

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Ethnic Differences and Similarities in Shared Agency between Older Youth and Parents

By

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This study examined ethnic differences in older youths' life goals, the degree to which youths and their parents shared goals, the role parents played in goal setting and pursuit, and the associations between the importance of educational goals, types of pursuit (e.g., shared or individual), and college adjustment (i.e., college grades, student motivation, and satisfaction with college experiences). The study also investigated whether individual differences in familism (i.e., perceptions of parental sacrifice and family obligations) can account for hypothesized ethnic differences in goal setting and pursuit. College students (225 Asian Americans; 121 European Americans) and a subsample of their mothers (89 Asian Americans; 67 European Americans) were recruited to complete questionnaires for this study.

Compared to their European American counterparts, Asian American college students and mothers placed greater importance on life goals beyond education, such as entering stable occupations, selecting conventional future partners, and maintaining their ties with family. Asian American parents were also more likely than European American parents to have equal or more control in making decisions on life goals and in youths' pursuit of educational goals. Results also showed that shared educational goal pursuit (the

use of strategies whereby older youth and their parents are both involved in youths' education) was in general positively associated with college adjustment (i.e., higher grades, motivation, and satisfaction). In contrast, parental involvement without older youths' own engagement was associated with lower grades and less satisfaction with college experiences. Contrary to predictions, individual differences in familism did not explain ethnic differences in shared goal setting or pursuit. Moreover, ethnic differences were smaller than differences found between college students and their mothers.

Consistent with a growing body of literature on culture-general developmental processes, ethnic groups did not differ in the associations between the importance of educational goals, the extent to which education was jointly pursued, and students' academic outcomes. These findings have implications for the understanding of ethnic differences in college adjustment, parenting practices, and motivation.

