Wellness of Select Immigrant Chinese and Taiwanese Wives in the United States

Ya–Wen (Melissa) Liang

Texas A&M University–Kingsville

Amanda LaGuardia

University of Cincinnati

Karen Furgerson

Texas A&M Univeristy–Kingsville

Jennifer Boswell

University of Houston–Victoria

Author Note

Ya–Wen (Melissa) Liang, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and Program Advisor in the Department of Counselor Education and Leadership at Texas A&M University–Kingsville.

Amanda LaGuardia, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor and Counseling Program Coordinator at University of Cincinnati.

Karen Furgerson, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator in the Department of Counselor Education and Leadership at Texas A&M University–Kingsville.

Jennifer Boswell, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of School of Education, Health Professions, and Human Development at the University of Houston–Victoria

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ya–Wen (Melissa) Liang via ya–wen.liang@tamuk.edu.

Abstract

A qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted to investigate the acculturation experience and wellness of 10 Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant women who married United States citizens. A social constructivist theoretical framework was taken to explore the participants' acculturation experience and wellness issues from the lens of their worldviews. We attempted to understand these immigrant women's acculturation, wellness, cultural identity development, marital concerns, and contentment. Ten participants who married United States citizens were interviewed. Six of them participated in a group interview, and four of them completed individual interviews. Six themes were revealed: (a) language and cultural challenges, (b) relationship aspects of emotional suppression, (c) parenting conflicts, (d) determination for growth, (e) spousal support and gratitude, and (f) religious support. Cultural dissimilarities, diverse communication styles, and language differences appeared to result in challenges affecting these wives' wellness and acculturation to cultural aspects of their marriages and societal norms in the United States. Most participants gained a sense of competence related to their own personal wellness in relation to their acculturation process such as expressing their conflicting emotions. We encourage counselors and researchers to understand immigrant women's wellness as it relates to the cultural complexities regarding their acculturative transitions so as to better help these women address their wellness and counseling issues.

Keywords: immigrants, Chinese and Taiwanese wives, acculturation, wellness

Wellness of Select Immigrant Chinese and Taiwanese Wives in the United States

Approximately 40 million or 13% of people in the United States were foreign–born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Asian immigrants are the fastest growing group in North America and had reached 12 million (25%) of foreign–born populations in the United States by 2010 (Ahmad, Jandu, Albagli, Angus, & Ginsburg, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Chinese and Taiwanese made up the largest Asian group with four million people living in the United States as of 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, 2012c). Immigrant wives are considered a marginalized group whose voices and needs are often devalued by society, and their lived experiences have not been explored in–depth by researchers (Zhang, Smith, Swisher, Fu, & Fogarty, 2011). Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant women often experience adjustment conflicts, financial stress, and inadequate support because of culture and language challenges as they acculturate to their new country (Myers–Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011). Typically, the acculturation process is fraught with worry, stress, and anxiety for individuals seeking to adapt to a new culture when they also maintain their own cultural identities (Mui & Kang, 2006). Chinese and Taiwanese female immigrants often lack opportunities to vocalize their difficulties, seek tangible resources, and connect with supportive communities (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005). Furthermore, Chinese immigrants have intense or high expectations of adapting to their new community, which might lead to excessive stress (Yan & Berliner, 2011). These acculturative stressors could lead to a decrease in wellness and overall health.

The *Wheel of Wellness* model outlined five main life tasks a person moves toward for greater health and life satisfaction, one of which is self–direction (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer 2000). Twelve sub–components are found within self–direction such as: (a) sense of worth, (b) sense of control, (c) realistic beliefs, (d) emotional awareness and coping, (e) problem

solving and creativity, (f) sense of humor, (g) nutrition, (h) exercise, (i) self–care, (j) stress

management, (k) gender identity, and (l) cultural identity. Several of the self–direction sub–

components have been found to be lacking in Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant women when

they adapted to acculturation in the United States, which makes the process of cultural

accommodation particularly difficult (Zhang et al., 2011). Diverse social norms and language

barriers often contribute to immigrants' cultural maladjustments (Myers–Walls et al., 2011).

Culture, Social, and Language Challenges

Intersections of gender, language, culture, ethnicity, and social issues have a tendency to

affect immigrant women's cultural adjustment (Yakushko & Chronister, 2005). Social issues and

a lack of a social network significantly impact immigrants' physical health and overall well–

being (Deng, Liang, LaGuardia, & Sun, 2016; Myers et al., 2000; Shang, O'Driscoll, & Roche,

2016; Tsai, Morisky, Kagawa–Singer, & Ashing–Giwa, 2011). A lack of friendship and social

support has also been found to be predictors of depression, low self–esteem, and increased

physical health conditions (Cramer, 1994; Deng et al., 2016; Hafen, Franksen, Karren, &

Hooker, 1992; Ulione, 1996). Additionally, language barriers hindered these women from

conforming to mainstream cultures and contributed to their feelings of isolation towards their

adopted society, especially when their children refused to talk to them in their native language

(Hwang, Woods, & Fujimoto, 2010). Unfamiliarity with the official language and dominant

culture may lead to immigrant women's isolation and their suppression of voice. When

considering issues of acculturation and cultural adaptation, wellness concerns can emerge with

regard to emotional coping, stress management, sense of worth, self–care, socialization, and

conflicting beliefs in lifestyle expectations and self–determination (Myers & Sweeney, 2004;

Myers et al.). Dealing with acculturation could result in stress, which affected individuals'

wellness and satisfaction toward self–care (Deng et al.). Individuals who participated in support groups tended to have more confidence when coping with stress or illness issues and have greater satisfaction regarding wellness and lifestyle (Deng et al.). According to Kim, Heo, and Kim (2014), interactions with members of the same ethnic group, especially for immigrants, has a positive correlation with mental health and social connection as members share similar cultural languages, customs, and social norms. Under Chinese cultural influences, individuals tend to value social harmony over expressing one's emotions and concerns (Lam et al., 2010).

Relational Aspects of Emotional Suppression and Identity

Chinese individuals often conceal negative emotions and economic stress (Lam et al.; Sellmann, 2009; Zhang & Cross, 2011). They are accustomed to a cultural patriarchy, in which men are perceived as superior to women. This cultural belief tends to contribute to Chinese wives' behaving in a way consistent with patriarchal expectations, which is considered an internalized oppressive process (Zhang et al.). According to the study of Zhang et al., Chinese wives tended to give up their careers in their home countries in order to accompany their husbands abroad. Some wives expressed that moving to a foreign country without earning income decreased their power in marital relationships. Wives with income were able to increase their satisfaction and respect in the marriage because they were able to make decisions independently such as going shopping (Zhang et al.).

According to Zhang et al., Chinese immigrant wives often value their domestic responsibilities more than personal wellness during acculturation. Chinese wives often define their identities through kinships, household responsibilities, and parenting (Chen, 2009; Tang, 2010; Tzou, Kim, & Waldheim, 2012). Researchers suggested that Chinese immigrant wives enhance a healthy identity and a balanced partnership through increasing social support,

practicing language skills, and expressing emotions (Zhang et al.). Enhancing language skills allows these wives to better communicate with others and increase relational competency (Zhang et al.). Relational issues often affect these wives' wellness. Zhang et al. further noted that wives who accompanied their husbands to the United States often experienced frustration and boredom regarding being left alone at home and lacking time with their husbands who were busy with responsibilities outside the home. Relational issues within the family can emerge through intimate partnerships and role expectations associated with parenting or mothering. These wives are encouraged to redefine their behavior patterns, social norms, and cultural values of parenting involvement so as to enhance emotional support and intimacy in marriage (Zhang et al.).

Parenting Expectation and Stress

In the Chinese culture, the role of a wife is expected to be highly involved with monitoring children's academic success, which is viewed as way to contribute to the family goal regarding parenting, mother–child relationship, and interpersonal harmony (Lam et al.; Zhang et al.). According to Hwang et al. (2010), different values and generational heritages often result in acculturative gaps between Chinese parents and their American born children, which can then result in additional stress. Acculturative stress and language barriers often contribute to Chinese immigrant parents' inadequate feelings and frustration when supporting their children's academic success (Lau, 2010). Therefore, parenting issues could contribute to Chinese wives' acculturative stress (Hwang et al.; Lau, 2010; Myers–Walls et al.).

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Purpose Statement

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There is a significant lack of research regarding Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant women's acculturation and wellness experiences after a marriage to a United States citizen. The purpose of this study was to explore the acculturation experiences and the subjective wellness of

women in a cross–cultural group of Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants who were married to male United States citizens through the analysis of their lived experience. Researchers defined acculturation as cross–cultural adjustment in predominantly White environments (Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012). A qualitative procedure was adopted to increase researcher and counselor knowledge in the hope that mental health professionals might better address immigrant women's acculturative stress and wellness as they manage inter–cultural relationships.

Method

Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to gather and interpret insights, meanings, lived experiences, and holistic viewpoints from participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). According to Kwan, Chun, and Chesla (2011), qualitative inquiry serves as an appropriate method to explore in–depth data of the Asian population. Given these strengths, a qualitative methodology was used to explore participants' acculturation and wellness experiences and interpret possible meanings related to those experiences. Creswell (2007) noted that social constructivism, developed by Mertens, allows researchers to comprehend participants' worldviews, historical experiences, and lived experiences. We adopted social constructivism as the theoretical framework to bracket our researcher bias, which is informed by both personal experience—with Chinese culture and with acculturation—of the primary researcher and exposure to the literature on this topic. Bias relates to the belief that immigrant women are typically submissive to their husbands and do not express their conflicting or negative emotions. This perspective was evaluated and reflected throughout the process of the study to ensure appropriate exploration of participants' worldviews, social experiences, and wellness in a way that would reflect the most genuine experience of participants in their own acculturative process.

Participants

The participants in this research study self–identified as females with a Chinese or Taiwanese ethnic heritage, having been born and raised outside of the United States. Participants were required to be fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, or Taiwanese and legally live with their spouses in the United States. Ten participants residing in a southern state were recruited through purposeful sampling. A purposeful sampling allows researchers to collect data that can best represent the target population (Creswell, 2007). The primary researcher identified three church groups in order to engage culturally Chinese immigrant wives. A snowball sampling method was also used to recruit participants. The primary researcher made phone calls and sent emails to 15 potential participants identified by three church group leaders. As this population of women can be an isolated group, the snowball sampling method allowed researchers to connect with participants otherwise difficult to access (Gay et al., 2006).

Ten to fifteen respondents are considered to be an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984). Six participants with pseudonyms of Yi, Yun, Fen, Ni, Lan, and Hwa joined the face–to–face focus group interview, and another four participants with pseudonyms of Li, Jin, Chi, and Zhu were included through individual phone interviews. Five participants were originally from Taiwan, three were from Mainland China, one was from Hong Kong, and one was from Malaysia. Participants' ages ranged from 36 to 58. The mean age was 49. The length of time participants had lived with spouses in the United States at the time of the study ranged from two to 25 years. The mean was 13 years. One participant had a Ph.D., two had master's degrees, five had college degrees, and two had high school diplomas. Five participants received their highest degrees in the United States. Nine of 10 participants were married to Caucasian, United States born spouses. One

participant was married to a Chinese immigrant who was a naturalized United States citizen. A naturalized citizen refers to an individual from another country who legally becomes a citizen (Gerst, 2009; Landale, Hardie, Oropesa, & Hillemeier, 2015). As the United States citizenship was required of the spouse, the participant whose spouse was a Chinese immigrant was included in this study. Her spouse immigrated in his thirties, which was four years prior to this study and seven years after his marriage to the participant. The researchers chose to include this participant because she contributed the unique acculturation experience of moving to the United States after her spouse acquired citizenship and thus her experience may contribute to transferability of results, serving as a subject for deviant case analysis (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

Instrument and Procedure of Data Collection

University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the data collection. The IRB approved protocol was introduced and implemented during the interviews to enhance the credibility of the data collection. The consent agreement was introduced and given to participants prior to interviews, and all recruited participants gave consent to be interviewed.

Open–ended questions allowed researchers to explore participants' life circumstances in a way that encouraged open sharing and processing (Creswell, 2007). Three open–ended and broad questions were used to allow participants to share their worldviews, acculturation experiences, perceptions of personal wellness, and details of their marital relationships. The research questions of both individual and group interviews included: (a) what are your lived experiences in the marital relationship, (b) how have you changed ways of communicating emotions since you married, if at all, and (c) how do you find contentment in daily life? One additional question used in individual interviews was "please describe your marital relationship".

Pseudonyms were used during interviews and for reporting results. Semi–structured interviews enabled researchers to collect in–depth data and enabled participants to explore further processes or reflective comments (Gay et al.). The primary researcher interviewed all participants and transcribed all interviews in both Chinese dialects and English, depending on the languages that participants spoke during interviews. A focus group member with a Ph.D. earned in the United States reviewed the completed focus group transcript (of which she was a participant) with pseudonyms in place to ensure proper translation of language from Chinese dialects to English. The transcript was then sent to all focus group members for member checking to ensure accuracy and solicit feedback. Member checking is a process of sharing results with participants and inviting them to interpret emergent themes in order to increase accuracy of the data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2011). Participants who were involved in the individual interviews were also invited to review their individual transcripts and provide feedback and insight. Follow up interviews allowed researchers to solicit in–depth meanings, clarify feedback, and investigate emerging themes from participants (Creswell, 2007; Hacieminoglu, 2014; Monden et al., 2014). All participants agreed with all the identified emerging themes. A few participants offered more information about the emerging themes, such as (a) establishing a hiking club or outdoor group activities can enhance immigrant wives' psychological and physical wellness, (b) Americans husbands would not consider it is their responsibilities to financially support their wives' middle–aged children even though Chinese wives view it is their responsibilities to take care of children regardless of their children's age, and (c) gender roles in the Chinese culture rather than personal factors contributed to a participant not receiving spousal support to complete her master degree.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis is one of the most effective methods for analyzing data because it engages in a process of reviewing the responses of participants from the interviews and analyzing the transcripts to identify themes (Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Several researchers noted that constant comparative analysis corresponds to the theoretical framework of social constructivism because of its within–case analysis, as well as cross–case analysis (Creswell, 2007; Fernández–Esquer, Agoff, & Leal, 2017; Koeing, Zimmerman, Haddock, & Banning, 2010; Meiklejohn, Heesch, Janda, & Hayes, 2013). A constant comparative data analysis was used in this research to identify the primary analytic themes regarding the emic—within–case—and etic—cross–case—meanings, which corresponds to social constructivism in bracketing researcher bias in exploring emergent themes through participants' worldviews (Creswell, 2007; Fernández–Esquer et al., 2017; Koeing et al., 2010). This analysis enhanced the credibility of emergent themes shared by participants (Fernández–Esquer et al.). This process is typical of grounded theory, the method aligned with the phenomenological research design and allowed for more in–depth questions to be asked in follow–up interviews with subsequent participants (Guzman & Hapan, 2014; Hacieminoglu, 2014; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016; Meiklejohn et al., 2013; Monden et al.).

The primary researcher, second researcher, and a doctoral counseling fellow comprised a coding team to analyze common themes of the transcripts. The coding team started the data analysis with open coding to discover categories throughout the process of data collection (Creswell, 2007). The team used textual description to summarize contextual definitions from the participants to discover their in–depth meanings and the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Emic coding defines meanings from the participants' classification and was used to

analyze data from participants' worldviews (Creswell, 2007; Koeing et al.). The team used an

etic approach to identify shared themes from the participants' cultural practices (Koeing et al.;

Willis, 2007). The coding was developed by attending to specific phrasing and sentences. Sets of

codes where then developed so that a variety of common elements could be evaluated to examine

the qualitative data (Willis, 2007). Each coding member reviewed the manuscripts with

pseudonyms and identified themes for each participant using an emic approach. Each member

further used the etic approach to identify emerging themes based on their understanding of the

information. Finally, the coding team redefined and acknowledged emergent themes after

collaboration of their individual findings.

Trustworthiness

Debriefing is a method used to establish the trustworthiness of research results (Salkind,

2010). After the interviews, a licensed professional counselor, as well as a doctoral fellow

conducted a debriefing with the primary researcher. The debriefing was intended to reduce

researcher bias that could influence the data collection and analysis (Given, 2008; Lavrakas,

2008). The primary researcher contacted the participants in the third week after the interviews to

clarify in–depth meanings of transcripts and again in the seventh week to ensure their agreements

with emerging themes to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis (Creswell,

2007). Triangulation reduces risks of researcher bias and increases the trustworthiness of data

analyses, thus data were analyzed using member checking, an outside expert review, and a

research coding team (Maxwell, 2005).

Researcher Bias and Analysis

The researcher bias considered by the primary researcher during the debriefing included:

(a) immigrant wives might not disclose their frustration towards marriages to their spouses

because they received financial and emotional support from their spouses and (b) immigrant

women might limit their social activities because of financial concerns and language barriers.

After debriefing, the primary researcher realized that her bias towards immigrant women's

vulnerability might affect the data analysis. She recognized that most participants in this research

courageously sought ways to express their emotions and communicate with their spouses and

seemed open to discussing this process. When participants chose to avoid certain issues, they

considered those issues as unresolvable through discussions with their spouses. It seemed that

participants chose different approaches, such as showing their love and not holding grudges

towards their spouses for the purpose of enhancing their marital relationships and preventing

arguments. The primary researcher reflected that most participants in this study were not limited

by financial constraints or social isolation; instead, they actively participated in church activities,

community events, and ethnic social groups since their immigration.

Results

Six themes emerged as a result of analytic procedures. These included: (a) language and

cultural challenges, (b) relationship aspects of emotional suppression, (c) parenting conflicts,

(d) determination for growth, (e) spousal support and gratitude, and (f) religious support. The six

themes identified are discussed as follows:

Theme 1: Language and Cultural Challenges

Diverse cultural norms, expectations, and communication styles influenced the

participants' frustration, stress levels, and anxiety levels in their acculturation into society and

marital expectations. One participant, Li, stated, "It's not easy to have somebody who has a

different language and cultural background to live with for a long time." This theme included

two sub–themes addressed below:

Language proficiency. Participants appeared patient and courageously sought resources to practice effective communication, reduce frustration, and increase wellness. Fen stated, "I translated what I wanted to say from websites and gave it to my husband after he came home from work." Li stressed, "I want to encourage international wives to brush up their language skills. Without proper language skills, it makes marriage more difficult." Language barriers appeared to contribute to the participants' frustration and stress regarding communication in marriage and acculturation to society.

Cultural differences. One's cultural perspective helps to shape the meaning an individual may give to a situational experience. For example, asking to take food home is viewed as appreciation in the Chinese culture but can be viewed as impolite in the United States. Saving money is viewed as a virtue in the Chinese culture but can often be perceived as stinginess in the United States. Jin stated, "My husband told me not to ask to bring friends' food home when we were invited to potluck." Li shared, "I tried to save money. My husband harbored anger in his heart." Fen (the focus group participant) stated, "Americans think it's silly to limit daily spending for supporting adult children [30 or 40 year–old sons or daughters]." These different cultural expectations appeared to contribute to the participants' acculturation conflicts to social events, financial arrangements, and family values.

Theme 2: Relationship Aspects of Emotional Suppression

Emotional suppression is employed as a coping mechanism to prevent arguments and conflicts in the Chinese culture (Wei, Su, Carrera, Lin, & Yi, 2013). Yun shared, "From my culture, if you heard something that is not right, you try to be quiet." Zhu stated, "When I have bad times, I hide my emotions from my husband and keep myself busy." Cultural norms appeared to lead to these immigrant wives' emotional suppression and belief that they could ease

disagreements and prevent emotional disturbance by putting aside their negative perceptions and negative emotions.

Theme 3: Parenting Conflicts

Parental involvement was perceived as necessary to ensure children's future success according to the participants' perspectives and Chinese cultural norms. The participants appeared to feel offended and frustrated when their spouses did not share their attitude toward parental involvement and practices based on diverse cultural norms. Yi complained, "My American husband thinks it's not his duty to supervise my son's [an adolescent child from a previous marriage] homework." Jin stated, "My husband prefers our child to have freedom and to be independent, but I prefer our child to have a routine schedule." The participants maintained a firm attitude on their parental involvement and supervision of their children's daily activities regardless of the parenting disagreements with their spouses.

Theme 4: Determination for Growth

This theme indicated that participants' focus was on personal growth despite reported feelings of fear and anxiety associated with immigration. Li suggested, "International wives need to go out more, to experience society." Lan stated, "My friend helped me learn to drive. I have no problem in handling my life." Increasing social interactions, career opportunities, and life skills appeared to enhance these immigrant wives' confidence, wellness, and capabilities to conquer acculturation challenges.

Success in marriage. Participants promoted their own feelings of wellness and succeeded in marital relations through taking pride in and engaging in household duties. Chi shared, "I enjoy my job as a housewife." Jin revealed, "Happiness sometimes is a choice."

Wellness as an enhancement to marriage. Yi learned to take care of her own wellness and establish equality in the marital relationship. Yi smiled and proudly stated, "After I yelled back at him [husband], right away he lowered his voice. I learned if he is nice to me, I'm nice to him." Li responded, "I learned not to hold grudges against him [husband]. I talked to him with love." Li mentioned, "It is challenging for me to meet the expectations of the marital relationship. I wish to receive counseling to conquer the challenge." Participants learned that expressing emotions and seeking counseling can balance marital relationships and enhance wellness.

Theme 5: Spousal Support and Gratitude

Receiving support from spouses played a significant role in boosting the participants' confidence in overcoming acculturation challenges. The participants further enhanced happiness and wellness by confirming their gratitude towards their spouses. Li smiled and declared, "My husband is like a walking dictionary." Lan shared, "He [My husband] never criticized me." Fen stated, "Trust breaks down the wall between the couple." Participants appreciated their spouses who offered constant support and respect. However, one participant continued to express her appreciation towards her spouse although he had an affair and decided to divorce her. She stated with tears, "He has always been a very wonderful person. I asked him 'What can I do to make you happy?' He said 'Just let me go.'" She appeared to believe that she should adapt to the needs of her spouse, just as she needed to fit into the dominant culture as an immigrant.

The only participant who married a Chinese born naturalized United States citizen mentioned not receiving support from her husband. She shared, "I felt very frustrated about seeking help from my husband. I thought about getting a master's degree, but my husband asked me to take care of my child and have another baby." This dissonance might indicate a variety of issues that could be individually specific. During the follow–up interview, this participant

clarified that it is consistent with the gender role of the Chinese culture that the wife takes care of children instead of pursuing a master degree.

Theme 6: Religious Support

Participating in religious activities and receiving religious support appeared to help most participants enhance their happiness and wellness in their acculturative process and marriage. Li shared, "Faith is the foundation in my marriage. God created the marriage so I have to go back to the source, and God will teach me how to make marriage work." Zhu shared, "Do volunteer for church. I feel very content." Fen stated, "Going to church with my husband is my biggest contentment." Hwa expressed her desire to establish a hiking club with church members to help her release stress and cope with marriage issues. Few participants did not identify themselves as Christians, but they reported gaining contentment and confidence in overcoming acculturation and marriage challenges through participating in church activities.

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Discussion

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The participants shared crucial elements that would hinder or bolster their wellness during their acculturation to U.S. societal expectations and their own marriages. Several emerging themes were consistent with the *Wheel of Wellness* model (Myers et al.) regarding self–direction of life tasks toward greater health and life satisfaction. Examples included: (a) language and cultural challenges elucidated the participants' cultural identity, problem solving and creativity, (b) relationship aspects of emotional suppression uncovered the participants' emotional awareness, coping, and stress management, (c) parenting conflicts challenged the participants' gender identity and cultural identity, (d) determination for growth verified the participants' sense of control and self–care, (e) spousal support and gratitude corresponded to the participants' sense of worth, and (f) religious support bolstered realistic

beliefs. From the participants' perspectives, determination for growth, cultural gaps, language differences, spousal support, religious support, and social support affected their wellness and acculturation to marriage and society.

Language and Cultural Challenges

Most participants shared their wellness issues regarding adapting to different languages, cultures, and values. Some participants expressed feeling stress related to tremendous efforts required for learning how to adjust to acculturation and how to express their emotions. Participants with career experiences or a higher education appeared to pay more attention to self–awareness and were able to better articulate their stress, conflicts, and cultural differences. Chinese individuals who experienced more vocational opportunities and cultural norms in the United States tended to feel more nervous, anxious, pressured, and frustrated towards immigration (Yan & Berliner, 2011). It is possible that the participants with more career experiences or interactions with people from the mainstream culture have more opportunities to experience diverse cultural norms and values. Thus, they were able to better describe their experiences with acculturation conflicts and stress, as well as explore alternative perspectives and actions to balance their sense of wellbeing. It seemed as though the more participants felt comfortable in both cultures, the better they were able to maintain their ethnic identity and experience more contentment, confidence, and wellness in their day–to–day life.

Language proficiency. Several participants reported feeling eager to enhance their language proficiency. The life tasks of *problem solving* and *creativity* in the *Wheel of Wellness* model (Myers et al.) was evidenced by a participant's sharing that she used a website to communicate with her husband to conquer language insufficiency. Participants from Malaysia

and Hong Kong, where English is one of the official languages, appeared more open to the process of expressing their emotional issues.

   Cultural differences. The participants appeared to feel some pressure or anxiety to adopt the cultural norms perceived to be associated with living in the United States as experienced through their social interactions. The participants appeared to cautiously adopt the mainstream culture in order to minimize conflicts and reduce potential criticisms derived from diverse cultural expectations. Asking to take food home is viewed as a compliment and show of appreciation toward the host's cooking skills and hospitality in the Chinese culture. A participant expressed that she learned not to ask to take friends' food home after a potluck as this action was perceived to be disrespectful, and thus the participant conformed to United States cultural norms. Cultural differences seemed to contribute to challenges and stress resulting in a need to cope with their immigration process both as individuals and within their marriages. The participants appeared to exhibit distinct acculturative levels towards society and marriage. Many felt more comfortable or confident in their abilities to integrate the United States and Chinese cultural norms at home, as well as in their marriages.

Relationship Aspects of Emotional Suppression

   Researchers claimed that Chinese and Asian immigrant women often conceal negative emotions and that concealment was often complicated by language barriers, which is a process further exacerbated by cultural expectations that guide women to avoid seeking equality in their marital relationships (Hwang et al.; Lam et al.; Sellmann, 2009; Zhang & Cross, 2011; Zhang et al.). However, the participants in this study were eager to develop language proficiency and socialization to enhance their wellness during acculturation. They began to express their

viewpoints and negative emotions, especially with their spouses. They were reflective and not defeated by acculturation challenges.

The participants considered that they have to communicate with their Caucasian spouses in English instead of their native Chinese dialects at home. This submissive attitude might be influenced by the acculturation process and cultural identity because learning the dominate language is expected by the dominant culture. The participants appeared to use emotional suppression as a coping mechanism or self–care to prevent experiencing difficult or negative feelings that seemed to result from embarrassing situations. Individuals may perceive embarrassment as aversion and tend to cope with embarrassing feelings through avoidance so as to eliminate these negative emotions (Apsler, 1975; Dong, Huang, & Wyer, 2013). During the interviews, participants seemed reluctant to discuss details associated with events they identified as embarrassing. It might be a way the participants try to protect their dignity and wellness consciously or unconsciously (Dong et al., 2013). Halberstadt (2005) noted that individuals could feel embarrassed by a lack of proficiency in communication or interactions. A few participants were reluctant to share challenges by responding that they forgot what challenges they encountered after many years of immigration. However, it is possible that under the influence of Chinese cultural norm, participants minimize difficulties to prevent others from worrying about them (Wei et al., 2012).

Language barriers and communication styles resulting from diverse cultures sometimes influence participants' suppression of emotions and issues. One participant who used a website translation might not have been able to fully express her feelings and thoughts through basic website translations. Additionally, the Chinese language contains limited expression for emotion, which might hinder participants' ability to communicate emotions. For example, the Chinese

language includes words such as happy, unhappy, sad, angry, painful, and miserable, but not more nuanced, extreme, or neutral feeling words such as jubilance, cheerfulness, pleasure, distress, achy, blue, gloomy, melancholy, or mad. Halberstadt (2005) noted that changes in language could affect individuals' information process of social circumstances and accuracy when describing genuine emotions. The participants might not be used to express various types of emotions because of components of their ethnic language and thus their own perspectives on the relevance of emotions beyond what could be described in their native vernacular.

Parenting Conflicts

Several participants reported parenting conflicts with their spouses. Parental involvements appeared to be a crucial issue in Chinese culture and resulting parenting conflicts. The participants with school–aged children insisted on being involved with their children's school assignments and routine schedules. Based on Chinese gender identity, the mothers are expected to be highly involved with children's academic success (Poon & Byrd, 2013). Participants appeared to have an authoritative parenting style compared to their spouses who were reported as having a permissive parenting style and allowed children more independence. It is possible that because of Chinese culture regarding parental involvement (Poon & Byrd, 2013), the participants felt confident in asking their Caucasian spouses to follow their parenting styles.

Determination for Growth

The participants' determination for growth corresponded well with the *sense of control* of life tasks in *Wheel of Wellness* model (Myers et al.). The participants put significant efforts into learning, respecting, and adopting the perceived mainstream cultural norms to improve their social interactions, which brought them a sense of control and satisfaction in achieving their life

tasks. Several participants aimed to reach out to the community to learn communication styles and cultural norms from their local community members.

Success in marriage. The participants appeared to share a greater independence with the goal and courage to succeed their marriages. This was evidenced by their willingness to leave their home countries and the goal to establish a successful marriage in a new county with unfamiliar customs. The participants practiced talking with love and gratitude when insisting on equity in the marriage, using translation tools to express feelings and thoughts to enhance communications in the marriage, and persistently participating in church–based activities with their spouses to engage with the community as well as couple activities.

Wellness as an enhancement to marriage. Most participants reported that they aimed to facilitate effective ways to overcome language barriers, communicate with their spouses, seek tangible resources, and engage in social activities to increase contentment and enhance personal wellness when they deal with acculturation issues in their communities and within their marriages. For example, non–Christian participants consistently attended weekly church services with their spouses and participated in church activities despite their disinterests in the religious constructs of the church. It appeared that the more participants engaged in socialization, religious activities, and skill–building, the more confidence, contentment, and wellness they enjoyed.

Spousal Support and Gratitude

Receiving respect and support from spouses appeared to enhance the participants' confidence and wellness when they coped with conflicts and stress derived from acculturation and marital issues. Based on the individual and group participant reports, receiving support and never being criticized by their spouses boosted their gratitude toward their spouses. Spousal

support appeared to enhance the participants' *sense of wort*h of life tasks toward health and life

satisfaction as addressed in the *Wheel of Wellness* model (Myers et al.).

The Halo effect, avoiding expressions opposite opinions in a group, (Ng, Koh, Ang,

Kennedy, & Chan, 2011; Srivastava, Guglielmo, & Beer, 2010) was evidenced during the focus

group interview. The group participants shared merits of spouses with each other and appeared

careful about criticisms towards spouses. The halo effect may have influenced participants to talk

about their "nice" husbands during the focus group interview. Group members often conform to

others' comments based on cultural norms (Kwan et al., 2011). Several participants appeared to

convey their decisions optimistically in relation to their spouses by vocalizing positive

perspectives of their spouses and their lived experiences in the United States, perhaps in the

hopes of being perceived in a way that would facilitate a connection (Ma, 2011).

Religious Support

Spirituality and religious support appeared to ease most participants' difficulties within

their marriages and challenges in the acculturation process. A participant relied on the wisdom of

Bible to ease her grudges and deal with marital challenges. A non–Christian participant

mentioned that going to church with her husband every week is her biggest contentment.

Another non–Christian participant mentioned that she wanted to join outdoor activities with

church members. It appeared that religious support brought participants contentment and allowed

them to increase social support so as to deal with marital and acculturation stress.

Delimitations and Limitations

Chinese women who were not married but lived with their partners were not recruited.

Most participants reported a determination to overcome acculturation and marriage challenges to

stay in the United States. Not all Chinese immigrant women who married United States citizens

had a strong determination to stay in the United States to deal with cultural conflicts and marital

challenges. Most participants in this study appeared financially dependent on their spouses,

especially when they lacked external support in the early stage of immigration or when they

experienced financial insufficiency after the age of fifty. Chinese immigrant wives who have a

high income or successful career might enjoy financial independence and thus not be financially

dependent on their spouses.

Additionally, all individual interviews were conducted through phone interviews, a

process which might limit in–depth data collection. It is possible that the primary researcher

might not detect participants' emotional expressions through phone interviews. Inversely, it is

also possible that participants might feel more comfortable in sharing difficulties through phone

interviews rather than in person because of Chinese cultural shyness (Dong et al.; Keltner, 1995).

Member checking procedures were meant to address this limitation so as to provide an

opportunity for further communication regarding any issues discussed in recorded sessions.

Implications

Counseling immigrant wives is challenging for counselors because of language barriers,

diverse communication styles, cultural norms, and potentially incongruent counseling

expectations. Asian clients often underreport psychological symptoms or discrimination issues

because of cultural stigma valuing non–disclosure of distress (Mereish, Liu, & Helms, 2012). We

suggested that counselors explore with clients their changes of behaviors and somatic discomfort

during acculturation because Chinese clients' stress and psychological maladjustments tend to be

reflected in their change of behaviors or somatic symptoms (Deng et al.). Counselors are

encouraged to explore cultural complexities within cross–cultural transitions (Wang et al., 2012).

Some participants noted a lack of opportunities for outdoor activities or receiving counseling to

cope with marital and acculturative stress, which may heighten the need to establish supportive connections with others. A study involving Chinese immigrant breast cancer survivors (Deng et al.), reported a lack of ethnic programs designed to enhance immigrant wives' wellbeing. It is recommended that counselors advocate culturally–informed counseling groups, multicultural parenting, or family counseling workshops in schools and communities to help immigrant women feel comfortable to address wellness and stress regarding parenting, marital, and acculturation issues. Chinese immigrants tend to feel more comfortable attending support groups with a curriculum design to overcome negative stigma associated with mental health services and to support their needs for community (Deng et al.). Counselors can facilitate counseling support groups in their practice to enhance immigrant women's wellness and acculturation to a new country. Support groups can help these immigrant women feel encouraged to share their acculturative stress and thus seek alternatives to enhance their personal wellness.

Accept and Explore Cultural Differences

Building rapport, cautiously maintaining good eye contact, and utilizing tools such as an atlas or globe can help immigrant women feel comfortable sharing immigrant experiences and difficulties (Kwan et al.; Yakushko & Chronister, 2005). Most participants used "*we"* to include the primary researcher in their sharing of information related to their acculturation experiences. They expressed feelings of acceptance regarding their worldviews. This may have been related to perceived cultural alignment and comfort with the primary researcher. We suggest that future researchers develop familiarity with Chinese cultural norms and employ culturally appropriate therapeutic techniques in order to facilitate effective research.

Acknowledge Ecosystemic Contexts

Exploring factors related to ecosystemic contexts helps interracial couples acknowledge sociocultural concerns (Inman, Altman, Kaduvettoor–Davidson, Carr, & Walker, 2011). The participants revealed conflicts related to money management and parenting roles because of different ecosystemic contexts. Examining impacts of multiple contexts including cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs can enhance immigrant wives' well–being and coping skills (Kwan et al.; Yakushko & Chronister, 2005). When counselors enhance cultural knowledge and appreciation towards diverse cultures, immigrant wives could gain greater trust in counseling. Participants in this study felt culturally acknowledged by the primary researcher; hence, they were able to share feelings of incongruity, such as the Chinese virtue of saving money and being identified as stingy.

Enhance Confidence and Communication

Enhancing clients' motivation to achieve language proficiency and effective communicate styles with spouses can reduce their stress and marital conflicts so as to enhance their wellness. The participants shared that expressing feelings to their spouses, interacting with colleagues, and attending church activities helped them establish confidence, contentment, and wellness when coping with acculturation. Participating in social activities and securing a job helped immigrant wives overcome loneliness and feelings of incompetence (Chen, 2009).

Conclusion

Researchers noted an increase of 31% of Asian individuals married to Caucasian Americans (Passel, Wang, & Taylor, 2010). There is a need for researches to address marital crises for Asian immigrant wives (Tzou et al., 2012). We suggest that researchers and counselors explore and facilitate individual, couple, and family counseling to help Chinese and Taiwanese

immigrant wives, their American spouses, and their children explore ecosystemic contexts that affect their wellness, acculturative stress, communication styles, marital satisfaction, parenting roles, and cultural conflicts. Seeking a balanced social life, communication style, marital relationship, parenting patterns, and money management will enhance the multicultural adjustment, life satisfaction, wellness, and contentment of these immigrant wives, their spouses, and their children.

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