

Cultural Shift from Interdependence to Independence

Cambio cultural de la interdependencia a la independencia

Olivet Kiranmayi Neethipudi¹, Denise L. Winsor²

Abstract: Asian Indian Immigrant Parents (AIIP) of adolescents are encountering high levels of acculturation and enculturation experiences that are adding complexity to their parenting styles while raising teenagers. Having a different background embedded within collectivistic cultures versus the enculturating experiences of their teenagers being raised in the United States with individualistic cultures is forming a barrier. The purpose of this research was to explore those challenges with cultural barriers of AIIP who struggle to raise their adolescents in the United States. This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological design to explore the in-depth lived experiences of five AIIP from a large Mid-southern city in the US who are navigating acculturation, enculturation, and parenting with their adolescent children. The AIIP participated in 60-90 minutes, semi-structured interviews virtually, using Zoom due to the global pandemic. The interview transcripts were thematically analyzed through phenomenology using four levels of analysis and interrater reliability with two raters which provided a process that allowed for identifying complexities in their experiences. The preliminary finding shows that the AIIP struggled with anxiety, frustration, and fear during their navigation of parenting in an entirely different culture from the culture they were raised in.

Keywords: Asian-Indian-Immigrant-Parents; Acculturation; Enculturation; Parenting-Challenges; Phenomenological-Inquiry.

Resumen: Los Padres Inmigrantes Indios Asiáticos (AIIP, por sus siglas en inglés) de adolescentes se encuentran con altos niveles de aculturación y experiencias de enculturación que agregan complejidad a sus estilos de crianza mientras crían a los adolescentes. Tener un trasfondo diferente incrustado en culturas colectivistas versus las experiencias de enculturación de sus adolescentes criados en los Estados Unidos con culturas individualistas está formando una barrera. El propósito de esta investigación fue explorar esos desafíos con barreras culturales de los AIIP que luchan por criar a sus adolescentes en los Estados Unidos. Esta investigación cualitativa utilizó un diseño fenomenológico para explorar las experiencias vividas en profundidad de cinco AIIP de una gran ciudad del medio sur de los Estados Unidos que están navegando por la aculturación, la enculturación y la crianza de sus hijos adolescentes. Los AIIP participaron en entrevistas semiestructuradas de 60-90 minutos de forma virtual, utilizando Zoom debido a la pandemia mundial. Las transcripciones de las entrevistas se analizaron temáticamente a través de la fenomenología utilizando cuatro niveles de análisis y confiabilidad entre evaluadores con dos evaluadores que proporcionaron un proceso que permitió identificar complejidades en sus experiencias. El hallazgo preliminar muestra que los AIIP lucharon contra la ansiedad, la frustración y el miedo durante su crianza en una cultura completamente diferente de la cultura en la que se criaron.

Palabras clave: Padres-inmigrantes-indios-asiáticos; aculturación; enculturación; Retos de la crianza de los hijos; Fenomenológico-Indagación.

1. DOCTORAL STUDENT IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS, TN, USA. knthpudi@memphis.edu
2. UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS, TN, USA. dwinsor@memphis.edu. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0835-6373>

Suggested Citation (APA, 7th edition)

Neethipudi, O. K., & Winsor, D. L. Cultural Shift from Interdependence to Independence. *Espergesia*, 9(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18050/rev.espergesia.v9i1.2055>



1. Introduction

Culture plays an important role in the life of an individual. It is practiced and shared by a group of people who are related or closely connected. Acculturation and Enculturation are two different and opposite processes with their powers and priorities. According to Bámaca-Colbert (2019), acculturation is an adaptation process to a different culture and enculturation is a process of preserving an ethnic or heritage culture by a group of people. After immigration, immigrant parents acculturate to the American culture while enculturating to their ethnic culture. Conversely, it is the opposite experience for their children because they are predominantly exposed to American customs from birth. So, adolescent children try to enculturate to their American surroundings while acculturating toward their parent's ethnic culture.

Parenting styles also play an important role in the adjustment and adaptation to the environment. Eastern cultures practice authoritarian parenting styles that have no or negligible negative influences on children's development in the collectivistic cultures; whereas it has a negative impact on children from the individualistic cultures (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Apart from acculturation and enculturation, the parenting styles of the immigrant parents play a crucial role in the life of an individual. While raising their kids in a cultural setting different from their own, immigrant parents need to be aware of the processes that impact their living styles and their children's lives. Consequently, as immigrant parents try to raise their children with authoritarian parenting styles in an individualistic culture the children might encounter enormous negative consequences.

This research addressed the prevailing problem of immigrant parent's struggle to raise their children in an individualistic culture and investigated the parenting experiences of AIIP in the United States of America. The problem is that immigrant parents are unaware of the new culture and are afraid of losing their own native culture. Contributing to the fear of loss, AIIP experiences resistance from their adolescent to accept, learn, or practice their native culture. The purpose of this research was to explore the trajectory of AIIP who struggled to raise their adolescent children in a different culture. A Phenomenological inquiry was used to bring out the essence of these experiences with semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed through a phenomenological approach. Specifically, four levels of thematic analysis helped to reduce the data and to make sense of the AIIP experiences, for which interrater reliability was conducted. Thematic analysis refers to a complex and creative process of recovering the structures of meaning embodied in the human experiences (van Manen, 2016, p.320). Five AIIP participants were interviewed to gather information to develop a richer and deeper understanding of their immigration and parenting phenomenon. To get that rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon, the data was reduced to themes based on van Manen's approach. The study findings are discussed in-depth about parent's acculturation process, immigrant parenting strategies; and recommendations are discussed for immigrant parent's relationships to better understand the enculturation of teens to the United States.

Findings from this research revealed that due to immigrant parents' higher bonding of enculturation, they are pulled towards their ethnic culture and their acculturation process towards the mainstream American culture becomes too slow that it can take two decades until their children leave for college. As the two processes of enculturation and acculturation are moving in two opposite directions for immigrant parents, it becomes a challenge and slows down their acculturation process towards the mainstream American culture. Further, due to the independence and autonomy in the mainstream American culture, adolescent children lean towards it, by slowly fading away from their parent's ethnic cultural values. This shows that their enculturation towards the mainstream American culture is expediting while their acculturation towards their parent's ethnic culture is slowing down or slowly fading away.

Additionally, due to their ethnic parenting styles (i.e., authoritarian), parents and their adolescents experience a cultural imbalance. For instance, AIIP wants their children to listen to them without questioning their authority; however, this is quite counter to the authoritative parenting styles of individualistic cultures. Lastly, confusions and conflicts arise between parents and their adolescent children whose opinions never coincide because of which immigrant parents struggle with frustrations, fear, and anxiety.

1.1. Literature Review

The current study is grounded in the research literature that addresses Asian Indian immigrant populations that came from Eastern cultures and emphasizes collectivistic cultural values with interdependence. In this review of the literature, the research is divided into subdivisions that described a culture in terms of acculturation and enculturation, parenting styles, and phenomenological inquiry.

1.1.1. Culture, Acculturation, and Enculturation

According to Bámaca-Colbert, et al. (2019), culture is the beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of closely knitted people, acculturation is the adaptation process to the mainstream culture, and enculturation is the preservation of the ethnic or the heritage culture. Based on the definitions and strategies of acculturation and enculturation given by Bámaca-Colbert et al., the trajectorial path of immigrant parents and their adolescent children was investigated. Parents are acculturating to the American culture while enculturating to their ethnic culture, whereas, their children are enculturating to the American culture. Children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents are quick to understand that they adopt a Western perspective, while at the same time, acculturate to their parent's ethnic culture.

Relevant to the current research is the work of Sen Das (2018) who explored collectivistic and individualistic cultural values and their practices. Collectivistic cultures value interdependence by insisting their children to follow them whereas individualistic cultures value independence by allowing their younger generation to learn through exploring and experiencing. This section studied the differences between the Eastern/collectivistic and the Western/individualistic cultures, their values, practices, along with their dependence on others.

1.1.2. Parenting Styles

This section studied the literature about parenting styles and their role in adaptation to the cultures. As explained by Pinquart & Kauser (2018), Asian Indian immigrants practice authoritarian parenting styles which emphasize interdependence and insists their children listen without questioning whereas Western cultures practice authoritative parenting styles which emphasize independence and allows their children to be autonomous. According to Bradley et al., depending on how rapidly the acculturation and enculturation processes are taking place (Bradley et al., 2016), after immigration, immigrants try to accommodate the new culture cognitively, at the same time assimilate and try to fit in the new culture with their ethnic cultural values. This can define their strategy for both acculturations as well as enculturation processes. The balancing phenomenon between the two cultures with acculturating parents to their ethnic culture (Indian/Eastern) and enculturating adolescents to their ethnic culture (American/Western) which are different and quite opposite processes formed a cultural barrier of challenges for the AIIP.

1.1.3. Parents and Adolescents adaptation process

This section studied the literature about the strength of ethnicity and the desire to adapt to the new culture along with the balancing strategy between interdependence and independence as researched

by Lui (2019). It talked about the interdependence of parents and their children among themselves and the society in collectivistic cultures and explains the importance of independence and autonomy in individualistic cultures.

1.1.4. *Phenomenological Inquiry – van Manen’s approach*

This section studied the literature on phenomenology according to the phenomenologist van Manen (2016) from the book named *Phenomenology of Practice*. This literature reviewed how to conduct phenomenological interviews, the way we need to analyze the transcripts, the way we need to code and categorize the gathered data, and the way we can observe the emergence of themes from the categorized data. Through phenomenology, we observed the unfolding of the hidden emotions which is the core requirement of this research. The balancing phenomenon of the immigrant parent’s struggles experienced between the two cultures can be captured through the insights provided by the author of this mentioned book.

1.1.5. *Phenomenological Inquiry – Vagle’s approach*

This section studied the literature according to the phenomenologist Vagle (2018) from the book named *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. This book revealed how phenomenologists study the relationships of an individual while they are being, becoming, and moving through the lifeworld, and explained how the interpretations and appearance of a phenomenon are important rather than the individual herself/himself (p. 22). According to the author, many express the uncomfortable fact that phenomenological research and analysis is intertwined with the individual and the phenomenon, it is not crystal clear, and there is no single specific way to craft it, which paves the beauty of honing the research (p.52). This is the reason for us to choose van Manen’s approach over the other phenomenologists. The author also suggested that van Manen’s approach is challenging because of its adjusting nature due to the fact of the research on human experiences which are not similar for every individual (p.57). The author, therefore, explains and insists that a phenomenologist needs to analyze the phenomenon and not the individual as we analyze in the other qualitative methodologies. So, this research analyzed the phenomenon of AIIP raising their children in a different cultural setting.

2. Methodology

This research included materials requiring precautions for human subjects because this research involved AIIP who can be considered a minority population and sometimes considered marginalized. The materials this research utilized are consent forms, a semi-structured interview with the corresponding script, and a digital audio recorder to record the interviews for accuracy while transcribing the interviews.

This research utilized qualitative methodology and a phenomenological design to capture the emotions from the lived experiences of AIIP. A phenomenological approach was selected as a means to capture the essence of AIIP lived experiences. The challenges of immigrant parents are the phenomena in my study.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. The general Asian population according to the 2020 Census Bureau of the USA represented 2% in the State where the research had been conducted. Asian populations include all the immigrants from Asian countries and far East Asia. Among these populations even though the Asian Indian population is less, yet, as the Asian immigrant populations are increasing enormously (Bradley et al., 2016), so do Asian Indian population, therefore, there is a need to investigate their experiences based on the differences in their ethnic culture and the mainstream American culture. This research selected the participants based on their interest and voluntary participation., the research involved five first-generation AIIP who are residing in a large

Mid-Southern urban area located in the United States of America using a convenience sample and a snowball sampling procedure. Participants were recruited through an email sent from the Principal Investigator (PI), the email requested voluntary consent to participate in the study and/or provide the name of another individual who met the inclusion criteria that they thought might be willing to participate. Participants expressed their interest through email correspondence. If they were not interested, they referred their friends. These referrals received a recruitment email.

After selecting the sample, each participant was individually contacted, and a signed consent form was obtained from each participant before the interview. Lived experiences of the research participants were captured through a semi-structured interview guide as an instrument utilizing 60 – 90 minutes for each interview through phenomenological inquiry. Due to the global pandemic, the interviews were held virtually utilizing the zoom platform. An interview guide was designed to encourage the participants to unfold their lived experiences. The data was gathered and analyzed phenomenologically.

According to van Manen (2016), “The data gathered from a phenomenon through phenomenological inquiry is reduced to meaning-making process through epoche and reduction” (p. 320). The data gathered was observed, reduced, and analyzed for understanding, in-depth experiences of immigrants, and making meaning about their immigration and parenting experiences. This research utilized analysis through van Manen’s approach of openness and intentionality which was challenging. Yet, we overcame this challenge through a structured process as explained by Vagle (2018) in *Crafting Phenomenological Research* which helped us to analyze the phenomenon of parenting in a different cultural setting.

Based on Vagle’s approach, the first step in that structured process is the selection of an interesting phenomenon by the researchers (p.57), we, as authors, selected the phenomenon as parenting in a different culture. In the second step (p.58) we investigated the phenomenon through reading and observing the transcripts, rather than conceptualizing them. In the third step, we reflected on the themes of the phenomenon. The fourth step was describing the phenomenon by writing (p.59). The fifth step of the analysis was to maintain a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon (p.60), we reflected everything to the immigrants parenting strategies. The sixth and last step was balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (p.60), we observed the emergence of essence through themes by looking at acculturation/enculturation as a whole as well as stepping back and looking at them as parts.

3. Results and Discussion

The data collected was analyzed using four levels of analysis. The level 1 analysis represented the coding of the transcripts by two raters through general coding and line-by-line coding methods. The level 2 analysis was the identification of categories from coded transcripts. Figure 1 provides an example from a collectivistic and an individualistic perspective. Within these perspectives are the direct words of the participants as they describe their experiences. Data was reduced into categories of conflicts and confusions, and a corresponding emotion was aligned based on the interview context. In some cases, the participants used the words for their emotion, and in other cases, where the emotion was not articulated explicitly, it was thoughtfully assigned by the authors.

Meaning making Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Participants Ethnic Culture	Participant is trying to preserve ethnic culture	Participant tried to preserve ethnic culture	Participant trying to follow the ethnic culture	Participant practiced ethnic culture	Participant tried to follow ethnic culture and also tried to change
Adolescent's adaptation	Adolescent resisted to parents and tried to move away	Adolescent resisted to participant by fighting against participant	Adolescent resisted and do not want to share anything with parents	Adolescent resisted to follow his dreams but was convinced to follow the ethnic culture of parents	Adolescent was satisfied because of the change observed in parent as they do not necessarily follow the ethnic culture
Participant's expectations towards their adolescents	Participant expected adolescent to be accountable for his/her actions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected adolescent to listen and follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected adolescent to follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected and convinced adolescent to listen and follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant wanted to preserve the ethnic culture – Authoritarian PS at the same time change based on adolescent's requirements
Underlying emotions experienced by participants	Frustrated and Anxious about the child	Frustrated because of the consequences	Frustrated when child does not follow the directions	Convinced child to follow directions due to the Fear of outcomes	Fear of losing ethnic culture at the same time want to change to

Figure 1. Identification of Categories from a collectivistic and an individualistic perspective

In level 3, the categorized data was reduced to find the meaning-making process through phenomenological design by looking across all the participants. Reduced data was represented to reflect all 5 participants. The meaning-making categories observed are “participant’s ethnic culture”, “adolescent’s adaptation”, “participant’s expectations”, and the “underlying emotions”. Throughout this level of the analysis, saturation occurred and themes emerged. Below is the table showing level 3 analysis with reduced data as well as level 4 analysis represented by the highlighted phrases.

Meaning making Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Participants Ethnic Culture	Participant is trying to preserve ethnic culture	Participant tried to preserve ethnic culture	Participant trying to follow the ethnic culture	Participant practiced ethnic culture	Participant tried to follow ethnic culture and also tried to change
Adolescent's adaptation	Adolescent resisted to parents and tried to move away	Adolescent resisted to participant by fighting against participant	Adolescent resisted and do not want to share anything with parents	Adolescent resisted to follow his dreams but was convinced to follow the ethnic culture of parents	Adolescent was satisfied because of the change observed in parent as they do not necessarily follow the ethnic culture
Participant's expectations towards their adolescents	Participant expected adolescent to be accountable for his/her actions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected adolescent to listen and follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected adolescent to follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant expected and convinced adolescent to listen and follow the directions – Authoritarian PS	Participant wanted to preserve the ethnic culture – Authoritarian PS at the same time change based on adolescent's requirements
Underlying emotions experienced by participants	Frustrated and Anxious about the child	Frustrated because of the consequences	Frustrated when child does not follow the directions	Convinced child to follow directions due to the Fear of outcomes	Fear of losing ethnic culture at the same time want to change to

Figure 2. Table showing level 3 and 4 analysis

Level 4 was the identification of four themes that make up the current study’s findings.

3.1. Interpretation of Finding One

Parents Acculturation process is slow and progresses as their children grow. As immigrant parents have a culture, they try to preserve their ethnic culture and because of their strong connection towards it, their acculturation process is slow. We can observe those strong connections through participant's direct quotes: "want my kids to know their grandparents by talking to them every day", and "we miss our family during festivals". The trajectory and the complexity of the acculturation process of parents can be represented as zero in the early years of their kid's life because the kids are not exposed to the mainstream culture and the parents are not aware of the American culture. As kids progress through their schooling years, parents become more aware of mainstream American culture. Figure 3 demonstrates the trends, which were represented with the circle of lighter color at the beginning and progressively darkens the circles. As parents are still learning to acculturate and shift from their ethnic culture, the process is slow and hurdled with confusion, conflicts, frustrations, and fears.

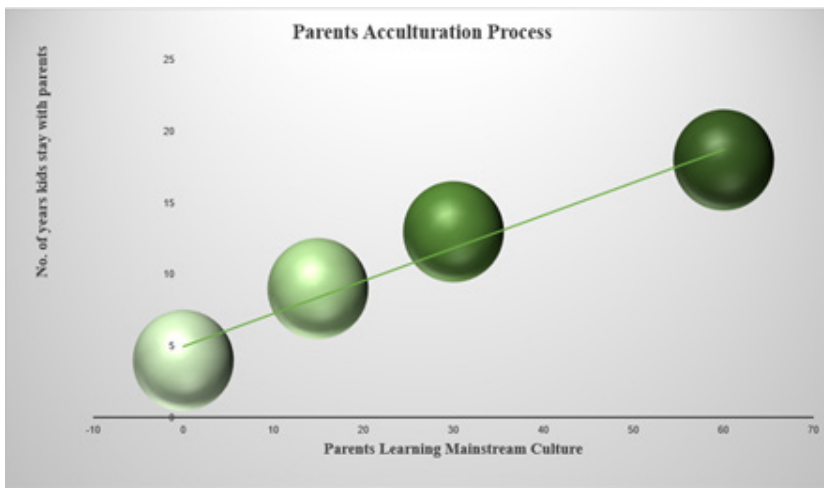


Figure 3. Graph representing the parent's acculturation process

3.2. Interpretation of Finding Two

Adolescents' acculturation process is slowly fading away from their parent's ethnic culture due to the development of independence and autonomy from the mainstream American culture. This shows that their enculturation towards the mainstream American culture is expediting while their acculturation towards their parent's ethnic culture is slowly fading away. As children explore and learn fast, they tend to lean towards the mainstream American culture by being independent and adapting to the culture. Figure 4 demonstrates the independence among the children, from what parents said in their direct quotes, "they went out without informing us" and "they do not want to share with us". We noticed the trajectory and the complexity of adolescent children's acculturating process towards their parent's ethnic culture, it was represented at a maximum during their early years as they were not exposed to mainstream culture and their parents were not aware of the American culture, they all tend to have only immigrant parent's ethnic culture. The darker to lighter circles represent the period of entering school and learning about the mainstream American culture and leaning towards it. As the circles become lighter children of immigrant parents may see their parent's ethnic culture is fading away, causing confusion and conflicts between them and their parents.

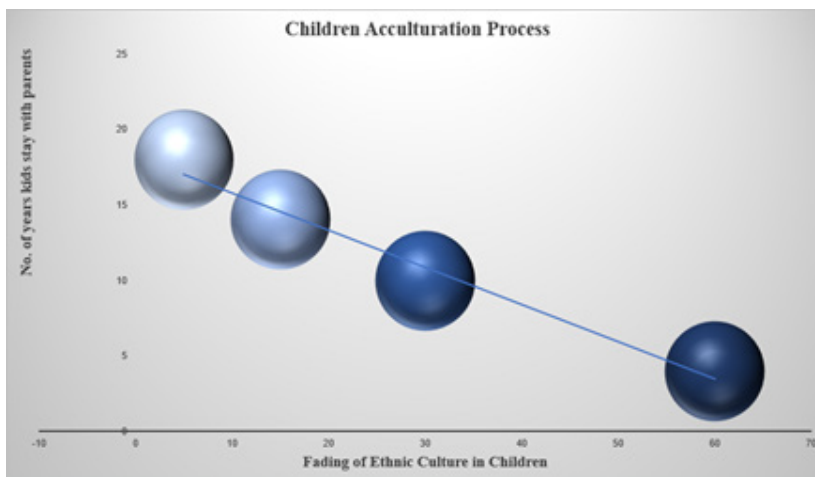


Figure 4. Graph representing the children’s acculturation process

3.3. Interpretation of Finding Three

Parents and their adolescent children never meet at a common ground to compromise with each other. Immigrant parents wanted their children to listen to them without question. If the children question, conflicts arise between them as they cannot compromise with each other. We can observe this again by direct quotes from the parents, “we are being very strict to him”, “we did not give him a car”, “we told him what career he should pursue”. All these phrases reflect collectivistic cultural values. Even though each parent had a different reason for avoiding something, they never agreed with their children, ultimately attributing the whole process to the authoritarian parenting styles from the collectivistic cultures. The two trajectories of parents and children move in opposite directions and there is no common ground where both parents and their children can meet. So, conflicts arise between them making it more complex. Since we are concentrating on the parents’ lived experiences in this research, only the frustrations and fears of parents are observed. Figure 5 represents the combination of the different experiences that parents report that they have and how they perceive the experiences of their children.

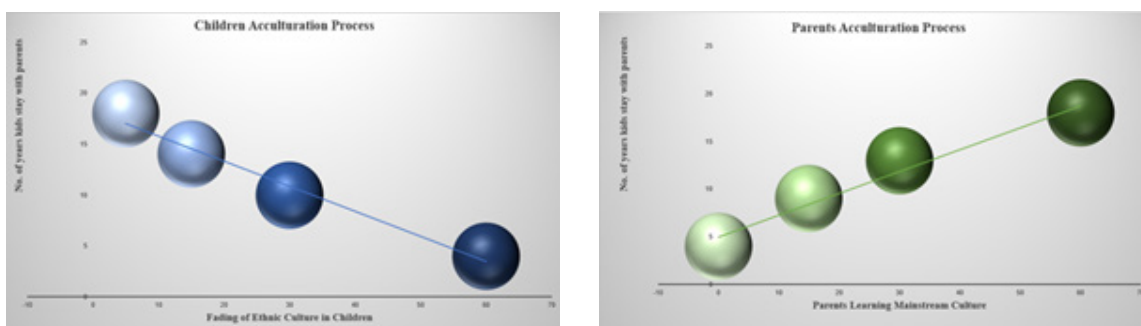


Figure 5. Graph representing the trajectories moving oppositely

3.4. Interpretation of Finding Four

Confusions and conflicts arise between parents and their adolescents whose opinions never coincide with each other, so, parents and children need to be studied together and not in isolation. As their opinions never coincide, parents are distressed with frustrations and fears. We can observe this frustration again through a direct quote “everything you learn in India you forget and start fresh”. Figure 6 represents the combination of both the graphs where the complexity of circular represen-

tation of culture was removed and it was depicted with only lines for simpler visual representation. The tiny point of intersection of both graphs is the time when the parents and their children have similar perspectives and agree with each other whereas the moving away of the graphical lines represent the arguable situations with differing perspectives between the parents and their children.

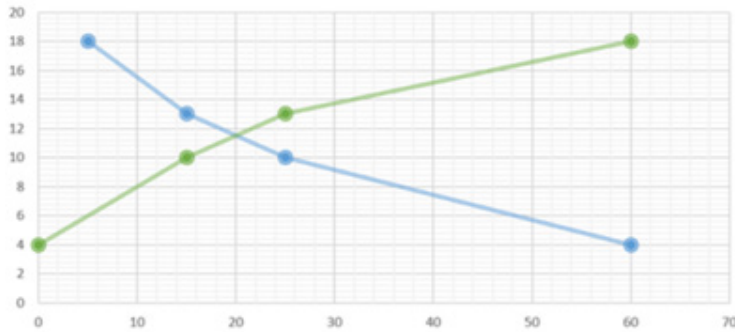


Figure 6. Combination of both the graphs with lines

4. Conclusions

Phenomenological analysis brought out the emotions of frustration, fear, and anxiety from the lived experiences of immigrant parents who are afraid and frightened to navigate their children in an unknown culture. The cause for the distress among the immigrant parents is due to the fact that they are taking a longer time than expected to adjust with their kids because of their own complex cultural beliefs. So, the question now becomes how can parents thrive in an independent culture without compromising any of their heritage cultural beliefs? Results are discussed in-depth about the parents acculturating processes and have implications for immigrant parenting strategies which provided insights for parents about how their children enculturate to the US culture. Implications also included reducing the negative consequences of fear and anxiety in immigrant parents, and to help them learn and understand the two different and opposite cultures. Limitations of the study included a small sample size from the same area and few of the participants dropped due to their unwillingness to share their lived experiences. Future research is recommended on more cultural challenges between both immigrant parents and their children who are entangled with complex cultural beliefs.

Funding Statement

This research study is not sponsored or funded by anyone or any organization.

Competing interests

No competing interests were disclosed

Acknowledgements

I cannot express enough thanks to my Advisor and Committee Chair, Dr. Winsor, for her continued support and encouragement throughout my research project and for making my doctoral journey an enjoyable entity.

My sincere gratitude to my research participants for offering their valuable time and experiences without hesitation even by risking their emotional breakthroughs.

Finally, the completion of this research project could not have been accomplished without the help and support of my loving, and caring husband, Mr. Anil Prabhas Lankapalli, and my two teenage boys, Prannoy and Praharsh.

Ethical Declaration

Privacy guidelines to protect the research participants are developed in scholarly disciplines through professional associations.

Confidentiality of the research participants was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to replace the participants' names.

The data collected and/or gathered was stored only for research purposes and will be destroyed along with the participant's consent forms after one year of data collection.

Information that might potentially identify specific individuals will not be published or used in connection with this study.

5. References

- Bámaca-Colbert, M. Y., Henry, C. S., Perez-Brena, N., Gayles, J. G., & Martinez, G. (2019). Cultural orientation gaps within a family systems perspective. *Journal of family theory & review*, *11*(4), 524-543. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7220130/>
- Bradley, R. H., Pennar, A. L., & Glick, J. (2016). The home environments of adolescents whose parents legally immigrated to the United States: Findings from the new immigrant survey. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *25*(9), 2695-2709. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-016-0455-0>
- Lui, P. P. (2019). Rethinking the acculturation gap-distress theory among Asian Americans: Testing bidirectional indirect relations. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *89*(6), 627-639. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/ort0000322>
- Pinquart, M., & Kauser, R. (2018). Do the associations of parenting styles with behavior problems and academic achievement vary by culture? Results from a meta-analysis. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *24*(1), 75-100. <https://psycnet.apa.org/buy/2017-15641-001>
- Sen Das, S. (2018). 'This is our culture!' or is it? Second generation Asian Indian individuals' perceptions of parents' socialization messages. *Journal of Family Studies*, *24*(2), 146-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2016.1141110>
- Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315173474>
- van Manen, M. (2016). Human science methods: Empirical and reflective activities. In *Phenomenology of Practice* (pp. 311-341). Routledge.