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Challenging Cultural Essentialism: Gender, Power, and Family Politics Among Mothers, Sons, and Daughters-in-law Across Cultures

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by

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"Two roads diverge in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference"
~ Robert Frost

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Challenging Cultural Essentialism: Gender, Power, and Family Politics Among Mothers, Sons, and Daughters-in-law Across Cultures

by

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Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology
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Dr. Karen Pyke, Chairperson

Using qualitative in-depth interviews with daughters-in-law, my dissertation engages a feminist analysis of gender and power dynamics in Taiwanese, Chinese American, and Mexican American families. A primary theoretical objective is to "research against cultural essentialism" as reflected in a tendency to view racial/ethnic minority families as homogenous and without internal variation, thus reducing racial/ethnic family dynamics to ethnic values and ideals. This study challenges cultural essentialist assumptions that predominate in the family literature by identifying similarities among three groups, as well as variations within each group. Further, I consider how socio-structural factors account for between-group similarities and within-group variations.

Chapter 1 interrogates how cultural values of filial piety inform Chinese American daughters-in-law's understanding of their relationship and power dynamics with immigrant Chinese American mothers-in-law. Ideals of filial respect accord limited authority to mothers-in-law who engage other mechanisms of power, such as their domestic expertise. Many respondents covertly resist by feigning compliance in the

presence of their mother-in-law but disobeying in her absence. These findings suggest scholars should not assume Asian cultural ideals dictate actual family practices, or that ritualistic displays of deference indicate powerlessness.

In chapter 2, I explore the stereotypes and ideologies daughters-in-law utilize in understanding and giving meaning to their relationships with their mother-in-law. Many women draw on the ideology of "intensive mothering" and "feminization of love" to describe their ideal of a good mother-in-law and utilize these ideologies to evaluate their mother-in-law. They frequently use their relationship with their mother as a "contrast structure" to explain that with their mother-in-law. I explore the implications of this comparison and how it can contribute to disappointments in the relationships of daughters- and mothers-in-law. I also explore how drawing on stereotypes and unrealistic expectation of the mother-in-law can exacerbate negative family relationships.

Chapter 3 examines family power dynamics from the perspectives of Chinese American and Mexican American daughters-in-law. Findings indicate that childrearing is the most conflictual area for women and their mothers-in-law. When mothers-in-law offer unsolicited advice, some women interpret that as criticism. Many women want to change their mother-in-law's childcare methods; however, many feel they do not have the power to make such demands, especially those who rely on their mother-in-law for childcare. Spousal support is an important resource for women as some rely on their husband's authority to negotiate with their mother-in-law. Finally, despite possible conflicts, some women identify their mother-in-law as a source of support when she is perceived as willing to understand and help them work through marital problems.

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Challenging Cultural Essentialism: Gender, Power, and Family Politics Among Mothers, Sons, and Daughters-in-law Across Cultures

A cultural approach dominates scholarship on racial/ethnic families, viewing them as homogenous and without internal variation. This contributes to a tendency to conflate cultural ideals (e.g., familism, gender and generational hierarchy such as noted in Confucianism) with actual practices and lived experiences, treating culture as static and behavior as over-determined by cultural beliefs. Further, most qualitative research on racial/ethnic minority families focuses on a single ethnic group or two ethnic groups within a racial category. The absence of cross-racial comparisons further contributes to essentialist and reductionist tendencies in family scholarship by suggesting certain issues and patterns are unique to one racial/ethnic group. The result is a monolithic image of specific racial/ethnic families (Harris, 1997), contributing to stereotypes that distort the reality of family life among racial/ethnic minorities and the shared experiences among families of different racial groups (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Turner, 1993; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Narayan, 1998, 2000). As Abu-Lughod (1991) has argued, there is a need to research against cultural essentialism.

This dissertation engages a feminist analysis of gender dynamics in Taiwanese, Chinese American, and Mexican American families.[1] My overarching theoretical objective is to "research against cultural reductionism and cultural essentialism" in family

[1] I use the term Chinese Americans to refer broadly to second-generation individuals whose families migrated to the U.S. from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan (see also Lan, 2002). These individuals may self-identify as either Chinese Americans or Taiwanese Americans.

scholarship (Abu-Lughod, 1991), as discussed above. By comparing Taiwanese, Chinese American, and Mexican American families, my purpose is to challenge the presumption that cultural ideals dictate family practices. The goal of this comparative study is not simply to identify differences among these groups, but to discover similarities with attention to within-group variations. I also explore how socio-structural factors (e.g., geographic proximity, dependency on mother-in-law for childcare, mother-in-law's financial dependency) account for within-group variations and similarities and differences across groups. This study design avoids the tendency in family scholarship to juxtapose racial/ethnic minority families with White middle-class families, which are treated as the norm and the standard bearer against which all other racial/ethnic groups are measured.

I choose to study Taiwanese, Chinese American, and Mexican American families for several reasons. First, they share important commonalities, such as collectivistic family orientation, extended kinship structure, and informal support networks (Baca Zinn, 1994; Glenn with Yap, 1993). All three groups are characterized by the ideal of *familism*, which suggests that family roles are highly valued and emphasizes family members' responsibilities and obligations to one another.

In addition, both Chinese American and Mexican American groups include many immigrant members and are racial/ethnic minorities in the U. S., a society where racial stratification shapes family resources and structures in ways that differentiate them from mainstream white families (see for reviews, Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Burton et al., 2010; Glick, 2010; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Landale & Oropesa, 2007;). Yet, these groups have

distinct immigration histories, socioeconomic and structural conditions, and patterns of family formation and experiences in the United States (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000; Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Turner, 1993; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Further, although racial/ethnic minority families tend to show stronger norms of familism (Fuligni et al., 1999), characteristics of familism (or collectivism) vary tremendously among Asian Americans and Latino Americans.

I examine power dynamics, gender and generational solidarity in marital and in-law relations, mothering ideology, and constructed meanings of the mother-in-law role. Specifically, my comparative study analyzes: 1) whether and how mothers- and daughters-in-law form gender solidarity in resisting and coping with male patriarchal authority; 2) if and how husbands and wives form cross-gender alliances (e.g., marital solidarity) in resisting intergenerational power; 3) the potential roles of the son/husband as an instigator or mediator of the relationship between his wife and mother; 4) how stereotypes and popular beliefs inform respondents' subjective understanding and evaluation of the role of mother-in-law. I present three standalone chapters on these topics as a part of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1:

Power, Resistance and Emotional Economies in Women's Relationships with Mothers-in-law in Chinese Immigrant Families[2]

Introduction

Family scholarship tends to conflate Confucian cultural ideals such as familism, gender and generational hierarchies, reverence for tradition, and filial piety with actual Asian American family practices. The presumption is that to know Asian family cultural ideals is to know actual Asian family practices. As Ishii-Kuntz (2000: 276) notes, this cultural approach treats Asian culture as static and monolithic, and Asian American families as all alike due to a shared cultural heritage. This approach ignores ethnic variations. For example, Chinese Confucianism did not influence the cultural systems of all Asian ethnic groups, like Filipinos and Vietnamese. Remarkably, scholars studying African American and Latino families engage a critical approach that emphasizes social structure and diversity but when studying Asian Americans, they focus on family stability, cohesiveness, and harmony and downplay diversity, inequality, and conflict (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000). Such cultural essentialism contributes to stereotypes that distort the reality of life in Asian American families (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Narayan, 1998).

One site where the presumption of harmony in Asian families is interrupted is the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship, which scholars depict as inherently conflictual. Yet they attribute the contentiousness of this in-law dyad to Confucian values

[2] The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in *Journal of Family Issues, 31(3),* 2010 by SAGE Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. © Kristy Shih and Karen Pyke.

of filial piety and respect and gender hierarchies that obligate the daughter-in-law to serve and defer to her mother-in-law and that place both women in subordinated positions, pitting them against one another as they vie for more individual power. Thus here again scholars depict Asian family life as over-determined by cultural values (Gallin, 1994; Kung, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Stacey, 1983).

In response to a cultural reductionist approach that assumes stability and harmony in Asian American families, Ishii-Kuntz (2000: 277) suggests family scholars engage a critical perspective that regards individual family members as actively shaping family life into a diversity of forms rather than passively enacting cultural ideals. Moreover, she urges scholars to consider the conflicting interests of family members and their different structural locations, historical and social situations, and day-to-day interactions which together inform the construction of gender and family life. We draw on these suggestions in framing our study of power and gender dynamics in Chinese American mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships.

We chose to study Chinese American families rather than another Asian ethnic group because it is Chinese Confucianism that is conflated with Asian values and applied to Asian American families in general, even though many Asian ethnic groups are not associated with Confucianism. We focus our analysis on daughters-in-law's accounts of relations with their mother-in-law as this is a rich site for exploring the limits of Confucianism on family practices given women's defined roles as kin keepers and the bearers, transmitters, and enforcers of cultural traditions from one generation to the next (Lan, 2002; Lim, 1997). Thus interaction between the two women will be more intense

and role-bound than that of a husband and his wife's parents or a wife and her father-in-law. This study also permits an exploration of generational gaps in cultural views. Further, as feminist scholars, we consider the possibility of the two women uniting to resist the power and privilege commonly accorded male family members. Such defiance would suggest limits to the cultural models informing research on Asian American families and point to potential structural change in women's position.

While we are critical of approaches that simply reduce family practices to cultural ideals, we nonetheless view cultural meanings as a resource and, at times, an obstacle, through and around which individuals construct, challenge, and resist family structures and arrangements. Hence it is vital not to completely disregard the role of cultural meanings and practices, such as filial piety, in shaping these relationships. We present a brief overview of traditional Chinese family practices in order to consider how cultural meanings and expectations might be variously deployed and resisted in daughters-in-law's accounts of their relations with mothers-in-law. We then describe how we conceptualize power, emphasizing a variety of dimensions that include covert forms of power and emotional economies of entitlement, obligation, and gratitude.

Background

The philosophy of Chinese Confucianism that gave shape to traditional East Asian family ideals emphasizes strong family role prescriptions, hierarchies of males over females and elders over the young, and children's devotion to parents including the provision of filial care (Gallin, 1994; Yang, 1959). In traditional Chinese society, females are expected to live with and serve their husband's family, a custom that accords more

value to sons than daughters who are commonly referred to as "spilled water," (Lan, 2002, 2003; Thornton & Lin, 1994). According to popular literature and early research on families in China and Taiwan (Wolf, 1972), the mother-in-law is responsible for training the daughter-in-law for her role, often using harsh discipline and treatment to emphasize the younger woman's subordination. In this sense, the mother-in-law is "patriarchy's female deputy in the Chinese family" (Stacey, 1983: 54). Feminist scholars suggest that by reinforcing male privilege through the training of their daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law strike a "patriarchal bargain" as a strategy for maximizing their interests and power within the existing social and structural constraints (Kandiyoti, 1988; Lan, 2003). It is only with the addition of a daughter-in-law that the older woman, formerly a daughter-in-law herself, acquires greater status. However, as her authority is mediated through her relationships with men in the family, it is limited (Wolf, 1972). Because the quality of their later years depends on the strength of mother-son bonds, mothers often raise sons to regard the purpose of marriage as continuing the family line rather than love or personal satisfaction which could undermine their son's filial devotion and willingness to side with his mother should conflict arise with her daughter-in-law (Wolf, 1972). As Kandiyoti notes (1988, p. 279):

> Older women have vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance. Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in-law's control.

More recent research challenges the assumption that Asian cultural norms dictate hierarchal conflict-ridden relations between mothers- and daughters-in-law and finds situational conditions to be important (Gallin, 1994). Mothers-in-law who provide more resources to the younger couple tend to enjoy more power, respect, filial care, and freedom than counterparts with fewer resources. On the other hand, mothers-in-law who financially depend on the younger couple occupy a lower status, feel powerless vis-à-vis their daughter-in-law, defer to the needs of their adult children, and are reluctant to challenge family arrangements (Lan, 2002; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002). When daughters-in-law depend on their mother-in-law for child care, especially so they can work outside the home, they experience a decline in their power. Generation gaps contributing to differences in opinions about domestic tasks, parenting, and financial management can generate conflicts (Kung, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Lan, 2006). In the case of immigrant families, children tend to acculturate faster than immigrant parents, which can fuel even greater generation gaps and disagreements between daughters- and mothers-in-law (Kibria, 1993; Pyke, 2000).

Research largely ignores the son's potential role as a mediator or instigator of conflicts between his mother and wife. There is some evidence that when a daughter-in-law lacks her husband's support, she has few resources with which to bargain for better treatment and is more likely to obey her mother-in-law and care for her as she ages (Gallin, 1994). In one study, when sons act as mediators, mothers- and daughters-in-law have better relationships; but when sons avoid or ignore their disagreements or take sides, their conflicts intensify (Kung, 1999a).

The scant scholarship on the mother- and daughter-in-law dyad in immigrant Asian American families provides a varied picture. Some scholars refer to Asian immigrant mothers-in-law as "cultural gatekeepers" who enforce cultural traditions like patriarchal authority and filial piety (Lan, 2002; Lim, 1997). In upholding ethnic practices, mothers-in-law often push traditional gender arrangements and discourage married sons from doing housework, risking the resentment of daughters-in-law. Yet other mothers-in-law assist in implementing more gender egalitarian arrangements in their son's marriage by providing child care and household services while their daughter-in-law works outside the home (Min, 1998; Tam & Detzner, 1998). This suggests mothers-in-law can join daughters-in-law in resisting male privilege and domination.

The scholarship suggests that any examination of mother- and daughter-in-law relations must consider the varied cultural understandings individuals bring to family life as well as the situational factors that shape their interactions. With this in mind, we focus our analysis on the subjective accounts of daughters-in-law so as to uncover the underlying assumptions, cultural understandings, and emotions they draw on in understanding and giving meaning to their relationship and power dynamics with their mother-in-law. We consider how situational factors shape their accounts, such as dependency on their mother-in-law for child care, husband's mediation, residential proximity to their mother-in-law, and gender solidarity with their mother-in-law. In so doing, we explore the following questions: How do respondents experience power dynamics in their relationships with their mothers-in-law? How much importance do they give to cultural meanings in their description of those power dynamics? For example, do

they describe the traditional role accorded mothers-in-law draw as enhancing the older woman's power? If so, do they engage any resistance strategies and, if so, are they effective? How do situational factors such as dependency on child care, geographic proximity, and husband's willingness to mediate affect the power and resistance of daughters-in-law in their relations with mothers-in-law? Do daughters-in-law describe any incidences of gender solidarity with her mother-in-law in resisting male domination or enhancing the freedom of women in the family?

Studying Hidden Power and Emotional Economies

In studying power, we consider hidden as well as overt dynamics (Komter, 1989; Lukes, 1974; Pyke, 1994, 1996, 1999). Overt power measures of decision-making and conflict outcomes assume power is exercised in a direct, observable manner (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). This approach, which is associated with resource theory and treats power as a zero-sum game, has come under attack in recent decades for oversimplifying power dynamics and ignoring how gender meanings and status inequalities structure family roles, and shape latent and invisible power processes that prevent issues and conflicts from erupting to the surface (Komter, 1989; Pyke 1994). For example, the less powerful individual might anticipate the needs of a more powerful partner, or accept an undesirable situation out of a sense of futility or fear of negative repercussions. Individuals are often unaware of covert power but conscious of decision-making outcomes and who wins overt conflicts. Thus measures of power *outcomes* rather than processes are inadequate for assessing hidden power. Instead it is necessary to assess whether respondents feel they can raise issues without fear of dire consequences or desire changes that they do not

attempt to implement due to a sense of helplessness. To do this, we asked daughters-in-law to describe any changes they desired in their mother-in-law or in their relationship with her, whether they ever tried to implement such desired changes and if so, with what results, and if not, why not. We also asked them if they were aware of any changes their mother-in-law desired and if so, how they knew this and whether their mother-in-law ever pushed for change and if so, with what result. These questions helped us to identify subtle indicators of powerlessness as well as strategies of resistance. We also asked questions about disagreements and conflicts to get at overt power dynamics.

To further explore hidden power dynamics, we draw on the concept of an emotional economy of entitlement, obligation, and gratitude used in the study of marital relations (Hochschild, 1989; Pyke, 1994; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996) and intergenerational relationships (Pyke, 1999). Cultural ideologies concerning what certain family members owe to or are owed by other members inform emotional economies. Take, for instance, norms of filial piety that shape emotional interplays of entitlement and obligation and, in the process, shape power dynamics. Norms of filial piety can lead a mother-in-law to feel entitled to deference and service from her daughter-in-law, who might feel obligated to provide such care, thus reducing the power of the daughter-in-law. However, in families that do not subscribe to norms of filial piety, the mother-in-law will not feel entitled to such services and the daughter-in-law will not feel obligated to provide them. In this scenario, if the daughter-in-law provides care giving services to her mother-in-law, those services are likely to be regarded as a gift for which the mother-in-law is expected to be grateful, and obligated to reciprocate in some way. Such reciprocation creates balance in

the relationship, at least symbolically, and may be necessary to ensure the daughter-in-law's on-going provision of services. In this interplay, the mother-in-law might be expected to show her gratitude through deference to her daughter-in-law (Pyke, 1999). Of course, not all mothers- and daughters-in-law will be in agreement about filial piety, what is a gift, what is an obligation, what is obligatory, what they owe, and what they are owed in their relationship. When they disagree, conflict, resentment, and resistance can result.

Drawing on this concept, we analyze respondents' descriptions of feelings of entitlement, obligation, gratitude, and resentment, and what these emotions inform us about power dynamics. For instance, when respondents describe feeling obliged or coerced in providing services or attention to in-laws or resent doing so, we interpret that as an indicator of less power in that situation. When respondents are grateful for their mother-in-law's service, like child care, they may feel indebted to her and obligated to obey (or reluctant to overtly challenge) her directives.

Method

Sample

We located 15 second-generation Chinese American daughters-in-law through ethnic organizations, churches, online list-serves, personal acquaintances, and snowball sampling techniques. All respondents are married to a Chinese-American man whose mother is, like her own mother, a first-generation immigrant from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan. Respondents range in age from 26 to 37 (average is 31). All reside in California except one who lives in New York. One mother-in-law lives with her daughter-in-law; the mothers-in-law of half of the remaining sample live within 25 miles and the other half

live in another state. Respondents have been married between 1-12 years; six respondents have been married fewer than four years and have no children, and nine respondents have been married for four or more years, seven of whom have young children under the age of 8. All four mothers-in-law who are grandmothers and live nearby provide childcare for their daughter-in-law, and one who lives out of state provides child care during extended visits. The remaining three mothers-in-law with grandchildren do not provide child care and live out of state.

Ten daughters-in-law and eight mothers-in-law work for pay. All respondents and mothers-in-law are middle class and well-educated. All the daughters-in-law have a college degree, including eight who have advanced degrees. Similarly, a majority (9) of mothers-in-law attended college though did not graduate; three attended graduate school; and three have a high school diploma. According to 2004 American Community Survey, 50 percent of Chinese Americans have at least a bachelor's degree compared to 27 percent of the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Although our sample is skewed toward the upper half of the Chinese American population, the purpose of this study is not to generalize findings to that population. The class bias suggests there is less intergenerational dependency on material resources in our sample, and thus less likelihood of power differentials resulting from material imbalances than one might find in the larger population. Given this control for social class and education, we can consider other factors in explaining variations in our findings and thus do not engage an analysis of relative resources.

Mothers-in-law range in age from 51 to 74 years (average is 61 years). As none of them suffer health problems, our sample excludes those in need of assistance with daily living. One mother-in-law is divorced and the rest are married. All the mothers-in-law have lived in the U.S. for at least 20 years (average is 32 years). As they have had time to adapt to the mainstream society, we assume they are familiar with the prevailing practices of the dominant culture, including the ethic of individualism that distinguishes many mainstream family practices from the familism associated with non-Western cultures (Pyke, 2000).

Data Collection and Analytic Strategy

The first author collected intensive interview data in English from each respondent, using a six-page interview guide with open-ended questions and follow-up probes. She asked each respondent to describe their relationship with their mother-in-law and the kinds of interactions they normally have along with some specific examples. She also asked about their general feelings toward their mother-in-law, conflicts, any shared interests or leisure activities, traits they like and dislike about her, domestic tasks, including childcare, they do together or provide for one or the other, expectations they each have for their relationship, specific examples of when their mother-in-law has tried to influence their home life or marriage, and the kinds of things they say about their mother-in-law to others. She also asked questions designed to get at various dimensions of power which we described previously. Interviews lasted one to three hours, and were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

The data analysis involves reading the interviews multiple times, sorting data into broad topical categories that reflect the general question areas, and writing detailed summaries for each respondent from which we identify additional coding categories and patterns. Using a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965), we compare respondents across several categories, including presence of children, child care assistance, husband as mediator, and so on, so as to identify relevant themes in understanding the complexity of their relationships. As we are interested in the social construction of experience, we focus our analyses on the emotional tenor, situational factors, and cultural meanings that shape respondents' understanding of their relationship with their mothers-in-law. We consider their strategies in resisting the authority and power of mothers-in-law, whether they regard husbands as helpful in mediating relations with mothers-in-law, and if they view mothers-in-law as helpful in mediating other family relationships. In addition, we explore what the daughters-in-law's descriptions of feelings of entitlement, gratitude, and obligation reveal about their power dynamics. Because we examine the subjective accounts of daughters-in-law, we do not regard our data as providing an objective view of reality, including power dynamics. As past research informs us (see Bernard, 1972), even when we collect data on power from both partners in a relationship, we typically get two different, conflicting perspectives, highlighting the impossibility of capturing an "objective" rendering of power dynamics in relationships. Thus we stress that our analysis emphasizes the understandings and meanings that our respondents give to their relationships.

Findings

We first present our analysis of daughters-in-law's accounts of power processes in their relationships with mother-in-law, including their descriptions of complying as well as resisting the authority of the older woman. Respondents refer to domestic tasks and parenting methods as the two areas where they have the most interaction and conflict with their mothers-in-law. We thus begin our analysis with these domains. We then examine women's descriptions of their husbands' role as a mediator during family conflict, take into consideration structural factors such as dependency on mother-in-law for childcare, length of marriage, and geographic proximity to mother-in-law. Finally, drawing on Goffman's notion of front and back stage, we find daughters-in-law engage in a form of covert resistance by giving symbolic deference to their mother-in-law in her presence, while not carrying out her advice when she is out of sight.

Domestic Expertise of Mothers-in-law as a Source of Power

Most respondents describe their mothers-in-law as displaying some degree of entitlement to the authority and deference accorded elders in traditional Chinese culture. As the accounts are filtered through the lens of respondents, they are shaped by the younger woman's expectations that ethnic norms of filial respect are responsible for the intergenerational dynamics when, in fact, factors beside cultural norms can be at play. Indeed, most respondents describe their mother-in-law as having to work at acquiring and maintaining authority which she does through assuming the role of domestic expert, which often requires her to share her domestic skills, such as cooking, and in so doing, provides a service to the younger couple. Nonetheless, that some daughters-in-law

attribute their mother-in-law's power to cultural norms of filial respect reflects the power of this cultural ideology in shaping their understanding of intergenerational relations and their reluctance to defy cultural expectations by overtly challenging their mother-in-law's authority.

Only a few respondents describe a mother-in-law who tacitly assumes a wide-reaching authoritative stance that includes the expectation she should be informed about, and able to direct, the decisions of her son and daughter-in-law. Sarah provides the most extreme example. As she describes, when she and her husband were considering moving from New York to California, her mother-in-law purchased a home for them in California without their input or permission, and in defiance of Sarah's previous instructions not to do so. Sarah explains:

> My husband and I were discussing the possibility of coming to California, because my parents were here… [My mother-in-law] came out, saw this area, and saw this house, and said, "I'm going to put a deposit down [on the house] for you guys…" They signed the paperwork saying that we would commit to buying this house without really consulting us… That was a huge decision that involved [many issues], like what kind of work my husband is going to do, what kind of work do I have to do in case I need to go back to work in order to afford a house. [It was about] much more than just the house!"

Similarly Mia blames her mother-in-law's intrusiveness for their rocky relationship, which began years earlier when the older woman took control of Mia's

wedding plans. Mia remembers, "She wanted to have a say in every little detail of the wedding, from where and when the wedding took place, to how many tables, to guests to invite, to dinner menu… everything!" Although Mia did not want the traditional Chinese wedding banquet her mother-in-law planned, she went along but insisted that one of her favorite dishes be on the menu. When her mother-in-law refused her request, Mia was ready to call the wedding off. She explains, "There were a lot of little things that indicate to me that she really didn't respect my opinion and she was trying to influence my husband to not go along with me." Mia left it to her husband to mediate the conflict, "I don't know what [he] worked out with her, but I won on my food [choice for the menu]… otherwise I was going to call off the wedding." Mia describes her mother-in-law as having to turn to other mechanisms of power after the couple challenged her authority early on in their relationship.

Most respondents describe mothers-in-law who do not assume the kind of automatic authority that Sarah describes, and which is associated with traditional Chinese family practices. Rather, like Mia's mother-in-law, they have to "work" at earning their power. Twelve mothers-in-law (including Mia's) engage the role of domestic "expert" to establish a hierarchal relationship with their daughter-in-law. By asserting their expertise by giving recommendations and advice on matters such as health, daily household management, finances, child care, and meal preparation, mothers-in-law can acquire status and respect and enhance their power. Respondents describe the success of this strategy as dependent on whether they are grateful for this advice, and thus view it as a gift, or resent it as a threat, insult, or attempt to dominate.

Anne provides an example of a grateful daughter-in-law. She describes her mother-in-law as an excellent cook from whom she enjoys learning how to prepare Chinese meals that are familiar to her husband but different from her own mother's cooking. Anne happily receives her mother-in-law's instructions and serves as her "helper." Rather than resenting her mother-in-law's role as expert and teacher, she says, "It's neat to be able to learn a few things that I didn't know and I'm appreciative that she's willing to teach me…" Ella, on the other hand, expresses ambivalence about her mother-in-law's role as teacher. She says:

> When we both cook, she's like the main cook and I'm just [her] helper… She would tell me how she makes things and I will help her out… I think in some ways it's fine because she's teaching me how to cook. But most of the time, she wants it her way… She's the one always giving advice.

Ella is cognizant of the power and status hierarchy when her mother-in-law takes charge of the cooking, and expresses irritation that the older woman "wants it her way." She is not as eager as Anne to learn from her mother-in-law and is thus less appreciative and unwilling to tolerate the power inequities this situation generates.

A few respondents express resentment, rather than gratitude, toward the household services provided by their mother-in-law, which they do not feel they need. Hence rather than perceiving her services as helpful assistance, they regard it as an invasive lack of confidence in their ability to care for their family. Samantha provides an example:

> If I'm cooking a Chinese dish and I forgot [to use] ginger, it's no big deal to me. [She'd say] "Oh, when I make that I put ginger in it." [I] translate that to mean, "You think I'm cooking this wrong." I am sure [that is what she means]…

Madison, whose mother-in-law lives in the Midwest, provides another example:

> When we first got married [and lived closer], my mother-in-law used to come over and she would bring two weeks' worth of food. It was kind of insulting to me because I felt like she felt that I wasn't feeding her son properly… She would do laundry… I told my husband, "She doesn't have to do that. I know how to do laundry!"

Respondents who describe their mother-in-law's advice as unwelcome believe they are using the guise of offering suggestions to give orders and criticize the way they manage their household and perform domestic tasks. Like Samantha and Madison, they are offended by the implication that they are not a good wife or mother. These daughters-in-law experience such advice as a burden inflicted by her mother-in-law, and not a gift for which she feels grateful and indebted. In this scenario, the mother-in-law has difficulty establishing power and authority in her interaction with her daughter-in-law who, by not appreciating her advice, does not feel beholden and willing to defer to the older woman. Instead the daughter-in-law's resentment for having endured the burden of the mother-in-law's offensive intrusion can result in her feeling that something is owed to her in the emotional economy of their relationship.

In assuming the role of household expert and attempting to train their daughters-in-law, and not their sons, how to perform housework and cook, mothers-in-law reaffirm domestic work as a culturally-designated female job (see also Lim, 1997). In so doing, they transmit the expectation that their daughters-in-law, including those who work full time, assume responsibility for household tasks. They thus can influence a more gender-polarized division of labor in the younger couple's marriage. Further, the cultural (re)production of domestic activities as women's domain provides mothers-in-law a site for maintaining their power as well as their presence and influence in their adult son's household. However, as we discuss later, the resistance strategies of daughters-in-law can undermine the power of mothers-in-law.

Childrearing as a Domain of Power, Gratitude, and Ambivalence

The seven respondents with children in our sample report more overt conflicts with their mothers-in-law than do the eight respondents without children. The conflicts are related to the greater dependency of daughters-in-law with children on their mother-in-law for childcare and household assistance.

Those with children generally describe their views on motherhood and childrearing as in line with contemporary, mainstream values while they view their immigrant mothers-in-law as adhering to more traditional childrearing practices. As is the case with domestic work, they view the older women as drawing on her greater experience with parenting to assume an expert stance in relation and treating them as novices in need of training. Given the personal and emotional tenor of raising children, as well as the dependency of several respondents on their mother-in-law for child care

assistance, it is not surprising that childrearing methods generate the most tension in these relationships. Six of the seven mothers in our sample describe having open conflicts with their mother-in-law about parenting practices.

Most mothers in our sample report having little success in getting the older woman to abide their parenting practices when the two women disagree. Typically mothers-in-law simply ignore the requests of their daughter-in-law while implementing their own parenting methods when caring for their grandchildren. For example, Melissa and her mother-in-law disagree on how to respond to the cries of her newborn daughter. Melissa recounts:

> My mother-in-law came out first to help out when my daughter was born. She would not put her down; as soon as she made the slightest whimper, my mother-in-law was scooping her up… Her way of comforting the child was to walk them around the house and rock them in her arms to get them to stop crying… I'm like, "I won't be able to do that [because I have a toddler that wants me to carry him as well.]" [So I said to her,] "Mom, please stop carrying her around." She kind of ignored me…

Ella's efforts to get her mother-in-law to conform to her parenting goals are likewise ignored:

> I was trying to take my son off the bottles… I wanted everybody who was taking care of him to not feed him from the bottle, but try to feed him from the cup. My mother-in-law initially resisted. Every time we came home, we would find her picking up the bottle and feeding him.

Five of the seven mothers in our sample who have conflicts with their mothers-in-law over parenting regularly depend on her for child care, or in one case, have relied on her for temporary child care. Their dependency thus reduces their power. Ella, for example, works outside the home and relies on her mother-in-law's childcare and household assistance, for which she is grateful. As she explains, her feelings of gratitude and indebtedness make her unwilling to impose her wishes:

> I thought I couldn't say anything because she was here taking care of my son while I was working. [I] felt like I owed her for that… I think about times [when] I get frustrated and I don't want to hurt her feelings. I sometimes feel bad [getting into conflicts with her] because she's helping out so much. I don't want to do anything that might make her feel like she's not wanted or her help is not appreciated…

Indeed, on their own, the daughters-in-law who depend on mother-in-law's childcare assistance lack the power to bring their mother-in-law into compliance. In some situations that respondents describe, it is only after the husband joins his wife in admonishing his mother that the older woman begins to change her parenting behavior, a topic we turn to later. Mia, who depends on her mother-in-law for child care, frequently butts heads with her mother-in-law until her husband steps in. She says:

> When I had my first son, we left my son with her. We had a certain things that we wanted her to do… [be]cause we were paranoid about SIDS… And she wouldn't do it so that would upset me because I felt like I can't trust you… She's like, "I raised three kids, and you don't know what you

> are talking about…" So I didn't get along with her and fought a lot with her then… If she believes that we're not doing the right thing with our kids, she will overrule us… It made me feel annoyed because I feel like we're the parents, so parents should be the one ultimately in charge of how the kids were raised… So finally my husband spoke to her and said, "Listen, I love you and everything but if you continue on this way, we can't leave our son with you at all." Then she started to do what we asked.

Despite their conflicts, Mia is grateful to her mother-in-law for her child care. As she notes, "She's always willing to babysit. She never gives me a hard time about it. She never makes me feel bad about asking her to babysit and she always offers to cook when she comes over. And if she sees I have laundry, she'll fold it for me without me asking." Her gratitude leads Mia to feel obligated to reciprocate, which she does by offering insincere praise:

> I usually compliment her on her cooking. I don't like her cooking, but I just feel like I should… thank her for all the help that she's given me… I appreciate her cooking so I feel like if I praise her that she won't feel unappreciated… I try to thank her for everything because my husband told me that really goes a long way with her… I'll make a special effort to thank her for everything she does, however minor it is.

Cathy is the only one of seven mothers in this study who does not have disagreements with her mother-in-law about parenting. Cathy respects the way her husband was raised, and views her mother-in-law as a better parent than her mother had

been, with whom Cathy frequently has disagreements about childrearing. In contrast to her own mother, she regards her mother-in-law as easy-going and reluctant to give advice:

> [My mom] is always critical… She's never happy with my career or anything, even though I went to [an Ivy League university] and got a job right after at [a great company]. Every decision I made, she would say it's terrible. [His] mom is not like that at all. She's actually pretty laid back [and not like] the usual Asian mom. The fact that little things wouldn't bother her [shows that]… One thing that's good about her is that she does not [give much advice] or expect her advice to be followed.

In describing her mother-in-law as different from the typical or "usual" Asian mother, Cathy seems to be drawing on and reiterating the stereotype of Asian mothers-in-law as intrusive and overbearing. This stereotype, along with her mother's tendency to criticize, contributes to Cathy's feelings of gratitude to her mother-in-law for being "exceptional."

Several respondents who resent their mother-in-law for giving domestic and childrearing advice or attempting to exert undue influence in their lives are restrained in their resistance. In some cases this is due to their dependence on the assistance they receive from their mother-in-law, such as child care, for which they are grateful. While these women describe not liking the interference of their mothers-in-law, neither can they live without it. They thus vacillate between resentment and gratitude, generating an emotional wave of ambivalence that stalls their resistance. Even those who are not dependent on the services of their mother-in-law typically do not engage overt resistance

for fear of hurting her feelings, showing disrespect, and creating the impression of a bad daughter-in-law.

Husbands as Mediators in Marriages with Children

As we argue earlier, scholars have often depicted Chinese families as over-determined by Confucian cultural ideals, including filial piety and gender hierarchies. It is also commonly assumed that Asian American males are more traditional than their female counterparts, and thus likely to endorse more traditional family arrangements (Kim, 2006; Nemoto, 2006). For example, in a study of never married Chinese American and Japanese American women, respondents cite not wanting to be a traditional Asian wife or obedient daughter-in-law as one reason they are unmarried (Ferguson, 2000: 52). However, in our study when wives have conflicts or disagreements with their mother-in-law, most husbands do not insist they implement his mother's directives or behave as docile daughters-in-law. Rather, husbands tend to support their wives' resistance. Further, half of our respondents turn to their husbands to negotiate on their behalf with their mother-in-law when conflict or disagreement erupts. Thus husbands and wives enjoy a cross-gender alliance that empowers and elevates the status of daughters-in-law. For example, Jen who does not want a housekeeper is supported in her decision by her husband making it easier for her to disregard her mother-in-law's repeated insistence that she hire one. She explains, "[My husband] usually agrees with what I think after we talk about it. Because I have his support, we make the decision that way."

Husbands in families with children are more likely to mediate the relationship of their wife and mother than those without children as the couple's dependency on the

older woman for childcare prompts some husbands to mediate the relationship. For example, Samantha, Melissa, Shirley, Mia, and Ella all depend on their mother-in-law for childcare and their husband to mediate their relationship with their mother-in-law. In contrast, only three of the eight respondents without children depend on their husbands for mediation.

Many respondents with children describe being unsuccessful in getting the older woman to comply with their wishes when they disagree about child care. It is only after their husbands step in and represent their interests that their mother-in-law alters her behavior. For example, Melissa's mother-in-law ignores her request that she stop carrying her baby daughter every time she cries. She says:

> My husband backed me up and was like, "Mom, you can't carry her around because when you leave, [Melissa's] not going to be able to handle carrying both of them all the time, just because one of them is crying…" She wasn't happy, but she stopped carrying her around.

Similarly, as we previously describe, Mia often turns to her husband for help and now enjoys greater power as a result of her husband's support. She remarks, "My husband's pretty much on my side and [my mother-in-law] knows it, so she tries very hard to maintain a good relationship with me because she knows that she's going to be on the losing end."

In contrast, Cathy and Sarah are the two mothers who do not depend on their out of state mothers-in-law for childcare and they also do not describe their husbands to be a mediator. As couples who live far away from their mother-in-law are less likely to call

upon her for childcare assistance than respondents whose mother-in-law lives nearby, there are also fewer opportunities for interaction and possible conflicts surrounding children and childcare. This thus suggests that dependency on mother-in-law for childcare and geographic proximity between mothers- and daughters-in-law are important confounding factors in understanding family power dynamics.

As these cases suggest, most of the wives with children depend on the power and authority of their husbands to get their mothers-in-law to obey their wishes. While other research describes mothers-in-law as striking a "patriarchal bargain" by using the social and structural constraints of patriarchy to enhance their power (e.g., Kandiyoti, 1988; Lan, 2003), we find that daughters-in-law can also elevate their power by bargaining with patriarchy. Specifically, daughters-in-law draw on traditional male authority by enlisting their husbands' support as a strategy for maximizing their power vis-à-vis their mothers-in-law. In using traditional male authority to their benefit, they participate in its reproduction, rather than affecting an increase in their own authority and position per se. They thus remain dependent on their husbands to represent their interests.

The length of marriage is important in whether husbands mediate between their wife and mother insofar as it is related to the presence of children and the conflicts with mothers-in-law. None of the six respondents married fewer than four years have children. They report fewer disagreements with their mother-in-law, and only one of the six in this group depends on her husband to smooth out conflict with her mother-in-law, typically when the older woman pushes her to have children. On the other hand, seven of the nine

respondents married over four years have children, and depend on their mother-in-law for child care and their husband to mediate.

The Covert "Back Stage" Resistance of Daughters-in-law

Ten of 15 respondents describe employing a strategy of resistance marked by a formal or symbolic display of deference to the directives of their mother-in-law when in her presence while failing to follow through and carry them out when out of her line of vision. To understand this emergent finding in our data, we draw on Goffman's theatrical metaphor of front and back stage. The front stage refers to "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). It is here that individuals are most likely to behave and interact in accordance with the norms, moral codes, and hierarchies associated with the cultural expectations of their immigrant parents-in-law. The backstage, on the other hand, provides a site of greater freedom where daughters-in-law can enact values and norms that conflict with those of the front stage. It is not only a place "where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted" but also where "the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude" and where the actor can openly violate expected role behaviors (1959, p. 112-113). As Lan (2003, 2006) points out, there is often an incompatibility between being true to oneself and being a "good daughter-in-law." This incompatibility prompts a distinction in the behavior of daughters-in-law between their front stage performances for their extended kin and their backstage behavior in the privacy of their own homes.

For example, Ella concurs with her mother-in-law's suggestions when in her presence, even when she secretly disagrees. She "just nods [her] head" in apparent agreement. However, she notes that she does not carry out the advice when her mother-in-law is not around:

> With my son, if [my mother-in-law] tells me, "Morning is very cold and you have to keep him in pajamas for a little longer." Most of the time, she's not here in the morning, so I change him anyway. I don't keep him in his pajamas.

May also feigns agreement with her mother-in-law but does not implement her suggestions: "I'll just nod and smile and say, 'Yeah, that's an interesting idea.'" Jen provides another example. Her mother-in-law wants her to hire a maid, which Jen, does not want. While she does not express her disagreement to her mother-in-law, when she is at home, she informs her husband that despite his mother's pressure, they will not be getting a maid. Stella, who resents her mother-in-law's advice, explains that when she is with her mother-in-law:

> She talked and I listened and nodded, which is I think, *typical* of most intergenerational interaction with your elder… There's supposed to be a way around that, which is you thank them for their advice and say "I'll think about it." Just don't say no to their face!

Mia describes a similar performance in her interactions with her mother-in-law:

> She'll see something on TV or read something in the Chinese newspaper then tries to tell me, "Don't do that or you shouldn't eat that." I just smile.

> In this way, I do *the Chinese thing.* I just smile and nod. But I totally ignore her [advice].

Asked about "the Chinese thing," Mia explains that pretending to agree with her mother-in-law allows her to "keep peace" while also abiding traditional expectations of respect.

Samantha also engages in this form of covert resistance. Although she regards her mother-in-law as very Americanized, the elder woman maintains a belief in traditional Chinese childbirth practices that includes a month of bed rest after giving birth. According to traditional beliefs, new mothers should not wash their hair or eat certain foods during this time. Samantha pretends to agree with her mother-in-law about this practice but does not comply in her absence:

> She would say I couldn't drink ice; I couldn't eat ice after I gave birth… The whole thing is that you can't wash your hair either… So when she would not be here, I would have ice water [or wash my hair!]… I wanted to respect her, but it was also too hot and I was so uncomfortable. I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Sarah refers to this kind of performance that she also engages as a balancing act:

> I'm more, I don't know, not submissive, but I kind of like [say], "Ok, ok, I hear what you are saying…" I may not necessarily do it, but I don't necessarily have to tell her that I didn't do it her way… Or I usually just say, "Ok, we've already taken care of it…" in a respectful way. [Like] saying, "I appreciate what you're saying, but we may not necessarily follow what you are asking us…" It's kind of like balancing a fine act

between not being obedient in a sense, and still being respectful…

Because she's my mother-in-law, I want to respect her and honor her. I don't want to make her think that I have an agenda that goes against hers. I don't want her to feel like I'm an enemy, that I'm trying to take her son away from her.

By nodding, smiling, or saying nothing when they disagree, respondents display the filial respect and obedience that they understand is expected of "good" Chinese daughters-in-law in the ethnic world of their mothers-in-law. In fact, Mia refers to this strategy as "doing the Chinese thing" and Stella describes it as "typical" of intergenerational interaction in Chinese families. Hence, this appears to be a form of resistance especially oriented to these ethnic expectations. In their study of how second-generation Korean and Vietnamese women enact gender across different interactional arenas, Pyke and Johnson (2003) find they commonly engage a form of femininity that complies with ethnic expectations when interacting with co-ethnics, especially elders, and a less formal, more Americanized femininity in the privacy of their home or among non-Asian peers. For example, one Korean American woman they studied performs the expected role of a traditional subservient daughter-in-law when with her husband's immigrant family. She hates this performance and resents her husband's family for expecting it of her but feels compelled to do so to avoid bringing dishonor to her husband. However, in the privacy of their home, she exacts repayment from him in the form of deference to her desires, which includes his performance of household chores. As this example suggests, the backstage autonomy of daughters-in-law who organize their

households and parenting practices with little influence from their mothers-in-law when she is absent, is made all the more possible due to their husband's support and agreement, as we previously discuss.

Discussion

We open this article by noting the common presumption in family scholarship that Asian ethnic cultural beliefs and actual family dynamics are one and the same (see Ishii-Kuntz, 2000). If that were the case, we would find mothers-in-law entitled to uncontested authority and respect bestowed by cultural values of filial piety. However, in most of the relationships we examine, mothers-in-law are not so easily accorded such authority. Instead they must work to establish such power, as through the provision of child care services or domestic assistance. This is not to say that norms of filial respect are not important in these relationships. They are. Daughters-in-law in our study typically feel obligated to show respect and honor toward their mothers-in-law. However, they do not feel they owe the older woman deference that is unconditional or unearned.

Many respondents describe how mothers-in-law attempt to establish power by assuming the role of expert in matters of childcare and domestic tasks, which if successful secures an authoritative presence in their adult son's family. Their attempts meet with limited success, however, as most daughters-in-law in our sample feel entitled to manage their own households and to establish childrearing practices without the interference of their mother-in-law. However, those respondents who receive needed domestic or child care assistance from their mother-in-law feel contradictory pulls of gratitude for those services and resentment toward the older woman's influence in their

home life. Their feelings of ambivalence often result in vacillation between resistance and deference to their mother-in-law.

Respondents with children often describe turning to their husband for support when conflicts and disagreement arise with their mother-in-law, especially when she provides childcare for the couple. Contrary to the widespread stereotype of Asian American men as domineering and heavily invested in maintaining traditional family practices, these husbands often mediate the relationship between their wife and mother or get their mother to comply with their wife's childrearing practices. We suggest such cross-gender solidarity empowers and elevates the status of daughters-in-law, but only by striking a bargain with patriarchy (see Kandiyoti, 1988). By relying on their husband's power to win their way, respondents consent to and reproduce male authority. The length of marriage and a respondent's proximity to her mother-in-law are important in whether a husband takes on the role as mediator, but only insofar as they are related to the presence of children and the dependency on mothers-in-law for childcare.

Daughters-in-law in this study commonly engage a covert form of resistance by appearing to comply and agree with their mother-in-law while not actually implementing her suggestions in her absence. By not overtly disagreeing, daughters-in-law avoid open conflict, show filial respect, and present themselves as a "good Chinese daughter-in-law" without actually having to comply and give up power over their own households. We believe this strategy of front stage compliance and back stage resistance is, as some respondents suggest, a common strategy in Chinese culture as well as any family system that emphasizes the formal displays of respect toward elders. Hence when scholars focus

on front stage behavior when studying power and other dynamics, they are likely to derive a distorted image of *actual* family practices, and to engage in cultural reductionism when explaining family life.

We do not find instances when respondents and their mothers-in-law form alliances to resist male authority in the family. Perhaps if we have focused on women's relationships with male family members, we would have uncovered such alliances. Or it could be that the forms of alliances female family members engage to resist male domination are more subtle. In fact, while mothers-in-law often reproduce a traditional gendered division of labor through the instruction and advice they provide their daughter-in-law on such matters, some of them also enable their daughters-in-law to work outside the home by providing child care and household services. That is, they make it easier for their daughters-in-law to implement more gender egalitarian arrangements. Overall, we find the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law to be far more complex and diverse than suggested by cultural approaches that have dominated the family scholarship on Asian and Asian American families.

Power and Emotional Economies

Our study of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relations departs from most family power research which relies on indicators of overt power to determine the most powerful partner in any given relationship. Rather than approaching power as a simple zero-sum game with one person designated the winner and other the loser, we treat power as an on-going process. We recognize that power dynamics and outcomes shift across time and situation, and who has the most power in any given relationship can likewise shift. In

some relationships power is dispersed with no individual being the "winner" or "loser." Further, power dynamics are often embedded in and constrained by broader systems of inequality, as is the case with mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relations which are situated within a system of male domination. Thus a determination of who has more power in such relations fails to elucidate the broader power dynamics at play.

To explore power process rather than outcomes, we consider hidden or covert power dynamics that are missed by manifest measures of power (see Komter, 1989; also Pyke, 1994; 1996) and use the concept of an emotional economy of entitlement, obligation and gratitude as a window into covert power processes (see Hochschild, 1989; also Pyke, 1994; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996). In so doing, we find the power of mothers-in-law to be closely related to the emotional economy of their relationship with their daughter-in-law. By examining the emotional tenor of these relationships, our study is better able to get at the complexity and contradictions of power dynamics than research that relies on simple overt measures.

In conclusion, we suggest future research on power dynamics needs to consider back stage as well as front stage behavior so as to capture covert forms of resistance that occur behind the scenes. This is particularly important when studying cultures that put much emphasis on formal displays of respect and familial honor in public or among extended family members. Future research is needed to develop quantitative measures of covert power so that this important dimension of power can be studied using larger data sets, and provide a more holistic view of power dynamics than the current emphasis on overt power measures allows. Our findings suggest researchers who study power

dynamics across cultures need to be careful not to conflate cultural ideals with actual power practices. They also should be more culturally sensitive not to assume that displays of deference in public or among extended family translate into powerlessness in other, more private realms.

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Chapter 2:

"My Mother-in-law isn't Like My Mother": How the Ideal of "Intensive Mothering" Shapes Women's Views of Their Mother-in-law in Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese Families

Introduction

Family scholars tend to bring a cultural approach to the study of Asian and Asian American families and a structural approach when studying Latino and African American families (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000). This distinction underscores a troubling pattern by which the experiences, arrangements, practices, and relations of Asian/Asian-American families are reduced to cultural values, most notably to Confucian principles. The presumption is that to know Asian cultural ideals is to know Asian American family practices. Reducing behavior to a simple set of cultural values obscures structural, situational, and historical variations, and casts Asians and Asian Americans as mere stereotypes – a monolithic group devoid of internal heterogeneity (Ishii-Kuntz 2000:276). This tendency in family scholarship is part of the larger Western imaginary of "Orientalism" that construes the "Orient" as culturally peculiar, exotic, and inferior to Western culture; that is, the "Occident" (Said, 1978). Part of the peculiarity attributed to Orientalism is the stability of Asian cultural values that stand locked in time and exert such force that those within their grasp can only conform. Hence, Asians cannot assimilate to other cultures, nor can they adapt to new situations and varying structural conditions. To be Asian is to be "Oriental" as construed in the Western imaginary.

Asian and Asian American families are depicted as rigidly hierarchal in terms of gender and age relations in accordance with Confucian ethnics (even though many Asian ethnic groups have little to no cultural connection to Confucianism), emphasizing the collective over the individual, promoting family harmony at the expense of individual self-fulfillment and expression, and free of overt conflicts and problems. In this manner, Asian cultural ideals associated with Confucianism are conflated with actual family practices. Unlike family scholarship on Black and Latino families, research on Asian American families tends to regard behavior as over-determined by cultural beliefs.

The tendency toward cultural reductionism is evident in popular discourses, particularly in trying to explain the family violence of Asian men. In 2006, the Los Angeles Times ran a story about 3 Korean fathers who murdered their children and/or wives before committing suicide within a span of one week (see Gable, Los Angeles Times, October 29, 2006). Much of the discussion of these cases applies a cultural explanation in which the Korean "culture" is blamed for these men's violent attack on their wives and children. For example, one Korean American family service center director and minister states in an interview, "Violence in Korean American families stems from cultural roots… Korean men experience physical punishment from an early age, and then bring that behavior to their marriage" (Gable, 2006). Rather than challenging the construction of masculinities that promotes violence in some men, accounts like the above suggest that there is something distinctive about the Korean culture that promotes such violent behavior.

In contrast, in cases of white male violence on their families, it is not white culture or white masculinity that is blamed. The Covina massacre provides a good contrast example. Bruce Jeffrey Pardo (aka "Santa killer") shot his ex-wife, Sylvia Pardo, and 8 of her relatives and set his ex-in-law's house in Covina, California on fire on Christmas Eve 2008 before committing suicide. In most of the reporting, the perpetrator's race and cultural background were rarely mentioned. Much of the media coverage cited Pardo's recent job loss, marital problems and recent divorce settlement (his divorce from Sylvia Pardo was finalized only a week prior to the shooting), and his financial stress as the contributing factors to his committing this terrible crime.

Cultural reductionism in the study of Asian American families is also evident in scholarship on domestic violence. In general, the domestic violence literature emphasizes socio-structural predictors of violence, such as income levels. Research on violence in Asian American families, however, is more likely to refer to cultural values as a primary contributing factor, such as women's assumed subordinated roles in Asian families and society, patriarchal gender ideologies, and conformity to traditional gender arrangements, to explain the causes of domestic violence (Yick & Oomen-Early, 2008; see for examples, Bell & Denton, 2005; Moon, 2005; Nguyen, 2005; Yu, 2005). For example, the authors of one study suggest that Asian American domestic violence is a result because, "Asian women are taught to live with the virtues of suffering and perseverance" (Tran & Des Jardins, 2000).

When scholars reduce the behavior of a particular racial/ethnic group to their cultural mores, we not only conflate their culture and race, we essentialize them as

inevitable, even natural (see Harris, 1997). It is as if it is in their "blood," an unavoidable biologically driven racial imperative. This presumption undergirds notions of Asians as inassimilable, perpetual foreigners. It is not that they will not assimilate to new cultural values; rather, they cannot. Cultural reductionism and the ensuing assumptions of an essential Asian personality are the very basis of anti-Asian stereotypes. They result in assumptions of a monolithic "Asian experience" (Harris, 1997) and contribute to scholarly distortions of the reality of life in Asian and Asian American families (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Narayan, 1998).

Cultural Essentialism in Feminists of Color Theorizing of Mothering and Motherhood

Dissatisfied with prior feminist theorizing that focuses primarily on white middle- and upper-class women's mothering experiences, feminists of color (e.g., Baca Zinn, Dill, Glenn, and Hill Collins) suggest that these theories have obscured and misinterpreted the mothering experiences of women of color. The aim is to challenge the universalism portrayed in previous feminist theorizing about motherhood by illustrating diversity in mothering experiences. Mothering, they argue, is not only gendered, but racialized and classed (Glenn, 1994). The notion that mothering is exclusively women's work overlooks the reality that women are not a universal category and that sociostructural forces differently affect motherhood and the parenting experiences of various groups of women.

Feminists of color "decenter" the dominant "white" model of mothering by examining the mothering experience at the intersection of race, gender, and class oppressions (Baca Zinn, 1994; Collins, 1994; Glenn, 1994). However, in their quest to challenge tendencies to universalize the experience of mothering for women, they

describe particular forms of racial/ethnic mothering that, while distinct from white mothering styles, often assume a monolithic form of racial and cultural essentialism. While they succeed at challenging gender essentialism, they rely on racial/cultural essentialism to do so. As Narayan (1998:87) suggests, "*universal* essentialist generalization about 'all women' are replaced by *cultural- [racial-] specific* essentialist generalization that depend on totalizing categories [such as 'Black women', 'Latino women', and 'Asian women']." Even scholars whose work stresses the importance of racial diversity often reduce race and ethnicity to a single practice, thereby, creating monumental images of particular racial and ethnic families (see, for examples, Hill Collins, 1992; Segura & Pierce, 1993).

Utilizing a black women's standpoint, Patricia Hill Collins (1992) argues that the women-centered networks (consisting of biological mothers, other mothers, and other female relatives) are an important support system in African and Afro-American families and communities as these networks not only help in childcare, but also provide a range of assistance to bloodmothers who may lack the preparation or desire for motherhood. By emphasizing this particular form of mothering among African American women, Collins seems to suggest that this arrangement is universal among and unique to African Americans. However, this oversimplifies the experiences of black mothers by failing to acknowledge that not all black mothers have access to such women-centered networks (e.g., Kaplan, 1996) and these networks are diverse (e.g., McDonald, 1995). Kaplan (1996), for example, finds that some unwed African American teenage mothers resent receiving little or no childcare support from their own mothers or other female relatives,

as the elder women see such pregnancies as diminishing their own community standing and upward mobility.

In an effort to legitimize and value the mothering work of many black women, Collins often engages in the use of a single brush stroke to paint a one-dimensional portrait of black motherhood. When discussing the roles and power of community othermothers in African American women-centered networks, Collins (1987:6) states:

> Community othermothers work on behalf of the Black community by trying, in the words of the late nineteenth century Black feminists, to "uplift the race," so that vulnerable members of the community would be able to attain the self- reliance and independence so desperately needed for Black community development under oppressive conditions.

This simplistic construction of the black motherhood contributes to an invariant image, what Shirley Hill (2005) calls "the black cultural ethos of motherhood", that portrays African American women as endowed with the essential ability for mothering work and childrearing skills and suggests that they experience motherhood as natural and intrinsically satisfying. This motherhood ethos represents only one model of black motherhood and minimizes the challenges many black mothers experience (Hill, 2005). Although some black women invest heavily in mothering work, their experiences cannot and should not be generalized to the entire group. Structural differences among individuals within the same group, such as social class differences, unequally shape mothering practices, resources, and experiences among black women (Kaplan, 1996). While wanting to provide maternal support for their young "underclass" little sisters at

the Birthing Project, some middle-class maternal activists find it difficult to sympathize with these young mothers' lack of respect for Black motherhood and find it challenging to build cross-class maternal cooperation (McDonald, 1995).

Further, the women-centered networks are not exclusive to African Americans. Some Latino/a families also develop and maintain similar forms of networks and mothering practices as those Collins describes. For example, the concept of othermothers in African-American communities is similar to that of *comadres* (co-mothers) in some Mexican American families. *Comadres* share parenting tasks with a child's biological parents as well as provide emotional and financial support when necessary. The relationships between *comadres* are extremely important among women as they often take care of and assume parental authority with one another's children (Del Castillo, 1984).

Other scholars (e.g., Hill, 2005; Segura, 1994) also criticize this universal portrayal of racial/ethnic women's role as mothers and the tendency to generalize within groups. They argue that diversity exists not only between groups, but also within a group with a shared history, origin, and/or cultural attributes (Segura, 1994). Hill (2005) further challenges the application of a cultural model to all African American women, seeing such generalization as problematic as it ignores how other systems of stratification and structural forces shape family life. Therefore, scholars who study racial and ethnic minority families must not compare groups in their entirety in search of their general differences. For if they do, they reify group differences, which devolve into stereotyping and racial/cultural essentialism.

By comparing Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese families in the present study, my goal is to examine within group differences as well as cross-group similarities. Examining within-group differences allows me to center my analysis on the diversity that exists within a group. Examining cross-group similarities allows me to avoid presenting a concept in a culturally essentialized fashion as it suggests that a certain practice or pattern is evident in multiple cultures, and thus, cannot be reduced simply to one's cultural values or with cultural explanations. For example, norms of filial piety, generally associated with traditional Confucian family values, are not practiced in all Chinese-American and Taiwanese families and often performed at different levels. However, we may find similar forms of filial respect and obedience in some Mexican-American families.

Mother and Mother-in-law Comparisons

Some scholars liken the relationships that women have with their mothers-in-law to those with their mothers, as both relations are between intergenerational female kin (Fischer, 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). Using the birth of a daughter's first child as the focal point of analysis, Fischer finds that the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship transformed into one with significant support patterns after the arrival of first grandchild, thus making their relationship more similar to that of a mother and daughter. Further, as Jackson and Berg-Cross (1988) posit, women's adjustment to mother-in-law may be influenced by their relationship with, dependency on, and problem solving strategies used with their mother. Together, these scholars suggest that because of the

similarities in these relationships, women may model their relationships with their mother-in-law on their relationship with their mother.

Such comparisons are not fully warranted as the roles of mother and mother-in-law are extremely different. While most mothers raise their daughters from birth, daughters usually do not acquire a mother-in-law until adulthood, so they never experience a level of dependency on their mother-in-law in any way comparable to that which they had with their mother. And as they were reared by their mother from birth, and co-reside with her during their formative years, they are more adapted to the lifestyle, values, and personality of their mother, while that of their mother-in-law might appear alien and in some instances conflict with the values and ways of doing things that they learned in their maternal home. Further, their relationship with their mother-in-law is generally not as intensive and not fully defined as the one between mother and daughter. Nonetheless, some scholars reiterate the popular tendency to equate these two roles; despite their clear and obvious differences (Fischer, 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988).

In this chapter, I examine this tendency by exploring the underlying meaning systems that shape women's expectations and understandings of their mother-in-law. I explore the following questions: 1) How do respondents understand and construct the role of mothers-in-law? 2) On what ideologies and stereotypes do they draw on in their understanding of this role? 3) When describing their mothers-in-law, do respondents draw on an ideology of mothering? Do they refer to their own mother-daughter relationship? 4) Are there racial and ethnic similarities and variations in these constructions?

Method

Sample

The sample for this particular analysis consists of 37 daughters-in-law from 10 Chinese American, 10 Mexican American, and 17 Taiwanese families. They are between the ages of 24 and 40 (average age is 35). All of them have at least a high school education, including 25 who have college or advanced degrees. Thirty-one daughters-in-law are employed part- or full-time and six do not work outside the home. All are married, and they have been married to their current spouse for an average of 8 years. Thirty-two daughters-in-law have young children under the age of 8.

All 37 women live within a 30 mile radius of their mothers-in-law and 13 live with their mother-in-law. Seventeen daughters-in-law provide monthly financial assistance to their mothers-in-law. Fifteen daughters-in-law receive housework assistance and twenty-four receive childcare assistance from their mother-in-law, with most receiving this assistance on a daily or weekly basis.

All of the Chinese American and Mexican American daughters-in-law are 1.5 or second generation (i.e., they immigrated to the U.S. prior to age 15 or were born in the U.S.). All are married to a co-ethnic man whose mother is, like her own mother, a first-generation immigrant.

Data Collection and Analytic Strategy

While analyzing data for Chapter 1, I observed that half of the daughters-in-law I interviewed invoked a comparison between their mother and mother-in-law, even though I did not ask them to do so. The voluntary and persistent nature of these comparisons

suggests that mothers serve as a powerful "contrast structure" in women's evaluation of the mother-in-law. That is, women use what they know about mothering relations to understand and give meaning to their relationships with their mother-in-law (see Pyke, 2000). Based on these emergent findings, I looked more closely at how a mothering ideology shapes constructions of the mother-in-law role in Mexican American and Taiwanese families, and this chapter contains the results of that analysis.

I collected intensive interview data from each respondent, using a six-page interview guide with open-ended questions. I also ask probe questions to uncover the assumptions and meanings respondents bring to their narratives and to make more explicit the underlying discourses and ideologies on which they draw in understanding their day-to-day interactions (Charmaz, 2006, 2009).

To explore the implicit assumptions and stereotypes that daughters-in-law utilize in understanding and articulating the mother-in-law role, I asked them to describe the expectations of future mother- and daughter-in-law relations they had before they were married. I pay particular attention to the ways that stereotypes of mothers-in-law shape respondents' understandings. To understand how respondents think about the mother-in-law role, I asked respondents to describe and give examples of a good mother-in-law, a bad mother-in-law, and the characteristics of an ideal mother-in-law. I also asked daughters-in-law how their relationship compares with their earlier expectations, stereotypes, and ideals.

To explore how daughters-in-law understand the roles of mother and mother-in-law, I asked respondents if their mother-in-law reminds them of anyone, and if they ever

compare their relationship with mother-in-law with other people with whom they have relationships. Rather than asking directly about whether respondents compare their mother-in-law to their mother, I tried to elicit such comparisons without leading respondents to provide such answers. A majority of the daughters-in-law in the sample voluntarily compared their mother-in-law to their mother. In the few cases in which respondents did not mention their mothers after initial questioning, I asked directly in follow-up questioning if they ever compare their mother-in-law to their mother.

I conducted the interviews with Taiwanese daughters-in-law in Mandarin Chinese and transcribed them verbatim. I read all of the interviews in Chinese and assigned codes in English so as to keep the codes consistent with interviews with the Chinese American and Mexican American subsamples which were conducted in English. Once coding and analyses were complete, I translated into English the segments of the interview that were used in the presentation of my results.

In my analysis, I took a social constructionist approach to the everyday production of reality, which assumed that individuals, in interaction, actively make meaning in their lives by drawing on available ideologies (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gubrium & Holstein, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Further, this approach postulated that respondents' accounts are an interpretive portrayal of their marital and in-law relations, rather than an objective rendering of such relationships. I utilized the family discourse analysis method to understand how respondents talk about marital and in-law relations and assign meanings to everyday life (see also, Gubrium & Holstein, 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). I focused on what people "do with words" to produce

and organize the meanings of family living (Bernardes, 1987). In this perspective, family members are taken to be interactional practitioners of family order who designate and assign meanings to domestic affairs.

I began my analysis with the general goal of exploring the subjective meanings respondents give to their family experiences with a focus on their relations with mothers-in-law. While I came to this study interested in the relations between women and their mothers-in-law, I relied on a grounded theory method by which explanations are generated through an inductive analytic process that stays rooted or "grounded" in the data (Boeije, 2002; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I read each interview several times to identify and code emerging themes and sort data into broad topical categories that reflect the general question areas. As part of this initial open coding, I write detailed summaries for each individual respondent as well as each family describing intergenerational and marital interactions such as harmony, conflicts, and tension. In addition, I include respondents' descriptions of the roles of their mother-in-law and mother, whether they make comparisons of the two roles, and their reasons for making such comparisons.

To move my inquiry beyond a simple descriptive analysis, I use a constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to generation more nuanced coding categories from the individual and family summaries and further code the data into analytical categories. This coding process is dynamic and iterative as themes and patterns are refined base on emerging findings. I also analyze coded

interviews and demographic data to identify similarities as well as differences both across and within racial/ethnic and transnational groups.

Once I develop some preliminary theoretical ideas, I employ theoretical sampling to narrow my focus on emerging categories and decide what data to gather next to saturate those theoretical categories. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to collect relevant data to elaborate and refine categories in the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collection in this phase is driven by emerging theory rather than by predetermined population dimensions such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status as is the case of initial sampling (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). Data collection, coding, and analysis continue until categories have reached a point of saturation where interviewing more respondents no longer sparks new theoretical insights (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detnzer, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings

Three themes emerged from the data analysis. Daughters-in-law in this study overwhelmingly draw on the ideology of "intensive mothering" and a "feminized notion of love" in constructing the role of a good mother-in-law. Many also use the "ideology of mothering" as a contrast structure in giving meaning to their relationship with their mother-in-law. Next, I provide some background discussion on the ideology of "intensive mothering" and "feminization of love" before presenting my data and analyses.

Ideology of "Intensive Mothering" and "Feminization of Love"

There is a widespread belief in intensive mothering as the ideal in North America. This ideology suggests that good mothering is child centered, emotionally involving, and

time-consuming (Hays, 1996). The mother portrayed in this ideology is devoted to the care of others and gives unselfishly of herself to the care of her children. This cultural image provides a template for understanding what it means to be a "good" or a "bad" mother and for judging one's own and other people's mothering. Women who conform to the ideal are viewed as "good mothers", while those who deviate are depicted as "bad mothers."

The ideal of "intensive mothering" is widespread and has been extended to other arenas, such as the workplace. For example, in female-dominated jobs involving care, such as education (teaching), health care (nursing), office and administrative support, and other service professions, female employees are expected to possess stereotypical feminine traits (such as warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, and understanding) and perform the "mothering" role. In this sense, womanhood often gets conflated with motherhood and the two are treated as synonymous identities. Further, because care is perceived as women's domain, women's labor is often taken for granted and seen as natural.

For example, college students hold different expectations for female and male faculty members, often expecting female professors to be warm, friendly, supportive, nurturing, and accessible (Bachen, McLoughlin, & Garcia, 1999; Bennett, 1982; Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Rubin, 1981; Sears & Hennessey, 1996). Sears and Hennessey (1996) find that both male and female students report feeling closer to female professors than male professors. One explanation is that female professors are more nurturing and thus play a mother-like role. This explanation is problematic as it assumes not only that all female faculty members are caring while all male professors are not, but

also that nurturance and care are natural for women and mothers. Bachen and colleagues' finding that female students are three times more likely to invoke those characteristics in their female professors illustrates the prevalence of the "mothering ideology" described above where female professors are also expected to embody the qualities of a "good mother", especially among female students. Further, students' perceptions and expectations influence their assessments of faculty (Bachen, McLoughlin, & Garcia, 1999; Kierstead, D'Agostino, & Dill, 1988), evaluating female more harshly than male professors when they are perceived to be lacking in nurturing qualities.

Further, as Cancian (1986) argues, there is an incomplete perspective of love in our society that draws on a feminized definition emphasizing emotional expression and talking about feelings. This perspective not only overlooks the instrumental and physical aspects of love that men tend to prefer but also assumes that all elements of love are included in the feminine role. It views love as women's domain and perceives women to be naturally skilled at loving. Further, the pervasiveness of feminized notion of love suggests that women are much more capable of love than are men and incorrectly assumes that all women are equally adept at love. Studies that find female students to favor caring and nurturing qualities in female professors provide a good example of the pervasiveness of the feminized notion of love. Students assume that, because of female professors' gender, they should naturally be loving and caring, and that those female professors who do not have these characteristics are inadequate.

Although the concepts of "intensive mothering" and "feminization of love" have been previously used to study European-American women and families and both are

dominant European-American cultural values, they emerged in my analysis on Mexican American, Chinese American, and Taiwanese women's accounts. While I might expect second-generation Mexican and Chinese American women to invoke these concepts, I was surprised to find that the Taiwanese women also invoked them. One explanation for this could be that in today's world, Western ideologies and values circulate widely via the global dispersal of Western capitalism and media. Thus, "intensive mothering" and "feminization of love" are present in Taiwan, although they may not take the exact form as they do in mainstream America.

Expectations

Several daughters-in-law expected, prior to being engaged, that their future relationship with their mother-in-law would be like the one they had with their own mother. They express the desire to treat their future mother-in-law as a mother and hope that their mother-in-law would treat them as a daughter. Jen (Taiwanese) says,

> Before I was married, my idea was simple. I expected to have the same relationship with my in-laws as with my own parents… In my mind, I see myself as her [mother-in-law's] daughter when I married into his family. And I often wonder why she couldn't treat me the way she treats her daughter… I realize that other people's daughter will never be your own daughter… For example, you are not their own. You have different life styles when you marry into this family. So if they cannot tolerate you and your life-style, you are always an outsider and never part of the family

Even though many women's expectations of their mother-in-law were not met, their accounts suggest that their initial expectations of mother-in-law are shaped by the mothering ideology.

Ideology of "Intensive Mothering"

The ideology of "intensive mothering" is pervasive in the interviews. Not only do women draw on this ideology to describe and judge their own and other people's mothering (e.g., Collett, 2005; Hays, 1996), many also use it to evaluate their mother-in-law. When describing their ideal mother-in-law, most women invoke the characteristics that would be used to describe a good mother, namely, loving, caring, and supportive. As Elizabeth (Chinese American) states, "A good mother-in-law would be motherly, someone who tries to take care of us, offers to listen and tries to be involved in our lives and wants to spend time with us." Further, daughters-in-law also suggest that a good mother-in-law is someone who provides assistance and advice but only does so when asked, someone who does not interfere in the relationship of son and daughter-in-law, and knows and maintains her boundaries. For example, Samantha (Chinese American) says,

> I would say a good mother-in-law is someone who is loving, who cares enough that if they see something they disagree with, they would still speak up and say it in a loving manner… and is able to communicate how she feels.

Natalie (Mexican American) states,

> [A good mother-in-law is] someone who's there to support you emotionally and will be there for you if you need help with anything, won't give you unsolicited advice, won't put you down in a demeaning way… won't be trying to force things on you.

Alexandra (Mexican American) provides another example,

> I think, having respect for the couple, being able to talk about things… not being involved in the couple's arguments of relationship problems, being like an observer and at the same time a listener… Like, if one of the partners needs to talk to her [about their problems], he/she feels like they can talk to her…

Further, to many of the women I interviewed, the role of a good mother-in-law is synonymous with that of a good mother. In many instances, discussion of mother-in-law is linked to that of a mother. For example, while considering the roles of mother-in-law, respondents draw parallels between a mother-in-law and a mother and suggest that a good mother-in-law should accept and love her daughter-in-law as her own child and treat her as part of the family. Here, Maria (Mexican American) provides a definition of "mother" and of "mother-in-law" to show how she perceives these two roles as equivalent. She says, "I think [the roles of mother and mother-in-law] are the same because the word mother is the same." Maria continues,

> A mother is someone [who is] caring, understanding, and protective. And 'in-law' is like that person [daughter-in-law] enters into your family. Whether they like it or not, the daughter-in-law is in the family. I think

> they should always see [daughter-in-law] as part of the family, as another child of theirs.

Pei (Taiwanese, mother of 2) expresses a similar sentiment,

> A good mother-in-law should be like a good mother… like the role of a good mother. Someone who shares her life experiences with us, her hardship and joy in life and with work… Someone who cares about her children (and children-in-law) and loves her daughter-in-law as her own child…

Sandra (Mexican American) shares,

> A good mother-in-law would be supportive towards the new family, being the child and the new partner, like include them in different things, being very open… Treat them as just a regular family member, like a daughter or son, not treat them like they're the new addition to the family…

Many daughters-in-law note that a good mother-in-law is someone with whom they are able to talk about issues, share feelings and emotions, and provide support and assistance. These are all qualities that describe a good mother in the "intensive mothering" ideology and are often expected of women who are mothers or those who perform the mothering role.

These are also characteristics found in a feminized style of love that predominates in our society (Cancian, 1988). Daughters-in-law overwhelmingly draw on the feminized notion of love and expect a good mother-in-law, like a good mother, to be naturally nurturing and to possess those qualities that emphasize emotional expressions. Under

such perspective, love is seen as women's domain, and because of such, mother-in-law should naturally be good at it. Further, most respondents do not expect a good father or father-in-law to hold those same characteristics or at least they do not articulate those expectations.

Mother and Mother-in-law Comparisons

When asked about whether their mother-in-law reminds them of anyone they know or any other relationships they have, many daughters-in-law compared their mother-in-law to their mothers, usually noting how their mother-in-law is different. It is evident that these women are using their mother as a standard against which they evaluate their mother-in-law. This comparison implies that these women see some similarities between the two relationships that are supposedly distinct. While mothers raise children from birth, mothers-in-law enter the lives of their son's wife much later and do not have the same high intensity role as that of a mother raising a child. Further, mothers-in-law are generally not expected to fill the role of a mother to their daughter-in-law. Thus, it is problematic to compare mother-in-law with mother who occupy extremely different roles and troublesome to evaluate them using the same set of standards (e.g., "intensive mothering ideology").

Only a few daughters-in-law express that they do not compare their mother-in-law with their mother and suggest that the two roles are not comparable. I use these as contrast cases to illustrate how other women in the study make comparisons of their mother and mother-in-law. As Robyn (Chinese American) compellingly states, "No one

is comparable to my mom. I recognize that. People should recognize that!" When asked why she thinks that no one is comparable to mom, she said,

> It's your mother; you grew up with her. Your life style is similar. You've spent the first 20 or so years with her, whereas with mother-in-law, it's a situation where you are basically walking into someone else's family… Because I am a stranger to her, she couldn't love me as much as my mom does. I would feel weird if she love me like my mom.

Yi-Ju (Taiwanese) shares a similar sentiment and articulates her reasoning for why these two relationships are different:

> They cannot be compared because mother and daughter is an inseparable relation. No matter how good of a relationship a mother-in-law has with her daughter-in-law, it will never reach the same level as the relationship with mom.

Other than these few cases, most daughters-in-law make voluntary comparisons between their mother and mother-in-law. Many daughters-in-law portray their mother as the better mother, and in contrast, describe their mothers-in-law in negative terms. Some women make use of the close and loving relationship they have with their own mothers as a basis for describing their relationship with mothers-in-law as superficial and emotionally distant. Some women do not have a good relationship with their own mother and thus, tend to highlight the positive characteristics of their mother-in-law. The next section contains examples of the different comparisons and illustrates how women in this study draw on the ideology of "intensive mothering" to make those comparisons

(examples of the ideology of "intensive mothering" are noted in brackets following the quotes that illustrate the concept). Kathryn, who describes having a cordial relationship with her mother-in-law, says,

> As comfortable as I feel with his family, I can't necessarily talk to my mother-in-law the way I talk to my mom… I'm comfortable with my mother-in-law, but she's not necessarily the first person I'll go to if I have an issue or if I have to talk things out because that's what I have my mom for *[intensive mothering]* (Kathryn, Chinese American, 28, married 2 years)

Alexandra (Mexican American) comments,

> I'm really close to my mother-in-law. But it doesn't matter how close you are to your mother-in-law, you always want your mom there… For example, [after I gave birth,] my mother-in-law came over for a week to help me [clean and cook] and help with the baby, but I would have wanted it to be my mom… You want your mom there to tell you that everything is okay *[intensive mothering]*

While noting closeness and comfort with their mother-in-law, Alexandra and Kathryn express a preference for their own mother. Further, even though Alexandra portrays her mother-in-law as "motherly" and provides much needed assistance, Alexandra would like her mother to provide support, which suggests that she sees the mother as taking a central place, even when the relationship with the mother-in-law is close.

Unlike Alexandra and Kathryn who describe having a friendly relationship with their mothers-in-law, some women compare their mother-in-law to their own mother because they are disappointed in their relationship with mother-in-law. Jen (Taiwanese) notes,

> You can talk freely with mom; you can tell her everything *[intensive mothering]*. But it's different with mother-in-law. I find that when I want to open my heart up to my mother-in-law and share my worries with her, like how I would talk with my mom, she would be oblivious to what I say, or act in disapproval or as if she doesn't care.

Ella (Chinese American) states,

> My mother-in-law and I don't really talk to each other like I talk to my mother. I don't know if we're ever going to. When my mother-in-law comes over, we talk. We don't talk about a lot of deep personal issues *[intensive mothering]*… She probably tells me more about her stories and what's going on in her life… It's just odd for me to open up to her…

Ella continues to say that the reason she thought she did not have a close relationship with her mother-in-law is because her mother-in-law never had a daughter, so she did not have practice with a daughter. Ella presumes that having a daughter prepares one to have a daughter-in-law.

On the contrary, a few daughters-in-law who do not have positive relationship with their own mother tend to view their mother-in-law more positively. Yuju (Taiwanese), who describes her own mother as showing favoritism toward her sister,

provides a different image of mother-in-law from the experiences of the majority of the women in this study:

> I feel I can talk to my mother-in-law about a lot of things, things that I am not able to talk to my own mother *[intensive mothering]*. Sometimes I don't even need to say much, my mother-in-law knows what I am thinking about. It's a marvelous relationship. This relationship didn't happen between my mother and me… But, I feel like I get from her [mother-in-law] what my mom didn't give me… even the love.

Meimei (Chinese American), who has a rocky relationship with her mother, compares and contrasts her mom with her mother-in-law throughout the interview. She says, "My mother-in-law doesn't get involved at all with our personal life, [whereas] my own mother, I'm hesitant to tell her stuff because she'll get into my business and start harassing me about something." Lilly (Mexican American) shares a similar sentiment, "With my mother-in-law, I feel more comfortable talking to her about some topics whereas with my mom, I don't…"

In contrast to women who describe positive mother-daughter relations; Yuju, Lilly, and Meimei indicate that they are better able to communicate with their mothers-in-law and feel that their mothers-in-law understand them better than their own mothers. Yuju, for example, credits her mother-in-law with being attentive, putting a lot of care into their interactions, being able to pick up on cues about when and if Yuju is unhappy.

Discussion

Despite the different results of the comparisons, the examples above show that the "intensive mothering" ideology influences how women evaluate their mother-in-law as many draw on its components in their comparisons. For example, the accounts above suggest these daughters-in-law utilize being able to talk about personal issues and having heart-to-heart conversations as a point of comparison between mother and mother-in-law. Those who have a good relationship with their mothers (e.g., Jen, Kathryn, and Ella) describe being more able to communicate with their mother, whereas those who have a better relationship with their mother-in-law (e.g., MeiMei, Lilly, and Yuju) suggest the opposite. These women apply their expectations of mothers to their mothers-in-law, without acknowledging or downplaying the distinct roles these women may occupy. Mothers-in-law who are viewed as not fitting the mother ideal or who do not hold the characteristics of a good mother are depicted as deficient.

Further, as the earlier examples show, many Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese women in this study draw on similar attributes and stereotypes to describe a good mother-in-law. They also engage in similar comparisons of the roles of mother and mother-in-law. The examples presented here illustrate the pervasiveness of the ideology of "intensive mothering" and how this ideology shapes our understandings of family relationships and interactions. They also show how such ideology gets embedded in the roles women play, the activities women engage in, as well as other's perceptions and evaluations of them. Although the cultural context is different, this study's examples of women drawing on the ideology of "intensive mothering" to evaluate

their mother-in-law complement the findings from other studies that show how this ideology is applied to women in areas outside of family. For example, college students' expectations of female professors as caring and nurturing often affect their perceptions and assessments of female faculty (Bachen, McLoughlin, & Garcia, 1999; Kierstead, D'Agostino, & Dill, 1988). Intensive mothering is thus used as an ideological structure that serves to put women in certain roles, such as the mothering role.

Further, it is evident that these women engage in a relational construction of the mother-in-law. This type of comparisons can feed the negative stereotypes about mother-in-law, such as those we see in the popular media that negatively portray mother-in-law. For example, if we expect a mother-in-law to engage in "intensive mothering" and to provide love and warmth like a mother, she is very likely to fail because the roles of mother and mother-in-law are different. These unrealistic expectations can further exacerbate negative family relationship with in-laws.

Although the focus of this study is on Mexican American, Chinese American, and Taiwanese families, this relational construction of mother-in-law is one that occurs across racial/ethnic groups and one I speculate also occurs in mainstream White families.

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Chapter 3:

Gender, Power, and Generational Politics in Chinese American and Mexican American Families

Introduction

In-law relations, particularly those between a mother- and daughter-in-law, have been stereotyped in the popular culture as conflictual and are often the subject of jokes and situation comedies and movies. Images depict the relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law as fraught with jealousy and competition as the women fight for the affection and loyalty of the man who is the son to one and husband to the other. Their disagreements often center on how domestic tasks and child care should be done and who has the authority to make decisions. The man who is son to one and husband to the other is often shown as stuck in the middle trying to please two women. Despite the prominence popular culture accords the mother-in-law in shaping family life, family scholars have given this relationship relatively little attention. The lack of research on this important family relationship prompts several scholars to advocate for the need for such examination in family scholarship (see, Goetting, 1990; Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003; Walker, 2000).

Research on in-law relationships has been sporadic. Despite the intermittent nature, the literature on in-law relationships presents several sub-themes. Early research (from the 1920s through the 1970s) on mother-in-law relations has focused primarily on in-law adjustment and parental aid to married children and indirectly to their spouses (see,

for a review, Goetting, 1990). In addition, a few early studies suggest mother- and daughter-in-law relationship to be the most problematic and difficult in-law relation (Christensen & Johnson, 1971; Duvall, 1954). Studies in the late 1970s and 1980s examine the effects of martial dissolution on in-law relations (e.g., Ahrons & Bowman, 1981; Anderson, 1984; Johnson, 1988), assistance from parents- to children-in-law (Fischer, 1983), reciprocal assistance between generations (e.g., Brody, 1986; Kivett, 1984), and perceptions of in-law obligation (Rossi, 1987). More recent research efforts have focused on the caregiver roles of daughters- and sons-in-law (e.g., Globerman, 1996) and aid and support given to aging parents and parents-in-law (e.g., Lee, Spitz, & Logan, 2003; Shuey & Hardy, 2003). Others have examined the influence of in-laws on marriage (Bryan, Conger, & Meehan, 2001) and relationship ambivalence (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006; Wilson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Even when there is research on in-law relationships, most have studied white samples of mothers- and daughters-in-law, and seldom has research examined this relationship in racial/ethnic families (see, for exceptions, Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Shih & Pyke, 2010).

There are several reasons that may contribute to such limited research on this family relationship. First, most family scholars focus their inquiry on primary family relationships, such as marital relations or parent-child relations; while few place an emphasis on secondary family relationships (Cotterill, 1994; Turner, Young, & Black, 2006; see also, Lopata, 1999 for a discussion). Second, in-law relationships are multifaceted as they are often influenced and mediated by other relations in the family system (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006). Finally, the complexity and sensitive nature of

the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship make it difficult to find appropriate methods to study this relationship (Cotterill, 1994; Turner, Young, & Black, 2006).

In this chapter, I examine family power dynamics of mother, son, and daughter-in-law from the daughters-in-law's perspective in Chinese American and Mexican American families. In studying power dynamics, I focus specifically on childrearing, domestic tasks, and living arrangements, as these have been identified as areas where daughters-in-law have the most interaction and conflicts with their mother-in-law (Shih & Pyke, 2010). I also allow respondents to identify other areas where they deem as important in understanding power dynamics among in-laws. I explore the following questions: How do respondents experience power dynamics in their relationships with their mothers-in-law? What strategies of resistance or compliance do daughters-in-law engage in relations with their mother-in-law? Similarly, what strategies do mothers-in-law engage, according to the accounts of respondents? How do respondents' husbands mediate or broker this relationship? Specifically, what strategies do some husbands enlist in trying to mediate or smooth out conflicts and tensions between the two women? Are they successful? Do some husbands take the side of either their mother or wife, and advocate on their behalf when conflicts or tensions emerge? How does such alliance affect mother, son, and daughter-in-law relations? Are there any incidences where respondents describe siding with their mother-in-law (or their mother-in-law siding with them) to resist the domination of male family members? Do daughters-in-law describe any incidences of gender solidarity with her mother-in-law in resisting male domination and patriarchal family dynamics?

I explore whether there are racial/ethnic similarities and differences in how Chinese American and Mexican American women describe their family power dynamics as well as the actual power practices in these families. I also consider how socio-structural factors (e.g., geographic proximity, dependency on mother-in-law for childcare, mother-in-law's financial dependency) affect family power dynamics. For example, do women who rely on their mother-in-law for childcare more likely to describe a sense of powerlessness in relation with their mother-in-law than those who do not depend on such services?

Review of Literature

As one of the major areas of tension between mothers- and daughters-in-law surround the care of children, I focus more specifically on how childcare and childrearing practices influence the relationships between mothers- and daughters-in-law in the first section of my review. I also review available literature on in-law relationships in racial/ethnic and immigrant families.

Issues concerning the care and parenting of one's children could be the source of most tension between mothers- and daughters-in-law as these two women belong to different generations and may have different childrearing practices. Some research on the effects of a child on mother-/daughter-in-law relationships finds women prefer to turn to their mother for childrearing advice significantly more often than to ask their mother-in-law for such advice (Fischer, 1983; Marx, Miller, & Huffmon, 2011). Further, Fischer's findings suggest that women with young children need and receive more assistance from both their mother and their mother-in-law than those without children. However, they

perceive assistance from mother and mother-in-law differently. Daughters-in-law are more likely to express ambivalence or negative feelings (e.g., viewing it as intrusive) about childcare assistance from their mother-in-law than from their own mother.

However, other research suggests that difference in childcare methods is not a major issue for some mothers- and daughters-in-law (Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). They find that a majority of daughters- and mothers-in-law in their farm and ranch families regard differences in childrearing practices to disturb little or only slightly their relationship with one another. And only a small portion of the daughters-in-law (16%) in their study reported being extremely disturbed by the differences in childrearing practices with their mother-in-law. These mothers- and daughters-in-law reported having different values and opinions as the most serious conflict in their relationship.

Research on in-law relations has rarely examined these dynamics in racial/ethnic minority and immigrant families (see, for exceptions, Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Shih & Pyke, 2010). A study of black mother/daughter and mother- and daughter-in-law relations find women most often employ a strategy that aims to be tactfully assertive in resolving problems with their mothers and mothers-in-law (Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). For example, in conflicts regarding punishing children, women who engage the tactful assertive strategy would explain to their mother or mother-in-law why they punish their child while continue to punish the child. They also find women use the compliance strategy more often with their own mother than with their mother-in-law. Compliance strategy implies that those who comply had assumed a subordinate role in conflict.

Although there is little empirical research on in-law relations in Mexican American families, research on parent-child relations, martial relations, kin support, and extended family integration in Mexican and Mexican American families provides some insights. A study on elder care in Mexico suggests that younger Mexican women oppose living with their in-laws as there has been a long history of negative mother- and daughter-in-law relations (Varley & Blasco, 2000). Older Mexican women in their study also express their desires to live alone so as to maintain a good relationship with their daughter-in-law. Emotional ties between Mexican American children and parents are important and the strength of such ties is expected to continue into adolescence and adulthood (Falicov, 1996; Keefe, 1984). This bond is especially strong between a Latina mother and her son. Based on her clinical observations, Falicov speculates the intense mother-son attachment as a major explanation for the common conflict between mothers- and daughters-in-law in Latino families (Falicov, 1998). Because the social position of mother carries considerable status and respect in Latino culture (Brice, 2002; Falicov, 1998; Laganá, 2003; Rodriguez, 1999), the mother may have a strong influence over her grown adult son. The strong mother-son bond may present a challenge for daughters-in-law who occupy a subordinate role and may be dependent on their husband for support (Falicov, 1998).

Research findings remain inconsistent and sometimes contradictory with regard to proximity to, contact with, and support to and from kin in Mexican American families (see for discussion and review, Landale & Oropesa, 2007; Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006). For example, some studies find Hispanic Americans to be more likely to provide

practical and financial support to kin than their European American counterparts (Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Shuey & Hardy, 2003), while others find the opposite (Roschelle, 1997) or no ethnic differences (Eggebeen, 1992). Literature on kin support suggests that Mexican Americans show higher rates of co-residence with and proximity to kin compared to their European American counterparts (e.g., Holms & Holms, 1995; Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006). Rather than attributing differences in co-residence and kin support patterns simply to cultural values, Sarkisian and colleagues (2006) argue that social class explains ethnic differences in co-residence patterns, proximity to kin, kin support, and household and childcare help among women. They conclude that the differences between Mexican American and European American extended family integration can be accounted for by ethnic differences in socioeconomic standing.

A small body of research on immigrant families finds mothers-in-law as playing a central role in maintaining and enforcing cultural traditions, such as patriarchal authority (see, for examples, Laganá, 2003; Lan, 2002; Lim, 1997; Shih & Pyke, 2010). Lim (1997) describes mothers-in-law as "gatekeepers" in Korean immigrant families as they not only try to maintain the traditional ways of doing family work, but also actively discourage their sons from doing housework, especially at the demand of their wives. Examining the influence of acculturation on pregnancy beliefs and practices, Laganá (2003) finds that some Mexican immigrant mothers-in-law attempt to convey and maintain Mexican cultural beliefs about pregnancy and childbirth practices.

Resource Theory and Intergenerational Power Relations.

Resource theory, which predominates in the study of family power, suggests power dynamics are greatly determined by the amount of relative resources partners bring to their relationships (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Blumberg & Coleman, 1989). Resources include socio-structural factors (e.g., education, employment, and income) as well as services (e.g., childcare and housework). The partner who brings greater resources or services on which the other partner depends is likely to have greater power in family decision making, while the other partner's reliance on those resources operates to weaken her/his power base (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Feminist scholars criticize the gender-neutrality of resource theory which treats resources as having the same effect regardless of the gender of the partner (Pyke, 1994, 1996; Tichenor, 2005). They point out that spouses might regard resources differently depending on who is providing them. For example, women's earnings might be regarded with resentment and not a resource if they represent a challenge to a husband's investment as the primary breadwinner or his self-esteem. In this scenario, a woman might have to compensate for her earnings by according more power to her husband, which also can serve as a way of soothing his hurt feelings (Lim, 1997; Pyke, 1994, 1996). In addition, studies that utilize this theoretical perspective tend to overlook how one's social locations (e.g., gender, race, class, age, and immigrant status) shape one's access to resources.

Much research on family power dynamics has centered on marital and romantic relationships both in the U.S. and internationally (see for examples, Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Brayfield, 1992; Komter, 1989; Kulik, 1999; Oropesa, 1997; Parrado,

Flippen, & McQuiston, 2005; Pyke, 1994, 1996; Rodman, 1967; Walker, 1996; Xu & Lai, 2002; Yount, 2005; Zipp, Prohaska, Bemiller, 2004). However, little is known about intergenerational power dynamics between aging parents and their adult children (see for exceptions, Cooney et al., 1982; Gallin, 1994; Kranichfeld, 1987; McDonald, 1980; Pyke, 1999; Shih & Pyke, 2010).

Drawing on resource theory, a study in a rural Taiwanese village finds that mothers who provide financial resources and capital to their son and daughter-in-law have more power over the younger couple, are less dependent, and enjoy more respect, filial care, and freedom from the younger generation than their counterparts who have less resources and capital (Gallin, 1994). On the other hand, women who are dependent on their son and daughter-in-law often feel that they have less status and are "powerless" as compared to their daughter-in-law. Resources in intergenerational relation include not only financial support, but also practical assistance (such as childcare, eldercare, and household chores). Dependency on a mother-in-law's childcare and household assistance reduces some Chinese American women's power to negotiate with and secure their mother-in-law's compliance with their parenting methods (Shih & Pyke, 2010). In this chapter, I apply resource theory where it is relevant in analyzing daughters-in-law's accounts.

Mothers-in-law: A resource, a source of conflict, or both?

Research on intergenerational relations in the U.S. suggests that patterns of intergenerational assistance generally flow from older to younger generations (Bengtson, 2001), especially the case of families with young children where grandparents provide a

source of support and assistance to their adult children. In addition, some researchers find that the balance of power may be shifting from the older to the younger generation in Taiwanese, Mexican, and transnational families (Lee, Lin, & Chang, 1995; Martin, 1990; Shieh, Lo, & Su, 1997; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002; Varley & Blasco, 2000).

Grandparents often take on child care and other household responsibilities, thus allowing young mothers to pursue employment outside the home (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Laganá, 2003; Min, 1998; Tam & Detzner, 1998; Williams & Torres, 1998). Such arrangements occur most frequently when the young couple resides with or nearby the in-laws. Goodman and Silverstein (2002), for example, suggest that Latina, African American, and White grandmothers assume care for their co-resident grandchildren because they want "to help financially" and/or their grandchildren's mother is working. Comparative studies of childcare arrangements among racial/ethnic families have focused mostly on women and found Mexican Americans to be more involved in providing childcare assistance than European Americans (Becerra & Chi, 1992; Roschelle, 1997; Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006; Uttal, 1999). Employed Mexican American and African American women are likely to utilize extended kin for childcare, even when that is not their preference (Uttal, 1999). Uttal argues that Mexican American women's decisions to use kin-based childcare are shaped not only by their individual needs and economic resources, but also by the economic needs of their extended family members. For example, one of Uttal's respondents does not prefer to utilize her mother-in-law for childcare, but does so because she understands how withdrawing her financial support in the form of childcare payments would negatively

affect her mother-in-law's economic well-being. Some Chinese and Mexican mothers-in-law travel from their home countries to the U.S. to support their daughters-in-law during the last month of pregnancy and postpartum recovery as well as help with childcare after birth (Laganá, 2003; Tam & Detzner, 1998).

Childcare arrangements may also generate tension between women and their mothers-in-law (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Lan, 2006; Shih & Pyke, 2010). In families where grandparents provide childcare, one stressor is conflict between the grandparents and their adult children. For example, a grandmother's interfering in childrearing (e.g., offering unwanted advice) and emotional hostility (e.g., criticism of the parents) may create conflict between young parents and the grandmother who provides childcare (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002). Lan, studying this relation in Taiwan, reveals that the power dynamics between mothers- and daughters-in-law when the younger woman relies on her mother-in-law for childcare as some mothers-in-law complain about having to sacrifice the comfort of old age to maintain their sons' families. However, young (educated and professional) mothers often employ alternative strategies, such as hiring nannies, so that they can safeguard their parental autonomy and avoid confrontation with their mother-in-law.

This literature informs us that a mother's childcare and housework assistance could be viewed as a resource for her adult son and his wife, but it could also be a source of conflict and tension between generations in some families. Intergenerational assistance, thus, provides a useful site in which to examine power dynamics between these family members. For examples, under what circumstances would daughters-in-law comply with

rather than resist their mother-in-law's childcare methods? What strategies do respondents enlist to resist or comply with their mother-in-law? What other factors could be used to explain why some women comply, even when they do not agree with how their mother-in-law takes care of their children?

Potential Roles of Son/Husband

The role of a son/husband in in-law relations is often ignored. Family scholars have only recently taken seriously the roles that a son/husband might play in family discord with his family (see, for examples, Shih & Pyke, 2010; Wu et al., 2010). Early family scholarship and popular media often depict mother- and daughter-in-law problems as a "battle" between two women, suggesting that in-law problems are a female problem (Nye & Berardo, 1973). However, as a married woman is sometimes considered to be an outsider to her husband's extended family, her opinions tend to be undervalued in situations of disagreement with his relatives. A husband, in contrast, has greater power when dealing with his own extended family than his wife has. In their study of farm families, Marotz-Baden & Cowan (1987) find that women are most likely to turn to their husband for advice and source of support when they are having problems with their mother-in-law. Thus, spousal support is an important resource for women who feel powerless in relation to their husband's family. It not only has a direct effect on marital satisfaction, but also buffers the negative effect of stressful events, such as conflict with a mother-in-law (Carels & Baucom, 1999; Fu, 1985). In addition, as several recent studies suggest, the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship is often influenced and mediated by other relationships in the family system, such as son/husband and grandchildren (Prentice,

2008; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Turner, Young, Black, 2006). For example, a husband who acts as a gatekeeper between his mother and wife can sometimes maintain peace between them by keeping some information private to one or both women.

There is some evidence that a Chinese daughter-in-law without her husband's support may have few resources with which to bargain for better treatment and be more likely to obey and respect her mother-in-law without explicitly expressing her desires for change (Gallin, 1994). Studies on Chinese families suggest that when married sons act as a mediator, mothers- and daughters-in-law report having a better relationship. However, when married sons avoid or ignore such conflicts or side more strongly with one woman over the other, conflicts tend to intensify (Kung, 1999a).

The role of son/husband as a mediator has an influence not only on how the conflict or disagreement is resolved, but also on women's perceptions of their marital satisfaction and success (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Wu et al., 2010) and satisfaction with their relationship with their mother-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Wu and colleagues suggest that women who report higher levels of conflict with their mother-in-law report lower levels of marital satisfaction. They argue that because a Taiwanese daughter-in-law is not able to directly oppose her mother-in-law, she transfers her anger or other negative emotions to interactions with her husband. However, they find that Taiwanese wives report higher marital satisfaction when they perceive their husband to take their side or use constructive methods to resolve conflicts with their mother-in-law. In addition, Taiwanese wives' marital satisfaction was not associated with the degree of conflict when they perceive that their husband supports them in the conflict.

Perceptions of husband's loyalty when disagreements arise with mother-in-law also have a positive influence on women's relationship with their mother-in-law (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). However, when a husband responds to the disagreement by immediately siding with his mother, it serves as a hindrance to the conflict situation.

Some husbands take the "non-involvement" stance in the hope that the women will resolve the matter between themselves. One study finds that few women could depend on their partners for support in conflictual situations with their mothers-in-law as their husbands were uncomfortable with these emotional situations (Cotterill, 1994). Based on observations with Latino families in therapy, another study suggests that the husband either tries to appease both his mother and his wife or refuse to intervene (Falicov, 1998). When wives perceive their husband as ignoring the conflict, they feel that their husband does not support them and thus may reduce their intimate feelings for their husband (Wu et al. 2010).

In terms of the roles of husbands and family power dynamics, second generation Chinese American wives often depend on the power and authority of their husband to get their mother-in-law to obey their wishes (Shih & Pyke, 2010). When wives have conflicts with their mother-in-law, most husbands tend to support their wives' resistance. Husbands do not insist that their wives implement his mother's directives or behave as docile daughters-in-law. Thus, husbands and wives enjoy a cross-gender alliance (e.g., marital solidarity) that empowers and elevates the status of daughters-in-law. Contrary to previous studies that describe mothers-in-law as striking a "patriarchal bargain" by using the social and structural constraints of patriarchy to enhance their power (Kandiyoti, 1988;

Lan, 2003), daughters-in-law can also elevate their power by bargaining with patriarchy. Specifically, Chinese American daughters-in-law draw on traditional male authority by enlisting their husband's support and mediation as a strategy for maximizing their power vis-à-vis their mother-in-law.

Taken together, this literature suggests the importance of the mediating role of the son/husband in understanding the relationship between his mother and wife. It also suggests a son/husband's involvement affects his wife's perception of their marital relationship. In this chapter, I further examine how do respondents' husbands mediate and what strategies they employ in trying to smooth out conflicts and tension between his mother and wife. I also explore whether the son/husband advocates for either woman in situations of conflict as well as how such an alliance affects the power relationship among mothers, sons, and daughters-in-law.

Method

Sample

The sample for this analysis consists of 20 daughters-in-law from 10 Chinese American and 10 Mexican American families. All are 1.5 or second generation (i.e., they immigrated prior to age 15 or were born in the U.S.); are married to a co-ethnic man whose mother is, like her own mother, a first generation immigrant; and have at least a high school education. Seventeen participants have a college or advanced degree. Participants' ages range from 24 to 38 years; the average age is 31 years. Sixteen daughters-in-law are employed part- or full-time and four do not work outside the home.

They have been married to their current spouse for an average of 5 years. Seventeen daughters-in-law have young children under the age of 6.

All 20 respondents live within a 30 mile radius to their mothers-in-law and 4 live with their mother-in-law. Five daughters-in-law (2 Mexican Americans and 3 Chinese Americans) provide monthly financial assistance to their mothers-in-law. One Mexican American daughter-in-law and her husband receive monthly financial assistance from her mother-in-law. Seven mothers-in-law provide regular housework assistance to their son and daughter-in-law, and 12 provide childcare on a daily or weekly basis.

Data Collection and Analytic Strategies

I collected intensive interview data from each respondent, using a six-page interview guide with open-ended questions. I also asked probe questions to uncover the assumptions and meanings respondents bring to their narratives and to make more explicit the underlying discourses and ideologies they draw on in understanding their day-to-day interactions (Charmaz, 2006, 2009).

To get at the general tenor of their relationship with their mother-in-law, I asked daughters-in-law to describe their relationship with the older woman, their interactions, what traits they like and dislike about her, any shared interests or leisure activities, and what assistance they provide for one another. To assess general power dynamics, I asked about the things they do to please their mother-in-law, occasions when their mother-in-law has tried to influence their home life and/or marriage, living arrangements and how their current living arrangement was decided, domestic and childcare tasks they do

together or provide for one another, expectations they have for the relationship, and disagreements and conflicts.

To understand marital solidarity, I asked daughters-in-law to describe their marital relationship, traits they like and dislike about their husband, the division of domestic and childcare tasks, and disagreements and conflict situations. I also asked for examples of what respondents' husband does when his wife has disagreements or conflicts with his mother. For example, I asked respondents to describe the last disagreement or argument they had with their mother-in-law and how their husband handled that situation. In addition, I asked daughters-in-law what they would want to change the way their husband handled conflict situation, if they could have it any way they wanted. I also asked if they have tried to implement those desired changes and with what result.

Drawing on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Straus, 1967), I explore unanticipated topics of relevance that emerge during the data collection process and adjust the interview guide accordingly. While I bring specific questions to this study, I also anticipate that some unexpected findings will emerge that may require new theoretical frames and/or grounded theoretical explanations. For the data analysis, I read the interviews multiple times, sorted data into broad topic categories, and wrote detailed summaries of the major themes for each interview as well as family. I use a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) to generate more nuanced coding categories from the summaries, and then engaged in additional sub-coding of the data into analytic categories. The coding process is dynamic and iterative, as themes and patterns are refined based on

emerging findings. [See methods section in Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on analytic strategies.]

Within and Between Group Comparisons

I first engage a within-group analysis of Chinese American and Mexican American families. I identify similarities and differences between those who engage varying patterns of power dynamics, focusing especially on factors that distinguish the different patterns. This allows me to center my analysis on the diversity that exists within a group.

I also employ between group comparisons where I look for similarities and differences between Chinese American and Mexican American families. Examining between-group similarities allows me to avoid presenting a concept in a culturally essentialized fashion as it suggests that this practice is evident in multiple cultures and cannot simply be reduced to cultural explanations (such as Confucianism). I also look for differences (e.g., characteristics that these families do not share) between groups. Finally, I identify social and structural factors (e.g., geographic proximity, dependency on mother or mother-in-law for childcare) that affect the different levels of comparisons across groups. By focusing on social and structural factors, it allows me to further interrogate these differences and to avoid problems of reducing between group differences to each group's cultural values.

Studying Power Dynamics

Most family power research since the 1960s conceptualizes power as a person's ability to carry out her or his will despite the resistance of others. This Weberian

approach focuses on power that is overt and observable, typically measured using decision-making and conflict outcomes (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). This approach has been criticized for oversimplifying power dynamics and ignoring how gender meanings, cultural norms, and status inequalities structure family roles and shape latent and invisible power processes that prevent issues and conflicts from erupting to the surface (Komter, 1989; Pyke, 1994)

Measuring Hidden Power. I draw on Komter (1989) who introduced measures of covert power processes in marriage. One way covert power works is by preventing issues from being raised. This occurs when the less powerful individual anticipates the needs of the more powerful partner and does not raise issues due to fear of a negative reaction. The less powerful individual, in choosing her/his actions, then internalizes the needs and desires of the more powerful person, even when doing so may compromise her/his own wishes. Consciously or unconsciously, the less powerful individual aims to maintain peace and avoid overt conflicts because she/he knows that it is futile to raise issues. Measures of hidden power provide a more nuanced and multi-layered portrait of power dynamics in family relationships. To measure hidden or latent power, I engage the concept of "relevant counterfactuals", or what one partner would have done in the absence of another partner's power (Lukes, 1974). For example, what would a daughter-in-law do differently from the way her mother-in-law had wanted her to do? Analyzing relevant counterfactuals reveals potential issues that are not overt or have not been realized (Komter, 1989; Lukes, 1974). I asked respondents about the kind of changes they would desire in their relationships to assess the hidden exercise of power. For example, a

daughter-in-law may be unhappy with the ways in which her mother-in-law takes care of the grandchildren, but does not try to implement desired changes because she anticipates the older women's resistance or resentment, suggesting the greater power of her mother-in-law in this particular realm. The daughter-in-law might, however, want to employ her own parenting methods when her mother-in-law is not present.

I asked daughters-in-law how they would change their mother-in-law and husband if they could change anything about them that they wanted, whether they have tried to implement any such changes and if so, what kinds of strategies they employ and with what results. I asked respondents about change in areas such as leisure activities, living arrangements, household and childcare tasks, and situation of conflict. If respondents said they had not pursued change, I asked why. If they described a sense of futility or fear of conflict or reprisal, I regard that as evidence of powerlessness because it suggests that the less powerful individual would accept an undesirable situation to avoid conflicts. In other words, conflicts could arise if the less powerful individuals were to express their wants and desires.

Measuring Overt Power. I also use conventional indicators of overt power that capture how decisions are made and who wins when disagreements occur. To measure overt power in marital relations, I asked daughters-in-law about spousal disagreements and conflicts and how those conflicts were resolved. To understand intergenerational power dynamics, I asked daughters-in-law about disagreements with their mother-in-law and how they resolved them.

Findings

Overview of Findings

An analysis of daughters-in-law's accounts suggests childrearing methods and standards of household cleanliness and housework as sites of conflict with their mother-in-law. I examine how daughters-in-law describe their family power dynamics as well as the actual power processes (measured by both covert and overt power indicators) in their relationships with their mother-in-law. I then explore the strategies that daughters-in-law use to achieve their desired changes without confronting their mother-in-law and whether and how strategies empower them in the process. I examine daughters-in-law's descriptions of their husband's role as a mediator during conflicts. And finally, I explore how mother- and daughter-in-law might develop gender solidarity and what that gender solidarity means for family power relations.

Childrearing: Disciplining and Boundary Crossing

In both Chinese American and Mexican American families, the most frequently occurring disagreement and conflict between mothers- and daughters-in-law centered on the care of grandchildren. Similar to prior findings on mother-in-law relations, many respondents report that they are not in agreement with the childcare and/or parenting methods endorsed or practiced by their mothers-in-law (Fischer, 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). Elizabeth (Chinese American) describes one area of childcare in which she and her mother-in-law tend to disagree:

> When my daughter was younger, we would fight a lot about whether we need to keep her at home for her nap time. She thinks it's okay for you to

> take the baby out wherever you go, so it's more parent directed. Whereas, I think if a child, an infant, needs to be at home because they need to take a nap at home and they should be at home.

According to Elizabeth, her mother-in-law eventually yielded in this situation and became a believer of Elizabeth's method as she saw how cranky the baby could get if she didn't have a good nap.

In addition to having different childrearing methods, another conflict between daughters- and mothers-in-law is the level of mother-in-law's involvement in parenting. Generally, daughters-in-law articulate that disciplining children is parents' domain and grandmothers should not interfere. Although this boundary can be applied to both sets of grandmothers, the meaning of this boundary is quite different for mother and mother-in-law as I will discuss at the end of this section. PCH's mother-in-law lives with PCH and her family and occasionally takes care of PCH's 3 children. PCH (Chinese American) describes an instance when her mother-in-law oversteps the boundary,

> The thing that makes me mad is if I say "no TV" and when I am not home and she lets them watch TV… Or if I said to [my son] "no TV" and then he'll go ask grandma…I think she just wants to be the one that can say yes or no. And I actually have talked to her before about TV. I feel like he watches too much and she's always saying to him, "Do you want to watch?"

PCH feels upset not only because her mother-in-law tempts the grandson to watch more television, but her doing so gives PCH the perception that she does not respect PCH's

mothering. PCH believes that in trying to assert her authority in her son's family and wanting to win her grandchildren's affection, her mother-in-law inadvertently crosses the boundary of what PCH considers as acceptable mother-in-law behavior, which is to respect the parents' childrearing methods. By defying the rules PCH sets at home, her mother-in-law's behavior is interpreted by PCH as her wanting to assume power that she does not have.

Other mothers share similar sentiments. Lisa (Mexican American) and her husband live with her in-laws to save money for a home of their own. Lisa's mother-in-law takes care of her son while Lisa works during the day and attends school at night. Lisa describes her irritation when she perceives her mother-in-law as interfering with their parenting:

> In the beginning if we try to discipline him in front of her, she would be like, "No, no! Leave the poor guy alone." She would butt in and that created a problem because, "No, we're the parents." It was irritating because I am the mom here, I am qualified! But, I never argue with her about it…

Because Lisa lives with her mother-in-law and relies on her for childcare, she wants to maintain a good relationship with the older woman. Even though Lisa is frustrated by her mother-in-law interferences, she does not feel she can voice her objection to her mother-in-law. Lisa usually just listens to her mother-in-law and lets her husband handle the disagreement with his parents. She expresses a sense of powerlessness in comparison with her mother-in-law, as I will discuss in a later section.

Sophia (Mexican American) also lives with her mother-in-law and relies on her for childcare. It upsets Sophia when her mother-in-law does not follow her childrearing practices:

> [I want to] make her understand that he is my child, so I choose how to raise him and she'd respect those rules and those decisions that I make… [For example,] I put a bib on him so he doesn't wet his chest. She doesn't and he gets all wet and it irritates me.

However, unlike Lisa, Sophia is not afraid of voicing her displeasure with her mother-in-law if she is not happy with her mother-in-law's parenting method. Because Sophia pays the family's rent and occasionally loans money to her in-laws, she believes that she is entitled to make demands on her mother-in-law about how she cares for her toddler son. Consistent with resource theory, Sophia's financial contribution enhances her status in her husband's family and her power vis-à-vis her in-laws.

Even though such boundaries could be applied to both sets of grandmothers, most women only convey frustration and irritation when their mother-in-law is the one who gives advice or does things differently from them. When their own mother offers childrearing advice; however, respondents are less likely to be insulted. Samantha (Chinese American) provides an example,

> Oh, it's cold outside. And I forget to bring my daughters' jackets and they need to wear a jacket. If my mother-in-law said that, I would think "Oh, you think I'm a bad mom." But if my mom said that, I wouldn't take offense to it. I would just be like "uh huh, don't worry, they'll be fine."

Samantha's statement illustrates how the meanings of boundary apply differently to mother and mother-in-law. As shown in Samantha's account, childrearing messages are differently received and interpreted even when her mother and mother-in-law make similar comments or give the same advice. Daughters-in-law are more likely to find mother-in-law's advice offensive and interpret it as criticism. Many other women share Samantha's view.

To many of these women, mothers should be the ones who set rules and discipline children while grandmothers should comply with parents' childrearing methods and not act as parenting experts. When mothers-in-law offer unsolicited childrearing advice, some mothers interpret it to mean that their mother-in-law is criticizing their mothering ability. Some feel that their mother-in-law does not respect as mothers. For example, Lisa's earlier statement "I am the mom; I am qualified" suggests her belief that mothers are the ones competent to be in charge of their own children. Mothers like Lisa, Sophia, PCH, and Samantha express irritation and resentment toward their mother-in-law for challenging their parental authority in front of their children. However, such frustration does not apply when it is the women's own mother who offers childrearing advice. This seems to be similar across racial/ethnic groups as equal number of Chinese American and Mexican American mothers express such sentiments.

Household Cleanliness and Household Chores

In addition to childcare and parenting issues, standards of household cleanliness and household chores is another area about which daughters- and mothers-in-law have disagreements. However, many daughters-in-law make an effort to avoid conflicts with

their mother-in-law in this area. Some consider household standards to be relatively unimportant. PCH (Chinese American) states,

> I prefer she didn't wash dishes, 'cause she doesn't wash it that good, but I am not going to tell her not to wash it. I just try to do it… I am not going to tell her, "You don't wash dishes good." That's just rude. That's offensive… Most of the time, I really prefer to be the one to wash, because I put them in the dish rack a certain way and I feel like it is cleaner…

Carrie (Chinese American) shares a similar example,

> If anything, [I would want her to] rinse the plates a couple more times… I think she still has soap left on it, but I'm anal about stuff like that… I am not going to ask her… What am I going to say? Rinse the dishes a couple more times? Or you don't clean the dishes well?

Alexandra (Mexican American) said she is not going to ask her mother-in-law to change because, "I have a certain way of putting things, where I want them, or cleaning them a certain way… just like she does things a certain way at her house."

Earlier in her relationship with her mother-in-law, Samantha felt the need to maintain the impression of being a good/perfect daughter-in-law. However, as time progresses, Samantha (Chinese American) says she is tired of and not wanting to play the "mind game" with her mother-in-law regarding housework.

> I like to keep dishes in my sink. I don't think it's such a big deal with a little pile up… But to my mother-in-law, she likes to have a clean sink… It used to be, when she starts doing dishes, I would tell her not to and she

would insist on doing it… Then I would get annoyed… It's that whole, "Do I let her do it?" – I don't want her to feel like she has to do housework when she's here, but I don't want to always play the cat and mouse game with her… Now, if she wants to do the dishes, I'll let her do the dishes… I just say thank you at the end and appreciate it… Honestly, I'm at the point where if she thinks I'm a bad mother, or if she thinks I'm sloppy or messy, that's fine. That's her opinion and it actually doesn't offend me anymore.

Having different sanitation standards and wanting changes in household chores are more salient in the accounts of Chinese American women than those of Mexican American women. As the examples above illustrate, many Chinese American women comment on the housework their mother-in-law engages in and offer specific changes that they would want to make in terms of what and how their mother-in-law does housework. It is not that these issues are less important in Mexican American families, but it may be because a majority of Mexican American women in this study report that their mother-in-law does not do housework in their house. Women who describe having a mother-in-law that does not do housework in their home also express wanting the housework arrangements to remain the same. Therefore, for these daughters-in-law, there is no need for change.

Most women do not depend on their mother-in-law's assistance for household chores. According to resource theory, their non-dependency should give them more bargaining power vis-à-vis their mother-in-law in this domain. However, that does not seem to be case with daughters-in-law who express wanting changes. When asked about

desired changes in household chores, most of the daughters-in-law say they would not raise such issues with their mother-in-law as shown in PCH, Carrie, Alexandra, and Samantha's accounts. Even when they do not like how their mother-in-law does housework in their house, these daughters-in-law's appear to consider it futile to ask for changes. Therefore, they make compromises by modifying their own expectations and actions. For example, they try to do household chores themselves before their mother-in-law gets to them or re-do the chores once their mother-in-law is not around.

Desired Changes and Power

When asked what they would want to change about their mother-in-law if they had the power to do so, a majority of daughters-in-law (13 of the 17 mothers) expresses a desire for change in the way their mothers-in-law care for their children. However, few actually act on that desire. Many of these women do not feel like they can change their mother-in-law. They do not raise issues and, instead, try to make compromises with and justification for their mother-in-law, partly because they rely on the older woman for regular childcare. For example, although wanting her mother-in-law to follow a regular feeding schedule so that she does not over-feed her granddaughter, Elizabeth (Chinese American, physician) is reluctant to place this demand on her mother-in-law, who watches her daughter on a daily basis:

> I think that's probably one of those conflicts I kind of avoid because when she's there, she's the one taking care of her so I need to respect that… When I am at work, I try not to interfere. I just let her do what she needs to do to take care of my daughter. I think it's okay for me to tell her that, but

> I've just been avoiding it. I don't think it's such a big deal because when I take care of her, I have certain feeding schedules… I try to pick my battles.

Elizabeth justifies why she does not want to challenge her mother-in-law's childcare methods. She rationalizes that because she has her own feeding schedule when she takes care of her baby, what her mother-in-law does when taking care of her daughter does not matter much. Elizabeth talks in detail about how she does not want her daughter to develop habits of emotional eating (e.g., eating when she is bored or when she cries), which suggests that she cares a great deal about her daughter's eating patterns. However, Elizabeth feels like she should avoid bringing up the issue and has to make compromises because her mother-in-law is the one "in charge" of the granddaughter when Elizabeth works. Further, according to resource theory, Elizabeth's reliance on her mother-in-law's childcare assistance reduces her power vis-à-vis the older woman. This may help to explain why Elizabeth tries to avoid bringing up such issues with her mother-in-law. Elizabeth also does so in order not to undermine her mother-in-law's authority in front of her daughter. As I will discuss in the next section, Elizabeth's justification of her mother-in-law's behavior reflects her powerlessness in her relationship with her mother-in-law, especially in the area of childcare.

Lisa (Mexican American) also wants to make changes in her mother-in-law's childcare methods. She states,

> Change in a way, I would like her to watch him a little bit closer. At least check on him once in a while… Maybe watching what he eats, but instead, he'd go to the pantry and make himself popcorns or eat three crystal bowls,

> so monitor that… Or like when he was younger, the neighbor called her and said, "Hey, did you know that your grandson is outside washing the dog? He's trying to drown the puppy!"… I just tell my husband, "Your mom needs to…"

Lisa does not argue with her mother-in-law when differences occur so as to keep peace with the older woman. She simply leaves it to her husband to mediate the disagreement:

> [I avoid conflict] because I don't want to be in bad terms with her and I live with her. Even if I don't live with her, I wouldn't want problems with her because that's my husband's mom… Plus, I need her. She helps me out. She watches my son. So I would hate to be in bad terms with her.

Lisa's example best illustrates Komter's conceptualization of covert power processes in family relations. By anticipating potential problems with her mother-in-law, Lisa's statement captures her powerlessness relative to her mother-in-law. Lisa does not want to raise issues with her mother-in-law for fear of a negative reaction from the older woman. Lisa (the less powerful individual) takes into account the desires of her mother-in-law (the more powerful partner) when choosing how to interact with the older woman. In addition, even though Lisa does not like the way her mother-in-law interferes when she disciplines her son, Lisa's reliance on her mother-in-law's childcare and household assistance diminishes her power to voice her displeasure.

Besides parenting methods and household tasks, women in this study also express wanting their mother-in-law to change the way she voices her opinions or how she manages the family life of the younger couple. Although not directly related to conflicts

with their mother-in-law, some women convey wanting to change living arrangements with and financial support of their mother-in-law.

Some daughters-in-law describe having a good relationship with their mother-in-law. They describe that they have not needed to avoid disagreements with their mothers-in-law as there have not been situations of conflict nor have they wanted any changes in their relationship with their mother-in-law (Peggy, Alice, Natalie, Alexandra). Alice (Chinese American) says:

> I would not want to change her; it would take away from who she really is… I really appreciate her role in our lives. I think she's such a great mom to her son and she's a great grandmother to our baby… What more can I ask for? She's very thoughtful. She always thinks of us, her daughters-in-law… We can always go to her if we need to.

In many of these cases, mothers do not feel like they can make demands on their mother-in-law to change, especially when their mother-in-law provides regular childcare. Their reliance on their mother-in-law for childcare reduces some women's ability to voice their concerns and to impose their preferences on their mother-in-law. Others, because of their financial contribution to their family, feel they are more able to challenge their mother-in-law in certain situations, as resource theory suggests. Those who consider themselves as unable to make changes often resort to other strategies to achieve their wanted adjustment. In the next sections, I discuss some strategies (such as making compromises, rationalizing mother-in-law's behavior, changing their own expectations, or ignoring the problems)

that the daughters-in-law in my sample have employed to achieve their desired changes without confronting their mother-in-law.

Making Compromises and Justifying Mothers-in-law's Behaviors

Some daughters-in-law evaluate the severity of the situations and learn to make compromises with their mother-in-law. Some view their relationships with their mother-in-law as a constant negotiation. For example, some women would confront their mother-in-law in certain situations, but not with matters they find less important. As PCH (Chinese American) succinctly puts it, "You have to pick your battles." PCH describes trying to avoid conflict with her mother-in-law, "I don't like confrontation, I mean, most people don't… Unless it's something that I feel like is detrimental to either my well-being or my kids' well-being. A lot of time I just let it slide." Many women, like PCH, try to minimize conflicts and only fight with their mother-in-law when they regard the issues to be severe. However, their reasons for avoiding confrontation vary, with wanting to "keep the relationship peaceful" as the most frequently mentioned reason.

When they perceive the matters to be less serious, some mothers rationalize their mother-in-law's behaviors and offer justification as to why they should tolerate such behaviors. Carrie and some other respondents do not challenge their mother-in-law in order to keep the relationship as peaceful as can be. Carrie said, "She watches him, but not day in and day out… maybe a few times a week. So those couple hours is not going to kill him." Mothers, such as Carrie, indicate that because their mother-in-law only takes care of their children once in a while, her different childrearing methods will not be detrimental to the grandchildren. Other mothers reason that because their mother-in-law

loves their children, they trust the older woman would not do anything that would cause them real harm. Natalie (Mexican American) provides an example:

> I know she has their well-beings in mind and she would never do anything to hurt them. She would never put them in any harm… Even if she were to discipline them, I know it would be for a good reason and not because she would do it out of malice.

Samantha (Chinese American) does not want her mother-in-law to give her daughters too much candy when she watches the girls. She shares a similar view:

> I think she cares for them really well. She loves them. Whether they have a little more candies here and there, overall, I know she is going to take good care of them; so it doesn't bother me. [Be]cause it's only when she's with them.

Clearly, Samantha cares about how many sweets her daughters consume when they are with their grandmother; however, "it is not worth it to get into a fight with her." Samantha's statement suggests that covert power is at play in her relationship with her mother-in-law, even though there is no evident of observable conflict between them. She anticipates what would happen if she were to challenge her mother-in-law. Not only does Samantha believe it is futile to raise such issues with her mother-in-law, she also makes compromises in order to "pick her battles." Samantha goes on to describe having other more serious issues with her mother-in-law in which there are observable conflicts.

From the accounts above, it is clear that covert power processes are at play in these women's relationships with their mother-in-law. Covert power processes occur

when the more powerful individuals subtly influence the decisions of the less powerful ones in ways that comply with the interests of the more powerful (Komter, 1989; Pyke, 1994, 1999). Such power processes not only work to prevent issues from being raised, but also secure the compliance of the less powerful individuals without the outbreak of conflicts. We can interpret these daughters-in-law's excusing their mother-in-law's behaviors as one way in which this covert power process works. By rationalizing rather than interrogating their mother-in-law's behaviors, these women may have internalized the needs and wishes of their mother-in-law. Further, these daughters-in-law make justifications for their own decisions (e.g., to tolerate their mother-in-law's childcare methods) even when such choices do not reflect their own interests. In so doing, they prevent potential conflicts from erupting to the surface.

Engaging Strategies to Achieve Desired Changes

Rather than arguing or openly disagreeing with their mother-in-law, several mothers employ various strategies to covertly make their mothers-in-law comply with their parenting methods, such as "training" their mother-in-law how to take care of their grandchildren. Peggy (Chinese American) was nervous to let her mother-in-law take care of her newborn daughter, but only did so when her husband suggested that they should give the mother-in-law a chance at caring for the baby. Although she wishes that her mother-in-law has a little more "maternal instinct", Peggy thinks that being a mother is something that can be learned. Peggy said, "Just teaching her little by little and so far she completely listens to what I've told her what I want. She follows my instructions fully. She wouldn't try and do something else. I respect her for that." By following her

daughter-in-law's childcare instructions, Peggy's mother-in-law not only gets to take care of her new granddaughter but also earns the respect of her daughter-in-law.

Carrie (Chinese American) said she would like her mother-in-law to be more conscientious about how she watches her grandson and be more educational and interactive in what she does with the baby. However, she has not discovered a tactful way to ask her mother-in-law to change her childcare methods. And instead of simply telling her mother-in-law what to do, Carrie tries to change her mother-in-law by providing examples:

> If she says, "This is colorful" and I'll say, "Yes baby, this is red." Don't just tell him it's colorful, tell him the color… Trying to give examples, maybe she'll get the hint. Or she'll say, "Mommy's away now" and I'll say, "Mommy's going to the grocery store, I'm going to pick up some milk. Look milk, empty." So do things like that to try and help her see that that's more helpful.

Carrie's strategy to show her mother-in-law how to be more interactive with and educational towards the grandchild has achieved limited success. She describes, "She'll follow me, she'll say, 'Mommy's going to the grocery store.' So if I say it and she will repeat it, but then on her own she won't." However, Carrie is optimistic that if she does it frequently enough, her mother-in-law will get the hint that she should do it.

PCH (Chinese American) does not like it when her mother-in-law gives her children too many sweets. Instead of arguing with her mother-in-law, which PCH

considers to be meaningless and creates unnecessary conflict. PCH decides not to buy things that she does not want her children to eat. She comments,

> In terms of sweets, I don't know what she does when I'm not there. Sometimes I'll intentionally not buy things that I don't want them to eat. Because I can't control how she's parceling it out. Because when I am not there, they may get five popsicles…

Simply by not purchasing those foods, PCH avoids having to fight with her mother-in-law about the sweets. These strategies may seem covert, but they also show how some mothers take an active role to prevent conflicts with their mother-in-law and achieve their desired childcare changes. As many women feel that they are not able to change their mother-in-law, they take control to change what they can. These strategies allow some mothers to feel they are better being to be in charge.

Sophia (Mexican American) employs a different method to try to get her mother-in-law to change:

> I don't like him to be dirty in public… Sometimes she has him dirty in public, and it bothers me. Like he has boogers all dried up and I don't like that. It irritates me… He's dirty. They don't clean him. I am the one that has to grab him and clean him in front of them… I make comments in front of her saying, 'Oh, he's just so dirty. How embarrassing!' to see if she'd get the point.

As opposed to "training" her mother-in-law or engaging in subtle strategies, Sophia complains in front of her mother-in-law with the hope that the older woman will pick up Sophia's dislike of her childcare methods.

However, daughters-in-law do not always engage in covert resistance with their mother-in-law. Some stand up to their mothers-in-law when they find the situation to be unbearable or harmful for themselves or their children. PCH further provides an example,

> [I would argue with her] when I feel like I need to protect my kids or when I feel like I have to defend myself… [For example,] one week last summer, some of the comments she made to me would be really rude or she would be critical. It was several days like that and I didn't know what the matter was. So the last time she had done it, I walked up to her [and said,] "What is the problem? Do you enjoy picking on me? Why are you always picking on me?"… I think it was good for me to stand up for myself. Cause I need to let her know, "No, you cannot push me around. You cannot treat me this way." It's one thing to talk to me about issues or things I am doing wrong, but to go cross the line and be rude about it, it's not acceptable.

Although standing up for herself was difficult for PCH, she learned that she could protect herself and her children from undesirable situations. Moreover, doing so has the potential to empower PCH and other mothers like her as they would feel that they could have the power to challenge or confront their mother-in-law, without having to anticipate the consequences of what might have happened after the argument.

The accounts above illustrate that many daughters-in-law avoid direct conflict with their mother-in-law by engaging in different strategies that help them achieve their desired changes. Both Chinese American and Mexican American mothers employ these strategies. These mothers' accounts suggest that they believe it is pointless to argue with their mother-in-law. These women may seem less powerful than their mother-in-law, but by actively engaging in other strategies, they can achieve their desired changes, even if limited in scope. One between-group difference observed from the accounts above is that Chinese American women (Peggy, Carrie, and PCH) tend to engage in covert strategies, while Mexican American women (Sophia) tend to engage in overt strategies.

Powerlessness and Marital Solidarity: Husbands as Mediator

Several daughters-in-law express a sense of powerlessness in their relationship with their mother-in-law. In some of these women's accounts, they suggest that the daughter-in-law is in no position to ask her mother-in-law to change. As PCH puts it, "I feel like, that's really not in my power. I can't make those changes for her… Because she'll be offended! 'Why are you trying to tell me what to do?'" Others suggest a sense of powerlessness in their accounts articulating their desire to avoid confrontation and to "keep peace" with their mother-in-law. When discussing how she would like her mother-in-law to change, Samantha states,

> Oh no. I am not going to ask her to change… We asked her to change the way she says stuff and she said, "That's the way I am! How could you ask me to change the way the way I am." Exactly like that, in that tone… It's not my role, I am the daughter-in-law. If it comes up in a conversation, I'll

> talk to her about it, but I just feel like I'm not going to approach her about this subject. I am trying to keep as much peace between me and her as possible.

Emma (Chinese American) describes her mother-in-law as a micromanager of her family life. When her mother-in-law makes comments about how to take care of children or about kitchen cleanliness, Emma just lets her be and waits for her husband to step in. Emma does not feel that she, as a daughter-in-law, can talk back to her mother-in-law.

> I am her daughter-in-law; I am not going to tell her to shut up… You are not going to argue with your in-laws. It is not the right thing to do; for me it is not. I don't want to argue with my in-laws… I still want them to have a good relationship with me and I don't want to step over my bounds…

Robyn (Chinese American) states that she avoids face-to-face conflicts with her mother-in-law. She would go upstairs to wash up whenever her mother-in-law stops by the house. She says:

> I avoid conflicts with her all the time… If I'm not comfortable with what she's saying, then I wouldn't say anything… [For example,] she complains about not seeing my daughter enough or threatening to move away. I wouldn't say anything. I don't like outright confrontation and I don't feel like me saying something would help the situation… I would like my husband to react to it immediately and perhaps say, "Don't say things like that… No one said for you not to come over."

Similar to findings in Chapter 1, many Chinese American and Mexican American women rely on their husband to mediate their relationship with their mother-in-law. Samantha, Emma, Robyn, and Lisa all discuss how their husbands have mediated tense situations they have had with their mother-in-law. Lisa (Mexican American) describes a disagreement where she talked back to her mother-in-law and later had to apologize. Because of that unpleasant experience, Lisa decides not to confront her mother-in-law in the future. When she needs to get her opinions across to her mother-in-law, Lisa vents to her husband so that he will go and talk to his mother. Other women also share similar experiences of depending on their husband to smooth out disagreement or conflicts with their mother-in-law. PCH (Chinese American) said of her husband,

> He has stepped in, especially if we were really heated. He'll try to make a joke and try to lighten the situation. Sometimes afterwards he'll talk to me and say, "You shouldn't have said that." Sometimes he will talk to his mom, "You shouldn't tell her what to do." He'll try to make peace. He definitely tries to make peace when he can.

Natalie (Mexican American) also describes how her husband confronts his mother and supports her in a conflict situation even if she is not present:

> He's actually always defended me… He's always said to me, "You're my wife and that's my priority. Once I got married, it's you and my kids. My mother comes after you." He's gotten into it with his grandmother, his mom, and his sister. Like that situation with his sister when she started calling me names and my mother-in-law was defending her daughter. My

> husband got upset and was questioning his mother, "Wait a minute, she's over here calling my wife names and you are defending her? You have no right to talk about my wife… She's never given you a reason to not like her; she's always been very cordial."

Daughters-in-law express that they would especially like their husband to step in to mediate in situations where they feel they do not have the power to negotiate with or demand desired changes from mothers-in-law. PCH provides an example of when her mother-in-law was not getting along with and was being extremely critical of her oldest daughter:

> I was torn between [whether or not to] step in. I felt like as a parent, I needed to protect my daughter, but at the same time, I was afraid if I step in, my mother-in-law was going to see me as interfering or protecting her… So I was afraid I was going to make it worse for my daughter by my stepping in. I wanted my husband to do it. I felt like he wasn't doing it. I was getting frustrated with him, I said, "You need to stop the way your mother goes over the boundary with [our daughter]. You have to protect her; you are her parent!"

PCH's story reveals her powerlessness. She worries about the possible repercussions both for her and for her daughter if she were to speak up to her mother-in-law. PCH does not confront her mother-in-law due to her fear of her mother-in-law's negative reaction. However, she is torn as she needs to defend her daughter from her mother-in-law's criticism. There is no observable conflict between PCH and her mother-in-law because

conflicts are being suppressed (or latent, according to Luke's conceptualization). Conflicts would be observable if PCH expressed her desires or voiced her concerns to her mother-in-law. In this situation, PCH believes that only when her husband intervenes would her mother-in-law stop her criticisms of their daughter.

Sophia (Mexican American) lives with her in-laws in a rental home in which she and her husband pay for a majority of the living expenses and lend money to her in-laws on a regular basis. Sophia is very upset with how her mother-in-law handles her finances, but she tries to avoid conflict with her mother-in-law:

> I just walk away, go to my room, and then tell my husband, or I text it to him instead of saying something in front of my mother-in-law. Like, instead of telling him in front of them, "Where is the money?" I just text it to him, "Have you asked your parents where is the money? Try to talk to your parents about the money", so that she doesn't hear it… I don't want her to feel like it's me that wants it. She should feel that we both want it… I want her to feel that we both need it, so we both are asking for it. Not just me because I want to be the mean one who keeps bugging them to get the money back.

Although Sophia lends money and provides some financial support to her mother-in-law, she feels that she does not have the power to directly ask her mother-in-law to return the money. She feels the need to enlist the assistance of her husband to request that her mother-in-law return the lent money.

Some women feel empowered when their husbands step in to provide support and/or mediate the relationship between them and their mother-in-law. PCH's and Sophia's examples suggest that some daughters-in-law depend on their husband's power to negotiate with their mother-in-law. Individually, they perceive that they do not have the power to seek the changes they desire.

However, daughters-in-law sometimes resent their husband when they perceive their husband to be unwilling to mediate conflicts. After Sophia and her mother-in-law blew up in a recent argument, Sophia's husband wanted her to just talk to the mother-in-law to resolve the issue. Sophia was upset by how her husband handled the situation:

> I didn't agree with him. Why should I talk to her? She should be the one initiating the conversation with me… [I want him to] give me my place… Like telling his mother, "Mom, she's my wife. Don't talk about her that way", when she was talking crap about me… It hurts my feelings that I had to ask him to defend me… I always tell him, "You have to defend me because I can only defend myself so much." Sometimes I need him to do it.

PCH (Chinese American) shares a similar frustration in her account above when she finds herself not knowing how to handle a situation between her mother-in-law and daughter. PCH wants her husband to speak up and be firm with his mother, especially when the mother-in-law crosses the line with their children. It frustrates PCH when she feels that her husband does not speak out enough on behalf of the kids.

As previously discussed, some daughters-in-law believe that it is not their place to challenge their mother-in-law. They believe that their husband is in a better place and has

more power vis-à-vis his mother to request changes. This perception could explain why many of the women in this study rely on their husband to facilitate their relationship with their mother-in-law. Emma (Chinese American) puts it:

> If I really want to get a point across, I will just let my husband say it because he is better at being completely honest. I have to care about her feelings, but he doesn't. He has the leverage of being the son, and she will take whatever he says. She will argue with him, but at least it is her son… My husband can do whatever he wants because he is the son.

Gender Solidarity: Mother-in-law as Mediator

Despite disagreements and desires for change, many daughters-in-law speak about how their mothers-in-law provide support and advice when they are in disagreement or conflict with their husband. In these situations, mothers-in-law mediate the relationship between their son and daughter-in-law. Mothers-in-law mediate couple relationships in different ways: some facilitate the relationship without taking sides, while others take the side of their daughter-in-law. Elizabeth (Chinese American) describes her husband as having a bad temper and being occasionally verbally abusive towards her. Elizabeth credits her mother-in-law's ability to mediate and respects her efforts to be fair when helping the younger couple work out their marital problems:

> When we first got married, we got into huge arguments. I think we needed to know each other better and we had all these complaints about each other… My mother-in-law told me to make a list of things that I would complain about my husband and then she told him to make a list. She sat

> us both down separately and discussed it with us. She would present his point of view to me and then she would ask me what I thought of what he said. She was trying to be the mediator, but at the same time she wasn't just trying to understand her sons' point of view, but also tried to understand my point of view.

Even though Elizabeth's mother-in-law stays neutral, her mediating the relationship without taking sides wins the respect of her daughter-in-law. Elizabeth interprets her mother-in-law's willingness to help the couple work out their marriage problem as a form of gender solidarity.

In some cases the mothers-in-law take the side of their daughter-in-law. Women who perceive their mother-in-law as showing gender solidarity express appreciation for the older woman's willingness to mediate and see things from their perspective. Lisa (Mexican American) says,

> When we argued before… If she knew that he was wrong, she'd be telling him, "No, don't talk to her like that" or "You're wrong; you better just stop." That's probably why my mother-in-law and I get along because if she would take his side, I would be mad.

PCH (Chinese American) recalls,

> Back when we were dating, there were times when she knew we were having a conflict. I was crying. I was upset. And she's like, "Did he say sorry?" She made him say sorry! There was one time after we were married, I was upset and I was crying too… I was telling her about it… I

> forgot what the fight was about. It's actually funny [be]cause she usually stands on my side in the fight.

Natalie (Mexican American) provides another example:

> She never got involved until this day, even when we were living with her. She doesn't get involved with our business… Actually, she sides with me more than she does with her son. And I like that… He'll probably be the one getting in trouble; she would tell him, "Why do you treat her this way" or "Why are you mad at her?"

This gender solidarity occurs even for some women who report not getting along or having issues with their mother-in-law (e.g., Lisa and PCH). From the accounts above, it does not seem to matter whether a mother-in-law stays neutral or if she takes the daughter-in-law's side in situations of conflict. These women appreciate their mother-in-law's willingness to mediate and their openness to understand issues from their perspectives. Some feel like they can trust their mother-in-law and count on her to help facilitate marital problems (e.g., Elizabeth) or get marital advice. Others consider the mother-in-law as a resource for advice about the husband, as their mother-in-law is another person who knows the husband well. Although not explicit, the accounts of these women suggest that alliances formed with the mother-in-law enhance some women's power vis-à-vis their husband. However, when the mother-in-law takes the side of her son, daughters-in-law interpret her as being unfair and this may contribute to daughters-in-law's resentment towards their mother-in-law for interfering with the relationship, as I will turn to next.

Only one daughter-in-law (Sophia, Mexican American) describes her mother-in-law as meddlesome in her relationship with her husband when they have an argument: "If we argue in front of her, she usually does butt in." Sophia hates it when her mother-in-law interferes with her marital relation. However, she is not afraid to stand up to her mother-in-law. Sophia said that she had to "kick her [mother-in-law] out of the argument" and asked her to "leave me alone."

A few daughters-in-law describe having a mother-in-law who does not interfere when they have a disagreement with their husband. Samantha (Chinese American) said,

> She doesn't butt in; at least at the moment she doesn't butt in or say anything… I think she knows better than to do that. If she saw us arguing and if she disagrees, she would sometimes go to my husband afterwards and gives her two cents about it. From her view it's being helpful and it's giving marriage advice, but it's not always received that way.

Samantha feels relieved that her mother-in-law gives marriage advice to her husband rather than to her, as she would interpret her mother-in-law the wrong way. She also suggests that it would be inappropriate for the mother-in-law to give unsolicited marriage advice to a daughter-in-law.

Alexandra (Mexican American) describes her mother-in-law as trying to stop the couple from arguing, without meddling in the relationship:

> When we argued, my mother-in-law really wouldn't say anything. Or she would tell us, "Okay, stop. You guys stop arguing, stop fighting. Stop

> arguing and talk to each other." But she wouldn't go into detail, she wouldn't say much…

Alexandra says that she would not want any changes because her mother-in-law does not do too much to mediate her marital relationship nor does she take sides. These examples illustrate that most daughters-in-law appreciate their mother-in-law when she mediates their marital relationships and shows gender solidarity, while a few others would rather have their mother-in-law stay completely out of their marital relations.

There are also a few Chinese American daughters-in-law who say that they intentionally avoid fighting with their husband in front of their mother-in-law. Although it is an unsaid and unwritten rule, these daughters-in-law suggest that it is out of respect that one does not fight with her/his spouse in front of the in-laws. Alice and Robyn provide their explanations:

> I think it's out of respect and common courtesy. You wouldn't fight in front of you friends and anyone else, so why would you do that in front of your in-laws? (Alice)

> When we have arguments, it's always between us… The way I feel about these things is that there's no need to publicly display, either in front of his family or mine. So let's talk about it behind closed doors (Robyn).

This practice is not observed in the interview accounts of Mexican American women. Although it is not clear why only Chinese women would intentionally keep private their conflict with their husband, it may be related to the notion of "saving face", in which

family problems or issues should not be aired outside of the family. As Robyn indicates, disagreements should only be discussed behind closed doors.

Discussion

Childcare and childrearing methods are the sites of the most conflict between daughters- and mothers-in-law (Fischer, 1983; Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988; Shih & Pyke, 2010). As mothers- and daughters-in-law belong to two different generations and different families, they likely do not share the same parenting philosophy and methods. Childcare, thus, provides a rich site for examining power dynamics between family members as they negotiate their differences.

Women react differently to childrearing advice and assistance depending on which of the two grandmothers offer such advice. Some daughters-in-law report feelings of being criticized when their mother-in-law offers them unsolicited childcare advice, whereas most women would not feel offended if such advice comes from their own mother. As Fischer (1983) suggests in her study, married women with children are four to five times more likely to seek childcare advice and assistance from their own mother as compared with their mother-in-law. When mother-in-law offers advice or assistance, daughters-in-law are more likely to interpret their advice and assistance negatively or with ambivalence. This is evident with mothers in the current study.

Both Chinese American and Mexican American mothers in this study report having different parenting methods from their mother-in-law and describe wanting to make changes in how their mother-in-law cares for their children. However, many women do not feel they have the power to make demands on their mother-in-law even

when they do not like her parenting methods. This is especially the case when the younger woman depends on her mother-in-law for childcare. Both Chinese American and Mexican American daughters-in-law engage in other strategies to achieve desired changes rather than directly asking their mother-in-law to change their parenting methods. One observed difference between Chinese American and Mexican American women is in the type of strategies they utilize to make their mother-in-law comply with their childrearing methods. Chinese American women are more likely to employ covert strategies, such as "training" their mother-in-law, while Mexican American daughters-in-law are more likely to utilize overt approach of public complaint. Although some strategies may seem covert, daughters-in-law could feel empowered and being "in charge" when they are able to achieve their desired changes.

Spousal support is an important resource for women who feel powerless vis-à-vis their mother-in-law (Carels & Baucom, 1999; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Some women in this study rely on their husband's authority to negotiate with their mother-in-law, especially when daughters-in-law perceive that they do not have power to secure their mother-in-law's compliance. However, wives sometimes resent their husband if he appears not to be willing to support them or mediate the strained relationship with his mother. Further, if such support is not provided, some daughters-in-law may transfer their frustration with their mother-in-law to their interaction with their husband (Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Wu et al., 2010). This, in turn, could influence women's perceived marital quality and their report of marital happiness and satisfaction (Bryant, Conger, & Meehan, 2001; Wu et al., 2010). Thus, the role a husband plays in family discord is important not

only in how the disagreement is resolved, but also how his handling of the situations may shape future family interactions.

Finally, this study finds that feeling a sense of gender solidarity with their mother-in-law is important for both Chinese American and Mexican American women. Daughters-in-law are grateful for their mother-in-law in situations where they perceive the older women as willing to understand their perspectives and/or help them work through their marital problems. Such gender solidarity provides comfort to some daughters-in-law, even for those who express having tension with their mother-in-law. Some women view their mother-in-law as a resource not only because she provides an extra hand in childcare and housework, but she is also an advisor whom these women can turn to for guidance about their husband (Fischer, 1983).

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Conclusion and Future Directions

In this chapter, I provide an overview and summarize some major findings from the three empirical chapters. And I conclude with some research questions that I have not yet had the opportunity to explore as well as future directions where I would like to take this research.

Chapter 1 examines relationship dynamics between immigrant Chinese mothers and their second-generation daughters-in-law, with particular attention to how ethnic practices of filial respect affect power strategies. I find many Chinese American daughters-in-law describe their mothers-in-law as frequently drawing on their elder status, norms of filial piety, and domestic knowledge in attempting to wield power over their daughters-in-law. Daughters-in-law also describe giving the appearance of consensus and not voicing opposition to the advice of their mother-in-law when in her presence. However, in the privacy of their own homes, and with the support of their husbands, respondents typically do not comply with the directives of their mother-in-law. Drawing on Goffman's notion of front- and backstage, I argue that these daughters-in-law employ a covert strategy of resistance that maintains family harmony and expectations of filial piety. Findings suggest that researchers who study power dynamics should not conflate cultural ideals with actual power practices, nor assume that displays of deference in public or among extended family translate into powerlessness in more private realms.

In chapter two, I explore the implicit assumptions, stereotypes, and ideologies daughters-in-law utilize in understanding and articulating the mother-in-law role. Many

Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese daughters-in-law repeatedly invoke the ideology of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996) and "feminization of love" (Cancian, 1986) in their interview accounts of evaluations and comparisons of their mother and mother-in-law. They often use the characteristics that one would use to describe a good mother (e.g., warm, loving, caring, and supportive) to describe their ideal mother-in-law. This cultural ideology provides a template for women to evaluate their own mother-in-law. Mothers-in-law who conform to the ideal image of a "good mother" are described positively; and those who do not fit the ideal are negatively depicted. In addition, Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese daughters-in-law draw on similar attributes and stereotypes in their descriptions of a good mother-in-law.

Further, Chinese American, Mexican American, and Taiwanese daughters-in-law also frequently make use of their own mother as a "contrast structure" in which to understand the role of and relationship with their mother-in-law. Women who describe having a good relationship with their own mother tend to describe their mother-in-law as emotionally distant and their relationship as superficial. In contrast, those who do not have a good relationship with their own mother tend to portray their mother-in-law as more loving and accepting. Many of these women draw on elements of the ideology of "intensive mothering", such as having personal conversations, as one source of comparison between their mother-in-law and mother.

Future Directions

I will analyze men's interview accounts to investigate whether they, like their wife, draw on the ideology of "intensive mothering" and "feminization of love" in

understanding the roles of mother and mother-in-law. Are there other ideologies that men draw on in their understanding and comparisons of these two roles? I will explore whether men also utilize their mother as a reference point of comparison with their mother-in-law and do they also view the two relationships as they ought to be similar. Are there gender differences and/or similarities in the comparisons men and women make?

I will examine interview accounts from mothers-in-law to explore whether mothers-in-law draw on a "daughter" ideology to understand and evaluate the role of daughter-in-law and in giving meanings to their relationship with daughters-in-law. That is, do mothers-in-law compare and contrast their daughter and daughter-in-law.

Also, I will explore whether mothers-in-law use their own mother-in-law as a point of comparison in understanding the mother-in-law role and giving meaning to their current relationship with their daughter-in-law. For example, do mothers-in-law make comments such as, "My mother-in-law treated me badly. I'm not like my mother-in-law and I do not want to treat my daughter-in-law the way I was treated"? Further, I will explore whether mothers-in-law use their own experiences as a daughter-in-law to compare themselves with their daughters-in-law. For example, do mothers-in-law make comments that would suggest such comparisons? (e.g., "I was such a good daughter-in-law, obedient and all not like my daughter-in-law who likes to talk back.")

Chapter 3 builds on my findings from chapter 1. Drawing on Komter's conceptualization of covert power processes, I examine power dynamics among mothers, sons, and daughters-in-law in Chinese American and Mexican American families. Several findings emerged from daughters-in-law's accounts:

Both Chinese American and Mexican American women identify childcare and childrearing methods as the most troublesome area in their relationship with their mothers-in-law. This thus makes a rich domain to examine power dynamics between mothers- and daughters-in-law in these families. Many daughters-in-law articulate wanting to make specific changes regarding their mother-in-law's childcare approach, but only a few women implements and attains their desired changes. Most daughters-in-law who desire changes employ other strategies, rather than directly confronting their mother-in-law, to achieve their goals. By so doing, some daughters-in-law are able to avoid having to engage in overt disagreement and/or conflict with their mother-in-law, as some know it would be a battle they cannot win.

Many daughters-in-law, especially those who depend on their mother-in-law for childcare, feel powerless about placing demands on their mother-in-law to change her parenting methods. This finding is consistent with resource theory that suggests a daughter-in-law's reliance on the resources of her mother-in-law (e.g., childcare assistance) is likely to reduce her power in the relationship.

When wives perceive themselves as not having the power to demand changes from their mother-in-law, they particularly wish for their husband to mediate the relationship on their behalf. Also in those instances, some daughters-in-law express having to depend on their husband's power to negotiate with his mother. Wives also report forming marital solidarity when they perceive their husband as willing to show support during conflict situations or mediate strained relationships with his mother.

Despite possible disagreement and/or conflicts, this chapter finds that some Chinese American and Mexican American daughters-in-law describe their mother-in-law as showing gender solidarity when they experience marital problems with their husband. Although not explicit in the accounts presented in chapter three, gender solidarity between mothers- and daughters-in-law has the potential to empower both women as they resist traditional gender arrangements and patriarchal family practices.

Future Directions for Chapters 1 and 3:

The current study explores the role a son/husband plays in the relationship between his mother and wife and finds the involvement of son/husband to be important in how wives perceive marital and in-law relations. As previous studies suggest, the relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law is mediated and shaped by other family relationships (Prentice, 2008; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Turner, Young, & Black, 2006). Thus, it is important to consider how other family members and/or family relationships influence the dyadic relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law. For example, the presence or absence of a father-in-law may considerably alter family power dynamics. With the absence of a father, a mother who depends financially and/or emotionally on her adult son may defer to her son's opinions in making family decisions. This, in turn, may make it easier for and grant more power to the daughter-in-law to have her voice heard. However, when the father-in-law is present in the family, he (and, in association, the mother-in-law) may hold authority in the family.

Chapter 3 finds daughters-in-law describe their mother-in-law's helping to facilitate marital problems as a form of gender solidarity. However, that is perhaps not

the only area in which mothers- and daughters-in-law could develop gender solidarity. I will explore further in what other areas do mothers- and daughters-in-law form an alliance. For example, do they tend to form an alliance in domains that are traditionally characterized as female (such as childcare and housework)? Do they provide assistance to one another in the resistance of traditional gender arrangements that promote male domination in the family? I will also interrogate how perceived gender solidarity affects actual power dynamics between mothers- and daughters-in-law in these families. For example, do mothers-in-law (or daughters-in-law) who perceive their daughter-in-law (or mother-in-law) as showing them gender solidarity more likely to want to resist raising issues with the other person in the fear of losing the gender solidarity they have built between them?

I will also analyze mothers-in-law's accounts to explore situations under which mothers-in-law describe forming an alliance with their daughter-in-law. Do mothers-in-law describe instances where their daughter-in-law provides assistance to them? For example, a mother-in-law may form an alliance with her daughter-in-law if there is something she does not like about her son and wants him to change. A mother-in-law may enlist her daughter-in-law's help in making those changes if she feels she does not have the power to change her son.

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Gender, Solidarity, and Constructed Meanings among
Mothers, Sons, and Daughter-in-laws

Construction of Mother-in-law & Daughter-in-law Ideology

Role of Mother-in-law

1. Thinking back to before you were engaged, what kind of expectations did you have in general for a daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relation?
   Probe: Looking back, where are some of the places you developed those expectations? (Hand respondent **LIST 1**). Can you give me an example?

2. How is your relationship with your mother-in-law different from what you expected?

3. What is a good mother-in-law like?
   Probe: What are some characteristics of a good mother-in-law?
   Probe: Describe a good mother-in-law that you know? Who?

4. What are some stereotypes of mother-in-law? Of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship?
   Probe: How does your relationship compare with these stereotypes?
   Probe: Where did you learn those stereotypes? (**LIST 2**) Can you give me an example?

5. Do you know any bad mothers-in-law? What are they like?

6. If your mother-in-law were the perfect mother-in-law, how would she be different?

7. What characteristics would your ideal mother-in-law have that your real mother-in-law does not?

8. What roles would your ideal mother-in-law assume that your real mother-in-law does not?

9. Is there anyone your mother-in-law reminds you of? If so, who?
   Probe: In what way(s) does your mother-in-law remind you of this person?

10. Do you ever find yourself comparing your relationship with your mother-in-law to other relationships you have? If so, what comparisons do you make?

11. Why do you compare your relationship with your mother-in-law to this other relationship?

12. Do you ever compare your relationship with your mother-in-law to your relationship with your mother? If so, how are they comparable? If not, why not?
    Probe: What are the similarities? What are the differences?
    Probe: Why do you think you make this comparison?

13. What do you think mother- and daughter-in-law relationships are like in other [Chinese-American, Taiwanese, or Mexican-American] families? Explain.
    Probe: Where did you learn that (or get the perception)?

14. Do you ever compare your relationship with your mother-in-law to that of other [Chinese-American, Taiwanese, or Mexican-American] families?
    Probe: If so, how does your relationship compare with that of the other [Chinese-American, Taiwanese, or Mexican-American] families?

Role of Daughter-in-law

15. What is a good daughter-in-law like?
    Probe: What are some characteristics of a good daughter-in-law?
    Probe: Describe a good daughter-in-law you know. Who?

16. Do you know any bad daughters-in-law? What are they like?

17. What characteristics would an ideal daughter-in-law have?

18. What roles would an ideal daughter-in-law assume?

19. Do you ever compare yourself with someone who is also a daughter-in-law?
    Probe: If so, why do you think you make this comparison?

Family Politics: Power, Gender and Generational Alliances

Marital Relations:

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about your marital relation.

20. Tell me about your husband. What is he like?

21. What is your relationship like with your husband?

22. What kinds of things do you do when you are with your husband?
    Probe: Who usually initiate these interactions?
    Probe: Are there things that you don't enjoy doing as much, but do it with your husband anyway? Why do you do them?

23. Tell me some of the things you like most about your husband.
    Probe: If you could change anything that you wanted to about your husband, what would you change? Why?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, with what results? If not, why not?

24. Are there any housework that your husband helps you with?
    Probe: If so, what kinds of assistance does he provide? How often?
    Probe: If you could have it any way you wanted to, what changes would you make to the kinds and levels of housework assistance you get from your husband?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, with what results? If not, why not?

25. Are there any childcare tasks that your husband helps you with?
    Probe: If so, what kinds of assistance does he provide? How often?
    Probe: If you could have it any way you wanted to, what changes would you make to the kinds and levels of childcare assistance you get from your husband?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, with what results? If not, why not?

26. Are there any matters or decisions that you and your husband tend to disagree about?
    Probe: Can you describe your last disagreement or argument?
    Probe: How was the disagreement/conflict situation resolved?

27. Do you ever try to avoid arguments or conflicts with your husband? If so, why? If not, why not? Can you describe a time you did?
    Probes: When happened? Why did you want to avoid conflict?

28. **[refer to the conflict in #26]** When you had that argument, what did your mother-in-law do?
    Probe: If you could have it any way you wanted, what would you want your mother-in-law do in the future when such situations arise? Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, with what results? If not, why not?

Mother-in-law

29. Tell me about your mother-in-law. What is she like?
    Probe: Tell me some of the things you like most about your mom-in-law (Why do you like them?)
    Probe: Tell me some of what you like least about your mom-in-law (Why don't you like them?)
    Probe: If you could change anything about your mother-in-law, what would you change? Why or why not?
    Probe: Have you ever tried to implement those desired changes with your mother-in-law? If so, what were the results? If not, why not?

30. What is your relationship like with your mother-in-law?

31. What kinds of things do you do when you are with your mother-in-law?
    Probe: Is there anything you enjoy doing with your mother-in-law? What are they? How frequently do you do these things? Describe your interactions.
    Probe: Who usually initiate these interactions?
    Probe: Are there things that you don't enjoy doing as much, but do it with your mother-in-law anyway? Why do you do them?

Gender Alliances:

32. Are there any areas in which your mother-in-law tries to help you?
    Probe: What kinds of assistance does she provide? How often?
    Probe: If you could have it any way you wanted to, what changes would you make to the kinds and levels of assistance you get from your mother-in-law?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? Why or why not? If so, what were the results? If not, why not?

33. Are there any ways you help your mother-in-law?
    Probe: If so, what kinds of assistance do you provide? How often? If not, why not?
    Probe: Have you ever wanted any changes in the kinds of assistance you provide to your mother-in-law? Why or why not?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, what were the results? If not, why not?

34. What sorts of things do you do to please your mother-in-laws?
    Probe: Have you ever wanted to change what you do to please your mother-in-laws?
    Probe: Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, what were the results? If not, why not?

35. Are there any areas of your marriage over which your mother-in-law has an influence?
    Probe: In what ways? (Probe for positive and negative influences.)
    Probe: Can you give me an example of the last time your mother-in-law exerted influence?

Power - General

36. Do you and your mother-in-law ever have disagreements?
    Probe: If not, why not? If so, describe the last disagreement/conflict you had with your mother-in-law?
    Probe: How was it resolved?

37. Have you ever tried to avoid conflict with your mother-in-law? Why or why not?
    Probes: Tell me about a time when you tried to avoid conflict, what happened?

38. **[refer to the conflict in #36]** When you had that argument, what did your husband do?
    Probe: If you could have it any way you wanted, what would you want your husband do in the future when such situations arise? Have you tried to implement those changes? If so, with what results? If not, why not?

Power - Living Arrangements:
I see that you *[do/do not]* live with your in-laws.

39. Tell me about how that decision was made.
    (If do not live with in-laws) Have you ever thought about the possibility of living together?

40. If you could arrange your living situation however you want, what would that be?

41. (If living with…) Tell me what it was like living with your in-laws.
    Probe: What are some positive aspects of living with the in-laws? negative aspects?
    Probe: (If not living with…) What are some positive aspects of NOT living with the in-laws? negative aspects?
    Probe: Do you think your marriage would be different if you didn't live with your in-laws? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

42. (If living with…) Have you and your husband thought about living apart from your in-laws?
    Probe: If so, tell me about that. What are the issues involved in your considerations? If not, why not?
    Probes: Have you ever had a conflict with your spouse about this? What happened? How was that disagreement/conflict resolved?
    Probe: Did you try to get the desired changes (repeat what the desired changes are)? If so, what did you do? What were the results? If not, why not?

Power – Household Tasks:
I see that your mom-in-law *[does/doesn't do]* housework at your house.

43. Can you tell me what tasks she typically does in any given week?

44. Have you ever wanted any changes in the housework she does at your house?
    Probe: If so, why? If not, why not?
    Probe: Have you tried to get the desired changes? If so, what happened? If not, why not?

You indicated that you *[do/don't do]* housework at your mother-in-law's house.

45. Describe what you do at your mother-in-law's house in a typical week.

46. Have you ever wanted any changes in the housework you do at her house?
    Probe: If so, why? Have you tried to make those changes happen? If so, what did you do? What were the results? If not, why not?
    Probe: If not, why not?

47. Can you describe how the last family party/gathering was planned and carried out?
    Probe: Have you ever wanted any changes in how those events are planned or carried out?
    Probe: If so, why? Have you tried to make those changes happen? If so, what did you do? What were the results? If not, why not?
    Probe: If not, why not?

Power – Children and Childcare:

48. Have you ever discussed your childbearing plans with your mother-in-law?
    Probe: If so, tell me about that. Who brought it up? What did you discuss? If not, why not?
    Probe: Have you ever had disagreements about having children? If so, describe a specific time you disagreed.

[If respondent has children] You indicated that your mother-in-law *[provides/doesn't provide]* childcare for you.

49. Describe how your mother-in-law cares for your child(ren) in a typical week [or during a visit].

50. Have you ever wanted any changes in how your mother-in-law cares for your child(ren)?
    Probe: If so, why? If not, why not?
    Probe: Have you ever tried to get the desired changes? If so, what happened? If not, why not?

Mother-Son Relations

51. What is your husband's relationship with his mother?

52. What kinds of things does your husband do when he is with his mother?

53. Is there anything that your husband does to please his mother?
    Probe: How do you feel about what he does (or doesn't do) to please his mom?

54. Has there ever been a time that your husband had disagreement with his mother?
    Probe: If not, why not? Has he ever avoided disagreeing with her?
    Probe: If so, what did they disagree about? What happened? What did you do when your husband had an argument with his mother?

Mother-in-law's Mother-in-law

55. Has your mother-in-law told you about her mother-in-law or their relationship?
    Probe: If so, tell me about that. What was her mother-in-law like? What was their relationship like?

That's all the questions I have.
Anything else that I didn't mention that you would like to tell me about?
Thanks so much for participating in this research.