

CHAPTER 7

MODELS OF CULTURAL ORIENTATION:
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN-BORN AND
OVERSEAS-BORN ASIANS

1. INTRODUCTION

Being American means...just living here, assimilating to their culture. Sometimes I don't consider myself American...I look at myself as more Hmong (Overseas-born Hmong American)

Being American means...being whoever I want to be, whatever makes me happy, whatever I do, just exploring my possibilities and not being limited... (American-born Hmong American)

The above quotes are the responses of two Hmong college students, one born in Laos and the other born in the United States, to the question, "What does being American mean to you?" (Tsai, Wong, Mortensen, & Hess, in press). The first respondent describes "being American" in relation to "being Hmong," whereas the second respondent describes "being American" without making any reference to Hmong culture. In this chapter, we argue that these two responses represent the different models of cultural orientation held by overseas- and American-born Asians. Although a considerable body of research has focused on models of cultural orientation across groups, few scholars have examined how these models might vary *within* cultural groups. Uncovering sources of variation within groups is becoming increasingly important, particularly in multicultural societies such as the United States, where differences within cultural groups may be as large as differences between them.

2. WHAT IS CULTURAL ORIENTATION?

Cultural orientation is the degree to which individuals are influenced by and actively engage in the traditions, norms, and practices of a specific culture. This chapter examines the models of cultural orientation held by Asian Americans who were born in the United States and those who were born overseas (i.e., immigrants). Therefore, we have chosen to use the term "cultural orientation" rather than acculturation, which refers to the cultural adaptation and adjustment of immigrants only (Berry, 1980, 1995). According to Ying (1995), cultural orientation should be

distinguished from ethnic identity, which refers to one's conscious identification with a cultural group (Tajfel, 1981). That is, individuals may be strongly influenced by and oriented to their cultures without explicitly identifying with their cultural groups. Despite their disparate meanings, these terms have been used interchangeably in the literature. For example, Rosenthal (1989) uses the term "cultural identity" to refer to cultural knowledge, feelings about one's culture, and participation in cultural activities. Similarly, Phinney (1990)'s definition of "ethnic identity" includes components of ethnic identity as defined by Tajfel (e.g., the ethnic labels used when describing oneself) and of cultural orientation as defined by Ying (e.g., language proficiency, participation in cultural activities, and affiliation with other cultural group members). In this chapter, we focus on cultural orientation rather than ethnic identity.

2.1 Domains of Cultural Orientation

In the literature, scholars have studied levels of cultural orientation in various life domains. The main domains that have been examined include social affiliation, participation in cultural activities, language use and proficiency, and feelings about one's culture.

2.1.1 Social affiliation

Social affiliation refers to the cultural composition of individuals' social networks, including friendships, dating relationships, and marriages. Social affiliation has been found to be an important indicator of cultural orientation, even among children and grandchildren of immigrants (Constantinou & Harvey, 1985).

2.1.2 Activities

Activities and participation in other cultural practices are also an important domain of cultural orientation. Examples of such activities include traditional holidays, rites of passage, and forms of entertainment and recreation. For example, Birman and Tyler (1994) found that the more Russian Jewish female refugees living in the United States participated in activities associated with Russian Jewish culture (e.g., attending synagogue; listening to Russian music), the more alienated they felt by American society.

2.1.3 Language

Language has long been viewed as an important indicator of cultural orientation. For example, Olmedo and Padilla (1978) argue that among Latinos, language is the strongest predictor of cultural orientation. This domain typically includes spoken and written language proficiency as well as preferred language use in different social situations.

2.1.4 *Feelings about one's culture*

Feelings about one's culture refers to individuals' attitudes toward and feelings about their native and host cultures (Boski, 1991; Der-Karabetian & Ruiz, 1997). These feelings may be either positive (e.g., proud, satisfied) or negative (e.g., ashamed, disappointed, critical). As individuals have less direct contact with their native cultures, their cultural orientation may become based more on this domain (S. E. Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000b).

2.2 *Models of Cultural Orientation*

Although a number of models of cultural orientation have been proposed, the unidimensional and bidimensional models are the most widely studied.

2.2.1 *Unidimensional models*

Unidimensional (or linear) models were first developed to explain immigrants' adjustment to their host cultures. These models consider orientation to native and host cultures as opposite ends of the same continuum (Stonequist, 1964). Thus, according to these models, becoming more oriented to American host culture by definition requires Asian immigrants to become less oriented to their Asian native culture. As Figure 1 illustrates, the unidimensional model allows for several types of cultural orientation. An individual may be: (a) more oriented to her native culture (N) than her host culture (H), (b) more oriented to her host culture than her native culture, or (c) equally oriented to both her host and native cultures.

Unidimensional models have been criticized for several reasons. First, these models assume that bicultural or multicultural orientation is psychologically unhealthy, particularly if the host and native cultures hold opposing world-views (Stonequist, 1964). For example, Park (1928) described an individual who is suspended between two cultures as "marginal," or unable to function in either culture. Increasing evidence, however, contradicts this assumption (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Second, unidimensional models assume that the more oriented individuals are to their host cultures (and the less oriented they are to their native cultures), the healthier they are. For example, Gordon (1964) explicitly outlined several stages of cultural adjustment, of which the most optimal is the "identificational" stage, during which one's native culture is abandoned in favor of orientation to one's host culture. Findings from several studies, however, suggest that higher orientation to the host culture is not associated with more positive health outcomes. For example, Vega et al. (1998) and Burnam et al. (1987) found that compared to their more Americanized U.S.-born Mexican peers, less Americanized Mexican immigrants had *lower* levels of depression and other mental disorders. Other studies suggest that individuals born in the United States have higher rates of suicide (Sorenson & Shen, 1996), drug and alcohol use (Gilbert, 1989; Vega, Kolody, Hwang, Noble, & Porter, 1997), and anxiety disorders (Karno et al., 1989) than their immigrant peers. Thus, assuming that individuals born in the United States

are more oriented to American culture than immigrants, these findings suggest that orientation to the host culture may result in negative rather than positive mental health. In fact, Escobar (1998) suggests that retaining a strong orientation to one's native culture may protect one against stress and may lead to positive health outcomes. Third, unidimensional models typically focus on only one or two domains of life experience (e.g., language proficiency), although a growing number of scholars is acknowledging that levels of cultural orientation may vary by life domain (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980; Tsai et al., 2000b).

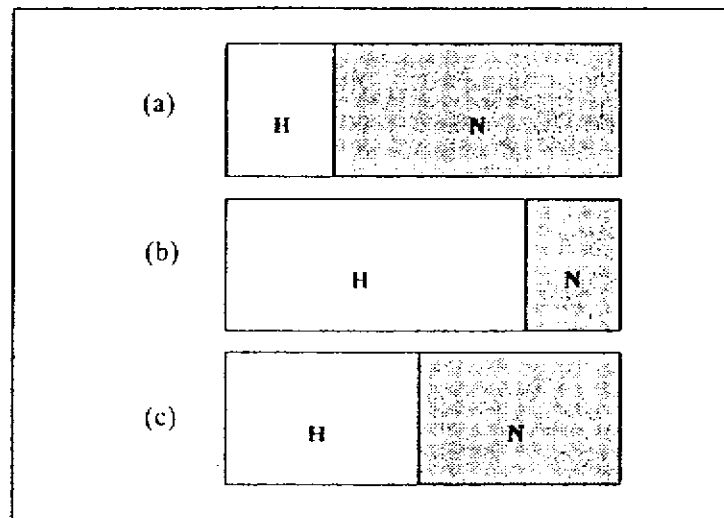


Figure 1. Types of cultural orientation according to the unidimensional model. "H" refers to the host culture; "N" refers to the native culture.

2.2.2 Bidimensional models

In response to these criticisms, *bidimensional (or orthogonal) models* have been proposed (Berry, 1995; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Sayegh & Lasry, 1992; Zak, 1973). These models view orientation to native and host cultures as separate processes that develop independently. Figure 2 illustrates several different possible types of bidimensional cultural orientation. An individual may be: (a) highly oriented to the host culture, but only slightly oriented to the native culture, (b) not oriented to either culture, (c) highly oriented to both cultures, or (d) highly oriented to the native culture, but only slightly oriented to the host culture. In each case, host and native cultural orientations are not related to each other. Berry (1980, 1995) has used the following terms to describe each of these types of orientations: (a) assimilated, (b) marginal, (c) integrated, and (d) separated.

Bidimensional models do not assume that high orientation to the host culture coupled with low orientation to the native culture is the optimal outcome. Nor do they view high levels of orientation to both host and native cultures as psychologically unhealthy. However, the primary criticism waged against bidimensional models is that they do not describe the experiences of certain groups,

such as immigrants. That is, by definition, adjusting to a new culture requires some degree of change in one's previous practices and beliefs; therefore, it seems unlikely that immigrants' orientations to their native and host cultures are completely unrelated to each other.

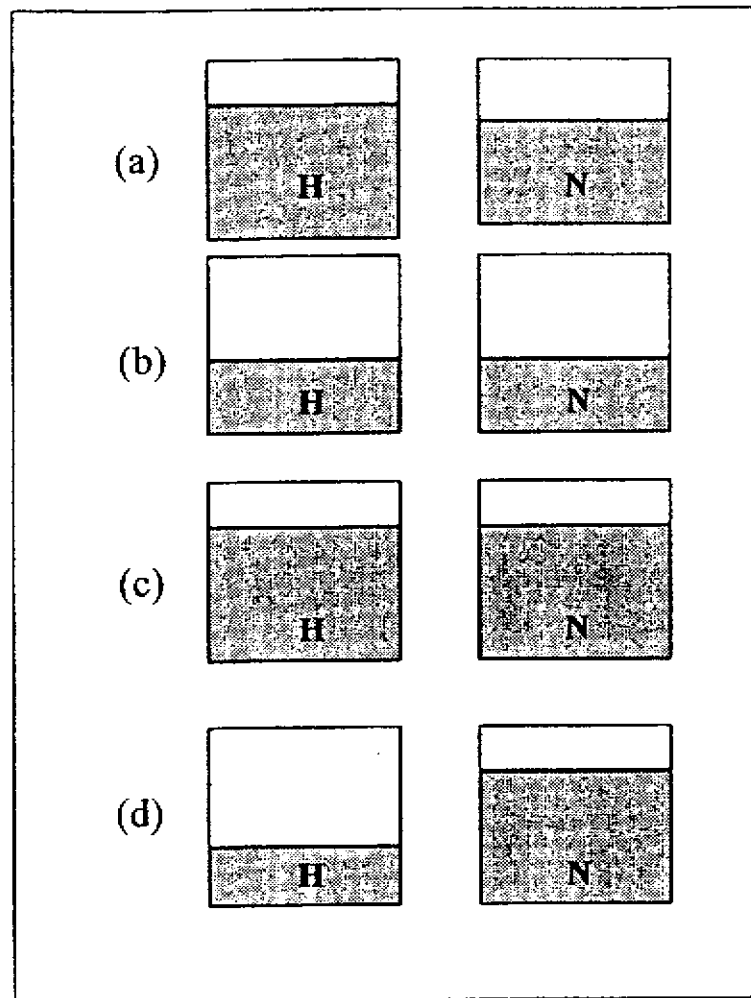


Figure 2. Types of cultural orientation according to the bidimensional model. "H" refers to the host culture; "N" refers to the native culture.

3. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR UNIDIMENSIONAL AND BIDIMENSIONAL MODELS

Empirical support exists for both models. For example, in support of the unidimensional model, Cuéllar, Nyberg, Maldonado, and R.E. Roberts (1997) found that for a culturally diverse sample of college students, orientation to American culture was negatively correlated with orientation to one's native culture. Other studies, however, suggest that while individuals become less oriented to their native

culture for some domains of cultural orientation, such as language proficiency, they remain highly oriented to their native culture in other domains, such as social affiliation (Constantinou & Harvey, 1985).

In support of bidimensional models, some studies demonstrate that cultural orientation does not diminish with time spent in the host country (Boski, 1992), but instead remains stable among subsequent generations (Der-Karabetian & Ruiz, 1997). Also in support of the bidimensional model, scholars have found that orientation to one's native culture is unrelated to orientation to the host culture (Der-Karabetian & Ruiz, 1997; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Sayegh & Lasry, 1992; Suleiman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1997). For example, Der-Karabetian and Ruiz (1997) found that for first- and second-generation Mexican American adolescents, feelings about Latino culture and feelings about American cultures (e.g., pride) were not related to each other.

Both the unidimensional and bidimensional models have been used to describe Asian American cultural orientation. For example, the most widely used measure of cultural orientation for Asian Americans, the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale, is based on a unidimensional model. This instrument has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of cultural orientation for a variety of Asian American samples (Ownbey & Horridge, 1998; Ponterotto, Baluch, & Carielli, 1998). However, other findings suggest that Asian American cultural orientation is bidimensional (Krishnan & Berry, 1992; Wong-Rieger & D. Quintana, 1987; Ying, Coombs, & Lee, 1999).

Given that both the unidimensional and bidimensional models have received empirical support, scholars have suggested that the characteristics and circumstances of a particular cultural group determine which model best describes the cultural orientation of that group (Ghuman, 1998; Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Sayegh & Lasry, 1992). However, none of these scholars has explicitly identified what these particular characteristics or circumstances are or how they might result in a unidimensional or bidimensional model of cultural orientation. In Tsai et al. (2000b), we argued that one's place of birth and concomitant cultural experiences would determine which model holds and that this would explain differences in models of cultural orientation among individuals within the same cultural group. In the next section, we discuss this argument in greater detail, focusing on Asian Americans.

4. DIFFERENT MODELS OF CULTURAL ORIENTATION FOR AMERICAN- AND OVERSEAS BORN ASIANS

Among Asian Americans, 60 percent were born overseas; the remaining 40 percent were born in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). As mentioned above, place of birth may assume an important role in determining individuals' cultural experiences, which may in turn affect individuals' models of cultural orientation. In the next section, we describe this process for American-born and overseas-born Asians.

Until they arrive in the United States, most Asian immigrants and refugees primarily have experience with and exposure to their native Asian cultures. As a result, until the time of migration, individuals may be entirely unaware of the degree to which their values, behaviors, and ideas are influenced by their native culture. When they arrive in the United States, immigrants are confronted with the task of adapting to a culture that differs greatly in its values, norms, and beliefs. At this point, immigrants may become acutely aware of their cultural orientation, or how strongly tied they are to the values, norms, and traditions of their native culture. In order to function effectively in their new environments, immigrants must learn the values, norms, and beliefs of their host cultures, even if they do not internalize them. Age of migration (e.g., before or after age 12), reason for migration (e.g., education or economic advancement, political refuge), and mode of migration (e.g., with or without parents) are factors that may influence this process of cultural adaptation and change. However, in most cases, immigrants must relinquish aspects of their native culture for aspects of their host culture, particularly in school and work contexts. In home contexts, immigrants may retain their connections to the native culture; however, this may become increasingly difficult over time.

By being born and raised in the United States, American-born Asians have first-hand knowledge of American culture. Like their immigrant counterparts, they may first be exposed to Asian practices (depending on whether their parents retain connections to their native culture); however, outside of the home, their environments are American. Thus, although to some extent American-born Asians may have to adapt to mainstream American culture, this adaptation process may be much easier and more natural than that of immigrants. American-born Asians can retain ties to their parents' native Asian culture at home, and, at the same time, develop an American orientation in school, work, or other contexts. Over time, American-born Asians may struggle with their status as ethnic minorities in American society; however, this challenge is considerably different from that of immigrants, who must learn and master American customs and traditions.

The different cultural experiences of immigrant and American-born Asians may result in distinct models of cultural orientation. Because immigrants must relinquish aspects of their native culture in order to acquire those of their host culture, their model of cultural orientation may be *unidimensional*. In contrast, American-born Asians are able to develop different cultural orientations in different contexts. As a result, their model of cultural orientation may be *bidimensional*. To date, we have conducted two studies that support this hypothesis. In the first study, we compared the cultural orientation of a group of American-born and overseas-born Chinese American college students living in the multicultural San Francisco Bay Area (Tsai et al., 2000b). The second study compared the cultural orientation of a group of American-born and overseas-born Hmong college students living in the Midwest (Tsai, 2001). In both studies we administered the General Ethnicity Questionnaire, an instrument that measures orientation to American and Asian cultures separately across a variety of life domains (e.g., language use and proficiency, social affiliation, cultural pride, cultural exposure, media, and cultural activities) (Tsai et al., 2000b). We examined the correlation between overall levels of orientation to American and

Asian cultures and found that for Chinese and Hmong born overseas, orientation to Asian culture was negatively correlated with orientation to American culture, supporting a *unidimensional* model of cultural orientation. For Chinese and Hmong born in the United States, overall levels of orientation to Asian and American cultures were not correlated with each other, supporting a *bidimensional* model of cultural orientation.

5. DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF CULTURAL ORIENTATION ON ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Given their different experiences with Asian and American cultures, American-born and immigrant Asians face somewhat different cultural challenges. Whereas the psychological well-being of Asian immigrants may be related to the process of cultural adaptation (Berry & Kim, 1988; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), the psychological well-being of American-born Chinese may be related more to their minority status in American society. In two studies that compared the relationship between cultural orientation and measures of psychological well-being for American-born and immigrant Chinese, we found evidence that supports this hypothesis. Tsai et al. (2000a) found that cultural orientation was related to self-esteem for overseas-born Chinese. This finding was similar to that of Chentsova (1996), who found that for a sample of international students, one-third of which were Asian, positive attitudes toward and identification with their native culture were positively correlated with self-esteem. Ying, Lee, & Tsai (in press) found that cultural orientation was significantly related to sense of coherence (the feeling that one's world is meaningful, manageable, and comprehensible) (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987) for overseas-born Chinese. However, for American-born Chinese, cultural orientation was not related to self-esteem (Tsai et al., 2000a) or sense of coherence (Ying et al., in press). Moreover, Ying et al. (in press) found that while the experience of racial discrimination was related to sense of coherence for American-born Chinese, it was not related to sense of coherence for immigrant Chinese. Across the studies described above, no group differences were found in overall levels of self-esteem, sense of coherence, or racial discrimination. These findings support our contention that the psychological well-being of American-born Chinese and overseas-born Chinese is affected by different cultural challenges. Although these findings are by no means comprehensive, they do have important implications for clinical interventions and future research with American-born and immigrant Asian groups.

6. CLINICAL AND COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

Guidelines regarding the assessment and treatment of members of different cultural groups emphasize the importance of assessing the client's current level of cultural orientation (Okazaki & Sue, 1995). Our findings, however, suggest that within groups, there are systematic differences in models of cultural orientation.

These systematic differences may result in the same intervention having very different meanings for American-born and immigrant Asian Americans. For example, to increase a client's level of comfort with American culture, a clinician may ask the client to participate in more American activities. This intervention may be perceived as threatening to an immigrant Asian American, who may equate increased participation in American activities with decreased participation in Asian activities. As a result, immigrant Asian Americans may not comply with this intervention. In contrast, this suggestion may be viewed positively by an American-born Asian, who may view increased participation in American activities as not affecting his/her participation in Asian activities. Thus, compliance with this intervention may be high for this group.

Moreover, the life challenges that may lead American-born and immigrant Asian Americans to seek treatment may be qualitatively different. As mentioned above, immigrant Asian Americans face stresses due to the process of cultural adaptation, and therefore, their psychological well-being is based on their orientation to their native and host cultures. American-born Asians, however, face stresses due to their minority status. As a result, their psychological health is based less on their cultural orientation and more on their direct experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination. Clinicians should keep these differences in mind when treating each Asian American group.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH ON ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Identifying differences within cultural groups in models of cultural orientation is essential in order to understand how cultural variables mediate the expression and subjective experience of emotional distress and psychological health. Although we are beginning to learn more about sources of difference within groups, more research is clearly needed. First, our findings are based on college student samples of Chinese Americans living in the San Francisco Bay Area and of Hmong Americans living in the Midwest. Despite variation in their migration histories and in the diversity of their current environments, differences between American-born and overseas-born individuals were comparable for these two groups. However, future research must determine whether the differences between American-born and immigrant Asian groups discussed in this chapter apply to other Asian American samples living in other regions of the United States. Second, these findings are based on inventories of cultural orientation that sample some, but not all, domains of life experience. Future research should include other life domains. For example, very few studies have directly examined the political and ideological component of cultural orientation (Constantinou & Harvey, 1985). However, research on political behavior of immigrant and minority groups suggests that political awareness and group ideology are more salient among American-born than immigrant generations. For example, American-born members of ethnic minorities are more likely to be involved in political and organizational activity than their naturalized counterparts (DeSipio, 1996). Participation in a range of political activities such as voting,

campaigning and working to solve community problems continues to increase from the first to the second and third generations of Asian American immigrants (Junn, 1999; Lien, 1994). Immigrants are struggling with cultural adjustment, and therefore, they may have less time to spend on politics than American-born Asians. In addition, compared to immigrants, American-born Asians may be more aware of and more likely to protest discrimination and prejudice because they are citizens of the United States by birth.

A third direction of future research should focus on other sources of difference within cultural groups. For example, Manaster, Rhodes, Marcus, and Chan (1998) examined the relationship between cultural orientation and birth order. They found that among second and third generation Japanese Americans, first-borns were more oriented to Japanese culture (as measured by traditional religious affiliation, adherence to traditional values, cultural knowledge and language competence) than were later-born Japanese Americans. Parents may spend less time with their second- and third-born children than with their first-born children; as a result, first-borns may have more contact with their native culture (through their parents) than their younger siblings. In addition, the parents themselves may be less oriented to their native culture by the time they raise their second and third children. Therefore, they may transmit less of their native culture to their later-born children than they did to their first-born child. Other sources of within cultural group variation include age of migration and the diversity of individuals' immediate environments.

Finally, research should focus on the mechanisms by which variations within cultural subgroups result in different models of cultural orientation. For example, how do differences in place of birth influence models of cultural orientation? We suggested that place of birth influences the ease of adjustment to a different culture by determining the nature of the cultural environments that individuals are exposed to early in their lives. However, there may be other mechanisms by which place of birth influences models of cultural orientation. Future research must examine such mechanisms.

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