict, such as education and career. Rather, men and women equally experience intergenerational cultural conflict and also equally experience poorer psychological adjustment outcomes when this conflict occurs. To the extent that existing findings about gender differences in the relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment remain inconclusive, we aimed to explore gender differences in levels of intergenerational cultural conflict and its links to psychological adjustment outcomes.

The Present Study

The goal of the present study was to examine for whom intergenerational cultural conflict would be more closely associated with various psychological adjustment outcomes. The focus on college-aged adults would help advance scientific understanding of personal characteristics and family experiences in a segment of the population at risk for psychological maladjustment. We examined depressive symptoms, negative affect, and subjective well-being for two reasons. First, these are common reasons for professional help-seeking among Asian American college students

(Lipson et al., 2018). Second, the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment have been shown to be stronger for internalizing symptoms and well-being than externalizing symptoms (Lui, 2015). Additionally, given mixed findings about gender differences in intergenerational cultural conflict, we aimed to explore gender differences in mean levels of and bivariate associations of intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment outcomes. Based on previous research on acculturation gap-distress and the distinct cultural expectations for interpersonal relationships and communication, we hypothesized that:

- (1) greater intergenerational cultural conflict would be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and negative affect, and lower levels of subjective well-being;
- (2) higher levels of trait assertiveness would be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms and negative affect, and lower levels of subjective well-being; and,
- (3) trait assertiveness would intensify the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment outcomes.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Domestic, non-international, Asian American undergraduate students participated in this study. Participants aged 18 years or older were recruited at a large, public university in the Midwestern region of the United States. The sample included students ($N = 141$, 57.5% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.86$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.02$) of diverse ethnic backgrounds (34.1% Chinese, 19.5% Korean, 19.5% Indian, 6.8% Vietnamese, 3.4% Filipino, and 16.7% of other ethnic subgroups, including Taiwanese, Thai, Pakistani, Japanese, and Indonesian). Students who identified as foreign-born, first-generation who came to the U.S. with their parents before the age of 12 (31.9%) or native-

born, second-generation (68.1%) immigrants were eligible to participate in this study.¹

Participants reported a median annual family household income in the range of \$80,001-\$100,000. This study received approval from the university IRB. Asian American students were recruited via mass emails sent to eligible students from the university registrar's office. Multi-ethnic students were eligible to participate as long as they self-identified as Asian Americans. Upon providing electronic informed consent, participants completed online surveys via Qualtrics. The survey took approximately 60 minutes to complete and participants received \$10.

Measures

Asian American Family Conflicts Scale (FCS; Lee et al., 2000). The FCS includes descriptions of 10 family conflicts that commonly occur in Asian American families. The FCS is a reliable and valid, unidimensional measure that assesses common acculturation-related intergenerational conflict among Asian American samples (Miller & Lee, 2009). Participants rated each item for both the likelihood of occurrence and seriousness of the conflict. Items include "You have done well in school, but your parents' academic expectations always exceed your performance" and "You want to state your opinion, but your parents consider it disrespectful to talk back." All items were rated on scales from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*) for likelihood and from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*) for seriousness of family conflict. We multiplied the likelihood score by the seriousness score to create an intensity score for each item. Higher average scale scores indicated more intense intergenerational cultural conflict (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS; Rathus, 1973). The RAS is a 30-item self-report

¹ Although we did not consider nativity status in our preplanned analytic strategies, a reviewer suggested including nativity status as a covariate in our analyses. We conducted an additional set of regression analyses with nativity status as a covariate (see Supplemental Table 1). Results did not differ with or without nativity status in the models.

measure that assesses trait assertiveness. Participants rated items (e.g., “When I have done something important or worthwhile, I manage to let others know about it”; reverse-scored: “I am careful to avoid hurting other people’s feelings, even when I have been injured”) on a scale from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 7 (*very much like me*). Scale items are most commonly averaged into a single score representing the construct (Henderson & Furnham, 1983; Quillin et al., 1977). The RAS has demonstrated convergent validity with other measures of assertiveness, including the Assertiveness Self-Report Inventory (Herzberger et al., 1984) and the Adaptive and Aggressive Assertiveness Scales (Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). Additionally, the RAS has demonstrated criterion-related validity across a number of psychological adjustment outcomes, including depressive symptoms, life satisfaction, and social anxiety (Blanco et al., 2014; Pelissolo et al., 2012; Tsitsas et al., 2019). The RAS has been used to measure assertiveness among Asian and Asian American samples (Aoki et al., 2017; Sue et al., 1983). Higher mean scale scores indicated greater trait assertiveness (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$).

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). The CES-D is a 20-item self-report measure designed to assess depressive symptoms in clinical and community samples. Participants rated the frequency in which they experienced depression-related symptoms in the past week (e.g., “I felt sad”; reverse scored: “I felt that I was as good as other people”) on a scale from 1 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (*most or all of the time*). Research has indicated a one-factor model fits the CES-D scores (Edwards et al., 2010). The CES-D has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of depressive symptoms among Asian American college students (Ying et al., 2007). Higher mean scale scores indicated greater levels of depressive symptoms (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$).

Differential Emotions Scale (DES; Izard et al., 1974). The Differential Emotions Scale

is a 30-item self-report measure designed to assess overall levels of negative and positive affect (Izard et al., 1974). Given that we aimed to examine negative affect as an indicator of psychological maladjustment, we administered only the 21 items purported to assess negative affect. Participants indicated the extent to which statements (e.g., “discouraged,” “fearful,” “angry”) described them at any given moment on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*). Using data from the DES, we conducted a principal components analysis to deduce the number of negative affect components in the current sample. Two primary components emerged with eigenvalues ≥ 2 (eigenvalues = 9.93 and 2.11, respectively). The items from the first component mapped onto descriptors of negative affect (e.g., “mad” and “scornful”), whereas the second component included items such as “shy” and “bashful,” that did not seem to describe negative emotional reactions to daily events or stressors. Therefore, we removed the 6 items from the second component. Retaining items from the first component resulted in a 15-item measure with excellent internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$). Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of negative affect.

Well-Being Scale (WeBS; Lui et al., 2016). The WeBS is a 29-item self-report measure designed to assess overall subjective well-being (Lui & Fernando, 2018). The 23-item WeBS is a shorter and validated version that assesses five domains of subjective well-being (i.e., hedonic, eudaimonic, social, physical, and financial well-being) among Asian Americans. Scale data from the original WeBS fit well with a bifactor structure; a general subjective well-being factor and five specific factors orthogonal to the general factor were identified (Lui & Fernando, 2018). This bifactor structure underlying scores justifies the use of a mean scale score to assess overall subjective well-being (Chen et al., 2013; Jovanovic, 2015). The current version of the WeBS has been validated to assess subjective well-being among Asian American samples (Lui et al., 2016).

Participants rated items (e.g., “I have enough financial resources to meet my needs” and “I am physically healthy”) from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of subjective well-being (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$).

Data Analytic Plan

Survey measures and data analytic plan were preregistered through the Open Science Framework (OSF) for public verification: <https://osf.io/navzj>. Syntax and data files were also stored through the OSF: <https://osf.io/fhj6n/>. To test our hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses to examine the unique and interactive roles of intergenerational cultural conflict and assertiveness in explaining the variances in depression, negative affect, and subjective well-being. To test Hypothesis 1, intergenerational cultural conflict was included in Step 1 of the regression model for each outcome variable. To test Hypothesis 2, assertiveness was added in Step 2. To test Hypothesis 3, we computed and added the interaction between intergenerational cultural conflict and assertiveness in Step 3.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

We used pairwise deletions to handle missing data (4.3%). We identified univariate and multivariate outliers using Z-score value and Mahalanobis distance, respectively. There were no systematic differences in our univariate and multivariate analytic results with and without outliers ($n = 4$); hence, we retained the outliers in our analyses.

Table 1 summarizes means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables for all participants. There were no statistically significant mean differences in any of the study variables across gender. Supplemental Table 2 summarizes means, *t*-test results, and zero-order correlations among study variables for men and women separately. As shown in Supplemental

Table 3, Fisher Z_r transformations revealed statistically nonsignificant gender differences in the correlations among study variables. Per our preregistered data analytic plan, we did not have the evidence to include gender as a covariate nor a moderator of the association between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment.

Regression Results Predicting Psychological Adjustment

Regression results for each outcome variable are summarized in Table 2. Data from our outcome variables followed a normal distribution; thus, they justified the use of ordinary least squares regression.

Depressive symptoms. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, intergenerational cultural conflict was positively associated with depressive symptoms in Step 1 ($\beta = 0.26, p = .003$). Contrary to our expectation in Hypothesis 2, assertiveness was negatively associated with depressive symptoms when it was added to the regression model in Step 2 ($\beta = -0.32, p < .001$). Intergenerational cultural conflict remained statistically significant in predicting depressive symptoms with assertiveness added to the model. Standardized regression coefficients showed assertiveness to be relatively more closely associated with depressive symptoms than intergenerational cultural conflict. Data did not support Hypothesis 3, however. When *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *assertiveness* was added to the model in Step 3, the interaction term did not account for additional variance in depressive symptoms. Assertiveness remained a statistically significant predictor in the final model. The final model accounted for 17% of the variance in depressive symptoms.

Negative Affect. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, intergenerational cultural conflict was positively associated with negative affect in Step 1 ($\beta = 0.18, p = .037$). In contrast to Hypothesis 2, assertiveness was negatively associated with negative affect in Step 2 ($\beta = -0.19, p = .029$).

Data did not support Hypothesis 3; *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *assertiveness* did not account for additional variance in negative affect in Step 3. The final model accounted for 7% of the variance in negative affect.

Subjective Well-Being. The present data did not support Hypothesis 1 in terms of subjective well-being. Intergenerational cultural conflict alone did not account for a statistically significant proportion of variance in subjective well-being in Step 1. Opposite to the directional hypothesis, assertiveness was positively associated with subjective well-being in Step 2 ($\beta = 0.38, p < .001$). Furthermore, data did not support Hypothesis 3; *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *assertiveness* interaction did not account for additional variance in subjective well-being in Step 3. The final model accounted for 17% of the variance in subjective well-being.

Exploratory Regression Analyses

Although we did not have the statistical evidence per our preregistered data analytic plan, based on recommendations by a reviewer, we conducted an additional set of exploratory regression analyses including gender and *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *gender* as predictors of adjustment outcomes (see Supplemental Table 4). *Intergenerational cultural conflict* x *gender* interaction was not statistically significantly associated with any of the psychological adjustment outcomes. Results including *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *gender* did not differ from the main analyses without this interaction term.

Discussion

This study is one of the few that systematically examined individual difference and demographic factors in the relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment. We quantified the extent to which intergenerational cultural conflict and assertiveness were associated with psychological adjustment, and explored whether

assertiveness moderated the relation between intergenerational cultural conflict and adjustment outcomes. Consistent with prior research, we found intergenerational cultural conflict to be positively associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, indicative of its relation to psychological maladjustment. Our study contributed to the literature by demonstrating that assertiveness was associated positively with subjective well-being and negatively with negative affect and depressive symptoms. Trait assertiveness generally is an asset for psychological adjustment among Asian Americans, consistent with previous research with Euro Americans (Anglim & Grant, 2016; Lea & Paquin, 1981). Contrary to “mainstream” research and our expectations for Asian Americans, assertiveness do not intensify nor reduce the relation between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment.

Previous research has shown mixed findings regarding gender differences in the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and adjustment outcomes. To add to this evidence base, our study showed no systematic variability across men and women in the associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment outcomes. Consistent with previous research that does not differentiate specific content areas of intergenerational cultural conflict, men and women did not differ in terms of their levels of conflict or in their psychological adjustment outcomes (e.g., Lee et al., 2005).

Assertiveness, Intergenerational Cultural Conflict, and Psychological Adjustment

Despite the notion that assertiveness is incongruent with values of obedience and conformity in Asian cultures, we found that greater trait assertiveness was associated with better psychological adjustment outcomes in our sample. Individuals with higher levels of assertiveness may experience less stress because they are better able to openly and effectively communicate opinions and needs (Peneva & Mavrodiev, 2013). As suggested in previous research,

assertiveness can affirm a sense of agency to execute and control one's actions in life, and help enhance self-esteem while effectively managing interpersonal relationships (Lin et al., 2004; Replogle et al., 1980; Williams & Stout, 1985). These processes are particularly salient among Asian Americans who navigate various challenges in life. In addition to the independent associations between assertiveness and psychological adjustment, our results did not show statistically significant associations between *intergenerational cultural conflict x assertiveness* and psychological adjustment. It is unlikely that Asian Americans who are more assertive across settings would be affected by intergenerational cultural conflict more adversely than people who are less assertive. Four conceptual, measurement, and statistical considerations may help contextualize these null effects.

First, one conceptual reason is that trait assertiveness might not be as relevant in navigating family conflicts compared to other interpersonal conflicts. Within Asian cultures, individuals' communication with their parents likely differs from individuals' interpersonal communication with friends, coworkers, and strangers. Given that a hierarchical relationship structure exists in many Asian families, directly disagreeing with parents typically is deemed to be disrespectful (Rhee et al., 2003). In Asian cultural contexts, the goal is often to fit in with the collective and maintain harmonious relationships. In this context, asserting one's needs and beliefs may be particularly problematic because assertiveness promotes personal interests and self-worth. Hence, expression of assertiveness in parent-offspring relationships are likely dampened. The discrepancies between our and mainstream findings concerning the buffering roles of assertiveness may be because prior research has tended to focus on Euro Americans and has not taken cultural contexts into consideration (e.g., Cooley et al., 2010).

Second, another conceptual reason that explains the assertiveness findings is that our

current sample likely consists of bicultural individuals who are able to integrate expectations from both Asian and mainstream U.S. cultures (Wei et al., 2019). Our participants were either born in the U.S. or immigrants to the U.S. before the age of 12. As a result of spending their formative years in the U.S., these individuals may be able to code-switch across settings. Specifically, bicultural Asian Americans can engage in different sets of behaviors in order to maintain harmonious family relationships and assert their needs in other nonfamily situations (Hua, 2008). Compared to less U.S.-oriented Asian Americans, more U.S.-oriented Asian Americans show greater similarity in personality traits to Euro Americans (Eap et al., 2008; Gungor et al., 2013). To the extent that our participants were recruited from a predominantly White university, it is possible that a successful navigation of the host environment demands these individuals to engage in behaviors—including assertiveness—that conform to cultural expectations in the mainstream U.S. society.

Third, the lack of statistically significant relations between *intergenerational cultural conflict* x *assertiveness* and adjustment outcomes might be explained by the content validity of the present assertiveness measure. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) contains items that cover a range of assertive behaviors across day-to-day situations and relationship contexts (Rathus, 1973). Whereas we used this well-established measure to tap general trait assertiveness, only a small number of items in the RAS capture behaviors that are specific to family relationships and intergenerational conflict (i.e., “If a close and respected relative were annoying me, I would smother my feelings rather than expressing my annoyance”). The broad content coverage of this assertiveness measure may have reduced the focus on aspects that are more relevant to intergenerational cultural conflict and family relationships. Given that increasing assertiveness is often the clinical recommendation for navigating family conflict, it would be

valuable to more precisely assess the role of assertiveness in family contexts in future research.

Fourth, we found the *intergenerational cultural conflict x assertiveness* interaction to have accounted for less than 1% of the variance in our outcome variables. Using a sample size of 140, our post-hoc sensitivity analysis conducted with G*power version 3.1.9.4 (Faul et al., 2009) revealed that a statistically significant interaction would need to explain at least 5.69% of the variance in psychological adjustment. Additionally, the confidence intervals for the interaction terms as correlates of each outcome variable were quite small. This suggests the parameter estimates were likely quite precise even with our current sample size. With a larger sample size, based on the small effect size and precision of the parameter estimates, it would be unlikely to detect a statistically significant interaction between intergenerational cultural conflict and assertiveness in relation to psychological adjustment outcomes.

Gender, Intergenerational Cultural Conflict, and Psychological Adjustment

Another contribution of our study was the null results concerning gender differences in the relations between intergenerational cultural conflict and adjustment outcomes. We did not observe systematic gender variations in the bivariate associations between intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological adjustment. In previous studies that showed gender differences in the levels of self-reported intergenerational cultural conflict and its associations with adjustment outcomes, the areas of conflict concerned dating and marriage issues (e.g., Chung, 2001). When examining conflict broadly—as we did using the Asian American Family Conflicts Scale, we did not isolate any specific sets of issues that may be differentially salient for women than men.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite advancing scientific understanding of assertiveness as an asset for Asian

American psychological adjustment, the present findings should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, college students represent only a subset of the emerging adult population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Future studies should examine whether these relations exist among noncollege emerging adults; this kind of research can help contextualize whether the relations stipulated in acculturation gap-distress theory manifest as a function of development, sociocultural influences, or both. Second, there are likely other important determinants of Asian Americans' psychological adjustment, particularly factors in the college environments such as stress related to peer relationships. Future studies can examine peer relationships in conjunction with family relationships to determine their respective influences on Asian Americans' psychological adjustment. Third, we did not measure and examine individual differences in bicultural competence. Individuals who have greater bicultural competence likely are better able to integrate mainstream U.S. and Asian cultural expectations. It is possible that individuals who are assimilated to the mainstream society engage in assertive behaviors across all situations, including situations where there would be cultural sanctions against being assertive (e.g., challenging their parents' cultural beliefs). These individuals may be more likely to experience more negative psychological impact of intergenerational cultural conflict. To better understand who may be most at risk for intergenerational cultural conflict and psychological maladjustment, future studies should build upon the present findings and examine other dimensions of individual differences, such as bicultural competence and cultural orientations.

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Table 1

Summary of Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	Possible Range	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	1-25	6.72 (3.89)	--				
2. Assertiveness	1-7	4.04 (0.63)	-.03	--			
3. Depressive Symptoms	1-4	1.82 (0.50)	.27**	-.32**	--		
4. Negative Affect	1-5	1.95 (0.69)	.20*	-.18*	.49**	--	
5. Subjective Well-Being	1-6	4.70 (0.63)	-.13	.40**	-.56**	-.31**	--

Note. *N* = 130-138 across study variables.**p* < .05, ***p* < .01

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Psychological Adjustment

Predictor	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	β
Depressive Symptoms (<i>N</i> = 129)									
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.04 (.01)	[.01, .06]	.26**	.03 (.01)	[.01, .05]	.25**	.02 (.06)	[-.10, .15]	.18
Assertiveness				-.26 (.07)	[-.39, -.13]	-.32**	-.28 (.11)	[-.50, -.05]	-.34*
ICC x Assertiveness							<.01 (.02)	[-.03, .03]	.08
ΔR^2 at Step			.07**			.10**			< .01
Model R^2			.07**			.17**			.17**
Negative Affect (<i>N</i> = 131)									
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.03 (.02)	[<.01, .06]	.18*	.03 (.02)	[<.01, .06]	.18*	.01 (.09)	[-.17, .18]	.04
Assertiveness				-.20 (.09)	[-.39, -.02]	-.19*	-.24 (.16)	[-.56, .08]	-.22
ICC x Assertiveness							.01 (.02)	[-.04, .05]	.15
ΔR^2 at Step			.03*			.04*			< .01
Model R^2			.03*			.07*			.07*
Subjective Well-Being (<i>N</i> = 127)									
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	-.02 (.02)	[-.05, .01]	-.13	-.02 (.01)	[-.05, .01]	-.11	.04 (.08)	[-.12, .20]	.23
Assertiveness				.39 (.08)	[.23, .55]	.38**	.47 (.14)	[.19, .76]	.47**
ICC x Assertiveness							-.01 (.02)	[-.05, .03]	-.35
ΔR^2 at Step			.02			.14**			< .01
Model R^2			.02			.16**			.17**

Note. ICC = intergenerational cultural conflict.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$

Supplemental Table 1

Summary of Exploratory Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Psychological Adjustment with Nativity Status as a Covariate

Predictor	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 1 95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 2 95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 3 95% CI	β
Depressive Symptoms (<i>N</i> = 129)									
Nativity Status (US Born = 0)	-.02 (.10)	[-.21, .17]	-.02	.04 (.09)	[-.14, .23]	.04	.04 (.09)	[-.14, .23]	.04
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.04 (.01)	[.01, .06]	.26**	.03 (.01)	[.01, .05]	.25**	.03 (.06)	[-.10, .15]	.19
Assertiveness				-.27 (.07)	[-.40, -.13]	-.33**	-.28 (.11)	[-.50, -.05]	-.34*
ICC x Assertiveness							<.01 (.02)	[-.03, .03]	.06
ΔR^2 at Step			.07*			.11**			< .01
Model R^2			.07*			.18**			.18**
Negative Affect (<i>N</i> = 131)									
Nativity Status (US Born = 0)	.12 (.13)	[-.13, .37]	.08	.18 (.13)	[-.08, .43]	.12	.18 (.13)	[-.08, .43]	.12
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.03 (.02)	[<.01, .06]	.18*	.03 (.02)	[<-.01, .06]	.17	.01 (.09)	[-.16, .19]	.08
Assertiveness				-.23 (.09)	[-.41, -.04]	-.21*	-.25 (.16)	[-.57, .07]	-.23
ICC x Assertiveness							<.01 (.02)	[-.04, .05]	.10
ΔR^2 at Step			.04			.04*			< .01
Model R^2			.04			.08*			.08*
Subjective Well-Being (<i>N</i> = 127)									
Nativity Status (US Born = 0)	.28 (.12)	[.04, .53]	.20*	.19 (.12)	[-.04, .42]	.14	.20 (.12)	[-.03, .43]	.14
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	-.02 (.01)	[-.05, .01]	-.14	-.02 (.01)	[-.05, .01]	-.12	.05 (.08)	[-.11, .20]	.28
Assertiveness				.36 (.08)	[.20, .53]	.36**	.46 (.14)	[.18, .74]	.45**
ICC x Assertiveness							-.02 (.02)	[-.06, .02]	-.42
ΔR^2 at Step			.06*			.12**			.01
Model R^2			.06*			.18**			.19**

Note. ICC = intergenerational cultural conflict.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$

Supplemental Table 2

Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations by Gender

Variables	<i>M(SD)</i> _{Men}	<i>M(SD)</i> _{Women}	<i>t</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	7.23 (3.78)	6.36 (3.94)	1.28	--	.09	.31*	.21	-.19
2. Assertiveness	4.09 (0.61)	4.01 (0.64)	0.70	-.22	--	-.39**	-.15	.41**
3. Depressive Symptoms	1.82 (0.47)	1.82 (0.53)	-0.01	.20	-.22	--	.47**	-.62**
4. Negative Affect	2.00 (0.72)	1.92 (0.68)	0.65	.18	-.23	.52**	--	-.31*
5. Subjective Well-Being	4.63 (0.66)	4.75 (0.61)	-1.08	-.03	.40**	-.49**	-.29*	--

Note. Bivariate correlations for men are presented below the diagonal ($N = 54$ -58), and correlations for women are presented above the diagonal ($N = 76$ -79). Comparisons of bivariate correlations are summarized in Supplemental Table 3.

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

Supplemental Table 3

Summary of Z Statistics from Fisher Z_r Transformation Analyses in Comparing Bivariate Correlations by Gender

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	--				
2. Assertiveness	-1.77*	--			
3. Depressive Symptoms	-0.67	1.06	--		
4. Negative Affect	-0.18	-0.47	0.37	--	
5. Subjective Well-Being	0.18	-0.07	1.07	0.12	--

Note. Bivariate correlations (*r*) are shown in Supplemental Table 2.**p* < .05

Supplemental Table 4

Summary of Exploratory Regression Analyses with Gender as a Moderator of the Associations between Intergenerational Cultural Conflict and Psychological Adjustment

Predictor	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 1 95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 2 95% CI	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Step 3 95% CI	β
Depressive Symptoms (<i>N</i> = 129)									
Gender (Man = 0)	.02 (.09)	[-.15, .20]	.02	<-.01 (.08)	[-.17, .16]	<-.01	-.21 (.17)	[-.56, .13]	-.21
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.04 (.01)	[.01, .06]	.27**	.03 (.01)	[.01, .06]	.25**	<.01 (.07)	[-.13, .13]	.02
Assertiveness				-.26 (.07)	[-.39, -.13]	-.32**	-.29 (.11)	[-.52, -.07]	-.37*
ICC x Assertiveness							<.01 (.02)	[-.03, .03]	.11
ICC x Gender							.03 (.02)	[-.01, .07]	.26
ΔR^2 at Step			.07*			.10**			.01
Model R^2			.07*			.17**			.18**
Negative Affect (<i>N</i> = 131)									
Gender (Man = 0)	-.04 (.12)	[-.28, .20]	-.03	-.06 (.12)	[-.29, .18]	-.04	-.18 (.25)	[-.67, .31]	-.13
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	.03 (.02)	[<.01, .06]	.18*	.03 (.02)	[<.01, .06]	.17*	-.01 (.10)	[-.20, .17]	-.07
Assertiveness				-.21 (.09)	[-.39, -.02]	-.19*	-.26 (.16)	[-.59, .06]	-.24
ICC x Assertiveness							.01 (.02)	[-.04, .05]	.19
ICC x Gender							.02 (.03)	[-.05, .08]	.11
ΔR^2 at Step			.03			.04*			< .01
Model R^2			.03			.07*			.07
Subjective Well-Being (<i>N</i> = 127)									
Gender (Man = 0)	.12 (.12)	[-.11, .35]	.09	.15 (.11)	[-.06, .36]	.12	.45 (.22)	[.01, .88]	.34*
Intergenerational Cultural Conflict	-.02 (.02)	[-.05, .01]	-.12	-.02 (.01)	[-.04, .01]	-.10	.08 (.08)	[-.08, .25]	.51
Assertiveness				.40 (.08)	[.23, .56]	.39**	.52 (.14)	[.24, .81]	.52**
ICC x Assertiveness							-.02 (.02)	[-.06, .02]	-.47
ICC x Gender							-.04 (.03)	[-.10, .01]	-.28
ΔR^2 at Step			.02			.15**			.02
Model R^2			.02			.18**			.20**

Note. ICC = intergenerational cultural conflict.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$