

# Linking Parents and Family to Adolescent Peer Relations: Ethnic and Cultural Considerations

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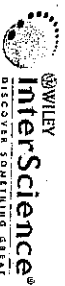
5 Despite sharing similar attitudes regarding the information about peers that parents have a right to know, the strategies African American and Hmong families use to seek or censor information about peers diverge because of ethnic differences in emphasis on trust, nurturing autonomy, respect for parental authority, and maintaining cultural traditions.

## Sharing Information About Peer Relations: Parent and Adolescent Opinions and Behaviors in Hmong and African American Families

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As North American youth move into adolescence, they encounter new types of peer relationships and more opportunities to interact with peers away from the watchful eyes of parents or other adults (Brown and Klute, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). One consequence of these changes is that, to an increasing extent across adolescence, the information that parents obtain about their child's peer relations comes primarily from what the child is willing to divulge (Kerr and Stattin, 2000). Among the factors likely to influence adolescents' decision about what they tell parents about their peers—and parent decisions about what information to solicit—is parental and adolescent beliefs about what parents ought to (or have a right to) know about peer relationships and interactions. These beliefs should reflect the quality of the parent-child bond, especially levels of trust and respect, and the parents' approach to parenting. Such beliefs may change in response to the child's behavior or activities of the child's associates. Misbehavior may heighten parental demands for information while redoubling adolescents'

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assertion of a right to privacy. Cultural differences also may be apparent, reflecting cultural beliefs about parental authority and the level of autonomy appropriate for adolescents (Fuligni, 1998).

Understanding adolescents' decisions regarding sharing information about peers and making sense of parents' demands for such information requires a thorough assessment of the peer and family worlds of young people. The study on which we report in this chapter considers these issues by way of basic quantitative data on parent and adolescent assessments of what parents have a right to know about peers, and intensive case studies of how families negotiate the flow of information about the child's peer relationships.

### Domains of Peer Relations

Our study builds on research by Smetana (1988), indicating that although adolescents acknowledge parental authority as legitimate in certain aspects of their lives, they tend to grant parents less authority than parents claim for themselves, largely because adolescents regard some behaviors as a matter of personal preference rather than an issue of morality or social convention. This extends to parent and adolescent opinions about children's obligation to disclose information about their lives to parents (Smetana, Metzger, Getman, and Campione-Barr, 2006).

Smetana included only a few items about peer relations in her measures. This approach helps to locate peer relations in the broader scope of teenagers' life space, but it does not capture the complexity of peer issues that adolescents typically encounter. Through focus groups and individual exploratory interviews preceding the current study (Krein and Brown, 2003), we were able to discern four domains of peer relations that adolescents distinguish in considering what to share with parents about their peers. The first is activities with peers, the "where-who-what-when" of peer interaction ("Where are you going, who will be involved, what are you doing, and when will you be home?"). A second domain focuses on features of relationships: how well one is getting along with a friend, whether or not one has a romantic relationship, and so on. The other two domains concern positive characteristics (conventional or prosocial behavior) and negative characteristics (undesirable traits or antisocial activities) of friends and the larger peer group.

### The Significance of Cultural and Social Context

Early studies of family-peer linkages emphasized how parents shaped the social lives of their children, rather than the other way around (see Parke and Ladd, 1992), and often assumed that similar dynamics were observable across families from different ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Our approach emanates from principles of developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1995). We consider not only how parents and young people jointly contribute to each other's behavior but also how their social

circumstances and ethnic background shape their behavior. We focus on families from two ethnic groups that display markedly differing histories in the United States, but all of our participants are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our consideration of ethnic influences must be placed in this particular socioeconomic context.

The long history of African Americans in North America is punctuated by exposure to oppression, discrimination, poverty, and the violent or deviant behavior that thrives in economically disadvantaged environments. The family, matriarchal in orientation and encompassing a broad network of real and fictive kin, is a central organizing feature of African American lives (Sudarkasa, 1997). Although parents raising families in more disadvantaged neighborhoods may feel compelled to shelter children from the dangers of the environment, the environments also spawn more egalitarian parent-adolescent relationships, with young people assuming adult responsibilities at an early age (Burton, Allison, and Obeidallah, 1995). Older African American youth in depressed urban areas, especially boys, are reticent to place much trust in their friendships, relying more on parents and other kin (Way, 1996). In music, language, and dress and grooming styles, African Americans have contributed substantially to prominent features of American "teen culture." This fosters parental awareness of the peer social situations their child is likely to encounter over the course of adolescence.

The Hmong families in our sample are part of a wave of recent immigration from Laos. Residing without a homeland for centuries, the Hmong are accustomed to creating insular communities that emphasize family loyalty and cultural traditions (Faderman, 1998; Trueba, Jacobs, and Kirton, 1990). Fathers are granted extensive authority over decisions affecting the family and family members, including who children should befriend and what they can do with friends (Xiong and Detzner, 2005). Children are expected to be respectful, compliant, and family-focused.

Reflecting the intergenerational tensions common to immigrant families in the United States (Rick and Forward, 1992), Hmong parents express frustration when youth question adult authority or are noncompliant. Parents are inclined to shelter their children from the unfamiliar world of American adolescence, yet they also fret about their limited understanding of host culture norms about parenting and teenage lifestyles (Kaiser, 2004-05; Xiong and Detzner, 2005). For their part, young people struggle with how to uphold parental and family expectations while adopting some "American" values and behaviors (Berry and Sam, 1997).

### Study Objectives

In this study we examined how individual, family, and ethnic group experiences seemed to frame parent and adolescent attitudes about what parents have a "right to know" about teen peer relations, as well as practices related

to actually soliciting or providing information about peers. We sought to discern unifying themes underlying these attitudes and beliefs. For this report, we emphasize ethnic differences in these themes. On the basis of differences in cultural traditions and experiences in the United States, we expected Hmong parents to assert more of a right to know about teen peer relations than African American parents would, and to emphasize family honor and obligation in enforcing rules about peer interactions. We also expected Hmong youth to express more ambivalence about sharing information with parents, as they struggled to negotiate their position in both family and host cultures. We anticipated that African American adolescents and parents would agree more about what parents had a right to know and would place more emphasis on adolescent autonomy.

### Sample and Measures

Nineteen African American and twelve Hmong American adolescents and their parents or guardians agreed to participate in the study. All were economically disadvantaged members of the same Midwestern community. In each family, we interviewed a primary caretaker (parent, adult guardian, or older sibling) and a child between the ages of twelve and nineteen. Sixty-two percent of the adolescents were females. Families varied in size and composition, but there were fewer (26 percent) with two (married) parents than a one-parent arrangement—a separated, divorced, widowed, or never-married biological parent, or guardianship by extended kin (such as uncle or grandmother). Hmong families tended to be larger and contain two parents more often than African American families; all Hmong parents had immigrated to the United States in adulthood. Families were recruited through neighborhood centers or community organizations offering after-school or weekend programs to economically disadvantaged adolescents. All participants were interviewed individually (in Hmong, if the respondents so preferred), most often in their own homes, by research staff members from the same ethnic background as the respondent. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours; they were tape-recorded, transcribed (with translations, if necessary), and "blinded" before analyses.

Interviewers followed a semistructured protocol that focused on the adolescent's relationships and interactions with peers, family rules governing these interactions, what the participant felt parents had a right to know about peer interactions, what information was actually shared, how this had changed over time, and how the respondent justified the adolescent's choice to share or withhold information about peers. In addition, respondents completed the Right to Know Inventory (RTKI; Krein, 2004), indicating the degree to which they thought (1 = definitely not, 5 = definitely do) parents had a right to know about thirty-one situations or issues involving

the adolescent and peers. Each item related to one of the four domains of adolescent-peer relationships outlined earlier: activities with friends, features of peer relationships, positive peer characteristics, and negative peer characteristics. A previous study on a larger and more diverse sample (Krein, 2004) indicated that the four scales had adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.81 to 0.90) and stability (five-week test-retest stability coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.84), as well as good evidence of construct validity. Scale internal consistencies were also good in this sample ( $\alpha = 0.78$  to 0.86). Respondents could choose to complete the instrument in English or Hmong (orally or in written form).

### What Do Parents Have the Right to Know? Quantitative Comparisons

Average scores for adolescents and parents from each ethnic group on each RTKI scale are listed in Table 5.1. Repeated measure ANOVA, with ethnicity and adolescents' age group (eleven through fourteen, fifteen through nineteen) as between-subject factors and generation (parent, adolescent) as a repeated measure, were conducted on each scale. Gender differences were not assessed because of small sample size. Findings must be interpreted with caution because of the very small sample size. Although Hmong youth and parents consistently scored lower than their African American counterparts, the only statistically significant difference was that for each RTKI scale adolescents felt parents had less of a right to know about peers than parents did. This generational difference was consistent with other studies of attitudes about disclosure to parents (Smetana, Metzger, Getman, and Campione-Barr, 2006). The discrepancy in scores between parents and young people appeared to be larger in Hmong families than African American families, but the difference was not statistically reliable.

**Table 5.1. Ethnic and Parent-Child Differences in Mean Scores on Right-to-Know Scales**

Scale	African American		Hmong American	
	Adolescents Mean (s.d.)	Parents Mean (s.d.)	Adolescents Mean (s.d.)	Parents Mean (s.d.)
Activities with friends	4.12 (0.73)	4.58 (0.45)	3.69 (0.96)	4.38 (0.94)
Features of relationships	3.62 (0.81)	4.03 (0.83)	2.85 (0.83)	3.54 (1.00)
Positive characteristics	3.38 (0.91)	3.62 (0.84)	3.25 (0.63)	3.48 (0.68)
Negative characteristics	3.14 (1.03)	4.19 (1.00)	2.94 (0.93)	4.12 (0.93)
(n)	(19)	(19)	(12)	(12)

### Case Studies

To explore why adolescents were less inclined to share information about peers than their parents expected them to be, and to determine how right-to-know attitudes affected both adolescent disclosure and parent information seeking, we engaged in intensive case study analyses of interview data from families in each ethnic group. We first used an iterative and sequential pattern coding technique (Miles and Hberman, 1994) to discern distinct patterns of disclosure and information seeking, as well as major categories of justification for these behaviors. Two authors read through all interviews to identify patterns and categories and then reread all interviews to ensure that lists of patterns and categories were clear and complete before training another staff member to code interviews on patterns of disclosure, information seeking, and justification. Next, we studied all interview material related to these three sets of codes to identify integrating themes that could tie together respondents' attitudes and actions. Once these themes were identified and clarified, each set of parent-child interviews was read as a case study to assess which themes were applicable and how consistently they were represented across interviews within the family. Finally, because of our interest in ethnicity, we examined all cases within each ethnic group to identify themes consistently expressed by members of that ethnic group. Because of space limitations, in this chapter we focus on just two families per ethnic group, using them to illustrate major themes emerging across families in that group.

**African American Families.** Although the organization and operation of African American families in our sample varied widely, two themes consistently emerged in comments of both adults and children. One was a realization, especially among parents or guardians, that the adolescents were getting more responsible and mature, or at least demanding more autonomy than they had in elementary school. Adults acknowledged their children's increasing mobility and capacity to shield certain aspects of their social relationships from parental scrutiny. These factors precipitated changes in their parenting practices, especially more emphasis on trust as the cornerstone of their relationship with their child. This trust component served as the second theme consistently articulated in African American interviews. However, the awareness of change and greater reliance on trust played out according to family contexts.

*Case One: Struggling with Trust and Maturation.* Kenneth, an unmarried African American adult, took over care of his two nephews several years ago, moving them from Chicago, where their mother still lives, to a smaller city several hours away. The boys, now twelve and fifteen, share the household with Kenneth and his fifteen-year-old son (who was not interviewed). Kenneth portrays his home as the locus of much of the boys' social lives, and himself as directly involved with their peers. "Actually," he says, "it's funny because when their friends come over here, I'm just one of them. . . . We kind of have that relationship where we hang out with each other and do things

together. It's a really close bond between us." This close bond, Kenneth asserts, encourages the boys to be very open about peer-related issues, except perhaps their relationships with girls.

Kenneth emphasizes trust and respect as the foundation of his relationship with the boys. "From the time they were able to walk, I think I instilled in them respect, and I instill in them that trust and respect from each other is mutual with them and myself. So they can tell me anything and I can talk to them about virtually anything." Accompanying this openness are strong expectations for information about peers. Kenneth records very high scores on the Right to Know scales (an average of 4.87 across all items); in the interview he asserts, "I need to know about everything. I need to know A to Z." In reality, his knowledge is incomplete. When asked about features of the boys' peer relationships, for example, he stumbles over the names of their close friends and confesses uncertainty about the depth of romantic relationships: "I would say so many different [girls] call here, I don't really know, as far as who they're with for a length of time or not. I don't know."

Kenneth has developed two strategies to deal with these uncertainties. One is to try to monitor the children closely. Asked how he knows about the boys' activities, he explains: "Most of the time [my kids] tell me and then I follow up. They say something about their friend and I go make sure this is true what they're saying. Not that I don't trust them, but there's too many things happening out here, peer pressure, other things that as a parent I have to follow up on their kids' activities."

The theme of trust resonates in his response, but this time it is expressed as a sense of mistrust of others, his fear of peers with negative characteristics who might influence his children. His reaction to this reveals a second strategy: working diligently to ensure that the boys are embedded in friendship networks reflecting the same values and expectations as his: "I don't expect my kids to do anything that I taught them not to do. I expect my kids' friends to be at the same, doing the same things my kids are doing. . . . If there's any friends that are out there that's putting pressure on my kids to do things that I don't approve of, they're crossed off. I really don't want [my kids] dealing with them."

The terse responses that Markus, the youngest child in this family, gave to most of our interview questions suggested that, at age twelve, his peer interactions and relationships remained fairly limited. His older brother, Julian, was much more talkative, but guarded and defensive in tone. Julian affirms his uncle's concern about tobacco and drug use and his inclination to cleanse the boys' social network of undesirable friends. Explaining why he demurred from telling his uncle details of certain misdeeds with friends, Julian states: "If I would have told him, I would have gotten into trouble and he would have told me don't hang around with them because they a bad influence on you. But I would have been hanging out with them anyway."

Beyond his concerns about maintaining his friendship network Julian worries about being sent back to live with his mother. Asked what would

happen if his uncle found out about certain activities, he responds, "I'd be in trouble, a lot of trouble. He'd put me on punishment. He'll call my mom and tell her what I did. I'd end up going to Chicago to live with my mom." Such concerns undoubtedly contribute to Julian's disinclination to grant parents much of a right to know about activities with peers. His overall score on the Right to Know Inventory was one of the lowest of all our respondents. He objected, especially, to parents' right to know about details of peer relationships and negative features of the peer network.

Julian's solution to this dilemma is to interact with friends away from home (contradicting his uncle's claims that home was the locus of the boys' peer activities) and to volunteer only the basic information about these activities: where he is going, what he is doing, whether or not an adult will be there. Other details are provided only if his uncle specifically requests them. Some aspects of his peer interactions are carefully hidden from Kenneth. Julian has yet to inform his uncle that he has a new girlfriend, even though they have been going together for four months.

Nevertheless, Julian does appreciate his uncle's motives in soliciting information about peers. "He loves me, and he's got to protect me from smoking and alcohol. He wants me to be an athlete and move on and go to a good college." For his part, Kenneth also has some awareness of the changing needs of the children under his charge, and he senses modest changes in his parenting to accommodate the boys' maturation: "I try to give them a little more leeway because they're older. I try to trust them more now because they're older and I will trust them until they do something to make me not trust them. So I don't worry about them. I think they're fine."

*Case Two: Moving Through Trust to Autonomy.* Like Kenneth, Donitra is a single parent raising children without significant assistance from another parent. Her two children are about the same age as Kenneth's—Marissa is thirteen and Andrew is fifteen—and like Kenneth's have had minor run-ins with the police while in middle school. She shares Kenneth's concerns about her children falling in with the wrong crowd, especially since both of them were goaded into delinquent behavior by friends. Despite these and other similarities, she articulates a philosophy and an approach to parenting that are distinctive from Kenneth's.

Donitra cultivates an open relationship with her children. "I let my children speak their mind," she says. "Even when I make a mistake they're able to tell me, 'You're wrong, momma' . . . I give them that respect." This openness extends to the children's peer relationships, such that both of them, Donitra claims, "really just come and tell me. I don't have to push for it." Although Donitra expresses a fairly strong right to know about her children's peer interactions, she is cautious about soliciting information and intervening in their relationships: "Sometimes, like now that they're both teenagers they have their own little personal relationships with each other and I want to, they be talking, I can hear them in another room whispering,

I be wanting to know, but I say, no, I'm not going to pry into that because that's their own personal thing."

Whereas Kenneth attempts to arrange his sons' circle of friends, Donitra relies on advice giving to foster the children's decision-making skills: "If I see something or suspect something, I let them know what I feel about it. I don't run the friend away. I let them make that choice. And so far they've made pretty good choices." Her comfort in approaching peer issues this way (especially in the "features of relationships" domain) is borne out of a strong sense of mutual trust that she has carefully cultivated: "And then when you build up that relationship and that trust with your kids, you know, even though we mothers, we doubt it, you know, I don't know. But sometimes if you just let it flow and know that what you're doing yourself first, it will be a whole lot easier, because I think right now a little boy could knock on the door for Marissa and I think I could sit here and go on and have my interview with you without worrying about what's going on out there in the front room."

This sense of trust is enhanced by Donitra's awareness of the children's maturation and her need to adjust her parenting practices to accommodate their growing autonomy: "Now that [Andrew's] fifteen he's kind of, you know, I let him make his own decisions now about a lot of things. So I wouldn't say that I could pinpoint where he didn't tell me everything. . . . I trust him and, like I say, he's getting at that age now where it's time for him to make his own decisions."

The children are well aware that trust plays a central role in the parent-child relationship. Asked how his mother usually finds out about his activities with peers, Andrew explains: "Basically a trust thing. But if she does get up and come down there to see if I'm down there or if she's going to the store and she wants to know if I want something, I'm where I say I'm going to be." Trust, however, is born out of action as well as age. Andrew relates an incident in which he did not go outside to play, as he had told his mother, but went over to a friend's house when no parents were home and later was accused by the friend's father of damaging property in the home. This was not as serious as an incident two years earlier when Andrew and a friend were caught shoplifting and had to go to juvenile court, but both events fractured Donitra's trust in Andrew and resulted in more restrictions and closer monitoring. Interestingly, when Marissa was caught shoplifting with a friend several years after Andrew's arraignment, it was her brother, not her mother, who read her the riot act.

Although Donitra portrays herself as nonintrusive in her children's peer relations, she actually is fairly directive. She enrolls Marissa in several after-school and weekend activities that become the core of the daughter's social life, thereby ensuring rather continuous adult supervision of her peer interactions. Much of Andrew's free time is consumed by a part-time job. Such activities have delayed both children's entry into serious romantic relationships and, for Andrew they have been a significant source of pride and responsibility:

Yeah, because like I said, I'm getting older and I need to start taking on my own responsibilities. . . . And I feel like now [mama] kind of say, kind of, "Take care of it on your own. . . ." When I got my job, the freedom was like that much more. She lets me do what I want to do with my own money and things like that. . . . It makes me feel good if mama need like twenty dollars from me, I give it to her. Or if Matisa needs to buy her poun poun, me and mama can go half and half on that for her. . . . So that makes me feel more of a young man than a child.

**Hmong Families.** Unlike the African American families, cultural issues dominated the Hmong interviews. Respect for parental authority and cultural traditions was a major theme in parents' interviews, whereas balancing tradition with engagement in American culture was a central theme for offspring. Parents wanted their children to be successful within the new host culture but still desired their children to remain faithful to Hmong traditions and worried that they would be corrupted by American societal norms. Adolescents felt frustrated by parents' limited appreciation of their desire to fit in to both cultures. Parent-child relations were based more on instrumental factors than emotional ones. Adolescents were expected to respect elders, help with family tasks, and avoid bringing shame to the family. Parents were expected to maintain tight supervision and provide for their children's needs. The severe restrictions adults often placed on peer interactions prompted adolescents to be more selective and strategic in the information they shared with parents.

*Case Three: Culture Clash.* Nineteen-year-old Mouna is the oldest of seven children. Her father's work is based in a city several hours away, so he is only home on weekends. In his absence, Mouna's mother, Doua Chi, struggles to maintain the household in the face of a full-time job and the severe health demands of her youngest child. As the oldest, Mouna is expected to contribute heavily to household tasks: cooking, cleaning, and watching over younger siblings. Besides school, this leaves little time to interact with friends.

Doua Chi imposes strict rules on the children, justifying them from a cultural perspective:

My children, I give them rules: when they return from school, when it's time for them to leave school; I don't allow them to go visit anymore, no cousins, no friends. I want them to study and do their homework. When they are done and have free time, I want them to help me around the house, help me with the young ones, help me make dinner. Our Hmong culture is different than the American culture, you know. In the future, you know, I want them to know how to support themselves and take care of themselves. And children, if you let them go out and they don't obey you, they'll see other kids and these kids' parents can't discipline them. They will come home and tell me, "Their parents don't even discipline them; how come you won't let us do this or that?" My children, I don't want them to go anywhere. They listen every time. They know that if I am coming home, they should be home.

This theme of distracting children from American values, so that they remain faithful to their Hmong culture, appears repeatedly in the interview, as does evidence of children's questioning their mother's position. Doua Chi acknowledges her daughter's anger that she cannot go anywhere with her boyfriend unchaperoned, accusing her mother of being "mean and strict" and "nothing like American parents." Doua Chi counters, "The Hmong culture is not like the American culture. The rules are not changeable. You are young and you don't know much."

Mouna is not convinced. She comments that her parents "always remind me that, 'Don't forget we're Hmong, we're not like Americans, you know.' And I was like, I know that but then, you know, I kind of, I guess I grew up here, and it's like I'm like in the middle and I have both points of view." Fueling this ambivalence is a cold and distant relationship with her father, who, she complains, never smiles at her or confesses pride in her accomplishments. Discussions with parents tend to turn into arguments. Fearing that her parents (especially her father) will take things the wrong way and deny all requests to do things with friends, Mouna becomes very selective in what she shares with her parents. In terms of activities with peers, when she really wants to go to a party Mouna sometimes simply lies to parents, claiming that she goes off to the library instead. This strategy is fraught with danger, however, because of her mother's close monitoring: "Every time they go now, I double-check. Sometimes, I drive by and see for myself if they really went there. But I don't let them know I am checking up on them. . . . I don't want them to know that I look for them. I ask the little ones to tell me."

This frustrates Mouna, who brings up the issues of maturation and trust so salient in the African American families: "I find it so hard to earn their trust," she says, "Because, like. . . how do you expect me to live by myself, I mean, when I'm all alone. . . 'cause I'm going to be used to having someone, you know, do everything for me, you know?" Her parents are not responsive to this argument.

*Case Four: Challenging Parental Authority and Cultural Traditions.* The situation is quite different for sixteen-year-old Chong, whose family dynamics were altered dramatically when her father died five years ago. Of the family's five children, Chong was her father's favorite. Her relationship with her mother, Mai, is not strong, especially since the father's death. Disappointed that Chong has not abandoned her childish interest in just playing with peers, Mai opines: "I can't make her do anything around the house. When she's staying at home, she's just watching TV. If she's happy, you can then ask her to do something like washing dishes. Even though she's getting older, she can't cook or anything."

Chong freely admits to defying curfew, staying out quite late with friends. Mai sometimes tries to track her down, but not as consistently or successfully as Doua Chi. Reflecting her concerns about negative characteristics of peers, Mai explains: "If she's gone and she's not over there, then you don't know where she is. When she comes in I ask her, 'Where did you go?' She will

respond that she's been out with friends. This part is the toughest part. What if she is not telling the truth? . . . No matter who is going with, she doesn't say. That's the hardest part. I'm so worried about that since it will affect her future." Despite her worries, Mai has not been able to step into the role of disciplinarian since her husband's death. In fact, Chong observes:

Ever since my dad passed away, we've got to do a lot more things he would never let us do. Yeah, he was very strict. We would call this house a prison. He would never let us do anything. But my dad could be really cool. . . . I like how my mom is. She's really cool and lenient. She'll let us go to parties and she'll always be, like, "Yeah, be back by like ten when you're going out to parties." But then we never come back until it's done. She knows where we are and she doesn't get mad about it. But when my dad was still here and we would go to parties, my dad would be like, "Be back by ten." When he says ten, you better be back by ten.

Mai bemoans the difficulties of applying Hmong cultural discipline practices or filial responsibilities within the context of the United States: "Us, the older generation, we must explain two rules—not just one like here in the United States. The rules to discipline kids in a family, we must say like we say back then. If we say it like here in the U.S., and we say it a bit harsh, the kids will think we are too harsh. Like, to do this, we want them to help us around the house and to learn so that they know. When we are no longer here, we want them to know how take care of themselves and cook food for themselves."

Similarly, Mai criticizes dating practices common in the United States. She describes how, in the "old country," boys would seek permission to take a girl anywhere. Such excursions were always chaperoned, and the girl was always returned home on time. "Therefore," she concludes, "we are definitely different from the ones that are born here in the United States. The ones here, if they want to go with their boyfriends they just sneak off."

Chong portrays her mother's bewilderment as an overreaction. Since middle school, she acknowledges, she has been spending increasing time with friends and less at home. However, she dismisses her mother's concerns about negative characteristics of her friends:

It's not like we do bad things, but we hang out and we talk and stuff. Just to chill. Where my mom thinks, "Oh yeah, you're out drinking and smoking and doing all this." And that's why sometimes when I go, I just don't let her know because she's always like that's the first thing she jumps to. She never thinks about the positive. . . . I think it's the fact that I'm a teenager and I'm in high school and she knows that the friends I used to hang out with back in my freshman year, they do a lot of drugs and stuff. But as I hit sophomore, I kind of knew which groups I wanted to go to and not go to. I think she kind of takes the past and like still puts it in the future.

Chong readily admits her mother's right to know the "basics" of her activities (where she's going, with whom, for how long), although, according to her mother, she routinely fails to divulge this information. She draws the line, however, at sharing details of her close relationships. Mai, for example, seems unaware of the dating relationship that Chong has had for the past half year. Absent from Chong's remarks is any explicit articulation of the cultural conflict (navigating two social worlds) that is so common in our interviews of other Hmong youth. However, her choice of friends and school activities suggest that she remains true to many Hmong cultural expectations, even while pursuing peer activities in a manner more consistent with mainstream American society.

## Discussion

Like those of Mounts and Kim in Chapter Two, our findings emphasize the plural nature of parenting behaviors concerning adolescents' peer relations. Whereas Mounts and Kim emphasize the role of parents' goals and concerns, our findings point to a third precipitating factor: attitudes regarding what parents have a right to know about their child's peer relationships. This factor was also instrumental in adolescents' own behavior, guiding decisions on disclosing or withholding information about peers from parents. Consistent with previous, related research (Smetana, Metzger, Getman, and Campione-Barr, 2006), adolescents from both ethnic groups granted parents less of a right to know about peers than parents claimed for themselves, but their justifications for these opinions, and the consequences for both parents' and children's behavior, were substantially different in the two groups.

Trust was a fundamental issue for many families, more obviously for African Americans. Donitra and her children exemplified the assets of mutual trust. Donitra steered her two teenagers into constructive, supervised environments and occasionally checked up on their leisure activities with friends, but she trusted them to make wise choices about friends and activities, and respected their right to some privacy. Daughter Marissa trusted her mother's ability to discern other people's motives. "And by looking at a person," Marissa remarked, "my mom can know what they're going to do when they go wherever. . . . When she say no, I'm like, OK, and I just listen." Son Andrew recognized the importance of his mother's trust in him and worked diligently to retain it. In doing so, he was able to achieve a remarkable level of autonomy for his age, taking responsibility for his own decisions and assuming some of the family's financial obligations as well. It is noteworthy that parent and adolescent right-to-know attitudes were more similar in this case study than in any of our other families.

Kenneth envisioned a relationship with his boys based on mutual trust and respect. However, his desire to remain intimately involved in their lives and his worries about affiliations with deviant peers led him to assert an unusually strong right to know about their peer relationships, which the older

boys regarded as intrusive and mistrustful. His nephew, Julian, granted Kenneth little right to know about his affairs with peers and withheld information on his activities and relationships for fear of his uncle's reprisals. Although the same age as Andrew, Julian lacked Andrew's maturity and self-confidence.

These two cases confirm the connection between trust and healthy development that others have noted (Kerr, Stattin, and Trost, 1999). An important question, however, is why trust issues seemed more salient in African American families than Hmong families in our sample. The answer may have something to do with parental agency, the degree to which parents can act in the home and community to guide children to healthy peer relationships. Although restricted to some extent by their socioeconomic circumstances, African American parents moved easily about the community to enroll their children in extracurricular activities; watch their performances in these activities; meet parents of children's friends and, if necessary, enlist friends and neighbors in tracking their children's whereabouts. They also felt comfortable joining in conversations or activities when children's peer associates were in their own home. Aware of their parents' ability to check up on them, Kenneth's and Donirra's children were cautious about violating parental expectations or trust. Parental agency was more restricted in the Hmong families, especially among mothers in this immigrant generation. Mai exemplified the challenges many of these mothers face. Unfamiliar with American institutions (such as the school) and norms governing adolescence, lacking confidence in her English language skills, and constrained by gender roles and a patriarchal family structure, Mai felt frustrated and powerless in the face of her daughter's cool defiance of her efforts to restrict activities with peers. In such circumstances, trust was simply upstaged by more pressing issues arising from the clash of Hmong and American cultures.

Our Hmong families displayed dynamics similar to those of the Mexican-oriented, less educated group in Updegraff, Killoren, and Thayer's study (Chapter Four) or the more collectivist Arab and Druze cultures in Israel (Seginer, Shoyer, Hossessi, and Tannous, in Chapter Six). Parents regarded family obligations as much more important than peer (especially, nonkin) relations, and they expected allegiance to Hmong traditions and parental authority. Adolescents understood their parents' expectations and often wanted to honor them but still pressed parents to accommodate to American societal norms for peer relationships. Parent-child tensions are often fueled in Asian-descent immigrant families by the contrast between family and host culture norms (Fuligni, Yip, and Tseng, 2002; Zhou and Bankston, 1998). Youth are torn between the desire to fit in with host culture peers and their commitment to honor family traditions and expectations (Copeland, Hwang, and Brody, 1996). Sensing their parents' diminished agency and struggling to achieve a bicultural identity, Mai's and Dona Chi's children felt justified in occasionally deceiving parents about the nature of their peer interactions. Their diminished sense of what parents have a right

to know seems to be tied to the limited scope of their parents' reach into their social world.

In a study of such limited scope and size, our findings must be regarded with caution. All of our respondents came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; a disproportionate share resided in single-parent families. We were unable to consider the role of important factors such as gender, or to isolate the unique contributions of such variables as ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and immigration status. Within these particular economic and ethnic niches, however, it appears that mutual trust, parental agency, family obligation, and adolescent identity are part of a complex interplay of factors underlying adolescents' and parents' opinions about sharing information concerning the child's peer relations, as well as the impact these assessments have on each generation's behavior. Attention to these factors should help us understand ethnic differences in linkages between the family and peer worlds of adolescents.

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