

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: The Moderating Effect of Family Cohesion on the Association between Acculturation Gaps and Parent-Child Conflict in Immigrant Families

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Intergenerational acculturation gaps have been found to be a source of conflict in many immigrant families. However, there has been limited research regarding variables that can moderate the association between acculturation gaps and parent-child conflict in immigrant families. Using a sample of 2,971 adolescents selected from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) and guided by the ABC-X model of family stress, the present study investigated the moderating effect of family cohesion. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis results revealed that gaps in both host culture acculturation and heritage culture acculturation were significant predictors of parent-child conflict. Family cohesion only moderated the association between heritage culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict. Interestingly, the direction of the moderation was not in the expected direction: higher family cohesion increased the association between degree of heritage culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict. Implications for reducing stress in immigrant families are discussed.

The Moderating Effect of Family Cohesion on the Association between  
Acculturation Gaps and Parent-Child Conflict in Immigrant Families

by

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the United Nations, as of 2013 the number of international migrants in the world reached approximately 232 million, which accounts for 3.2% of the world's population (United Nations, 2013). Each year, the number of international migrants has been increasing worldwide. The current number of international migrants is a 50% increase over the number in 1990.

The U.S. is by far the leading destination for international migrants. Approximately 20% of the world's international migrants reside in the U.S., while Russia, the second leading country, has only 4.7% of the migrants (United Nations, 2013). The United States Census Bureau reported in 2010 that approximately 40 million citizens, 12.9% of the U.S. population, were foreign-born. As the number of immigrants has increased in the U.S., the number of children from immigrant families has increased as well. In 2012, approximately 17.8 million children under the age of 18, 24% of all children in the U.S., had one or two parents who were foreign-born (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Immigration is typically a stressful transition for the whole family. Immigrants commonly lose direct access to their personal network of extended family and friends in their country of origin, even though in some cases relatives may have immigrated to the U.S. previously. Adults may experience a change in social status when they take on low-status jobs, based on their lack of credentials for better positions in the U.S. Also, children who were once good students suddenly find themselves struggling academically due to their lack of fluency in English (Gaytan, Carhill, & Suarez-Orozco, 2007). Furthermore, the family faces the challenge of adjusting to the culture of the host country.

This involves a process commonly known as acculturation, which is defined as “the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact” (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, p. 305). Cultural changes involve modifications in heritage customs and values, whereas psychological change includes changes in ethnic identity, as well as attitudes toward a person’s own culture group and other culture groups.

Since more than three decades ago, scholars have observed that children of immigrant families<sup>1</sup> tend to acculturate at a faster rate than their parents (Sluzki, 1979; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). This is mainly because school provides greater exposure to mainstream American culture and continuous access to an environment that is conducive to learning English (Hwang, 2006a). Consequently, the differential rates of acculturation result in intergenerational acculturation gaps. Acculturation gaps become an additional stressor in immigrant families, along with the intergenerational differences that commonly exist in any multigenerational family (Hwang, 2006a; Sluzki, 1979; Szapocznik et al., 1978). Acculturation gaps have been found to be associated with negative psychological outcomes for both the children and parents in immigrant families (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Fortune, 2013).

However, there have been limited efforts by researchers to explore variables that may moderate the negative effects of acculturation gaps in immigrant families (Kim &

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<sup>1</sup> The children of immigrant families are typically divided into three sub-groups. Second generation immigrants are those who were born in the U.S., 1.5 generation immigrants are those who came to the U.S. before the age of 13, and first generation immigrants are those who came to the U.S. between 13-18 years of age. Although it is not as common, some scholars include another sub-group, 1.75 generation immigrants, which are those who came to the U.S. before the age of 6 (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). In this current study, the term “children of immigrant families” is used to indicate those who were either born in the U.S. or arrived before the age of 13.

Park, 2011). Variables that have been found to buffer negative psychological (internalizing, such as depression) or behavioral (externalizing, such as aggression) outcomes in children of immigrant families are father-child communication quality (Kim & Park, 2011), and family cohesion (Li, 2014). In addition, family affection has been found to buffer the negative effect of acculturation gaps on parent-child relationship quality (Park, Vo, & Tsong, 2009), and father-child relationship quality has been identified as buffering the effect of acculturation gaps on externalizing symptoms and father-child conflict (Schofield, Parke, Kim, & Coltrane, 2008).

The identification of variables that can moderate negative effects of acculturation gaps between immigrant parents and their children and outcomes such as parent-child conflict can play a key role in the development of intervention programs and therapeutic approaches for immigrant families (Kim & Park, 2011). Consequently, there is a need to explore other variables that could possibly moderate negative effects of acculturation gaps, especially on parent-child conflict. Also, the previously identified moderating variables were derived from studies that used samples from a single ethnic group, with the exception of Li (2014) who included two ethnic groups. Although it is important to understand each ethnic group separately and explore the unique issues and challenges that they may encounter in the process of acculturation, it is equally important to understand common factors that can protect and enhance the intergenerational relationships in immigrant families, regardless of their ethnic group. The present study was intended to help fill this gap in knowledge about such factors.

## Purpose

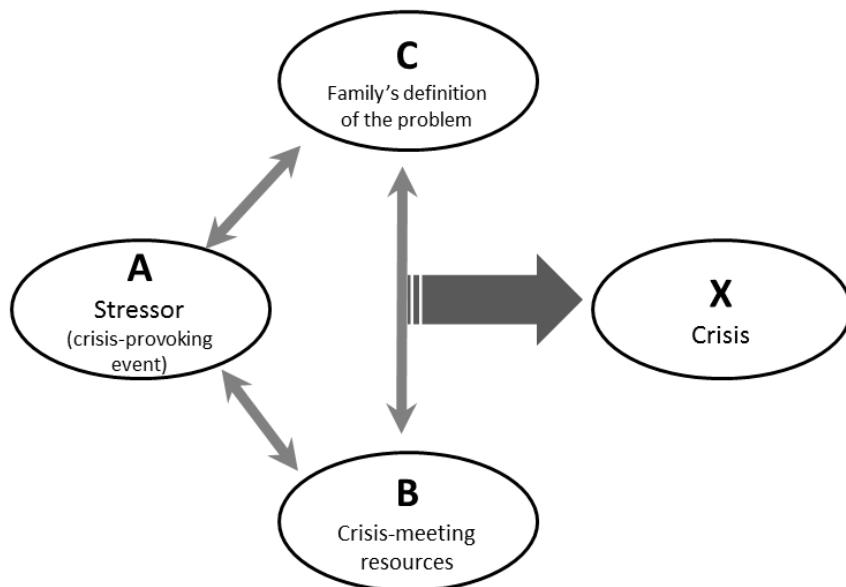
The purpose of the current study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding factors that can buffer the negative association of parent-child acculturation gaps with problems in parent-child relationships by investigating a potential moderating variable, family cohesion. Among various aspects of family functioning (e.g., cohesion, communication, organization [roles and rules], and shared beliefs), family cohesion has been found to be a key dimension that is positively associated with the other areas of family functioning (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, Huesmann, & Zelli, 1997). Also, multiple studies have repeatedly found family cohesion to be a predictor of various positive outcomes in individuals, such as greater self-esteem (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002), lower anxiety and depression (Barber & Buehler, 1996), social problem-solving skills and social efficacy (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012), and less suicide ideation (Wong, Uhm, & Li, 2012). In the current study, exploration of the moderating effect of family cohesion was not limited to one specific ethnic group in order to examine whether family cohesion has a moderating effect across multiple ethnic groups.

## Literature Review

### **Theoretical Model for the Study: The ABC-X Model of Family Stress**

The ABC-X model was first proposed by Hill (1958) as a way to conceptualize the impact of stressor events on the family unit. There are four factors in this model (see Figure 1): the stressor, or potential crisis-provoking event (A), the family's resources (B), the family's definition of the event (C; also referred to as appraisal or perception [Boss, 2002]), and the crisis state (X; also including varying degrees of stress [Boss, 2002]) that may occur. According to this model, states of disequilibrium and disorganized

functioning in families, which can reach the level of crisis or major breakdown in functioning, do not occur due to the direct effect of a stressor<sup>2</sup>. Even when experiencing the same stressors, some families will develop a crisis state whereas other families will adapt effectively to the situation. Some families have a characteristic that Hill termed “crisis-proneness” (p. 143). Crisis-proneness in families results from the influences (moderating effects) of the B and C factors. If a family tends to define stressor events as extremely negative and painful while simultaneously lacking sufficient resources to deal with the situations effectively, that family will be more crisis-prone.



**Figure 1.** Depiction of Hill's ABC-X Model of Family Stress (Hill, 1958)

The ABC-X model (Hill, 1958) is a useful framework for the current study. The model provides the premise that the same stressor event does not automatically lead to the same degree of stress or crisis in every family. Many of the previous studies regarding

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<sup>2</sup> It is important not to equate the stressor event (A factor) with stress (X factor). A stressor event is a stimulus, whereas stress is the subjective negative experiences that may result from exposure to that particular stimulus. Confounding the two elements as being synonymous results in circular reasoning (Boss, 2002).

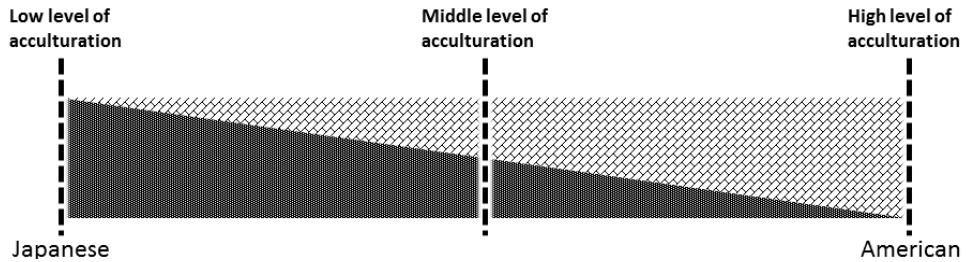
immigrant families have postulated that acculturation gaps between parents and children directly lead to negative outcomes in immigrant families. However, in the ABC-X framework, a stressor, such as an acculturation gap between parents and children, is simply a stimulus that has the *potential* to cause stress in the family (Boss, 2002). That potential may manifest as different degrees of stress or crisis in different families, depending on the family members' resources for reducing negative effects of the stressor (e.g., family cohesion, communication skills, problem solving skills) and their appraisal of the stressor (e.g., the degree to which parent-child cultural differences are perceived as a danger to the family's future).

Thus, the ABC-X framework provides an explanation for why the same stressor event affects families differently. In order to fully understand the impact of acculturation gaps on immigrant families, the family's resources and perceptions regarding acculturation gaps need to be considered. Therefore, guided by the ABC-X framework, this study examined the influence of an important resource (B factor) of the family—family cohesion. Although it also would be very valuable to examine the influence of family members' perceptions (appraisal) of acculturation gaps, the data set that was available for this study did not include any variables that adequately tapped perceptions; therefore, the C component of the model was not addressed.

### **Acculturation and Acculturation Gaps**

In the early phase of acculturation research, acculturation was mainly considered a unidimensional construct. In the unidimensional understanding of acculturation one's heritage culture is typically considered the starting point, and the host culture (the dominant culture of the society that has been entered) is seen as the end point. From this

perspective, acculturation is seen as a unidirectional process headed toward the ultimate goal of the individual adopting the host culture, inevitably identifying less with his or her heritage culture (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001; Suinn, Khoo, & Ahuna, 1995). A depiction of the unidimensional understanding of acculturation can be seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Unidimensional Acculturation of a Japanese Immigrant

A study by Atkinson and Gim (1989) provides an example of conceptualizing and measuring acculturation from a unidimensional perspective. In that study, a sample of 557 East Asian American university students was used to investigate the association between level of acculturation and attitudes toward mental health services. Sixteen items from the original 21-item Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987) were used to measure the level of acculturation of each participant. An example of an item is “*What language do you prefer? 1. Asian only, 2. Mostly Asian, some English, 3. Asian and English about equally well (bilingual), 4. Mostly English, some Asian, 5. English only.*” The average score of the 16 items was computed to create a single value that indicated the individual’s level of acculturation. This scoring process, along with the layout of options for each item, represents a unidimensional conception of acculturation, in which higher scores reflect higher levels of acculturation (stronger preference for the host culture) and lower scores

reflect lower levels of acculturation (stronger preference for one's heritage culture). The study's sample was divided into three groups according to acculturation levels (low, medium, and high). The results showed that the participants who had higher acculturation into Western culture were more open and positive toward mental health services.

A multidimensional conceptualization of acculturation differs from the unidimensional approach because it does not view a heritage culture and a host culture as polar opposites or mutually exclusive. Rather, in the multidimensional perspective, degrees to which an individual adheres to the two cultures are seen as separate and independent (uncorrelated) variables (Berry, 2003). When an individual lives in a culturally pluralistic society, he or she is confronted with two important issues (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). First, the individual needs to decide whether or not he or she will maintain and develop aspects of the heritage culture (values, behaviors, customs), which will influence how the individual interacts with people from the heritage culture. Second, the individual needs to decide how much he or she considers inter-ethnic contact as desirable and valuable. This determines the way an individual interacts with and participates in the larger host society. The former of the two distinct processes is heritage culture acculturation while the latter is host culture acculturation.

As previously mentioned in the first section of this chapter, children of immigrant families tend to adapt to the host culture at a faster rate than their parents, and this often results in acculturation gaps between the children and parents (Hwang, 2006a; Sluzki, 1979; Szapocznik et al., 1978). This gap has been labeled differently by various scholars, with terms such as acculturative dissonance (Le & Stockdale, 2008), acculturation disparity (Tardif & Geva, 2006), intergenerational acculturation conflict (Kim, 2011), and

intergenerational cultural dissonance (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008). Regardless of the label, greater generational differences in degrees of acculturation regarding the host culture and heritage culture have been found to be associated with greater parent-child conflict and lower satisfaction with parent-child relationships in immigrant families (Choi et al., 2008; Farver, Narang, & Bhada, 2002; Gil & Vega, 1996; Ho & Birman, 2010; Tardif & Geva, 2006). However there are also studies that have failed to find any correlation between acculturation differences and quality of the parent-child relationship (Lau et al., 2005; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009). Kim and Park (2011) argued that this inconsistency in results could be due to the fact that many studies fail to examine two distinct areas separately—the acculturation process regarding the host culture and the acculturation process regarding one's heritage culture. As mentioned by Berry et al. (1989), each individual chooses acculturation attitudes toward his or her heritage culture group and other culture groups separately. If a study simply clumps these two processes together or only considers one, then there is a possibility that intricacies of the relationship between acculturation and other variables may be masked in the results (Abe-Kim et al., 2001).

In a study of Korean-American families, Kim and Park (2011) examined the two distinct acculturation processes separately. The participants were 77 Korean-American mother-child dyads. The average age of the youth participants was 12.9 years, and they had lived in the U.S. for an average of 10.4 years; thus, they had spent most of their lives exposed to U.S. culture. It was hypothesized that larger parent-child discrepancies in both host culture acculturation and heritage culture acculturation would be associated with higher levels of youth internalizing symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, and

somatization) and externalizing symptoms (e.g., rule breaking behavior, aggressive behavior). Acculturation was measured with the Asian American Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AAMAS; Chung, Kim, & Abreu, 2004) for both the mother and child. The subscales for one's own Asian culture and White mainstream culture were used separately to represent the two distinct processes of acculturation. The results revealed that only the gap in heritage culture acculturation was positively associated with youth externalizing symptoms, whereas all other gap-distress correlations were not significant. Although the study was limited to one ethnic group, it highlights the need to examine the two acculturation processes separately when studying the effect of acculturation gaps in immigrant families.

Another study (Birman, 2006) also examined how the two distinct acculturation processes were associated with family conflict in Soviet-Jewish refugee families in the U.S. A sample of 115 Soviet-Jewish adolescents and their parents participated in the study. The adolescents were, on average, 15 years old and had lived in the U.S. for an average of 6 years. Acculturation regarding both the host culture and heritage culture was examined through three specific areas—language competence, cultural identity, and behavioral acculturation (behaviors associated with each culture; e.g., language use, media, music, food). The three areas were examined separately in order to better understand the specific aspects of acculturation that are associated with parent-child conflicts. The results revealed that larger parent-child gaps in Russian language proficiency, American identity, and American behavior were associated with greater parent-child conflict, whereas gaps in other areas were not related to conflict.

Birman's (2006) study not only demonstrated the need to differentiate the two acculturation processes regarding heritage culture and host culture, but also the need to consider specific aspects of each culture. As seen in the findings, not all culture-related gaps between parent and child are necessarily associated with parent-child conflict. For example, although there was a clear gap in English proficiency, in which the adolescents were more competent in English than their parents, this gap was not associated with parent-child conflict. Birman (2006) suggests that immigrant parents may even approve of their children being more proficient in English than themselves, because this will lead to greater opportunities of success for the children in the host country.

Hwang (2006a) posited that inconsistent results across studies regarding acculturation gaps exist because the gap itself does not directly lead to parent-child conflict. Hwang proposed a concept labeled acculturative family distancing (AFD), defined as "the problematic distancing that occurs between immigrant parents and children that is a consequence of differences in acculturative processes and cultural changes that become more salient over time" (Hwang, 2006a, p. 398). AFD consists of two dimensions—a breakdown in communication and incongruent cultural values—that influence each other while simultaneously increasing the risk of intergenerational conflict in immigrant families. A breakdown in communication can occur because the child becomes more proficient in English over time while the parents maintain the use of their heritage language to communicate with the child. As an example, Hwang describes how a child may be able to speak his or her heritage language to some extent, but may not be able to communicate emotional needs effectively and discuss complex issues with that language, creating distance between child and parents. Additionally, cultural differences

can impede parent-child communication because many of the cultures from which immigrant parents come rely relatively more on nonverbal indirect communication than the mainstream U.S. culture. As children adapt to the host culture, they may begin to prefer a more direct communication style than their parents use. This difference in communication styles in turn gradually increases the risk of parent-child conflict for the immigrant family.

Incongruent cultural values, the second dimension of AFD, are proposed to create further distancing between parent and child. As immigrant children grow older, they are increasingly exposed to the cultural values of mainstream American culture. Also, given the fact that cultural transmission occurs mainly through verbal communication, if the children's ability to speak their heritage language decreases, their parents are less able to pass on their heritage culture to their children (Hwang, 2006a). Thus, the incongruence between parents' and children's cultural values is exacerbated, increasing the risk for conflict.

Hwang, Wood, and Fujimoto (2010) conducted a study to examine if AFD is positively associated with depression in immigrant parents and children, and if family conflict mediates this association. The participants in the study were 105 Chinese American mother-adolescent dyads. All the mothers were foreign born, whereas 51% of the youth (ages 14-18 years) were U.S. born. The mean length of time that the foreign-born youth had resided in the U.S. was 7.04 years. The 46-item Acculturative Family Distancing (AFD) scale, developed by Hwang (2006b), was used to measure the mothers' and their adolescent children's levels of AFD. In order to test the hypothesis that greater levels of AFD are associated with greater levels of mothers' and adolescents' depression

via family conflict, depression and family conflict were measured as well. Additionally, Hwang et al. (2010) utilized measures that have been commonly used in previous acculturation research in order to examine which aspects of acculturation significantly predicted aspects of AFD. The acculturation measures were an English/heritage language fluency measure and a host culture/heritage culture acculturation measure. The results indicated that higher AFD was associated with higher levels of depression symptoms in both mothers and youth, but family conflict partially mediated this relation for only the youth. Also, only the degree of the heritage culture acculturation gap was a significant predictor of AFD. This study by Hwang et al. (2010) underscores the need to examine specific aspects of the parent-child acculturation gap that have the potential to increase the risk of conflict when studying immigrant families, rather than using a general measure of acculturation gaps.

### **Parent-Adolescent Conflict**

The period of adolescence is widely considered a time of physical, cognitive, and relational change. Past research has examined the impact of those changes on family relationships (Steinberg, 2001). Studies have shown that significant relational changes occur as the child enters adolescence and progresses through early to late adolescence. For example, adolescents have been found to increasingly assert their autonomy in their relationships with parents (Smetana, 1988), perceive the parent-child relationship as more egalitarian (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009), and turn to friends over parents as the major source of intimacy (Hunter & Youniss, 1982). Although the adolescent's pursuit of autonomy initially increases the frequency of conflict between the adolescent and parents during early to mid-adolescence, the frequency gradually subsides toward later

adolescence (De Goede et al., 2009; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Van Lissa et al., 2014). The contents of the conflicts between parents and adolescents have been found to be mostly regarding mundane issues of daily life such as attire, doing chores, regulations about activities (e.g., watching TV, shopping), and doing homework (Smetana, 1989). Recently, issues such as parents regulating their adolescent's internet use (Mesch, 2006) and generational differences in technology knowledge (e.g., online social networking, video chat; Vaterlaus, 2012) have been shown to be positively associated with parent-adolescent conflict.

Prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the majority of the studies regarding parent-adolescent conflict were conducted by using samples of White middle class two-parent families (e.g., Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Smetana, 1988; Smetana 1989; Smetana & Asquith, 1994). However, a study conducted by Fuligni (1998) sought to explore the cultural influence on parent-adolescent relationships. The sample for this study consisted of 998 students in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, or 10<sup>th</sup> grade from four different ethnic backgrounds—Mexican ( $n = 168$ ), Chinese ( $n = 148$ ), Filipino ( $n = 403$ ), and European ( $n = 279$ ). Each adolescent's immigrant generation was also distinguished. The participants were classified as either first generation (both parents and student were born outside of the U.S.), second generation (student was U.S. born, but one of their parents was not), or third or higher (both parents and student were U.S. born). Besides measuring parent-child conflict and family cohesion perceived by the adolescent, three beliefs of the adolescents were also measured: a) appropriateness of openly disagreeing with parents, b) legitimacy of parental authority, and c) expectations for behavioral autonomy (e.g., at what age the student expects to be allowed to go to parties

at night). Parent-child conflict was measured by asking the adolescents if they had discussed twelve specific topics (e.g., spending money, chores) with their parents during the past two weeks. If a topic was discussed, the adolescent indicated the intensity of the discussion, from 1 (*very calm*) to 5 (*very angry*). It was hypothesized that there would be differences in parent-adolescent conflict rates between ethnic groups, because achieving autonomy from parents is considered a relatively less important developmental task in many non-European cultures. Also, differences were expected between immigrant generations due to the fact that different immigrant generations vary in their length of exposure to mainstream culture. The results revealed that, overall, adolescents from non-European backgrounds had greater respect for parental authority and expected less autonomy than their European counterparts. Students from later immigrant generations were found to be more willing to disagree openly with their parents. By the third generation, adolescents from all non-European backgrounds showed beliefs similar to those of European heritage. However, despite these differences, there was surprisingly no significant difference in the level of conflict or family cohesion among all ethnic groups and generations. Fuligni (1998) suggested that beliefs about authority and autonomy are not the main factors influencing parent-adolescent relationships and that other beliefs that were not observed in this study may be more essential to understanding these intergenerational relationships. The other beliefs, however, were not specified in this study.

In a study by Ying, Lee, Tsai, Lee, and Tsang (2001), the relationship between cultural orientation and the quality of the parent-child relationship was explored. The sample for the study was 353 Chinese-American college students from a single university.

Among 353 students, 122 were second or higher generation immigrants, 121 were 1.5 generation, and 110 were first generation. Cultural orientation was measured by single items for American and Chinese cultures. The items stated, “Overall, I am Chinese” and “Overall, I am American.” The student replied to each item on a 5-point scale, with the higher number indicating stronger orientation to that specific culture. The quality of the parent-child relationship was measured with a 28-item questionnaire that assessed the levels of trust, communication, and alienation in the relationship. The results showed that regardless of generation, stronger American orientation was associated with a poorer parent-child relationship, whereas Chinese orientation was not significantly related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Although this study by Ying et al. (2001) utilized a simple single-item measure to assess each cultural orientation, and the sample was limited to one ethnic group, the results suggest that an individual’s general cultural preference is related to intergenerational relationships in immigrant families.

### **Family Cohesion**

Family cohesion has been considered one of the key factors of family functioning (Barber & Buehler, 1996; Tolan et al., 1997; Olson, 2000). Family cohesion is defined as “the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another” (Olson, 2000, p. 145). However there is still debate over basic characteristics of this concept. Scholars differ in whether or not they consider family cohesion to be related to the concept of enmeshment. Some have considered family cohesion and enmeshment to exist on a single dimension, where enmeshment is an extremely high level of cohesion between family members (e.g., Minuchin, 1974; Olson, 2000). Scholars who hold this view perceive the relationship between family cohesion and optimal family functioning to be curvilinear

(Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006). Family cohesion is assumed to be beneficial to family functioning only when it is moderate, whereas excessive cohesion leads to enmeshment and low cohesion results in disengagement, with both extremes being detrimental to family functioning.

One of the most commonly used assessment instruments for measuring family cohesion from this perspective is the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES), which was originally created by Olson, Bell, and Portner (1978) and has been revised a few times to the most current version, FACES IV. FACES is based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989; cited in Olson, 2000) which considers three dimensions of family relationships—family cohesion, flexibility, and communication. In this model, family cohesion is the degree of emotional bonding that family members share with each other, while flexibility is the degree to which change is possible in the family's leadership, roles, and rules. Communication, the final dimension, consists of listening/speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, respect, etc. It promotes movement in the other two dimensions. For instance, good communication facilitates greater flexibility and negotiation of family roles and rules, whereas poor communication will lead to rigidity.

Among these three dimensions, FACES measures family cohesion and flexibility. In the cohesion subscale, family cohesion is divided into three levels—disengaged, cohesion balanced, and enmeshed (Olson, 2011). Consistent with the Circumplex Model, in contrast with the middle level, the two extreme levels (disengaged and enmeshed) are considered unbalanced, and the model suggests that both extremes are associated with poorer family functioning. Similarly, balanced flexibility is assumed to be conducive of

good family functioning, whereas the two extremes (rigid and chaotic) are expected to have a negative effect on family functioning.

Olson (2011) conducted a study using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling in order to test the validity of FACES IV. Eighty-seven students in an undergraduate course participated in the study and were given extra credit to find others to complete the same process. This resulted in a final sample size of 469. FACES IV was used along with two measures to assess general family functioning and one measure to assess the degree of satisfaction that the participant has with his or her family's functioning. The results revealed that balanced cohesion was positively associated with healthy family functioning whereas the unbalanced scales (disengaged and enmeshed) were negatively associated with healthy family functioning. However, the correlations between the separate scales that measure disengagement, balanced cohesion, and enmeshment seem problematic. Although disengagement showed a strong negative correlation with balanced cohesion ( $r = -.90$ ), enmeshment and balanced cohesion only had a weak negative correlation ( $r = -.15$ ). This weak correlation was not discussed further by Olson (2011), but it suggests that family cohesion and enmeshment are independent constructs and should not be placed on a single dimension.

In contrast with the Circumplex Model (Olson et al., 1989, cited in Olson, 2000), Barber and Buehler (1996) conceptualized cohesion and enmeshment in families as two completely different constructs. According to Barber and Buehler, family cohesion is defined as "shared affection, support, helpfulness, and caring among family members" (p. 433), whereas enmeshment is seen as a form of psychological control. In this perspective, the relationship between family cohesion and functioning is linear, where higher levels of

cohesion result in better family functioning and individual functioning. Barber and Buehler (1996) posit that:

Confounding cohesion and enmeshment has impeded the theoretical and empirical examination of the proposition that humans develop best when they feel close to significant others and yet feel free to explore and create an independent sense of self (p. 434).

Using a sample consisting of 471 White students from middle-income families with a mean age of 13.7 years, Barber and Buehler (1996) explored the relationships that family cohesion and enmeshment each have with internalizing symptoms (anxiety/depression), and externalizing symptoms (delinquent behavior and aggressive behavior) of the participants. It was expected that family cohesion and enmeshment would relate to the adolescent's functioning in distinct ways. The results of the study revealed that the cohesion scale and enmeshment scale were uncorrelated ( $r = .03$ ). Enmeshment was found to have a positive linear association with the adolescent's aggressive behavior and anxiety/depression but was unrelated to delinquent behavior. The associations of family cohesion with adolescents' problematic symptoms were found to be negative and linear, with the exception of aggressive behavior, which showed a U-shaped curvilinear relationship. Adolescents' aggressive behaviors were highest when family cohesion was extremely low or high. Barber and Buehler (1996) suggest that families with extremely high levels of cohesion may also be permissive, and this may lead to a failure to regulate certain aggressive behaviors in adolescents.

Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, and Scabini (2006) explored whether culture had an effect on the link between family cohesion and enmeshment. Adolescents and young

adults from two countries that have very different family cultures—the United Kingdom and Italy—were recruited for the study. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 21 years, and 119 resided in Italy whereas 104 resided in the U.K. In the U.K., a common value is that a precondition for developing a young adult identity is separating from one's family of origin. Given this cultural environment, a high level of family enmeshment was expected to have a negative impact on the participant's psychological well-being (satisfaction with life, depression symptoms, and anxiety about the transition into adulthood). In contrast, a clear separation from the family of origin is not necessary for the process of developing a young adult identity in Italy, and thus the negative effects of enmeshment were anticipated to be weaker among Italian participants. The results showed that greater family cohesion was associated with better psychological well-being for both groups, whereas enmeshment was negatively associated with level of psychological well-being for the U.K. group but unrelated for the Italian group. Factor analysis of the combined sets of items for family cohesion and enmeshment revealed that the two constructs were unrelated distinct dimensions in the U.K. group. In contrast, in the Italian group family cohesion and enmeshment were found to be only moderately distinct constructs, having a moderate amount of overlap statistically. This study by Manzi et al. (2006) demonstrated that although family cohesion and enmeshment are for the most part independent constructs, the degree of association between these constructs and the degree to which enmeshment is associated with the individual's psychological well-being are influenced by the cultural context. It is noteworthy that despite the difference in family culture between the U.K. and Italy, family cohesion was associated with positive psychological outcome for adolescents from both countries.

Family cohesion has been found to be associated with numerous variables regarding individual functioning. For example, family cohesion was positively associated with psychological well-being (e.g., satisfaction with life, self-esteem; Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002; Crespo, Kielpikowski, Pryor, & Jose, 2011; Manzi et al., 2006), social problem-solving skills and social self-efficacy (Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012), and healthy eating behavior (Franko, Thompson, Bauserman, Affenito, & Striegel-Moore, 2008), as well as negatively associated with depression symptoms (Manzi et al., 2006), suicide ideation (Wong, Uhm, & Li, 2012), and delinquent behavior (Barber & Buehler, 1996; Marsiglia, Parsai, Kulis, 2009).

However, the moderating effect of family cohesion has been studied relatively less. In studies that were not focused on immigrant families, family cohesion has been found to moderate the relationship between depression and suicide ideation (Au, Lau, & Lee, 2009), HIV symptoms and suicidal thoughts (Demi, Bakeman, Sowell, Moneyham, & Seals, 1998), witnessing community violence and later delinquency (Barr et al., 2012; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004), and racial discrimination and forms of poor adjustment such as loneliness, anxiety, and somatization (Juang & Alvarez, 2010).

The number of studies that have explored the moderating effect of family cohesion in the immigrant family context is extremely limited. In a doctoral dissertation by Li (2014), the moderating effect of family cohesion on the relationship between parent-child conflict and self-esteem was examined. The sample consisted of adolescent 1.5 generation and second-generation immigrants with Asian ( $n = 946$ ) or Hispanic ( $n = 1142$ ) heritage. Parent-child conflict was measured by four items indicating the degree of conflict perceived by the adolescent. Family cohesion was measured with three items

(e.g., “*Family members like to spend free time with each other*”). Interestingly, the results revealed that family cohesion buffered the negative effect of parent-child conflict on self-esteem in the Hispanic group but not in the Asian group. Li suggested that this may be because Hispanic adolescents consider family cohesion to be more important than Asian adolescents do, and this in turn decreases the negative effect of parent-child conflict on the Hispanic adolescent’s self-esteem. Although the study by Li (2014) expanded the body of literature in this area, the buffering effect of family cohesion on the relationship between acculturative differences and parent-child conflict in immigrant families was not explored. The results of Li’s study do suggest that the moderation effect of family cohesion may differ among different ethnic groups.

Overall, the present review of existing literature suggests that family cohesion is a potent resource, whereas acculturation gaps are stressors. According to the theoretical framework of this study, family resources can reduce the degree of family stress resulting from a certain stressor. Therefore, family cohesion was expected to mitigate the association between the degree of stress caused by acculturation gaps in immigrant families and the level of conflict between the parent and child.

## **Variables**

### **Acculturation Gaps**

Acculturation gaps are the independent variables of this study and are defined as the cultural differences between parents and children, resulting from different degrees of adherence toward host culture and heritage culture. In the present study, acculturation gaps were represented by two variables: (a) the degree of difference in preference for American ways between child and parents, and (b) the child’s level of proficiency in his

or her parents' heritage language. The degree of difference in preference for American ways between child and parents represents the parent-child acculturation gap regarding the host culture, whereas the child's level of proficiency in his or her parents' native language represents the acculturation gap regarding heritage culture. It has been suggested by Birman (2006) that heritage language gaps between parents and their children (which is part of heritage culture acculturation gaps) can be exclusively attributed to the child's level of heritage language proficiency. This is because first generation immigrant parents tend to invariably consider their proficiency in their native language to be at the highest level when asked to indicate their level of proficiency on Likert-type scales (Birman, 2006; Birman & Trickett, 2001).

### **Parent-Child Conflict**

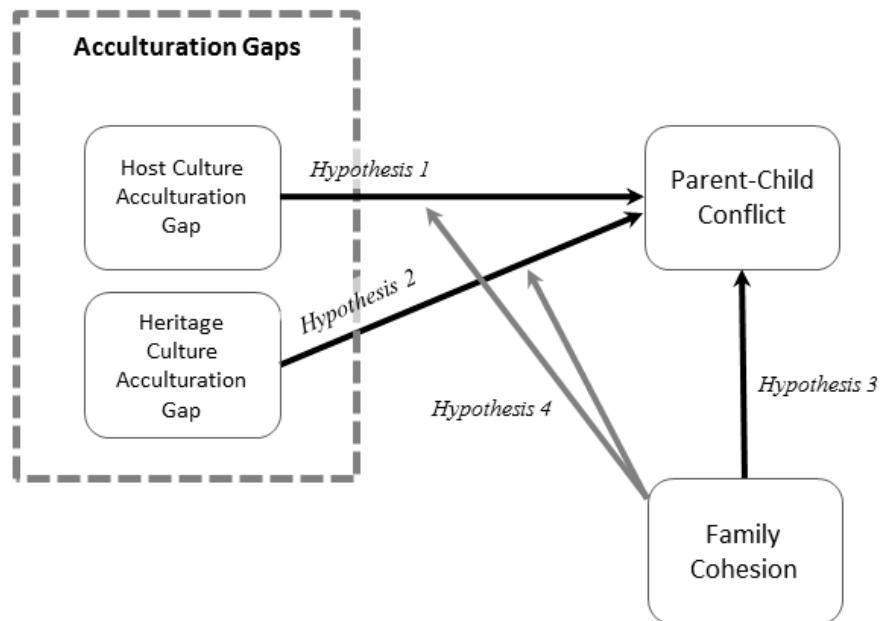
Parent-child conflict is the dependent variable of this study. In the study, parent-child conflict is defined as the child's perception of relational dissonance with his or her parents.

### **Family Cohesion**

Family cohesion is the moderating variable in this study. Family cohesion is defined as the child's perception of the positive feeling of togetherness that the family members share with one another. In this study, family cohesion is considered as a variable that has a positive linear relationship with family/individual functioning and is a distinct variable from enmeshment (Barber & Buehler, 1996; Manzi et al., 2006; Tolan et al., 1997). Thus, family cohesion is expected to have a negative main effect association with parent-child conflict and to moderate the hypothesized negative association between acculturation gaps and parent-child conflict.

## Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework underlying this current study and the review of existing literature, the hypotheses of this study were: 1) a greater host culture acculturation gap between parent and child will be associated with a greater level of parent-child conflict, 2) a greater heritage culture acculturation gap between parent and child will be associated with a greater level of parent-child conflict, 3) greater family cohesion will be associated with less parent-child conflict, and 4) the associations between the two acculturation gaps and parent-child conflict will be moderated by family cohesion—higher levels of family cohesion will reduce the positive association between acculturation gaps and the degree of parent-child conflict.



**Figure 3.** Hypotheses of the Current Study

## CHAPTER 2: METHOD

### Sample

This study involved secondary analysis of previously collected data. The sample used in the study was selected from the second wave dataset of the publicly available Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS; Portes & Rumbaut, 1991). The original sample of the CILS, at the time of the first wave, consisted of 5,262 eighth or ninth graders with foreign-born parents. The students were drawn from 49 schools in Miami, Florida and San Diego, California (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Data from the second wave were used for this study because the questionnaire used for the second wave included items that measure family cohesion. The selection criteria for the current study were: a) the respondent participated in the second wave, b) both parents were foreign born, c) the respondent's national origin was not Canada or Europe, d) the respondent's length of stay in the U.S. was five years or longer at the time of the first wave, and e) the respondent speaks a language other than English at home. The fourth selection criterion was included to select participants who were either second generation or 1.5 generation immigrants. The fifth criterion was necessary due to the fact that in this study heritage acculturation gap was measured by the adolescent's proficiency in his or her parents' native language that was not English (English was the primary language for some parents from countries such as the Philippines or Jamaica). After applying the selection criteria, the sample size for this study was 3,172 participants. For reasons that will be discussed in the preliminary data analysis section, 201 additional participants were removed, resulting in a final sample size of 2,971. The participants

included in the final sample reported 33 different national origins (see Table 1). The mean age of the sample was 17.18 years ( $SD = .85$ ) and 52.1% were female.

**Table 1.** National Origin of Respondents

National Origin	Frequency	Percent	National Origin	Frequency	Percent
Cuba	794	26.7	Jamaica	38	1.3
Mexico	371	12.5	West Indies	23	.8
Nicaragua	245	8.2	Philippines	422	14.2
Colombia	152	5.1	Vietnam	233	7.8
Dominican Republic	53	1.8	Laos	115	3.9
El Salvador	19	0.6	Cambodia	78	2.6
Guatemala	17	0.6	Hmong	40	1.3
Honduras	32	1.1	China	21	0.7
Costa Rica	5	0.2	Hong Kong	13	0.4
Panama	7	0.2	Taiwan	11	0.4
Argentina	27	0.9	Japan	10	0.3
Chile	21	0.7	Korea	4	0.1
Ecuador	20	0.7	India	13	0.4
Peru	19	0.6	Pakistan	10	0.3
Venezuela	10	0.3	Other Asia	5	0.2
Other South America	18	0.6	Middle East/Africa	17	0.6
Haiti	108	3.6	<b>Total</b>	<b>2971</b>	<b>100</b>

## Measures

### Acculturation Gaps

Host culture acculturation gap was measured by two items<sup>3</sup>, “*How often do you prefer American ways of doing things?*” and “*How often do your parents (or adults with whom you live) prefer American ways of doing things?*” Participants answered on a 4-

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<sup>3</sup> All the following measures of each variable were created by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) for the purpose of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS).

point scale ranging from 1 (*All the time*) to 4 (*Never*) for each item. The initial scores for each item were reverse coded in order to have a higher score represent greater preference for American ways. Then this score for the adolescent's perception of parents' preference for American ways was subtracted from the score for adolescent's preference for American ways. The possible range for the host culture acculturation gap value was from 0 to 3, where the higher scores indicate a larger gap between the adolescent and parents.

Heritage culture acculturation gap, which was represented by the participant's proficiency in the parent's native language, was measured by four items asking the participant about his or her proficiency in the language (other than English) spoken at home. Participants were asked how well they speak, understand, read and write that language. The answers were given on a 4-point scale that ranged from 1 (*Very little*) to 4 (*Very well*). The mean score of the four items was computed to indicate the adolescent's proficiency in his or her parents' native language. This mean score was then subtracted from 4 (the parents' heritage language proficiency as suggested by Birman, 2006) to indicate the heritage culture acculturation gap. The possible range for the heritage culture acculturation gap value was 0 to 3, where higher scores indicate a larger gap between the adolescent and parents.

### **Parent-Child Conflict**

Parent-child conflict was measured by four items. The first item asked, "*How often do you get in trouble because your way of doing things is different from that of your parents?*" and the participants answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*All of the time*) to 4 (*Never*). The next three items were asked under the instructions, "*Please answer how true each statement is for you.*" The three items were "*My parents do not like*

*me very much,” “My parents and I often argue because we don’t share the same goals,” and “My parents are usually not very interested in what I say.”* Respondents answered these three items with a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*Very true*) to 4 (*Not true at all*). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for these four items in the original study by Portes and Rumbaut (1991) was .71. The scores reported for each item on the 4-item parent-child conflict measure were reverse coded in order to have higher numbers indicate greater levels of parent-child conflict. Then the recoded values of the four items in the measure were summed together to create a single score representing the degree of parent-child conflict. The possible range for the parent-child conflict scores was 4 to 16.

### **Family Cohesion**

Family cohesion was measured through three items: “*Family members like to spend free time with each other,*” “*Family members feel very close to each other,*” and “*Family togetherness is very important.*” For each item, the participants were asked to answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*).<sup>4</sup> The Cronbach’s alpha value for these three items in the original study by Portes and Rumbaut (1991) was .85. In the present study, the scores for the three items were summed to create a single score in which a higher score indicated a greater level of family cohesion. The possible range for the family cohesion score was 3 to 15.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Portes and Rumbaut (2001) do not mention it, the three items used to measure family cohesion in CILS are identical to three items of the 20-item Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III; Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985).

## Procedure

The procedure of the present study involved accessing and conducting statistical analyses on the data set from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS; Portes & Rumbaut, 1991), which was carried out in three waves over the course of 15 years (1991-2006). The full CILS sample consisted of eighth and ninth graders from immigrant families in San Diego, California, and Miami, Florida. The sample size at the first wave (1992-1993) was 5,262. A 122-item questionnaire was developed for the purpose of the study. This questionnaire gathered information regarding a wide range of topics such as demographics, acculturation, self-esteem, depression symptoms, experiences of discrimination, etc.

The second wave was carried out three years after the first wave. During the second wave (1995-1996) of the study, items were added to measure familial characteristics such as family cohesion and familism. The sample size at the second wave was 4,288, or 81.5% of the original sample. In this wave, 2,442 parents were interviewed in order to gather information about employment, experiences in the community, characteristics of their present neighborhood, their aspirations for their children, family rules, etc.

The final wave of the study (2001-2003) was carried out a decade after the first wave and focused on the individuals' patterns of adaptation during the period of early adulthood (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005). The sample size for the final wave was 3,613, which was 68.9% of the original sample at the beginning of the study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESULTS**

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

The initial sample size for the present study after applying the four selection criteria was 3,172 participants. Additionally, preliminary analysis regarding the host culture acculturation gap variable revealed that 134 participants reported that their parents had greater preference for American ways than themselves, resulting in a negative value for the host culture acculturation gap variable (see Table 2). This was contradictory to the commonly observed phenomenon of children of immigrant families adapting to the host culture at a faster rate than the parents (Hwang, 2006a). These 134 participants were removed from the sample because it was unclear why these 134 participants had a lesser preference for American ways than their parents and because this group was relatively small compared to the rest of the sample (perhaps due to unknown factors in the children's lives that might confound tests of this study's hypotheses). This reduced the sample size to 3,038.

**Table 2.** Frequency Distribution of Host Culture Acculturation Gap Variable

Gap size	Frequency	Percent
-2	7	.2
-1	127	4.0
0	1938	61.1
1	941	29.7
2	113	3.6
3	15	.5
Missing	31	1.0
Total	3172	100

Missing data analysis was conducted to test whether or not the missing data were random. Compared to the overall sample size, there were only a small number of data

missing for each variable of this study (see Table 3). Little's MCAR (Missing Completely At Random) test revealed that the missing data did not have a particular pattern and were missing randomly ( $\chi^2 = 16.679$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $p = .407$ ). Cases with missing data were dropped from the study because the number of cases with missing data was extremely small, and the missing data were random. This led to a loss of 67 cases (2.2%) and resulted in a final sample size of 2,971. Descriptive information regarding the variables of the study along with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated in the present sample for each measure can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 3.** Missing Data from Study Variables

Variable	N	Missing Data	
		Count	Percent
Host Culture Acculturation Gap	3007	31	1.0
Heritage Culture Acculturation Gap	3031	7	0.2
Family Cohesion	3026	12	0.4
Parent-Child Conflict	3001	37	1.2

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Range	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Host Culture Acculturation Gap	0 – 3	0.4	0.59	-.*
Heritage Culture Acculturation Gap	0 – 3	1.09	0.79	.87
Family Cohesion	3 – 15	10.86	2.97	.85
Parent-Child Conflict	4 – 16	7.3	2.63	.72

\*Single item measure

A Pearson correlation analysis among the study variables revealed that, although the effect sizes were small, the correlation between parent-child conflict and each of the two independent variables (types of acculturation gap) was statistically significant (see Table 5). In addition, there was a significant correlation between family cohesion and parent-child conflict ( $r = -.42$ ).

**Table 5.** Pearson Correlations among Study Variables

	1.	2.	3.
1. Host Culture Acculturation Gap			
2. Heritage Culture Acculturation Gap	.115*		
3. Family Cohesion	-.173*	-.221*	
4. Parent-Child Conflict	.208*	.165*	-.420*

\* $p < .001$

### **Relations between Control Variables and Predictor Variables**

Two control variables were chosen for the analyses. The first control variable, gender, was chosen because studies regarding children of immigrant families have occasionally found gender differences (e.g., in conflict with parents regarding dating and marriage [Chung, 2001], and familism [Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2013]). Length of stay in the U.S. was chosen as the second control variable due to prior research revealing that length of stay in the U.S. can influence individuals' cultural values (Fuligni, 1998) or ethnic identity (Fuligni, Kiang, Witkow, & Baldelomar, 2008). Pearson correlations were computed between these two potential control variables and the variables that would be used to test this study's hypotheses, to determine whether they could confound the hypothesis tests. The correlations between the control variables and the predictor

variables were weak, with all correlations being smaller than .1 (see Table 6).

Nevertheless, the correlations were statistically significant, given the large sample size, and a decision was made to include both control variables in the multiple regression analysis.

**Table 6.** Correlations between Control Variables and Predictor Variables

	Host culture acculturation gap	Heritage culture acculturation gap	Family cohesion
Gender	-.038*	.060**	.039*
U.S. stay length	-.052*	.045*	-.019

\* Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

### Tests of the Hypotheses

Due to the variables of this study being continuous variables, a hierarchical multiple regression model was utilized to test the hypotheses. The model's assumptions were tested. The independence of residuals was confirmed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.02 (ranging from 0 to 4, values approximate to 2 indicate non-correlation between residuals). Linearity was assessed by examining the partial regression plots of each independent variable with the dependent variable and a scatterplot of studentized residuals against predicted values. The partial regression plots showed linear relationships, while the scatterplot of studentized residuals against predicted values formed a horizontal band, confirming the linearity assumption. The assumption of homoscedasticity (homogeneity of variance) was confirmed as review of the scatterplot of studentized residuals against predicted values showed that the residuals were evenly spread across the predicted values. The assumption of normal distribution of residuals was tested by examining the unstandardized residuals. The skewness (.615) and kurtosis

(.415) values were both approximate to zero, suggesting a normal distribution.

Additionally, a review of the histogram and P-P plot confirmed a normal distribution of residuals. All tolerance values for the independent variables were greater than 0.1 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 10, suggesting that there was no multicollinearity among the predictor variables.

In the multiple regression analysis predicting parent-child conflict, the two control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the two acculturation gap variables in the second step, then family cohesion in the third step, and the two family cohesion by acculturation gap interaction variables in the fourth step. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 7.

### **Step 1: Control Variables**

Analysis results showed that neither gender ( $\beta = -.005, p = .775$ ) nor length of stay in the U.S. ( $\beta = -.019, p = .306$ ) accounted for significant variance in parent-child conflict as control variables. The multiple correlation ( $R$ ) for this step was .02; with the  $R^2$  being .0004.

### **Step 2: Acculturation Gap Variables**

The first hypothesis stated that a greater host culture acculturation gap between parent and child will be associated with a greater level of parent-child conflict, and the second hypothesis stated that a greater heritage culture acculturation gap between parent and child will be associated with a greater level of parent-child conflict. These two hypotheses were tested by the second step of the multiple regression model in which the host culture acculturation gap variable and the heritage culture acculturation gap variable were entered simultaneously as the independent variables and parent-child conflict as the

dependent variable. Both host culture acculturation gap ( $\beta = .191, p < .001$ ) and heritage culture acculturation gap ( $\beta = .145, p < .001$ ) were found to be significantly positively associated with parent-child conflict, thus supporting the first two hypotheses (see Table 7). The  $R$  value at this step was .253, with the  $R^2$  being .064. The change in  $R^2$  (.064) was significant;  $F(2, 2966) = 100.821, p < .001$ .

**Table 7.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results\*

Variable	B	SE (B)	$\beta$	p
<i>Step 1: Control variables</i>				
Gender	-.028	.097	-.005	.775
Length of stay	-.061	.060	-.019	.306
<i>Step 2: Acculturation gap variables</i>				
Gender	-.035	.094	-.007	.707
Length of stay	-.050	.058	-.015	.390
Host culture acculturation gap	.853	.080	.191	<.001
Heritage culture acculturation gap	.481	.060	.145	<.001
<i>Step 3: Family cohesion</i>				
Gender	.058	.087	.011	.507
Length of stay	-.073	.054	-.022	.175
Host culture acculturation gap	.598	.075	.134	<.001
Heritage culture acculturation gap	.218	.056	.066	<.001
Family cohesion	-.340	.015	-.383	<.001
<i>Step 4: Interaction terms</i>				
Gender	.057	.087	.011	.514
Length of stay	-.072	.054	-.022	.179
Host culture acculturation gap	.580	.077	.130	<.001
Heritage culture acculturation gap	.226	.056	.068	<.001
Family cohesion	-.339	.015	-.382	.000
Family cohesion $\times$ Host culture acc. gap	-.031	.023	-.023	.186
Family cohesion $\times$ Herit. culture acc. gap	.056	.019	.050	.003

\*Dependent variable: Parent-child conflict

### **Step 3: Family Cohesion**

The third hypothesis stated that greater family cohesion will be associated with less parent-child conflict. In order to test this hypothesis, family cohesion was entered as an independent variable in the third step of the analysis. The results supported the third hypothesis, as family cohesion ( $\beta = -.383, p < .001$ ) was found to be negatively associated with parent-child conflict (see Table 7). The  $R$  value at this step was .448, with the  $R^2$  being .2. The change in  $R^2$  (.136) was significant;  $F(1, 2965) = 505.274, p < .001$ .

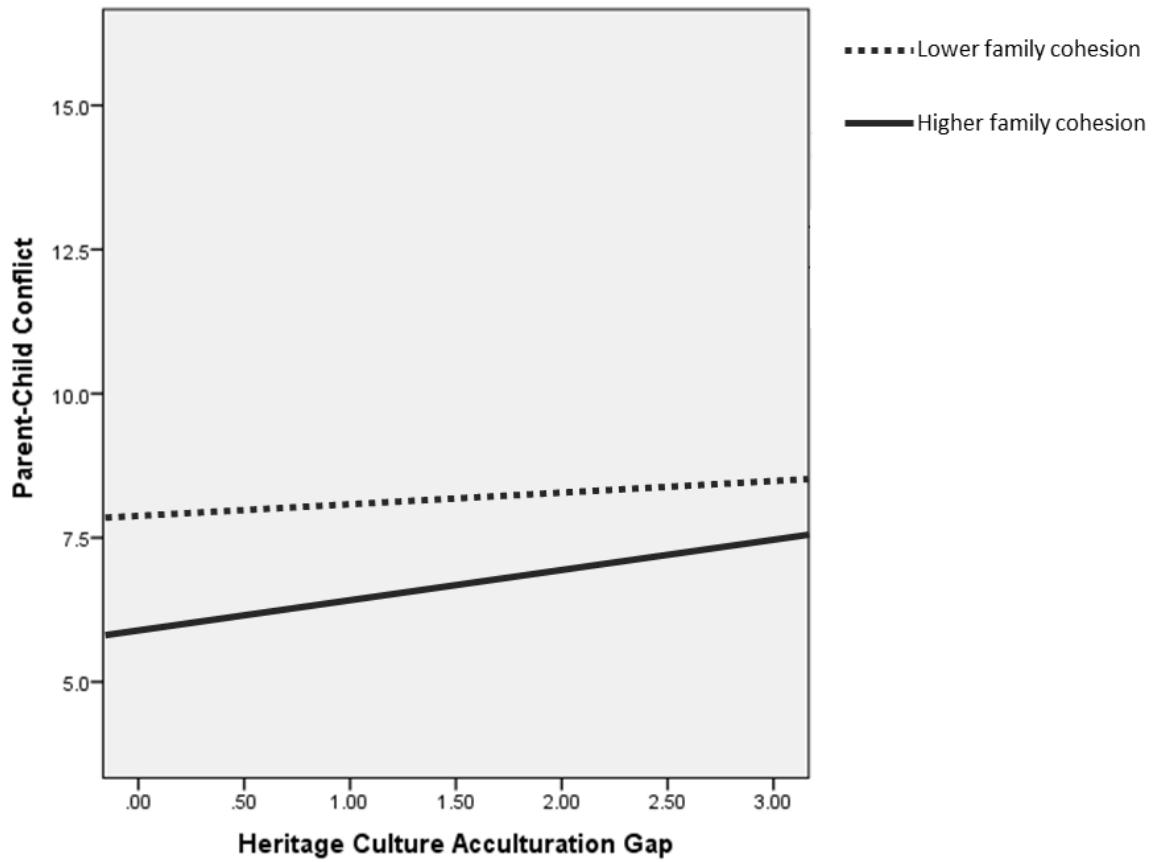
### **Step 4: Family Cohesion as a Moderator**

The final hypothesis of this study stated that the associations between the two acculturation gaps and parent-child conflict will be moderated by family cohesion—higher levels of family cohesion will reduce the positive association between acculturation gaps and the degree of parent-child conflict. Prior to creating the interaction terms to test this hypothesis, the two independent variables (host and heritage culture acculturation gaps) and the moderator variable (family cohesion) were centered by subtracting the variable's mean from each participant's score on that variable. This procedure typically is used to reduce the risk of multicollinearity and make it easier to interpret interaction term coefficients. Subsequently, each of the interaction terms was computed as the product of cohesion scores and scores on the acculturation gap variables. These interaction terms were entered into the final step of the multiple regression model. The family cohesion by heritage culture acculturation gap interaction effect was significant ( $\beta = .050, p < .003$ ) but the family cohesion by host culture acculturation gap interaction effect was not (see Table 7). The  $R$  value at this step in the analysis involving

the heritage culture acculturation gap interaction effect was .451, with the  $R^2$  being .203. The relatively small change in  $R^2$  (.003) was significant;  $F(2, 2963) = 4.981, p = .007$ .

In order to determine the direction of the significant moderation effect, the values for participants' family cohesion scores were recoded into 1 (*higher cohesion*) if the original value was larger than the median value and 0 (*lower cohesion*) if the original value was either equal to or smaller than the median value. A simple scatter plot was created with parent-child conflict as the Y-axis, the heritage culture acculturation variable as the X-axis, and the recoded family cohesion variable as the markers. A line of best fit was added to compare the two different relations between heritage culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict for the two levels of family cohesion (see Figure 6). The line of best fit for the higher family cohesion group had a steeper slope than the line of best fit for the lower family cohesion group, indicating that, unlike the hypothesized direction of moderation, higher family cohesion *increased* the association between heritage acculturation gap and parent-child conflict, compared to lower family cohesion (see Figure 6). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis was not supported as proposed.

In order to further understand the difference between the group with lower family cohesion and the group with higher cohesion, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted separately for each cohesion group with heritage culture acculturation gap as the independent variable and parent-child conflict as the dependent variable. The results for the lower family cohesion group can be seen in Table 8. In this group, heritage culture acculturation gap was a significant predictor of parent-child conflict ( $p = .021$ ). The  $R$  value at the second step of this analysis was .066, with the  $R^2$  being .004. The change in  $R^2$  (.003) was significant;  $F(1, 1554) = 5.375, p = .021$ .



**Figure 4.** Moderating Effect of Family Cohesion

**Table 8.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results for Lower Family Cohesion Group\*

Variable	B	SE (B)	$\beta$	p
<i>Step 1: Control variables</i>				
Gender	-.089	.142	-.016	.529
Length of stay	-.085	.089	-.024	.339
<i>Step 2: Heritage acculturation gap</i>				
Gender	-.112	.142	-.02	.431
Length of stay	-.093	.089	-.026	.296
Heritage culture acculturation gap	.207	.089	.059	.021

\*Dependent variable: Parent-child conflict

For the group with higher family cohesion, heritage culture acculturation was also a significant predictor of parent-child conflict ( $p < .001$ ; see Table 9). The  $R$  value at the second step was .187, with the  $R^2$  being .035. The change in  $R^2$  (.033) was significant;  $F(1, 1409) = 47.616, p < .001$ . Thus, there was a stronger relationship between the degree of heritage culture acculturation gap and the amount of parent-child conflict among families with higher cohesion than among those with lower cohesion.

**Table 9.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results for Higher Family Cohesion Group\*

Variable	B	SE (B)	$\beta$	p
<i>Step 1: Control variables</i>				
Gender	.202	.112	.048	.072
Length of stay	-.015	.068	-.006	.83
<i>Step 2: Acculturation gap variables</i>				
Gender	.147	.111	.035	.187
Length of stay	-.041	.067	-.016	.541
Heritage culture acculturation gap	.509	.074	.181	<.001

\*Dependent variable: Parent-child conflict

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Among the four hypotheses of this study, the first three were supported: the two acculturation gap variables were positively associated with parent-conflict, whereas family cohesion was negatively associated. The significant correlation between each acculturation gap variable and parent-child conflict (host culture acculturation gap:  $r = .208$ ; heritage culture acculturation gap:  $r = .165$ ) is consistent with prior findings that acculturation gaps are a source of intergenerational conflict in immigrant families (e.g., Choi et al., 2008; Park et al., 2009; Schofield et al., 2008). However, the  $R^2$  value of the multiple regression analysis showed that the second step, where the two acculturation gap variables were added as the independent variables, only explained 6.4% of the variance in the parent-child conflict variable. This modest effect size for acculturation gaps on parent-child conflict may be due to the fact that the participants in this study were adolescents. The conflict in their relationships may have been rooted in other common conflict-eliciting issues that parents and adolescents experience regardless of culture; for example, academic achievement, career aspirations, internet use, and choice of attire. Thus, acculturation gaps likely are only one of many issues contributing to conflict between the parent and adolescent and thus account for a fairly small percentage of the variance in parent-child conflict.

There was a negative association between family cohesion and parent-child conflict ( $r = -.42$ ), adding to the extensive list of positive outcomes associated with family cohesion described in this document's literature review. Contrary to expectations, there was no significant moderation by family cohesion of the association between degree of host acculturation gap and level of parent-child conflict. Family cohesion did, however,

moderate the association between heritage culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict. The moderating effect was not strong, with the  $R^2$  change being .003 in the final step of the analysis, but significant nonetheless ( $p = .007$ ), given the large sample size. Surprisingly, the direction of the moderation effect was the opposite of that proposed by the fourth hypothesis: the families with higher cohesion exhibited a stronger association between the degree of heritage culture acculturation gap and the level of parent-child conflict than the families with lower cohesion. This result is confusing because higher family cohesion has been found to be associated with various positive outcomes in prior research. Consistent with the ABC-X model, cohesion previously has been found to be a resource that reduced deleterious effects of stressors (e.g., Au et al., 2009; Barr et al., 2012; Juang & Alvarez, 2010). It is possible that adolescents who perceive their family to have higher levels of cohesion may be more sensitive toward any relational dissonance with their parents, compared to adolescents who view their family as having less cohesion. Additionally, families with higher cohesion might engage in more active parent-child conflict in response to acculturation gaps because they are more motivated to resolve the issues that the acculturation gaps create. Meanwhile, adolescents who come from families with lower cohesion may argue less with their parents because the family members are more apathetic toward each other, resulting in reports of less parent-child conflict.

Additional hierarchical multiple regression results for each of the two groups with different levels of family cohesion showed that heritage acculturation gap explained 3.5% of the variance in the parent-child conflict variable for the higher family cohesion group but only 0.4% for the lower family cohesion group. Furthermore, heritage culture

acculturation gap was a more significant predictor of parent-child conflict in the higher family cohesion group ( $p < .001$ ) than the lower family cohesion group ( $p = .021$ ). Also, the fit line for the lower family cohesion group in Figure 4 shows a slope that is close to 0. These results support the idea that families with lower family cohesion may be less influenced by acculturation gaps. Lower levels of family cohesion can result in family members feeling apathetic toward each other, and therefore acculturation gaps lead to less parent-child conflict not because they have sufficient resources or positive appraisals regarding the gaps but because they are relatively uninterested in each other.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The lack of detailed measures for both acculturation gap variables, along with the brief measure for the parent-child conflict variable, was a major limitation of this study. The mean value for host culture acculturation gap, 0.4 (range: 0 – 3), was very small. It seems likely that this small intergenerational gap regarding host culture in this sample was due at least in part to the lack of a more detailed and sensitive acculturation measure. Host culture acculturation was measured by the difference score between two single-item scales, restricting the range of possible scores. Although studies like Ying et al. (2001) have used single-item measures to assess degrees of acculturation, most studies regarding children of immigrant families have utilized multiple-item questionnaires to measure host culture acculturation and heritage culture acculturation (e.g., Ho & Birman, 2010; Kim & Park, 2011; Lim et al., 2009). Also, the host culture acculturation gap measure in the current study was limited as it solely asked the adolescent to report a perception of his or her own acculturation level and that of the parents. The small gap can be a result of the adolescents underestimating their parents' level of host culture acculturation. As pointed

out by Merali (2002) in a study using parent-adolescent dyads from Hispanic refugee families, both parents and adolescents have a tendency to underestimate the host culture acculturation gap between each other.

In addition, the heritage culture acculturation gap was measured solely by the adolescent's proficiency in his or her parents' native language. Although language proficiency has been considered to be a key element of acculturation (Hwang, 2006a; Kang, 2006; Wong & Uhm, 2012), it is not the only element. There are other important aspects of acculturation such as cultural identity and behavioral preferences (Birman, 2006) that were either not assessed in the CILS dataset or only assessed for the adolescents and not their parents, making it insufficient to create a gap variable. Furthermore, due to the absence of the parents' reports regarding their proficiency in their native language and in accordance with the practice suggested by Birman (2006), the parent's proficiency level was assumed to be at the highest level. However, the language proficiency measure used in the current study includes items asking about the level of proficiency regarding reading and writing the native language. Assuming that the parents' level of proficiency in their heritage language is at the highest level is also assuming that all of the parents are fully literate, which may not actually be the case. Overall, a more structured acculturation scale that measures the various aspects of acculturation for both host culture and heritage culture would have provided a more accurate measure of the independent variables.

The 4-item parent-child conflict measure, despite having an acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = .72$ ), was another limitation of the study, as the content validity of the item "My parents do not like me very much" was questionable as a

reflection of conflict. This item seems to be asking the respondent to provide a general assessment regarding the level of caring in the relationships with his or her parents rather than a specific description of conflict interactions with parents. Also, the mean value of the parent-child conflict scores was rather low ( $M = 7.3$ ; range: 4 – 16). This is most likely due to the participants in the study being in period of late adolescence ( $M = 17.18$  years old). Prior research has shown that the frequency of parent-adolescent conflict gradually decreases toward late adolescence (De Goede et al., 2009; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Van Lissa et al., 2014). It would have been preferable to use participants who are in the middle adolescence phase (14 – 16 year olds), the period in which parent-adolescent conflict typically reaches its peak. Using a sample that is more actively engaged in intergenerational conflict would have provided a better understanding regarding the factors that can effectively moderate the gap-conflict association.

Additionally, the CILS dataset did not include an adequate measure for another key factor in the ABC-X model (Hill, 1958)—appraisal. A measure that asks the parents and adolescents to what extent they view intergenerational cultural differences (regarding heritage culture and host culture separately) as positive or negative (or important) would have provided information about the possibility that subjective appraisals of acculturation gaps might moderate the association between degree of acculturation gap and level of parent-child conflict. For instance, an item on an appraisal measure might ask, “How much do you agree with the following statement: I am uncomfortable with having cultural differences with my parents/child regarding mainstream American culture.” or “I think a family should have similar cultural values.” The respondents would then rate their responses on a Likert-type scale, and separate scores for appraisal of host culture

differences and heritage culture differences would be generated. An appraisal of cultural differences measure would have allowed a more complete test of acculturation effects in terms of all the components of the ABC-X model.

Another limitation is that the data used in this study (the second wave of the CILS) had been collected two decades ago. It does seem possible that increasing globalization and worldwide connectivity provided by the internet could be changing the acculturation experience of children of immigrant families in the U.S., but there is no research suggesting differences in the acculturation processes of second generation immigrant adolescents from twenty years ago and those in the present age. Regardless, it would have been more desirable to use data collected in more recent years. However, as this investigator sought secondary datasets regarding children of immigrant families, three challenges were apparent: 1) the majority of the datasets that were focused on the immigrant population in the U.S. were limited to one or two specific ethnic groups, 2) the samples typically consisted of adults (18 years or older), and 3) the respondents were rarely asked questions regarding family relationships, especially regarding family of origin.

### **Implications of the Study**

The medium effect size ( $r = -.42, p < .001$ ) of the negative correlation between family cohesion and parent-child conflict demonstrates the importance of family cohesion in the relationship between parents and adolescents in general, aside from acculturation. Nurturing the emotional bonds among family members can be beneficial in keeping the level of conflict at a moderate level during adolescence while the parents and adolescents go through the process of restructuring their parent-child relationship in this period.

Both host culture acculturation gap and heritage culture acculturation gap were significant predictors of parent-child conflict. However, family cohesion only had a moderating effect for the association between heritage culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict, whereas no moderation was found for host culture acculturation gap and parent-child conflict. These results provide additional support for the need to consider host culture acculturation and heritage culture acculturation as separate constructs. Treating them as a single construct can easily confound the results of a study that includes acculturation as one of its variables. Additionally, the results show that although the two acculturation gaps are distinct constructs, they both have the potential to lead to intergenerational conflict in immigrant families.

Even though the hypothesized direction of moderation by level of family cohesion was not supported, the fact that family cohesion did influence the association between acculturation gap and parent-child conflict supports the need to re-conceptualize the process through which acculturation gaps lead to distress in intergenerational relationships among immigrant families. The theoretical framework of this study, the ABC-X model (Hill, 1958), can be a useful guide in this process. In the ABC-X framework, acculturation gaps are stressors that have the *potential* to cause stress in the family. However, the degree of stress experienced is not solely determined by the existence of the stressor alone but is rather a result of the dynamic interactive effects of two other factors: the family members' resources for coping and their appraisals of the stressor. The current study examined the role of one resource—family cohesion. There are other resources that could have a moderating effect on the gap-conflict relationship such as communication skills, problem solving skills, and social support networks.

Further research is needed to investigate these potential moderating variables and expand the list of effective resources for immigrant families.

Additional research is also needed to investigate the role of the appraisal factor (how immigrant family members perceive the intergenerational cultural differences present in the family). If family members consider intergenerational cultural differences to be a great threat (negative appraisal), then acculturation gaps may be more likely to lead to high degrees of stress in the family. On the other hand, a family may perceive cultural differences as a positive phenomenon. For example, parents may consider their children being more acculturated to the host culture as a promising sign that their children will be able to succeed in the host country (Birman, 2006). If this is the case, acculturation gaps will lead to lower levels of stress in these families.

In order to expand research in this direction, a different acculturation measure based on the theoretical framework of the ABC-X model is needed. Extant acculturation scales typically measure the degree of individuals' acculturation in certain aspects of culture (e.g., language, behaviors, identity). However, using the ABC-X framework, a measure that assesses the degree of acculturation for both host culture and heritage culture along with the existence of resources and appraisals regarding cultural differences in the family can be developed. This measure would be able to not only assess acculturation gaps but also assess the probability that acculturation gaps will lead to distress in that particular family. In other words, this measure would evaluate the family's degree of "crisis-proneness" (Hill, 1958, p. 143) regarding acculturation gaps.

Also, as previously mentioned, there is a need to continuously investigate variables that can moderate the negative effects that acculturation gaps can have on

immigrant parent-child relationships, because these variables can play a significant role in developing intervention programs and therapeutic approaches for immigrant families (Kim & Park, 2011). Theoretically, the B factor (resources) and C factor (appraisal) of the ABC-X model (Hill, 1958) are moderating variables. Thus, developing intervention models that aim to evaluate and increase the family's resources (e.g., communication skills, problem solving skills, community network), and change negative perceptions regarding cultural differences can be effective for immigrant families who have been experiencing prolonged distress from intergenerational acculturative conflict.

Lastly, the current study has clinical implications for family therapists working with immigrant families. The understanding that intergenerational acculturation gaps do not solely lead to distress in immigrant families, but other factors such as resources and appraisal play a key role in determining the level of distress experienced by the family, encourages family therapists to maintain a broad focus during the assessment process and not limit their focus to cultural differences between parents and children. Gaining a better understanding of the attitudes that family members have regarding intergenerational cultural differences and how the family communicates and solves problems can be equally important as assessing the extent of the acculturation gap. In the early phase of treatment, if the family has been experiencing prolonged intergenerational conflict and negative *sentiment override* (the process of having an individual's pre-existing negative feelings about a family member override the family member's current positive or neutral actions; Weiss, 1980), it may help to increase the family's resources before actually discussing the acculturation gap issues. For example, the therapist can help the immigrant family practice communication exercises to help each member to express his or her

feelings and feel heard and accepted by other members. This in turn will gradually decrease pent up negative affect and increase open communication in the family. The therapist can then guide the family to utilize those communication skills to share each member's thoughts, feelings, and concerns about intergenerational cultural differences in regard to host culture and heritage culture. After the family has gone through this process of working on the B factor (resources) and C factor (appraisal) of the ABC-X model (Hill, 1958), the family therapist can guide the family in facing their original stressor situations related to acculturation gaps. This approach would be more effective than attempting to tackle the issues resulting from acculturation gaps directly.

Acculturation gaps are a unique phenomenon that occurs between parents and children of immigrant families. This study provided support for the need for a more dynamic understanding of the acculturation-distress relationship and added to the body of knowledge regarding factors that can moderate the association between acculturation gaps and parent-child conflict. Developing a more detailed understanding of the underlying mechanism of the gap-distress relationship and developing methods accordingly to assist immigrant families in the process of effectively coping with this challenge will be conducive to strengthening the relationships among family members. This in turn will provide a firm foundation for these families as they strive to flourish in the host society.

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