

Parenting Satisfaction at Midlife

A Comparison of East-Asian and White-European Mothers of College Students

Esther S. Chang, Ellen Greenberger, and Chuansheng Chen. *Department of Psychology and Social Behavior at the University of California, Irvine*

Abstract

This study examined cultural differences and similarities in the correlates of parenting satisfaction at midlife.

Quality of relationship with young adult children was found to have significant and similar associations with perceptions of parenting satisfaction across ethnicity.

Perceptions of children's college experiences had strong associations with ratings of parenting satisfaction among East-Asian mothers but not among White-European mothers'.

Introduction

- Parents are typically at a different stage in adult development compared to adolescents during the transition to adulthood and have different developmental needs.
- Evaluating what kinds of adults their children are becoming during the launching years has been understood as an important feature of midlife parenting.
- Previous research has shown that parents at midlife, who perceived that their adult children were well adjusted, scored higher on measures of well-being and lower on depression (Ryff, Schmutte, & Lee, 1996).
- Erikson believed that parenting is a prime "generative" encounter. Thus, parenting satisfaction is proposed to be an important part of self-evaluation at midlife and important to the adjustment of middle-aged adults during their child's launching years.
- Previous research has focused mainly on the individual and marital correlates of parenting satisfaction among parents of children with disabilities or parents of very young children (e.g., Koski & Steinberg, 1990).
- This study examined parenting satisfaction in relation to qualities of the parent-child relationship during college and parents' evaluations of older adolescents' educational adjustment.
- Differential associations of the child's educational adjustment to parenting satisfaction are hypothesized based on the greater cultural importance placed on the child's educational success among East Asian mothers compared to White-European mothers (e.g., Chao, 1994).

Study Hypotheses

Mothers' ratings of parenting satisfaction will be positively related to ratings of life satisfaction and negatively related to depressive symptomatology.

ETHNIC SIMILARITIES: Mothers' perceptions of positive parent-child relationship qualities will be correlated with greater feelings of parenting satisfaction.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES: Mothers' perceptions of her child's college adjustment will be differentially related to parenting satisfaction across ethnic groups, such that they will be related to East Asian mothers' ratings of parenting satisfaction but not to White-European mothers' ratings.

Sample

157 mothers of college students respond to mailed questionnaire
 90 East Asian Americans (mainly Chinese)
 67 White-European Americans
 Mean age = 49.8 years ($SD=4.22$)^a
 92% married^a
 58% working full-time^a
 Average educational attainment was between technical degree and college degree ($M=4.4$, 6 pt. scale)
 Whites ($M=4.9$) > E. Asians ($M=4.1$)

Measures

Depressed Mood (CESD, Radloff, 1977)
Life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1999)
Parenting Satisfaction (Greenberger et al., 1982, 10 items, 6 pt. scale)
I feel that I have done a very good job as a parent
My child has not turned out as well as the children of my friends and relatives (reversed)
I am not satisfied with how my child is turning out (reversed)
I feel very tired of my role as a parent (reversed)
I am satisfied with my life as a parent

Parent-Child Relationship Quality

Conflict (Greenberger & Chen, 1998; 11 items, 4 pt. scale)*
Relationship Satisfaction (Himself, 2005; 3 items, 6 pt. scale)*
In most ways my relationship with my child is close to my ideal
Relationship Warmth (Himself, 2005; 14 items, 6 pt. scale)*
We really understand each other

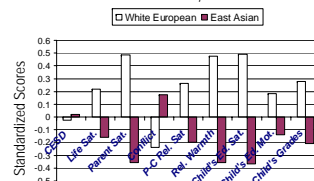
Child's Educational Achievement

College Grades (7 pt. scale)*
Academic Motivation in Child (7 items, 4 pt. scale)*
[my child] goes to the library to study or do research
Satisfaction with Child's College Experiences (8 items, 4 pt. scale)*
the extent to which one is satisfied with child's grades, progress towards degree, etc...

Note. ^a No significant ethnic group differences.

* Significant ethnic group differences (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Ethnic Differences between White-European and East-Asian Mothers.



Results and Conclusions: Correlates of Parenting Satisfaction

	East Asians	White Europeans
Life Satisfaction	.44***	.25*
Depressed Mood	-.39***	-.43***

Parenting Satisfaction is related to midlife subjective well-being and depressive symptoms.

		East Asians	White Europeans
ETHNIC SIMILARITIES	Relationship Quality		
	Parent-Child Conflict	-.39***	-.39**
	Relationship Satisfaction	.63***	.67***
ETHNIC DIFFERENCES	Warmth	.71***	.66***
	Grades	.44***	.04 ns
	Satisfaction with Child's College Experiences	.21**	.06 ns
	Academic Motivation in Child	.15 [†]	-.14 ns

Note. [†] $p = .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

$z = -2.55$, $p = .01$ for child's college grades

$z = -2.34$, $p < .05$ for satisfaction with child's college experiences

Positive parent-child relationship qualities were related to higher levels of parenting satisfaction; and child's educational success was differentially related to parenting satisfaction between East Asian and White-European mothers of college students.

Limitations

- This study was correlational. Thus, the causal direction of influence can not be determined.
- This study also relied entirely on maternal self-report.