

## **Southeast Asian Fathers' Experiences with Adolescents: Challenges and Change\***

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the fathering experiences of Southeast Asian immigrant men who are parenting their adolescent children in the United States. Focus group discussions were conducted with twenty-two Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese immigrant fathers. The study found that most fathers wanted to become closer to their children and be more involved in their children's daily activities. Common fathering roles such as the family provider, teacher, supervisor, and disciplinarian also emerged from the analyses. Parent educators, social service providers, policy makers, and practitioners who work with Southeast Asian families should understand the complex and critical roles of fathers and include them when designing, developing, and delivering programs and services for families.

### **Southeast Asian Fathers' Experiences with Adolescents: Challenges and Change: Introduction**

Fatherhood has recently become an important domain of inquiry in the social science literature. In the past two decades many research studies have investigated fathers' roles and relationships in the family. (For a review, see Lamb, 1997). Research on fatherhood has provided valuable information on the role of the father across the life span and over time in the family and child's life (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997). The research on fatherhood in European American families

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continues to accumulate, but little is known about the experiences of Asian men (Marsiglio, Amato, & Day, 2000; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000; Yang, 1999), particularly Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese fathers, who have a qualitatively different life history and family experience (Zhou, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese included in this study are refugees who fled Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos after the end of the Indochinese war to the United States. (For a review of the immigration history of these groups, see Rumbaut, 1989, 1991, 1995.) Hereafter we will use the term "Southeast Asian" to describe these four groups in accord with the literature on these groups (Hyman, Vu, & Beiser, 2000; Lynch & Richards, 1997; Tobin & Friedman, 1984). Although the term Southeast Asian was used here to refer to these ethnic groups, individuals from these groups do not necessarily identify themselves as such. They prefer to call themselves, for example, Hmong, Cambodian (or Khmer), Lao (or Laotian), or Vietnamese. Currently there are approximately 1.6 million Southeast Asians residing in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The research on the war experiences, migration, post-migration adjustments, and psychosocial experiences of Southeast Asians has been well established (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut, 1991, 1995). However, the fathering experiences of Southeast Asian men in the United States have been inconsistently examined. A few studies have investigated parenting issues in general (Strom, Johnson, Strom, & Daniels, 1992; Xiong, Detzner, & Rettig, 2001); parent-adolescent relationships (Dinh, Sarason, & Sarason, 1994; Nguyen & Williams, 1989); and the roles of Southeast Asian husbands and wives (Lynch & Richards, 1997; Westermeyer, Bouafuely, & Vang, 1984). Few if any focused on the experiences of Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese men with adolescent children.

We chose to focus on Southeast Asian fathers because previous studies showed some common struggles of Southeast Asian parents with their adolescent children as children became more acculturated to life in the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Xiong, et al., 2001). We also chose to focus on Southeast Asian fathers of adolescents for this study because fathering adolescent children in the United

States is significantly different from fathering adolescents in Southeast Asia (Morrow, 1987; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Rick & Forward, 1992; Tobin & Friedman, 1984; Tran & Nguyen, 1994). In Southeast Asia, children and adolescents, in general, tend to be more compliant, obedient, and filial. They are expected to obey parents and conform to family traditions and gender-specific behaviors (Bankston, 1995b; McKenzie-Pollock, 1996; Phanjaruniti, 1994; Xiong, 2000; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Teenage boys and girls are expected to make the transition to adulthood and take on adult responsibilities as early as age 10 (Tobin & Friedman, 1984). In the West, however, it is difficult for Southeast Asian parents to adjust to an additional six to seven years of ambiguous young adulthood because parenting adolescents takes on a new meaning (Detzner, Xiong, & Eliason, 1999; Tobin & Friedman, 1984). Examining fathers' experiences with adolescent children can provide realistic accounts of their daily interactions with adolescents.

There is very little discussion of Southeast Asian fathers' roles in the literature. Anecdotal writings describe Southeast Asian fathers as the head of the household, the chief provider to the family, and child disciplinarian (Bavolek, 1997; Leung & Boehnlein, 1996; McKenzie-Pollock, 1996; Phanjaruniti, 1994; Westermeyer et al., 1984). Phanjaruniti (1994) conducted an ethnographic study observing several villages in Laos which found that although mothers devoted more time caring for the children, fathers were the head of the household and made most decisions concerning the family's finances and the children's health and schooling. Kibria's (1993) anthropological interviews in twelve immigrant Vietnamese households found that both the men and women agreed that men assumed the primary breadwinning role in families. However, there is some evidence indicating that the roles and responsibilities of Southeast Asian fathers have changed after their post-migration resettlement. For example, Lynch and Richards (1997) used a qualitative approach to study ten families (six Cambodian and four Vietnamese) by examining the construct of family identity; they found that the primary breadwinner role, usually performed by the father, has changed in the United States. Respondents in this

study reported that economic hardship requires the breadwinner role to be divided between two parents and other family members, especially between parents and older children.

Strom et al. (1992) studied forty-eight Vietnamese and Central/South American parents to identify and prioritize parent education needs of immigrant and refugee parents. Respondents believed that providing for the physical needs of children is an important responsibility in raising children. This parent role has also been found in previous reports (Detzner et al., 1999; Phanjaruniti, 1994; Xiong et al., 2001).

A few studies have also found that Southeast Asian fathers assumed the disciplinarian role in the family. For example, Hughes's (1990) anthropological study with Hmong parents indicated that fathers do take on major responsibility in disciplining children, especially adolescent sons. Kibria (1993) also found that Vietnamese fathers are obligated to discipline their children. However, losing the breadwinner role may be linked to the decline of the disciplinarian role. Recent research with Southeast Asian men and women indicates that parents were frustrated and angered by their inability to discipline their adolescent children due to a perceived loss of authority (Detzner et al., 1999; Strom et al., 1992; Xiong et al., 2001). In this investigation, we assumed that fathers would express similar frustrations and anger as they reported their experiences with their adolescent children.

Research studies with Southeast Asian adolescents suggest that their fathers were less acculturated (Rick & Forward, 1992); endorsed more traditional family values in regard to socialization (Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Rosenthal, Ranieri, & Klimidis, 1996); and were more emotionally distant from their adolescent children (Dinh et al., 1994; Herz & Gullone, 1999) than their mothers. Johnson (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of the traditional and the present-day performance of household tasks of 65 married Vietnamese, Chinese-Vietnamese, and Lao women and men between the ages of 36 and 55. In contrast to other studies, she found Lao and Vietnamese husbands to be as involved as their wives in children's activities and special events. Similarly, Strom et al. (1992) found that some

respondents wanted to play with their children as a way to develop a closer relationship with their sons and daughters.

Although these findings are useful, the fathers' voices concerning their fathering experiences with adolescent children are missing across the four Southeast Asian groups. For example, Johnson's (1998) study was limited to Lao and Vietnamese fathers of younger children. Phanjaruniti's (1994) study was limited to Lao, Hmong, and Khmu fathers and mothers, and Strom et al.'s (1992) study focused only on Vietnamese parents' experiences. Thus far, no studies have examined the experiences of Southeast Asian immigrant fathers as they try to parent their adolescents in the United States. This is surprising, since many of the problems with truancy, runaways, delinquency, and gangs involve adolescents (Chanen, 2003; Hopkins, Weinberg, & Clement, 1994; Lor & Chu, 2002). The overall purpose of this exploratory paper is to examine the common fathering experiences of men with adolescent children across the four Southeast Asian groups.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A purposive sample was chosen for this study as a strategy to solicit parents from diverse backgrounds within the four Southeast Asian communities. A total of forty- six fathers and mothers took part in five focus groups as part of a research project designed to investigate parenting practices. Of the forty-six unpaired fathers and mothers, thirty-six of them agreed to participate in four separate ethnic-specific focus groups and another ten parents agreed to participate in a mixed-ethnic (Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese) focus group. In this paper, we focus only on the transcripts of the twenty-two fathers who took part in the five focus groups. Of the twenty-two men, there were four Cambodians, four Hmong, four Lao, and ten Vietnamese fathers. All of the men were married and had at least one adolescent child between the ages of twelve and nineteen at the time of the study. The ages of parent participants ranged from 25 to 66 years, with 80% between the ages of 35 and 54. All of the fathers were first generation immigrants who had lived in the United States for more than six years, with a range of 2

to 16 years. Three Lao and six Vietnamese fathers were recent arrivals compared to one Cambodian and two Hmong. About 92% of them had less than a junior high education in their homelands.

### *Focus Groups*

There is much discussion about how to appropriately conduct interviews with Southeast Asian parents and other non-English speaking ethnic groups. We decided that the focus group approach was most appropriate because many Southeast Asian parents cannot read or write in their native languages. Therefore, pen and pencil surveys would take more time, effort, and frustration to conduct due to the lack of culturally reliable measures. Next, family issues and conflict are considered private matters not talked about with strangers, but instead need to be discussed within the family or ethnic community. Focus groups allowed us to use key informants from the community to organize and facilitate the discussions. We believed key informants, who already have the credibility and trust within their own respective ethnic community, would strengthen the trust between the researchers and the participants, and therefore diminish language and cultural barriers. Finally, key informants could use focus groups to encourage interactions and exchanges on a number of topics in a limited period of time.

### *Procedures*

We first recruited eight key informants to serve as focus group moderators. Criteria for the selection of key informants included someone with: a) an occupation that involved working with Southeast Asian families (i.e., youth, parent, or family service); 2) fluency in both English and the language of their native tongues; 3) the ability to converse in ways that were respectful to parents and adolescents in their native languages; and 4) the ability to participate in the facilitators' training. Eight key informants from the four major Southeast Asian communities (Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese) were recruited. The final candidates for the focus group informants included two key informants for each of the four cultural groups. For each key informant team, there was one male and one female and one older member and one younger member. We recruited key informants in such a way to increase the levels of group interaction and to be sensitive to gender and age issues, which are critical in

the Southeast Asian culture. Three key informants were under 30 years of age, and the other five were over 30 years of age. Three persons worked on family programs, while the other five persons worked on youth programs within their respective community.

Prior to the focus groups, all key informants participated in two days of training on the recruiting strategy, the focus group approach, interviewing protocol and skills, logistical issues (Krueger, 1994), and evaluating the focus group questions. Key informants were asked to recruit parents from their community using the following criteria: (a) parents with at least one child, ages 12 to 19 years living at home, and (b) parents with and without adolescent children who were involved in various types of problem behaviors. Problem behaviors referred to acts that were socially sanctioned, such as running away from home, dropping out of school, and using chemical substances. Participating parents were offered a small honorarium and refreshments for participating in the focus group discussions.

Each pair of the key informants conducted one ethnic-specific focus group and a total of four ethnic-specific discussions. These focus groups were conducted in the native language and generally lasted two to three hours. The mixed-ethnic focus group was conducted by the authors in English and lasted about two hours. All focus groups took place in public places on days, evenings, or weekends during the summer and fall, 1995. General questions revolved around parent-adolescent relationships, roles and responsibilities, and perceptions of ideal parents and adolescents. All discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim in the appropriate Southeast Asian language by the older moderator and reviewed by the younger moderator. Next, the older key informant translated the transcript from the first Southeast Asian language into English and the younger key informant validated the English translation.

### *Analysis*

The original data set included focus group transcripts of unpaired mothers and fathers. For the purpose of this paper, transcripts identified only with the fathers' voices were extracted using a word

processor to create five separate, independent father transcripts. An open coding procedure, similar to the first step in the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), was used to identify central themes.

Using this open coding procedure, data were reduced into sentences for close examination and conceptualization of the texts. The first step of the coding was to create a spreadsheet file for each objective of the study. Three objectives were proposed: a) Identifying the fathers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities to their adolescent children, b) exploring the fathers' perceptions of their adolescent children, and c) examining strategies fathers use to rear their adolescent children. Each objective in the spreadsheet file contained five columns representing four cultural groups and the mixed group. Each of the transcripts was read and coded simultaneously for the three objectives. For example, during coding, the investigator read transcripts sentence-by-sentence and recorded short statements about each sentence and categorized each sentence by objective. This coding process served as a standard procedure for each objective across the five focus group transcripts. Next, statements under each objective were questioned for their meanings and examined carefully across the five focus groups. Themes were identified to represent the variety of statements that appeared to mean the same thing across groups. This process of careful attention to the data seems suitable for cross-cultural, cross-language research because it allows the researcher to repeatedly question the data to develop an in-depth understanding of meanings. Such an approach is believed to accurately reflect the voices of the fathers.

### **Findings**

The fathering experiences of Southeast Asian men with adolescent children in this study can be summarized by reducing the focus group texts into several recurring themes. Each theme was documented with several quotations as a means of maintaining the voices of the fathers in the interpretation.

The term "adolescent" was used interchangeably with the term "child" in most of the quotations in this study and throughout the transcripts. We used the term "adolescent" in the interpretation instead of the term "child". Based on our understanding of these cultures, the term "adolescent" is rarely used in normal conversations about children. The term "child" is used to refer to all children, regardless of their

ages, when a group of parents sits together to talk about their offspring. The context of the conversations tends to determine the meaning of the term. Thus, in our larger study, we asked the parents, both mothers and fathers, to talk about their adolescents instead of their school age children. The understanding was that we were talking about children from approximately twelve to nineteen years old.

### *Perceptions of the Fathers' Roles and Responsibilities*

To examine perceptions of the fathers' roles and responsibilities, we analyzed data related to one of our open-ended questions, "What are your responsibilities to your children?" Two themes emerged from the analysis: 1) the father as the executive of the family; and 2) challenges confronting fathers as they seek to perform their roles and responsibilities.

#### *The Father as the executive of the family*

Five roles that were essential to the father as the executive of the family included providing for, teaching cultural knowledge to, monitoring, control and discipline, and role modeling children. Discussions across the four cultural groups revealed that there was no single role or responsibility specifically identified as the fathers' alone. Instead, they perceived themselves as having multiple roles and responsibilities to meet the needs and demands of children in the family. In a very real sense, fathers saw themselves as the executives of the family, responsible for enforcement of cultural and family rules and expectations. As one Cambodian father replied, "There are many responsibilities, can't count them all." In general, we found many fathers believed that it was their duty to provide for and meet the basic physical needs of their children. Basic needs discussed included food, clothing, money, medicine, and shelter. Another Cambodian father said, "Our responsibilities include buying foods, clothes, and taking care of them...when they are sick." Besides providing for basic needs, it was their responsibility to teach adolescents what Hmong fathers call "paub cai", or the history and norms of the culture. Most fathers agreed that adolescents should not forget who they are and where their parents came from. They should understand their cultural roots and feel a sense of pride about who they are. One Hmong father explained, "I have always told my children that I am a Hmong. I don't have blond hair. I told them where my parents

and grandparents came from and where I had been raised.” As a part of this cultural socialization, the fathers emphasized the importance of knowing how to appropriately welcome guests and address other kin members according to their role, status, and generation. One Hmong father stated, “I told my children everyday that if anyone comes for a visit, they should invite him or her into the house. Then make sure that person feels comfortable.” A Lao father said, “Don’t teach our children to call someone [relative] by name.” They believed when adolescents learn to call kin members by their title, they “show respect to that person,” and in so doing, they learn to identify with their own cultural traditions.

Monitoring children’s activities, schoolwork, and interpersonal relationships were also found to be important fathering responsibilities. First, these fathers understood that children do not want to always stay home; therefore, fathers need to set rules to help manage behaviors, such as when children can go out, when they must come home, and what type of television shows can be viewed. Second, children’s education is a high priority in immigrant families, and most fathers talked about making sure that their adolescents attend school regularly, return home from school at an appropriate time, and do their homework. Some parents mentioned that fathers needed to have better communication with their children’s teachers and “check on their children’s school records” regularly. Third, to ensure future success for their children, these fathers also talked about restricting their adolescents from affiliating with people they called “bad influences.”

As the executive of the family, the father strongly felt that they must control and discipline their adolescents from “bad influences.” Bad influences discussed included adolescents who engaged in socially unacceptable activities, such as skipping school and doing drugs. These bad influences were considered by these fathers to be “disobedient children” or “gangsters” (Xiong et al., 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). One Vietnamese father explained, “A father can forbid his son to make friends with someone if he thinks that person will have a bad influence on his son.” A Hmong father stated, “The father is the family’s detector. If a child lies, he will growl first and spank the child the second time.”

The last recurring theme concerning the father's role was positive role modeling. The fathers in this study consistently stated that fathers needed to be "good role models for their children." They should not say one thing to their children and do the opposite. They have to be responsible for their own words and actions. A Lao father stated: "Some parents teach their children not to drink and not to gamble, but they themselves play cards [gamble] and drink [liquor] in front of their children." In addition to serving as positive role models for their own children, fathers also discussed how they should connect their children to other positive adult role models in the community.

### *Challenges confronting the fathers' roles and responsibilities*

Three themes that merit discussion include misinformation about disciplining children, cultural expectations for adolescent's behavior, and cultural meaning of expressing love and care. First, the most frequently recurring theme across the four ethnic groups was a belief that fathers could no longer scold or spank their adolescent children in the United States. These fathers consistently perceived that their adolescents were given too much freedom to explore and express themselves. As a Hmong father said, "Children [in the United States] have too much freedom; they have no fear, no respect for anybody." This freedom without limits was compounded with the perception that fathers could no longer use scolding, spanking, and hitting to discipline their adolescents. As a result, fathers were frustrated because they believed their authority was undermined and devalued by Americans or non-Southeast Asians. Another Hmong father said, "We were told that our way of disciplining by growling and spanking were wrong." Many felt trapped in the system, not knowing exactly what they should or could do to discipline their children. The following excerpt from a Cambodian father illustrates the feelings of many Southeast Asian fathers:

*I am frustrated with the system, upset with the law, the court system, and the probation officer. All accused parents for abusing their children...How can we facilitate a system to cooperate with parents to lessen the frustration? Whatever parents try to do, there are*

obstacles. The system tells parents that they can't do this, can't do that...it's illegal to discipline. It's hard to find the best solution for me to work well with my children.

Independence and disobedience were combined as the second theme because the fathers' reports linked the two concepts together. The fathers reported major obstacles managing adolescents who behaved contrary to their expectations. Fathers expected their adolescent children to be respectful and obedient, to stay home, and to contribute to everyday family responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings and cooking for the family. Contrary to what was expected, however, adolescents were perceived by these fathers as being too independent, disobedient, irresponsible, and less empathic toward their parents. A Cambodian father said, "In this country, [children] don't listen to us. When they want to go somewhere, they just go." A Lao father felt the same way: "[Children] don't listen to us like we did to our parents. They are taking charge of their lives and seeking independence from us. They do whatever they want to do." This suggests that the growing independence of adolescents that typically occurs in U.S. families is an emerging problem for these fathers that was interpreted as disobedience to parents.

Some fathers attributed the problem of growing independence and disobedience to the adolescent's inherent personality by labeling them as "bad children." As one Lao father said, "Bad children don't listen to their parents." A Cambodian father said, "They don't go to school...and they create problems by joining a bad group of people. For example, they steal, rob, and do other bad things." According to these fathers, bad children are unchangeable:

It doesn't matter how much parents know, or how much knowledge they have. If the children don't listen, they just don't listen and follow what we [parents] tell them. I have a brother who was a professor in Cambodia...He knows French and other things, but his children don't listen to him.

"Good children," on the other hand, were those adolescents who listened and obeyed their parents. It may very well be that these children were teenagers before arriving in the United States. They were easier to raise and discipline; they were responsible and obedient, they were concerned about

schoolwork, and they conformed to family traditions. One father said, "Old children who know more about the Cambodian culture and traditions listen to their parents more than younger children who grew up in this county."

The last recurring theme concerning the challenges confronting fathers was their expectation that children should understand the meaning of scolding, controlling, or spanking. To the fathers, scolding, controlling, or spanking conveyed a message of love and care. As a Lao father explained, "Scold or 'hai' means in Lao to teach but using stronger words...and 'tee' means to hit...it is a way of raising children." They believed that this type of parental behavior worked at home in Southeast Asia because both generations understood the meaning of the action. The challenge for the fathers in this study with the generation who grew up in the United States was that these children have a harder time understanding the intended meaning of scolding, controlling, or spanking that their parents use to convey love and care.

#### *Change in Parenting Practices*

The analysis revealed two themes that summarized parenting practices used by the fathers to rear their adolescent children. They included 1) self-awareness and adaptation, and 2) involvement.

#### *Self-awareness and adaptation*

The fathers believed that their problems with adolescent children were linked to an absence of parenting knowledge in the United States context. They reported that adolescents were no longer the children they used to be. Therefore, they wanted to learn about child development and parenting practices in the United States so that they could adapt to working models operated by European American parents. As a Hmong father said, "We should blame ourselves for not knowing parenting skills. We need to know about child development and understand that children's needs vary according to their age." A Cambodian father said, "American children when they did something good, their parents say, 'You did good' or 'Great.' We Cambodians should say something like that too." They continued to express intimately that they should become more flexible with their children and "not expect children to do everything" that is

asked of them. Fathers need to learn to forgive mistakes children make, avoid putting children down for making minor mistakes, and learn not to interpret acting differently as bad behavior.

Other fathers believed that providing for and meeting the material needs of the children was not enough in the U.S. context. They believed that they had to study adolescents carefully and learn about their real needs and problems to raise them in the United States. A Cambodian father said, “[We] help them [children] with money but we haven’t studied what our children want. The idea of what our children want is different than ours.” One of the solutions to these problems was to become more involved in their adolescent’s lives to show them that they cared. A Lao father commented, “If we don’t care about our children, they will not listen to us. Then our children will go out and hang around some [bad] places.”

#### *Involvement in activities*

One way the fathers could show their adolescent children that they cared and wanted them to succeed was by being involved in their daily activities. For example, some fathers talked about maintaining strong relationships by taking children to places such as the library, or by going fishing together. Other fathers created a structure in their families for ongoing conversations to solve anticipated and unanticipated problems. A Lao father said, “I talk to my children very often, every day, and every time we have meals. Don’t wait until 4 or 5 days. This is the way to solve our problem.” Aside from talking, some fathers also played an active role in their children's activities. By doing so, they could observe their children’s feelings and monitor their adolescents’ behaviors and activities. A Lao father’s words summarized his strategy very well:

We must get involved in our children’s education. For me, when children get home from school, I give them something to eat, and I try to find out if they have homework to be done. I observe them to see if they skip school or not, and I try to ask them about their school performances.

Some fathers reported that the process of trying to build better relationships through involvement was both challenging and growth promoting. Several fathers explained their experiences as being very

rewarding because getting involved with their adolescents' daily lives helped the fathers to grow emotionally. A few fathers discussed their own attitudinal changes and noticed that they became more attuned to their children's feelings as a result of involvement. The following excerpt from a Lao father is a good illustration:

It happened to me one time when I missed my son's school meeting. My son was expecting me to attend the meeting. Somehow, I totally forgot all about it because my friend asked me to repair his car for him. When my son came home, he was crying. I asked him if someone beat him up. He said no, except he felt very disappointed because I missed his school meeting. He cooled down after I asked him to forgive me. He then posed me a question whether I would choose to worry about the car or choose to care about him. It was a very worthy lesson I learned that day. (LFG)

A few fathers also said that they had improved their literacy through involvement with adolescent children. A Lao father explained how this unanticipated benefit occurred: "Read with our children. When my children come home from school, I ask them to read in English; they then ask me to read in Lao. My children and I improve our reading both in English and in Lao."

### **Discussion**

The analysis of the twenty-two fathers' transcripts showed that the fathering roles and responsibilities perceived by these men were more complex and dynamic than previously reported in anecdotal descriptions (Chan, 1986) and other studies (Hughes, 1990; Hyman et al., 2000; Kibria, 1993). These findings suggest that fathers assumed multiple roles and responsibilities in the daily socialization of their adolescents. Instead of the cold and distant father whose primary role was providing for the physical needs of the family, we found that these fathers shared the breadwinning role with others due to the economic realities confronting immigrant families (Rumbaut, 1991, 1995). In addition to helping provide for the basic physical needs of the family and adolescent children, fathers were also involved in providing for the emotional and psychological needs of their adolescents by supervising and monitoring adolescent

children's activities; disciplining when a situation demanded it; and teaching values and morality. Our findings are consistent with the conclusions of other studies (Phanjaruniti, 1994; Strom et al., 1992; Xiong et al., 2001) that emphasize the importance of the fathering role in meeting the multiple needs of children. The fathers in our study were seeking to be generative, emotionally available, and developmentally appropriate; however, their lack of knowledge about adolescence as a stage of development might have made these tasks more challenging in this context (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997; Lamb, 1997).

In the United States the period of adolescence is extended, and the meaning of adolescence is qualitatively different from what it would be in Southeast Asia (Grotevant, 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). U.S. adolescents are expected to express their sense of individuality and gain more autonomy and independence from parents. Both male and female adolescents are encouraged to form friendships and experiment with relationships outside the family (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). These expectations contradicted the expectations of the fathers in this study. We suspect that the reason Southeast Asian fathers have such difficulty understanding and parenting adolescents is because of the differences in how each culture defines adolescence and the different behavioral expectations for this stage of life (Kibria, 1993; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Tobin & Friedman, 1984). The past experiences of these fathers with obedient, polite children who make quick transitions from childhood to adulthood may not equip them to parent their adolescents in the U.S. environment, which prolongs adolescence, encourages independence and self-expression, and emphasizes equality for both genders.

This lack of preparation to parent adolescents in the U.S. context, although evident in this paper for the fathers, may not be unique to just the fathers. We suspected that most mothers would also experience similar problems and challenges as they continue to perform their parenting role in a vastly different sociocultural context. Much of the literature on the intergenerational gap between Southeast Asian parents and adolescents may be the outcome of this lack of preparedness. In addition, fathers are burdened by misinformation about discipline, challenged by their traditional perceptions about the

malleability of children who are disobedient, and confused about why children do not understand that traditional parenting practices are the ways that parents demonstrate their love.

A positive outcome for these families is that some fathers have become more involved in the lives of their children. We discovered that fathers wanted to do more than just provide for the financial and material needs of their children. Some fathers wanted to be more engaged and involved in their adolescents' daily lives as a way to build better relationships and to prevent future problems. This finding was consistent with Johnson's (1998) study of Lao and Vietnamese household task performances. Although Johnson did not examine the fathering experiences directly, she found that Vietnamese and Lao husbands were as involved in their children's education as their wives. We suspect that because the outcome of the adolescent's behavior can either bring pride or shame to the family (Chan, 1986; Suzuki, 1980), the children's education is perhaps the primary motivation for fathers to be involved in their adolescents' lives. Pride and shame issues have been described as important family values in the process of socialization of children in Asian families (Chan, 1986; Suzuki, 1980). These fathers believe that being involved will lead to well-disciplined adolescents and educational success. Children who attain educational success contribute to family pride and bring credit to the parents. Whether involvement is a learned behavior or a reemergence of old practices is not clear due to the nature of our research questions. Future studies should pay a particular attention to this issue.

We believe this paper contributes to the literature on parenting despite its limitations. Findings from this study were based on a small sample of fathers who were willingly to participate in the focus group discussions in the presence of other men and women. Therefore, the findings cannot represent the voices of Southeast Asian immigrant fathers in general. Generalization of the findings in this study to other Southeast Asian or immigrant fathers is not advisable. Future studies should try to draw a more representative sample of Southeast Asian fathers for examination and observation to extend the current knowledge of Southeast Asian fathering with adolescents. In addition, using focus group discussions that included women might have skewed the findings. With both men and women in the same focus group,

certain important but sensitive issues concerning roles, responsibilities, and parenting practices might not have been raised and discussed. Future studies should examine fathers alone, fathers in mixed groups, and the complementary roles of fathers and mothers to determine if the findings reported here are consistent.

The findings suggest that these fathers continue to consider themselves as the heads of households despite the marginalization that occurs for men as part of the immigration and resettlement process. These men are deeply concerned about their adolescent children and they desire to be better fathers. They want to learn more about child development and the culture of adolescents in the United States in order to become better equipped and more effective fathers. Thus, it is imperative for parent educators, social service providers, and others who work with Southeast Asian families to treat fathers as a primary audience, not just as mothers. If fathers continue to be treated only as the breadwinners and the secondary parenting adults in the family, then only mothers, particularly stay at home mothers, will be the participants of educational programs. Fathers are also the keepers of culture and values and very important to the future success of their children in the new and confusing environment that immigrants inhabit. Parenting programs should be designed to affirm fathers' strengths, while teaching new skills for fathers to adapt with their adolescent children in a foreign environment.

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