

Ethnic Identity, Socialization Factors, and Culture-Specific Consumption Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study is designed to discover the degree to which ethnic identity and socialization factors influence the culture-specific consumption behaviors of Asian American young adults, in general as well as in specific situational settings. Findings indicated that perceived parental cultural identification tended to strengthen the ethnic identity, which in turn influenced Asian American young adults' culture-specific consumption behaviors. However, although their perceived parental acculturation level had no effect on their ethnic identity, it directly weakened the subject group's culture-specific consumption behaviors. The ethnic-friendship orientation was found not only to influence ethnic identity but also to influence directly the group's culture-specific consumption behavior. Further analysis revealed that a situational factor (i.e., the presence or absence of ethnic friends) influenced culture-specific consumption behavior, regardless of the strength of ethnic identity. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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As American culture becomes more culturally diverse, the cultural and ethnic factors influencing adolescent or young-adult development have created significant challenges, albeit opportunities, for U.S. marketers (Kara & Kara, 1996). To meet these challenges, and take advantage of the opportunities, marketers must gain a better understanding of the unique consumption needs and patterns of ethnic subcultures. One such subculture, the Asian American young adult, deserves special attention. Not only is this population segment growing rapidly, but also its purchasing power is increasing exponentially (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1998). Therefore, Asian American young adults were selected as the focus of the study, with the following goals: (a) to determine how parental acculturation and cultural identification and ethnic-friendship networks influence ethnic identity, (b) to examine the impact of ethnic identity on culture-specific consumption behavior, and (c) to determine how various situations affect the influence of ethnic identity on consumption behavior.

According to Arnett (2000), the period from 18 to 25 years of age, which Arnett labels as emerging adulthood, represents a developmental stage distinct from other periods. During this critical developmental period young adults develop a subjective sense of identity through experimentation and explorations (Erikson, 1968). This developmental period is even more critical among ethnic young adults because their ethnic identity also forms and develops during this stage (Phinney, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1981; Waterman, 1985). Defined as an individual's sense of self within an ethnic group, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992), ethnic identity becomes an integral part of the ethnic young adult's social identity and a vital component of his or her self-concept or self-image (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990).

From a demographic standpoint, the young-adult stage is also distinct from other stages. Young adults demonstrate a higher degree of demographic diversity and instability, with many living away from home for the first time (Arnett, 2000). As they gain independence and a greater sense of financial responsibility, they begin to make long-term decisions regarding their occupational preferences and the roles and directions they wish to take in their personal lives (Arnett, 2000). Furthermore, besides acquiring significant buying power in the marketplace, young adults develop new consumption patterns—patterns that exert a major influence on their behavior as consumers in later life (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979).

In order to better understand the factors that influence ethnic identity and consumption decisions, this study relies on a socialization model developed by Moschis and Churchill (1978). Essentially, this model assumes that young people acquire certain mental and behavioral outcomes through their interaction with various socialization agents (Moschis, 1987; Ward, 1974). For the purpose of this study, parents and friends

were considered as socialization agents, and the young adult's perceived interaction with these two socialization agents was then presumed to produce two types of outcomes: ethnic identity as a mental outcome and culture-specific consumption behavior as a behavioral outcome.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

H1. Effects of Socialization Agents on Ethnic Identity

Studies have shown that parents serve as important socialization agents, transmitting values and/or other attitudes to their children (Flouri, 1999; Moore-Shay & Berchmans, 1996; Palan & Wilkes, 1997). It has been further demonstrated that Asian parents in particular serve in this capacity (Gregory & Munch, 1997; Hofstede, 1980; Rotheram-Borus & Wyche, 1994). Early parental socialization influence on children in particular was assessed in this study because anticipatory parental socialization (i.e., the implicit, often unconscious learning of roles that will be assumed sometime in the future) is known to be particularly instrumental during later adolescence (Phinney, 1992; Yinger, 1986).

Because of the widely accepted belief among researchers that ethnic identity stems from a bi-cultural perspective (i.e., the degree to which individuals adopt the values of the mainstream culture while at the same time maintaining the values of their own ethnic group) (Umana-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002), both influences (parental acculturation and parental cultural identification) were addressed in this study. Often viewed as two distinctive dimensions, they should be measured separately (Gentry, Jun, & Tansuhaj, 1995; Jun, Ball, & Gentry, 1993; Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 2002).

Parental Acculturation [H1(a)]. *Acculturation level*, the degree to which an individual conforms to the norms of a new culture, is multi-dimensional, incorporating cultural identity, language usage, religion, and social activities (Hui, Kim, Laroche, & Joy, 1992; Jun et al., 1993). Among ethnic groups, the attitudes and behavior of parents influence the strength of an adolescent's sense of ethnic identity (Phinney & Nakayama, 1991); furthermore, highly acculturated parents can be expected to emphasize their original culture less than do their counterparts (Jun et al., 1993). Therefore, Asian American young adults who perceive their parents as less acculturated are expected to have a stronger sense of ethnic identity than those who perceive their parents as highly acculturated. This argument has led to the following hypothesis:

- H1:** (a) The ethnic identity of an Asian American young adult is negatively related to his/her perceived parental acculturation level.

Parental Cultural Identification [H1(b)]. *Cultural identification*, the degree to which an individual's ethnic identification conforms to his/her original culture, represents an individual's perception of belonging to an ethnic group (Jun et al., 1993). Understandably, those with a higher degree of cultural identification remain more attracted to their original culture. Therefore, Asian American parents with a greater attachment (as opposed to those with a lesser attachment) to their original culture can be expected to spend more time and energy educating their children about their ethnic background. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: (b) The ethnic identity of Asian American young adults is positively related to their perceived parental cultural identification.

Peer Influence on Adolescents' Ethnic Identity [H1(c)]. The extant socialization literature also suggests that peers serve as important socialization agents, exerting a powerful influence on the ethnic attitudes and behaviors of young adults (Ting-Toomey, 1981). Furthermore, through peer influence, a young person develops autonomy and grows into adulthood, especially during the college period, when familial influences can be expected to decline significantly (Brown & Huang, 1995; Clausen, 1968). Communicating with peers significantly influences an adolescent's consumption-related attitudes and behaviors (Moschis & Moore, 1979) and also helps maintain group identity (Bearden & Randall, 1990). Thus, it can be expected that the ethnic-friendship network will directly influence the strength of ethnic identity, and therefore, H1(c) is proposed as follows:

H1: (c) The ethnic identity of an Asian American young adult is positively related to his/her ethnic-friendship orientation.

H2. Effects of Ethnic Identity on Culture-Specific Consumption Behavior

According to Moschis (1987), mental and behavioral outcomes are two interrelated sets, wherein the mental outcomes should have a direct impact on behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, a sense of ethnic identity has been found to strongly influence immigrants' consumption patterns (Deshpande & Stayman, 1994; Hirschman, 1981; Valencia, 1985) as well as their culture-specific consumption behavior (Penaloza, 1994; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983). Thus, it is hypothesized that ethnic identity influences culture-specific consumption behavior.

Because late adolescence/young adulthood is regarded as the most important stage in the development of ethnic identity, confirmation of this proposition, as hypothesized below, will shed light on the process by which ethnic culture-specific consumption behaviors develop:

- H2:** The ethnic identity of an Asian American young adult is positively related to his/her culture-specific consumption behavior (i.e., food and entertainment behavior).

H3. Situational Influence

Social surroundings are relevant to the study of situational ethnicity (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989) because *situational influence*, the influence arising from factors particular to a specific time and place, is independent of a consumer's individual characteristics (Belk, 1975). In their study of an ethnicity-specific context, Stayman and Deshpande (1989) introduced a "felt ethnicity" construct and differentiated it from objective ethnic membership (i.e., self-designated ethnicity) by stating that felt ethnicity is "not just who one is, but how one feels in and about a consumption" (p. 361). More specifically, their research findings indicated that different social situations (i.e., the presence of parents or business associates in the consumption situation) produce different, corresponding effects on the strength of one's felt ethnicity and ethnic consumer behavior. In a similar vein, Forehand and Deshpande (2001) defined ethnic self-awareness as a temporary state during which a person becomes more sensitive to his or her ethnic group membership. According to these researchers, although the strength of one's ethnic identification is a major determinant of one's ethnic self-awareness, ethnic self-awareness is only salient when an individual processes ethnic information and categorizes him- or herself according to ethnic criteria in the momentary situation. As a result, one's immediate social situation has a major impact on the strength of ethnic self-awareness.

As concluded by Forehand and Deshpande (2001), individuals do not need strong ethnic identification to feel attached to their ethnicity in a particular situation. Thus, it is expected that, regardless of the strength of their ethnic identity, Asian American young adults will engage in culture-specific consumption behaviors to a greater extent when they are with friends from their own ethnic group than when they are with American friends. Therefore, H3(a) is proposed as follows:

- H3:** (a) Regardless of the strength of the individual's sense of ethnic identity, a situational factor will influence that individual's culture-specific consumption behavior.

It is also likely that the combination of the situational factor and ethnic identity produces an interaction effect on culture-specific consumption behavior. In more specific terms, when with ethnic friends, an Asian American young adult with a stronger sense of ethnic identity will engage in culture-specific consumption behavior to a greater extent than one with a weaker sense of ethnic identity. Thus, H3(b) is stated as follows:

- H3:** (b) The relationship between an individual's ethnic identity and his/her culture-specific consumption behavior is strengthened by the situational influence.

METHODOLOGY

Measurements

To fine-tune the instrument, a focus-group interview ($n = 7$) and a pre-test of the questionnaire ($n = 15$) were conducted. Table 1 presents statements used for each scale and the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the constructs used in the analysis.

Ethnic Identity. To assess respondents' level of ethnic identity, the multigroup ethnic identity measure (MEIM) Scale (Phinney, 1992) was adapted. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) the degree to which they agreed with each of 10 statements used in this study.

Perceived Parental Acculturation and Cultural Identification. To assess each student's perception of his/her parents' level of acculturation and cultural identity, the two scales of Jun et al. (1993) were adapted. Respondents were asked a series of questions (7-point, Likert-type, wherein 1 = *never*, 7 = *always*) regarding each respondent's perception of his or her mother's and father's acculturation and cultural identification, respectively.

Ethnic-Friendship Orientation. To measure ethnic-friendship orientation, Ting-Toomey's four-item friendship communication questionnaire (FCQ) (1981) was adopted. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) the importance of the ethnic backgrounds of friends and close friends, their preferences for friends of a certain ethnicity, and the degree to which they believe the closeness of a friendship depends on ethnicity.

Culture-Specific Consumption Behavior. To gauge culture-specific consumption behavior, two measures were included: ethnic food and entertainment. In this study *food* means any meal, and *entertainment* means movies, music, and cultural performances. Respondents were first asked to indicate how often they ate food specific to their ethnic background and/or engage in entertainment activities specific to that background. They were then asked to indicate how often they engaged in those activities in two specific social settings (when with friends from the same ethnic group and when with Caucasian American friends) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

Table 1. Measurements.

Construct	Statements	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
Perceived parental cultural identification (ξ_1)			0.71
	While I was growing up, my father (mother):		
x_1	Participated in ethnic group activities.	0.82	
x_2	Talked to me about our cultural background.	0.74	
x_3	Wanted to be recognized as Asian or Asian American rather than an American in public.	0.69	
Perceived parental acculturation level (ξ_2)			0.88
	While I was growing up, my father (mother)		
x_4	Watched American TV programs.	0.89	
x_5	Spoke English at home.	0.87	
x_6	Read American newspapers.	0.83	
x_7	Socialized with his (her) Caucasian-American friends.	0.82	
Ethnic friendship orientation (ξ_3)			0.89
x_8	Most of my friends are from my own ethnic group.	0.89	
x_9	Most of my close friends are from my own ethnic group.	0.87	
x_{10}	I see more commonalties between me and friends from my own ethnic group rather than friends from other ethnic groups.	0.86	
x_{11}	I prefer to hang out with friends from my own ethnic group rather than friends from other ethnic groups on social occasions.	0.84	
Ethnic identify (η_1)			0.85
y_1	I spend time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group, such as its culture and history.	0.76	
y_2	I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.	0.75	
y_3	I am happy that I am a member of the ethnic group I belong to.	0.72	
y_4	I am not very clear about the role of my ethnicity in my life.	0.69	
y_5	I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my ethnic group.	0.69	
y_6	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.	0.69	
y_7	I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments.	0.66	
y_8	I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.	0.65	
Culture-Specific consumption behavior in general (η_2)			0.69
y_9	Eat ethnic food or Asian food (e.g., Chinese/Japanese/Thai food).	0.83	
y_{10}	Watch ethnic movies (with/without English subtitle) or movies that portrait Asian culture.	0.82	
y_{11}	Listen to my ethnic music or music that is closely related to Asian origin.	0.68	
y_{12}	Attend ethnic or Asian cultural performances (Japanese drummer, Charchy acrobats, etc.).	0.68	

Sampling and Data Collection

The sample population consisted of Asian American college students attending colleges in various geographic locations across the nation. College students were chosen because most are living away from home for the first time, and thus for the first time making numerous consumption decisions with regard to running a household, including decisions related to food, entertainment, technology, and household items. However, it quickly became apparent that obtaining accurate, current addresses for college students (who are generally transient) and for Asian American students in particular, would be difficult, especially on a national basis. Therefore, a combination of the two techniques (a mail survey and Web-based survey) was deemed an appropriate means for generating a desirable sample size without creating a sampling-source bias. From a mailing brokerage firm, a national sample was obtained, composed of approximately 1500 Asian American surnames (individuals supposedly attending college, of ages ranging from 18 to 24). An initial mailing of the survey questionnaire, followed by a second mailing of the same questionnaire 5 weeks later, resulted in 128 usable responses. The low return rate was disappointing; however, very likely the mailing list included many individuals outside of the targeted age range and/or many not enrolled in a college at the time of data collection. A Web-based survey was then sent to Asian American student organizations at various universities and colleges located in 20 states. A total of 208 people, representing 19 states, participated in this Web survey.

To eliminate sampling-source bias, a series of independent *t* tests, between the two sample sources, was conducted on the mean scores of the major constructs used in this study. No significant differences were found to exist between the two data sets: perceived parental acculturation level ($t = 0.08, p = 0.94$); perceived parental cultural identification ($t = 0.44; p = 0.66$); ethnic-friendship orientation ($t = 1.48, p = 0.14$); ethnic identity ($t = 1.27, p = 0.21$); and culture-specific consumption behavior ($t = 1.11, p = 0.27$). A series of chi-square analyses on socio-demographic variables also indicated that the two groups were similar in terms of gender, age, generational status, class standing, ethnic groups, parental income, and parental education. Therefore, a concern regarding a possible sampling-source bias was discarded. A total of 336 useable responses were included in the subsequent data analysis.

Respondents' Characteristics

Of 336 respondents, 64% were female, and 36% were male. Approximately 40% were lower-division students, whereas 60% were upper division. Most of the respondents (78%) were born in the United States as offspring of first or previous generations, whereas 28% were born outside of the United States but raised here for most of their lives. Chinese

Americans represented 54% of the respondents, followed by Korean-Americans (10%), Vietnamese Americans (8%), Filipino Americans (7%), Japanese Americans (6%), and others (15%, e.g., Indian-American, mixed, or other). With respect to socioeconomic characteristics, almost 68% of the respondents' fathers held a college degree or graduate degree, and approximately 56% of the fathers held a professional or managerial job. Mothers averaged a slightly lower education level, with almost 64% having received a college degree or graduate degree, and 46% holding a professional or managerial job. Last, the respondents showed an overall high family-income level, with nearly 56% of the respondents earning an annual household income greater than \$70,000.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Results

Exploratory factor analysis (i.e., principal-component factor analysis with varimax rotation) was initially performed on all five constructs. To examine H1 and H2, Lisrel 8.3 was employed for structural equation modeling. The measurement model was estimated first, followed by the structural equation model. The measurement model, consisting of three exogenous and two endogenous constructs, was assessed by means of a confirmatory factor analysis for each of the latent variables. Table 2 presents the measurement model results. The factor loadings for each latent variable were statistically significant, and the reliability and variance extracted for each latent variable suggested that the measurement model was reliable and valid.

Structural Equation Model Results

A correlation matrix was used to estimate the structural equation model and to demonstrate the relationships among its constructs (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995) (see Table 3). The initial structural model revealed a relatively good fit, yielding a GFI (goodness-of-fit index) of 0.90, an AGFI (adjusted goodness of fit index) of 0.86, a CFI (incremental fit index) of 0.93, and an RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) of 0.06. The chi-square of 462.03 (226 *d.f.*) was significant ($p < .05$).

Modification indices suggested that two direct paths be added: (a) from perceived parental acculturation level to culture-specific consumption behavior (γ_{21}) and (b) from friendship orientation to culture-specific consumption behavior (γ_{23}). Although these paths were not initially proposed in the conceptual model, it was determined that adding them was justified by the following rationale: According to Moschis and Churchill (1978), it is possible that socialization agents influence behavioral out-

Table 2. Measurement Model Results.

Construct Indicator	Standardized Factor Loading	SE	<i>t</i>	Construct Reliability ^b	Proportion of Extracted Variance ^c
ξ_1 (perceived parental cultural identification)				0.70	0.45
x ₁	0.72 ^a	—	—		
x ₂	0.81	0.095	8.59*		
x ₃	0.45	0.069	6.46*		
ξ_2 (perceived parental acculturation level)				0.88	0.64
x ₄	0.76 ^a	—	—		
x ₅	0.82	0.047	17.44*		
x ₆	0.87	0.046	18.87*		
x ₇	0.75	0.049	15.30*		
ξ_3 (ethnic friendship orientation)				0.88	0.65
x ₈	0.85 ^a	—	—		
x ₉	0.91	0.045	20.34*		
x ₁₀	0.74	0.049	15.11*		
x ₁₁	0.70	0.050	13.93*		
η_1 (ethnic identity)				0.84	0.58
y ₁	0.60 ^a	—	—		
y ₂	0.71	0.054	13.05*		
y ₃	0.64	0.055	11.58*		
y ₄	0.58	0.057	10.17*		
y ₅	0.57	0.056	10.08*		
y ₆	0.76	0.052	14.42*		
y ₇	0.61	0.056	10.89*		
y ₈	0.58	0.056	10.20*		
η_2 (culture-specific consumption behavior)				0.74	0.42
y ₉	0.51 ^a	—	—		
y ₁₀	0.79	0.062	12.76*		
y ₁₁	0.75	0.062	12.19*		
y ₁₂	0.50	0.060	6.65*		

Note: The constructs were tested for sufficient discriminant validity.

^aThe first λ path for each construct was set to 1; therefore, no SEs or *t* values are provided.

^b $(\sum Std. Loadings)^2 / [(\sum Std. Loadings)^2 + \sum \xi]$.

^c $[\sum Std. Loadings^2 / (\sum Std. Loadings^2 + \sum \xi_i)]$.

**p* < .001

comes *directly*, and not just through mental outcomes. Thus, it appears that the relationship between ethnic-friendship orientation and culture-specific consumption behavior is not fully captured by measuring ethnic identity, a discrepancy that indicates a direct link between friendship orientation and culture-specific consumption behavior (γ_{23}). The additional path γ_{21} suggests that, unlike perceived parental cultural identification, perceived parental acculturation level plays a distinct role in influencing ethnic identity and culture-specific consumption behavior. This seems especially true in light of the fact that γ_{11} proved insignificant (see the discussion section for more detail).

The modified model produced a decreased, though still significant,

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Indicators for Structural Model.

	x_1	x_2	x_3	x_4	x_5	x_6	x_7	x_8	x_9	x_{10}	x_{11}	y_1	y_2	y_3	y_4	y_5	y_6	y_7	y_8	y_9	y_{10}	y_{11}	y_{12}	
x_1	1.000																							
x_2	0.424	1.000																						
x_3	0.234	0.363	1.000																					
x_4	0.116	0.032	-0.101	1.000																				
x_5	0.070	-0.035	-0.235	0.621	1.000																			
x_6	0.114	-0.022	-0.169	0.674	0.701	1.000																		
x_7	0.026	0.028	-0.174	0.545	0.636	0.644	1.000																	
x_8	0.014	0.019	0.056	-0.057	-0.069	-0.186	-0.216	1.000																
x_9	0.083	0.084	0.054	-0.065	-0.123	-0.226	-0.223	0.296	1.000															
x_{10}	0.023	0.071	0.082	-0.116	-0.044	-0.205	-0.216	0.373	0.099	1.000														
x_{11}	0.040	-0.037	0.094	-0.031	-0.001	-0.094	-0.170	0.396	0.062	0.619	1.000													
y_1	0.252	0.250	0.208	0.085	0.069	-0.024	0.007	0.090	0.116	0.058	0.045	1.000												
y_2	0.126	0.352	0.299	-0.004	-0.086	-0.008	-0.024	0.469	0.400	0.307	0.395	0.391	1.000											
y_3	0.154	0.165	0.157	0.058	0.039	0.051	0.014	0.187	0.222	0.121	0.117	0.437	0.342	1.000										
y_4	0.089	0.203	0.182	-0.002	-0.118	-0.035	-0.085	0.131	0.155	0.090	0.066	0.230	0.143	0.561	1.000									
y_5	0.143	0.188	0.214	0.018	-0.023	-0.036	-0.068	0.380	0.140	0.126	0.076	0.579	0.250	0.429	0.341	1.000								
y_6	0.187	0.207	0.162	-0.012	-0.121	0.083	-0.121	0.352	0.083	0.092	0.000	0.360	0.448	0.526	0.452	0.468	1.000							
y_7	0.145	0.221	0.225	0.066	-0.024	0.026	-0.033	0.442	0.303	0.320	0.218	0.367	0.224	0.484	0.442	0.294	0.308	1.000						
y_8	0.117	0.130	0.126	0.049	-0.076	0.002	-0.009	0.469	0.151	0.209	0.119	0.269	0.185	0.374	0.134	0.217	0.242	0.540	1.000					
y_9	0.020	0.223	0.227	-0.135	-0.196	-0.190	-0.189	0.168	0.243	0.269	0.245	0.012	0.177	0.162	0.117	0.126	0.099	0.209	0.118	1.000				
y_{10}	0.028	0.172	0.121	-0.107	-0.186	-0.261	-0.178	0.276	0.064	0.257	0.258	0.156	0.149	0.226	0.111	0.094	0.086	0.247	0.157	0.200	1.000			
y_{11}	0.060	0.146	0.143	-0.182	-0.219	-0.243	-0.201	0.275	0.034	0.313	0.345	0.181	0.223	0.174	0.084	-0.002	0.124	0.232	0.106	0.970	0.296	1.000		
y_{12}	0.230	0.221	0.155	0.049	0.056	0.082	0.024	0.205	0.102	0.065	0.130	0.404	0.340	0.193	0.185	0.097	0.293	0.191	0.152	0.102	0.139	0.307	1.000	

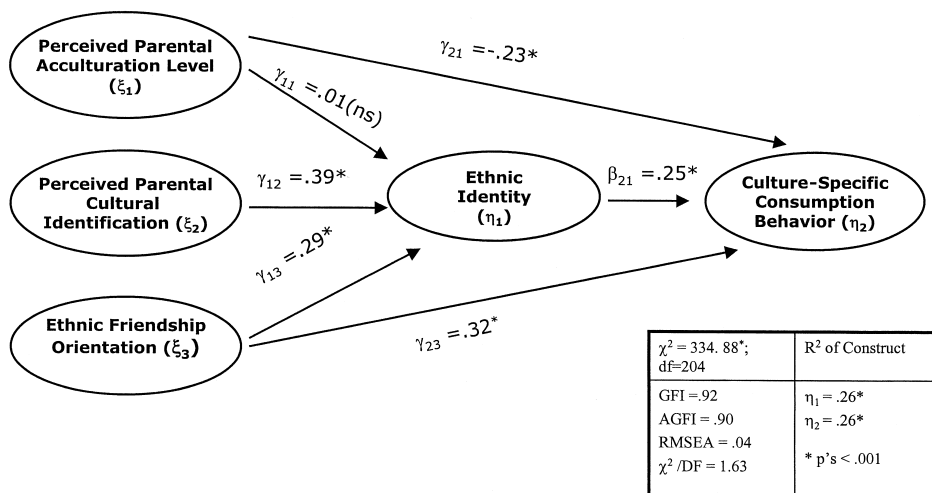


Figure 1. Structural model of socialization effects on ethnic identity and cultural consumption behavior.

chi-square of 334.88 (*d.f.* = 204, $p < .05$). However, the overall model fit was significantly improved as follows: a GFI of 0.92, an AGFI of 0.90, a CFI of 0.96, and an RMSEA of 0.04. Also, the ratio of chi-square (χ^2) to degrees of freedom (*d.f.*) at 1.64 indicated the good fit of the model. A review of the three types of overall measures of model fit (i.e., incremental and nonincremental indicators) revealed consistent evidence that the proposed model fit well. Figure 1 presents the model and structural path coefficients for each relationship.

TESTING HYPOTHESES 1 AND 2

H1(a) was not supported. The path coefficient from the perceived parental acculturation level to ethnic identity was not statistically significant ($\gamma_{11} = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$); however, H1(b) and H1(c) were both supported, as indicated by the significant path coefficient ($\gamma_{12} = 0.39$, $p < 0.05$) from perceived parental cultural identification to ethnic identity, and the significant path coefficient ($\gamma_{13} = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) from ethnic-friendship orientation to ethnic identity. Because it was deemed possible that a stronger ethnic identity may lead to a stronger ethnic-friendship orientation, modification indices were examined for this effect. However, no such relationship was evident. Consequently, the notion of a reverse effect was discarded. The positive-path coefficient from ethnic identity to culture-specific consumption behavior proved significant ($\beta_{21} = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, H2 was supported.

As shown in Figure 1, a negative path coefficient from perceived parental acculturation level to ethnic identity ($\gamma_{21} = -0.23$, $p < .05$) and

a positive path from friendship orientation to culture-specific consumption behavior ($\gamma_{23} = 0.32, p < .05$) were suggested. Ethnic-friendship orientation exerted the strongest total influence on culture-specific consumption behavior ($\gamma_{13} * \beta_{21} + \gamma_{23} = 0.39$). Perceived parental cultural identification also exerted the strongest total indirect influence ($\gamma_{12} * \beta_{21} = 0.10$) on culture-specific consumption behavior.

Testing Hypothesis 3

To test H3(a) and H3(b), the MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance), repeated-measure technique was employed. Subjects were divided into two groups based on their scores on the ethnic identity scale. Respondents whose ethnic identity was higher than the mean score ($M = 5.38$) were grouped into a high-ethnic-identity group ($n = 189$), whereas those scoring lower than the mean score were grouped into a low ethnic identity group ($n = 149$). The results suggest that the within-subjects factor (i.e., a situation) had a significant main effect on culture-specific consumption behavior ($F = 237.49, p < .001$). This indicates that, regardless of the strength of their ethnic identity, Asian American young adults engaged in culture-specific consumption to a greater degree when they were with friends of the same ethnicity than when they were with Caucasian American friends. Therefore, H3(a) was supported. H3(b) examined the interaction effect of ethnic identity and situation on Asian American young adults' culture-specific consumption behavior. As predicted, the interaction effect was found to be significant ($F = 15.60, p < .001$) (see Figure 2). Consequently, H3(b) was accepted, with the conclusion that the situation factor produced a stronger effect on culture-specific consumption among those with a greater sense of ethnicity than among those with a lesser sense of ethnicity.

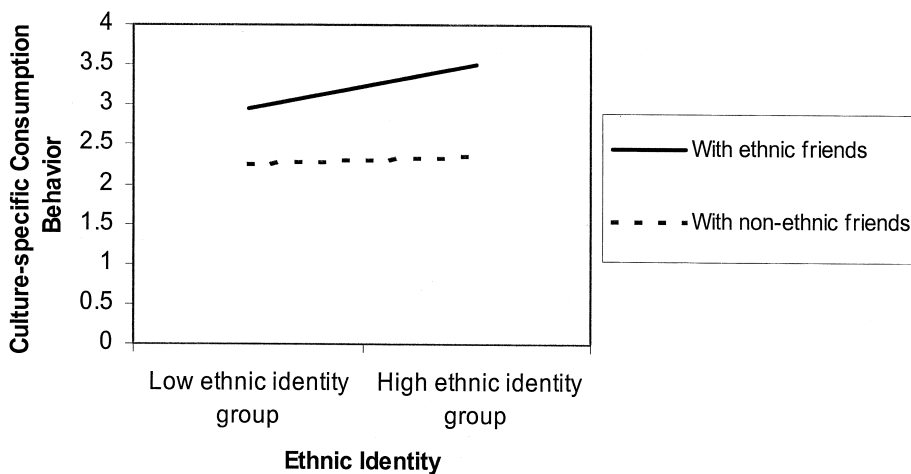


Figure 2. Interaction effects of a situational factor.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although social science and human development researchers have studied the impact that parental influence has on adolescents' ethnic-identity development and other relevant topics, very few studies have focused on young adults' ethnic identity and its impact on consumption behaviors. Furthermore, despite the known effect of acculturation on immigrants' values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns (Khairullah, Tucker, & Tankersley, 1996; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983), its impact on their children's socialization process has not been investigated extensively. Therefore, in this study, socialization theories and situational factors were integrated into a conceptual model to examine ethnic identity and its impact on the consumption behavior of a particular consumer segment (Asian American young adults) from a developmental perspective. Findings revealed that perceived parental cultural identification and young adults' ethnic-friendship orientation exert a significant influence on an Asian American young adult's sense of ethnic identity. This sense of ethnic identity in turn was shown to influence the young adult's consumption choices with regard to ethnic food and entertainment in general. In addition, the findings indicated that perceived parental acculturation level and ethnic-friendship orientation directly influence a young adult's culture-specific consumption behavior. These results confirmed the Moschis and Churchill (1978) consumer socialization model and its predictive ability in studying a particular segment of an ethnic group. Therefore, this study's findings make a contribution to both theoretical and empirical research in the realms of consumer ethnicity, ethnic socialization, and consumption situations. This study also provides information that should prove useful to marketers and practitioners wanting to attract this segment, especially marketers of ethnic food and entertainment. Understanding the role that ethnicity plays in the lives of minority young adults and how it affects their consumption behavior can only aid them in their efforts. More specific discussion follows.

Perceived Parental Influence on Ethnic Identity and Consumption Behavior

This study found a positive relationship between perceived parental cultural identification and a young adult's sense of ethnic identity. This indicates that Asian American young adults who perceived that their parents emphasized their original culture (not only in their own activities but also in socializing their children) indeed demonstrated a stronger sense of ethnic identity during their young adulthood, while they were living away from home.

This finding supports previous research focusing on the anticipatory

parental effects on a child's sense of ethnic identity. More specifically, the finding supported Phinney (1990), who indicated that the parents' desire to culturally orient their children, and the extent to which parents teach their children about their ethnic background, have a strong impact on the children's ethnic-identity development. Although the past literature on identity suggests that peer influence may increase and parental influence decrease during adolescence (Brown & Huang, 1995; Clausen, 1968), this study revealed that anticipatory parental influence still plays an important role in ethnic socialization process—a role no less important than peer influence. It would seem, then, that parents who more fully understand the important role they play in their children's development of a strong ethnic identity, and who demonstrate a strong identification with their original culture, can more effectively socialize their children within their cultural context. Furthermore, a clear association (one not seriously considered in previous studies) between perceived parental cultural identification and a young adult's sense of ethnic identity has been established.

A negative relationship initially predicted, between parental-acculturation level and young adults' sense of ethnic identity, proved insignificant. Interestingly, however, parental acculturation apparently has a direct, negative effect on culture-specific consumption. Therefore, the degree to which the parents are assimilated into American mainstream culture may not be directly associated with the mental outcome (i.e., the strength of an Asian American young adult's ethnic identity) but may instead be associated directly with the behavioral outcome (i.e., culture-specific consumption). A possible explanation for this finding is that acculturation level has been regarded as an attribute directly related to behavioral change rather than to attitudes and beliefs (Jun et al., 1993). In fact, Maldonado and Tansuhaj (2002) consider acculturation level to be a behavioral dimension of the acculturation process. It is plausible that the extent to which parents' behaviors have conformed to a host culture has an impact on their children's ethnic-related behavioral pattern, but not on their children's ethnic attitudes. Thus, in this particular model, parents' acculturation level may not be directly related to their children's mental outcome but directly related to their behavioral outcome. It is also plausible that highly acculturated Asian American parents may demonstrate characteristics similar to non-European Americans, who were found not to form a strong identity as compared to other ethnic groups (Rotheram-Borus, 1989). Therefore, one interesting result of this study might be the indication that the levels of parental cultural identification and acculturation may play a distinctive role in the socialization and developmental processes of the Asian American young adult. In other words, parental cultural identification influences the Asian American young adult's cognitive or mental outcomes, which then influences behavioral outcomes indirectly through ethnic identity. On

the other hand, parental acculturation apparently influences the Asian American young adult's behavioral outcomes directly and negatively, without influencing his/her mental outcomes.

Peer Influence on Ethnic Identity and Consumption Behavior

The results of this study indicate that a young adult's ethnic-friendship orientation is positively related to his or her sense of ethnic identity. More specifically, the more that an Asian American young adult associates with friends from his or her own ethnic group, the more likely he or she is to possess a strong ethnic identity. This finding supports previous studies asserting that a young adult's friendship orientation is an important component of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1981). It is interesting to note that no reverse effects—the influence of ethnic identity on ethnic-friendship orientation—were detected, a finding that supports Ting-Toomey (1981).

The study also demonstrated that ethnic-friendship orientation has a positive, direct effect on the Asian American young adult's culture-specific consumption behavior. Those Asian American young adults, who apparently associate more with their ethnic friends, prove more likely to consume ethnic food, listen to ethnic music, and to attend ethnic movies and performances frequently. This finding may result from the fact that ethnic food and entertainment activities are normally engaged in with friends rather than alone. Therefore, it is logical that ethnic-friendship orientation has a relatively stronger influence on the young adult's culture-specific consumption behavior than do other constructs. In sum, a close relationship with ethnic friends was found to be important to Asian American young adults during the process of developing a strong ethnic identity and when engaging in ethnic food and entertainment consumption behavior.

Ethnic Identity, Consumption Behavior, and Situational Influences

The results of this study indicate that the effect of ethnic identity on an Asian American young adult's ethnic food and entertainment consumption behavior is significant. That is, Asian American young adults who have a stronger sense of ethnic identity are more likely to consume ethnic food and attend ethnic entertainment activities. Numerous other studies support this finding (Penaloza, 1994; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983), which also sheds light on relevant minority-adolescent research and Asian American studies in particular. Furthermore, it highlights the process by which culture-specific consumption behavior develops during the transitional period of young adulthood. Although the structural-equation modeling results did not suggest that a culture-specific consumption behavior has any reverse

effect on ethnic identity, it is quite possible that this might be the case over a long period of time. In other words, frequent consumption of culture-specific products and services may indeed contribute to the development of a stronger ethnic identity. If this could be proven, researchers could better articulate the role of consumption in the youth and adult development process.

This study also found that the extent to which Asian American young adults engage in culture-specific consumption behavior changes significantly when the young adult is in the company of ethnic friends versus Caucasian American friends. Regardless of their strength of ethnic identity, Asian American college students tended to consume more culture-specific products when they were with their ethnic friends than when they were with American-mainstream friends. Past research agrees that situational influences affect ethnic food consumption behavior; the discussion can now be extended to include entertainment consumption behavior.

Also, the interaction effect of ethnic identity and situational factors on culture-specific consumption behavior indicates that the situational factors more strongly influence Asian American young adults with a stronger sense of ethnic identity. Although no existing studies have fully investigated the interaction effect of situational factors and ethnic identity on ethnic food and entertainment consumption behavior, part of this finding is consistent with the Stayman and Deshpande (1989) conclusion that social surroundings serve as a moderator in the ethnicity–food behavior relationship.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides some promising insights, certain limitations in the design of the research should be recognized in order to guide future exploration of this subject. For instance, two types of data collection were used: a mail survey and a Web survey. The Web survey was much more efficient and effective for collecting data from Asian American college students, and therefore may well be more viable than the traditional mail survey as means of targeting college students. Also, the respondent's sense of parental acculturation and his or her degree of cultural identification were assessed by the respondent rather than by his or her parents (although it was believed that college students should be able to accurately assess their parents' level of acculturation and cultural identification). Nevertheless, future studies should employ a dyadic approach. Similarly, future research may propose a more direct measure of peer influence on ethnic identity and culture-specific consumption behavior.

Although this study focused on determining the degree to which young adults are influenced by their parents, future studies should investigate the degree of influence Asian American young adults exert on

their parents' acculturation process and consumption attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, other types of socialization agents, such as the media, the individual's school, and the Internet, might have different effects on the Asian American young adult's sense of ethnic identity, as well as on his or her culture-specific consumption behaviors.

Finally, it should be noted that this study measured its subjects' sense of ethnic identity at a particular point in time. The findings should thus be used as a reference point for longitudinal studies that assume a developmental perspective to determine whether the examined relationships remain static or change as ethnic young adults age, and whether those relationships continue to affect their culture-specific consumption decisions. More accurate conclusions concerning the reciprocal relationships existing between friendship orientation and ethnic-identification development might also be gleaned from a longitudinal study.

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