

CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION: PREDICTORS OF COHERENCE IN CHINESE AMERICAN YOUNG ADULTS

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The study examined the contribution of domain-specific cultural orientation and racial discrimination to subjective competence (as measured by sense of coherence) in American-born and immigrant Chinese American young adults. It was hypothesized that sense of coherence would be more strongly predicted by domain-specific cultural orientation for immigrants, but by racial discrimination for American-borns. A total of 122 American-born and 231 immigrant Chinese American college students living in a multicultural setting participated in this study. As hypothesized, domain-specific cultural orientation more strongly predicted sense of coherence for immigrants (coherence varied by cultural orientation on all three life domains studied) than for American-borns (coherence varied by cultural orientation on only one domain). Also, racial discrimination more strongly predicted sense of coherence for American-borns than immigrants. Implications of the findings are discussed. © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States is one of the most culturally pluralistic nations of the world, and its population is continuing to diversify. In 1990, it com-

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prised of 75% Whites, 12% African Americans, 9% Hispanics, 3% Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 1% Native Americans (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). It is projected that by the year 2020, it will be comprised of 64% Whites, 16% Hispanics, 13% African Americans, 6% Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 1% Native Americans (De Vita, 1996). Concomitant with this diversification, the literature on the cultural orientation, acculturation and ethnic identity of non-White Americans has grown significantly (for review, see LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Phinney, 1990). By far, the largest number of empirical studies have focused on Latino/Hispanic Americans (for a review, see Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991). However, as the census data show, the fastest population growth in the next two decades is expected to occur among Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

Focusing on the largest Asian ethnic group in the United States, the present investigation examines the subjective competence (as measured by sense of coherence) in Chinese American young adults. Two-thirds of the Chinese American population are immigrants and most of the American-borns are children of immigrants (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). The experiences of American-born and immigrant Chinese have been found to vary significantly, which impact their overall orientation to Chinese and American cultures (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000). Thus, the present study assesses the contribution of cultural orientation and racial discrimination to sense of coherence in American-born and immigrant Chinese American young adults.

Because one of the primary objectives of cross-cultural engagement is the achievement of competence, this study aims to identify the cultural orientation most predictive of sense of coherence in the life domains of language, social affiliation and cultural pride. In addition, as the experience of racial discrimination is likely to impede the development of competence, its contribution to sense of coherence is also examined. More specifically, it was hypothesized that sense of coherence would be better predicted by domain-specific cultural orientation in immigrants but by racial discrimination in American-borns. Below, the study's environmental context is discussed first, followed by a presentation of the study variables and their hypothesized relationships.

Environmental Context

The importance of person-environment fit for the healthy development and functioning of individuals has been eloquently articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Particularly in the study of cultural orientation and sense of coherence, the situational context plays an important role in the development of specific cultural orientations (Rosenthal, 1987), and defines what is adaptive and competent behavior (Ying, 1995).

The current study was conducted at the University of California at Berkeley, where a significant diversity may be found in its undergraduate population (19.3% Chinese, 20.1% non-Chinese Asian, 32.4% White, 13.8% Hispanic, 5.5% African Americans, and the remainder was unidentified) in the spring of 1995, the time of the study (Office of Student Research, 1999). In addition, in its surrounding community, the San Francisco Bay Area, the population continued to diversify between 1990-1997. During this time, the White population declined from 61% to 54%; the African American and American Indian populations remained constant at 9% and 1%, respectively; the Hispanic population increased from 15% to 19%, and the Asian American population increased from 9% to 12% (McLeod, 1998). As such, the environmental context, in which the study participants need to develop a sense of competence, is a multicultural one that includes a significant number of Chinese Americans.

Domain Specific Cultural Orientation

A large literature on acculturation, cultural orientation, and ethnic identity has accumulated in the last few decades (Phinney, 1990). Given the inconsistent use of the term “acculturation,” Ying (1995) proposed the term “cultural orientation” to describe a minority person’s affiliation with the ethnic and majority cultures. Most empirical studies thus far have assumed cultural orientation to be uniform across life domains. Thus, items assessing conceptually different domains were added up to yield a single score or classification category (e.g., Suinn, Richard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987). However, this method masks potential variation in cultural orientation across life domains, which was recently demonstrated in Chinese Americans (Tsai, et al., 2000; Ying, 1995).

The current study examines cultural orientation in the domains of language, social affiliation and cultural pride (LaFromboise, et al., 1993; Phinney, 1990; Rogler et al., 1991; Suinn, et al., 1987; Ying, 1995). Berry’s (1980) scheme was used to classify cultural orientation in each domain: “bicultural/integrated” for the acceptance of both cultures; “marginal” for the rejection of both cultures; “separated” for the acceptance of the culture of origin but rejection of the new culture; and “assimilated” for the rejection of the old culture but acceptance of the new culture.

Given differential exposure and the presence of a strong Chinese American community that sustains a Chinese cultural orientation, it was hypothesized that, in the social affiliation and cultural pride domains, American-born Chinese (who have more exposure to American culture) would be more likely to be assimilated and bicultural/integrated, while immigrant Chinese (who have more exposure to Chinese culture) would be more likely to be separated. However, in the language domain, the most practical and necessary for daily functioning, it was hypothesized that immigrant Chinese would be bilingual rather than separated, monolingual Chinese-speakers, as English competence is crucial to their functioning as college students (see *Sample* for a fuller description). In contrast, American-borns were hypothesized to be assimilated, monolingual English speakers, as Chinese language competence is less crucial to their daily functioning.

Domain Specific Cultural Orientation and Sense of Coherence

Turning to sense of coherence, Antonovsky proposed this construct as a mediator of positive health, defining it as “a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli, and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement” (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 19). He referred to these specific components as comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, respectively. As such, sense of coherence reflects efficacy and competence. Empirical research has shown it to be correlated with better physical and psychological health, adjustment, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in general and clinical populations (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987, 1993; Linn, Lewis, Cain, & Kimbrough, 1993; Sagy, Antonovsky, & Adler, 1990).

In the language and cultural pride domains, it was hypothesized that a bicultural orientation would promote the best person-environment fit (Phinney, Chavira, & Williamson,

1992), and thus the greatest sense of coherence in Chinese American young adults. Within the language domain, a bilingual orientation provides the means for significant participation in both the mainstream and ethnic Chinese communities in the multicultural environment. Similarly, pride in both American and Chinese cultures is consistent with the value placed on cultural plurality at the study site.

In the social affiliation domain, it was hypothesized that an assimilated orientation would be best predictive of a higher sense of coherence, as it facilitates mastery of the demands of the larger societal context. In a cross-race comparison study, Ying and her colleagues (Ying, Lee, Tsai, Hung, Lin, & Wan, in press) found significantly fewer cross-racial groups were represented in the social network of Asian Americans than that of White, Hispanic and African American students. Less diversity in social network composition, in turn, was associated with a lowered sense of coherence. In a within-group comparison study, Ying and her colleagues (Ying, Lee, Tsai, Lee, & Tsang, in press¹) found Chinese Americans with the most racially and ethnically diverse relationships enjoyed the strongest sense of coherence. Both studies showed racial/ethnic diversity of social network promoted the comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness of the multicultural world. However, these studies did not classify the cultural orientation of the participants' social affiliation nor consider the contribution of language and cultural pride. In the current study, the cultural orientation of each domain was derived from responses to multiple item subscales of the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (Tsai, et al., 2000), as described in *Measures*.

An absolute difference in sense of coherence between American-borns and immigrants was not hypothesized. On the one hand, American-borns may be more knowledgeable about mainstream American society, because they have lived here their entire lives. On the other hand, the study's multicultural context, with its large Chinese American presence, provides significant validation for the immigrants' experiences. However, it was hypothesized that sense of coherence would be better predicted by cultural orientation for immigrants than American-borns. Upon arrival, immigrants made deliberate efforts to enculturate (e.g., acquire a new language, social rules, and values) in order to achieve a person-environment fit and competence in the United States. As such, their sense of competence is likely to be highly associated with how they relate to Chinese and American cultures, captured by their domain-specific cultural orientations. In contrast, as United States is their native context, American-borns are imbued with American culture. While they are also exposed to Chinese culture (at home), they did not face the challenge of mastering an entirely new and foreign culture. Thus, their sense of competence may be derived less from their domain-specific cultural orientations.

Racial Discrimination and Sense of Coherence

In addition to the personal variable of cultural orientation, the study also incorporates the social variable of racial discrimination to understand sense of coherence in Chinese Americans. Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory proposed that minority group members devalued by society will suffer a decline in self-concept. Thus, it was hypothesized that more frequent experiences of racial discrimination would lower sense of coherence. Empirical research has shown racism to be associated with physical illness and psychological distress, including lower self-esteem and life satisfaction, in African Americans (for a review, see Utsey, 1998). The research on Asian Americans has been limited and inconclusive. Crocker and Quinn (1998) found discrimination and self-esteem were not cor-

related in Asian Americans. However, Asamen and Berry's (1987) found perceived prejudice was negatively correlated with a positive physical self-perception in Japanese Americans but not Chinese Americans.

It was also hypothesized that immigrants would experience more racial discrimination but Americans-borns' sense of coherence would be more affected by it. Immigrants are likely to experience more racial discrimination because they are less familiar with American culture than American-borns, making them objectively more vulnerable to discrimination. However, discrimination is likely to have a stronger deleterious effect on American-borns because they are subjectively more aligned with American society. For American-borns, membership in American society is a birth right, and a part of their self-identification. To them, racial discrimination is a challenge and affront to who they are, their place in this society, and its comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. In contrast, for immigrants, being American is an acquired identity. In spite of their physical existence here, they may retain a psychological connection to their country of origin for an extended period of time. Not having other Americans as their primary reference group and enjoying a history of acceptance and affirmation in their culture of origin may protect immigrants from the negative impact of racial discrimination.

In summary, it was hypothesized that the distribution of domain-specific cultural orientation and frequency of racial discrimination would vary between American-born and immigrant Chinese American young adults, but level of sense of coherence would not. It was also hypothesized that sense of coherence would be more strongly predicted by domain-specific cultural orientation in immigrants but by racial discrimination in American-borns. A bicultural orientation in language and cultural pride, an assimilated orientation in social affiliation, and fewer experiences of racial discrimination were hypothesized to be associated with a greater sense of coherence in both groups.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 353 Chinese American undergraduate students at the University of California at Berkeley. As Table 1 shows, there were 122 American-born and 231 immigrant participants. The two groups did not vary on the distribution of gender (50.7% was female) and marital status (99.2% was single), and number of years at the university (mean = 2.68, SD = 1.18). American-borns were younger than immigrants (mean = 19.71, SD = 1.48 and mean = 20.51, SD = 1.86, respectively $t = -4.09$, $df = 351$, $p < .001$). Using Hollingshead's method of calculating socioeconomic status (SES) from fa-

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	<i>All (N = 353)</i>	<i>American-Borns (N = 122)</i>	<i>Immigrants (N = 231)</i>	<i>Significant Difference</i>
% Female	50.7%	51.6%	50.2%	
% Single	99.2%	100 %	98.7%	
Mean Age (SD)	20.23 (1.77)	19.71 (1.48)	20.51 (1.86)	$p < .001$
Mean SES (SD)	28.56 (15.25)	23.38 (13.74)	31.30 (15.32)	$p < .001$
Mean Year in School (SD)	2.68 (1.18)	2.60 (1.20)	2.72 (1.17)	
Mean Year in U.S. (SD)		8.80 (4.99)		

ther's education and occupation (where the possible range of scores if from 11 to 77, with 11 being the highest socioeconomic level), American-borns enjoyed a higher socioeconomic level than immigrants (as a lower number indicated higher SES, mean = 23.38, SD = 13.74 and mean = 31.30, SD = 15.32, respectively, $t = -4.79$, $df = 351$, $p < .001$). Immigrants have lived in the United States for a mean of 8.80 years (SD = 4.99).

Measures

Assessment of Demographics. The sample completed a brief demographic background questionnaire, that assessed their place of birth, gender, marital status, age, years at the university, and father's education and occupation [from which their SES was calculated, using Hollingshead's method (1957)], and, for immigrants only, their length of residence in the United States.

Assessment of Sense of Coherence. The Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (Antonovsky, 1987) consisted of 29 items that examined the extent to which the respondents felt their life was comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Some sample items were: 1. When you talk to people, do you have the feeling they don't understand you (reverse coded, measures comprehensibility); 6. Has it happened that people you counted on disappointed you (reverse coded, measures manageability); 4. Do you have the feeling you don't really care about what is going on around you (reverse coded, meaningfulness). Participants responded to the items on a seven point scale, expressing differential levels of endorsement. Items 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 25 and 27 were reverse coded. The total sense of coherence score was created by summing the item scores; with a possible range from 29 to 203. In over twenty studies, the instrument's Cronbach alpha of internal consistency has ranged from .82 to .95 (Antonovsky, 1993). In our sample, the alpha reliability was .89 for American-borns and .90 for immigrants. One month test-retest reliability in a subsample was .94 ($n = 60$). The criterion validity of the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire has also been established in numerous investigations by the presence of significant correlation with health and well-being (Antonovsky, 1993).

Assessment of Cultural Orientation. Cultural orientation was derived from the General Ethnicity Questionnaire—Chinese and American versions (GEQC and GEQA), which referenced American and Chinese cultures, respectively (Tsai, et al., 2000). Other than this difference, they consisted of 37 identical items which assessed the degree of affiliation with the two cultures (see Tsai et al., 2000, for a copy of the complete questionnaires). The items were coded on a 5 point scale, with "1" indicating strong disagreement and "5" indicating strong agreement. Items assessing language proficiency were coded "1" for very much to "5" for not at all. These items were reverse coded, such that higher scores indicated greater endorsement.

Separate factor analyses with varimax rotation identified six distinct and conceptually meaningful factors for the GEQC and GEQA (Tsai, et al., 2000). Across the two instruments, five of the factors were conceptually similar: language use and proficiency, social affiliation, cultural pride, participation in cultural activities, and food preference. The sixth factor of the GEQC was exposure to Chinese culture, and the six factor of the GEQA was preference for media in English. In order to create identical domain subscales, only items loading on conceptually similar GEQC and GEQA factors were re-

Table 2. Internal Reliability of Cultural Domain Subscales in American-born and Immigrant Chinese Americans

	<i>American-Borns</i>	<i>Immigrants</i>
Chinese Language	.66	.81
English Language	.75	.79
Social Affiliation with Chinese	.75	.75
Social Affiliation with Americans	.67	.71
Pride in Chinese Culture	.69	.66
Pride in American Culture	.72	.61
Participation in Chinese Cultural Activities	.64	.64
Participation in American Cultural Activities	.32	.61
Preference for Chinese Food	.60	.57
Preference for American Food	.57	.50

tained, and the sixth factor on the GEQC and GEQA was dropped from this study. In addition, the internal reliability of the five subscales was tested in American-borns and immigrants. Chinese/American subscales measuring comparable domains were retained if their alpha reliability exceeded .60 in both American-borns and immigrants (see Table 2). As a result, the language, social affiliation, and cultural pride subscales were retained and the activity and food subscales (each of which consisted of only two items) were dropped. Table 3 presents the items comprising these subscales.

One month test-retest with sixty participants showed retest reliability to be as follows: .99 for the Chinese language subscale; .94 for the English language subscale; .80 for the

Table 3. GEQC and GEQA Items Used to Measure Domain-Specific Cultural Orientation

Domain: Language Use and Proficiency

26. How much do you speak Chinese/English at home?
27. How much do you speak Chinese/English at school?
28. How much do you speak Chinese/English at work?
30. How much do you speak Chinese/English with friends?
34. How much do you view, read, or listen to Chinese/English in literature?
35. How fluently do you speak Chinese/English?
36. How fluently do you read Chinese/English?
37. How fluently do you write Chinese/English?
38. How fluently do you understand Chinese/English?

Domain: Social Affiliation

10. I go places where people are Chinese/American.
12. I relate to my partner or spouse in a way that is Chinese/American.
14. I would prefer to live in a Chinese/American community.
22. Now, my friends are Chinese/American.
24. The people I date are Chinese/American.

Domain: Cultural Pride

4. Compared to how much I negatively criticize other cultures, I criticize Chinese/American culture much less.
5. I am embarrassed/ashamed of Chinese/American culture (reverse coded).
6. I am proud of Chinese/American culture.
7. Chinese/American culture has had a positive impact on my life.

Table 4. Domain-Specific Cultural Orientation by Migration Status

	Total (N = 353)	American-Borns (N = 122)	Immigrants (N = 231)	Significant Difference
English Use and Proficiency	3.93 (.60)	4.37 (.32)	3.70 (.58)	$p < .001$
Chinese Use and Proficiency	2.76 (.88)	2.05 (.46)	3.14 (.81)	$p < .001$
Social Affiliation with Americans	3.01 (.71)	3.44 (.58)	2.79 (.66)	$p < .001$
Social Affiliation with Chinese	3.55 (.74)	3.31 (.71)	3.68 (.73)	$p < .001$
Pride in American Culture	3.31 (.60)	3.42 (.64)	3.25 (.57)	$p < .05$
Pride in Chinese Culture	3.94 (.67)	3.92 (.67)	3.95 (.67)	

social affiliation with Chinese subscale; .78 for the social affiliation with Americans subscale, .76 for the pride in Chinese culture subscale, and .73 for the pride in American culture subscale.

The construct validity of the six domain subscales was demonstrated using t-tests that showed American-borns to consistently score higher on all American-oriented subscales (for English use and proficiency: $t = 13.81$, $df = 349.48$, $p < .001$; affiliation with Americans: $t = 9.11$, $df = 351$, $p < .001$; and pride in American culture: $t = 2.51$, $df = 351$, $p < .05$) and immigrants to score consistently higher on all but one Chinese-oriented subscales (Chinese language use and proficiency: $t = -16.01$, $df = 348.69$, $p < .001$, and affiliation with Chinese: $t = -4.44$, $df = 351$, $p < .001$; see Table 4).

For each domain, participants were classified using Berry's (1980) four cultural orientation categories as follows: "separation" was coded for those who scored above the midpoint on the Chinese subscale but at or below the midpoint on the American subscale; "assimilation" was coded for those who scored above the midpoint on the American subscale but at or below the midpoint on the Chinese subscale; "biculturality" was coded for those who scored above the midpoint on both American and Chinese subscales; and "marginality" was coded for those who scored at or below the midpoint on both American and Chinese subscales.

Assessment of Racial Discrimination. The experience of racial discrimination was assessed by the extent to which the participant "felt you were subject to racial discrimination" in the last six months. The possible responses were "0—not at all," "1—a little," "2—somewhat," "3—often," and "4—all the time." Test-retest reliability for this item was .75 ($n = 53$).

Procedure

The participants were recruited through the psychology subject pool, announcements made at classes and Asian American student organization meetings, flyers posted throughout the campus, and by word-of-mouth. They signed a consent form and completed the paper-pencil assessments described above either alone or in a group with other participants.

RESULTS

Table 5 shows the results of bivariate analyses comparing American-borns and immigrants on sense of coherence, frequency of racial discrimination and cultural orienta-

tion in the language, social affiliation, and cultural pride domains. The two groups did not differ on sense of coherence (overall mean = 127.55, SD = 21.37). American-borns reported experiencing racial discrimination less often than immigrants (mean = .63, SD = .84 vs. mean = .94, SD = .98, $t = 2.91$, $df = 351$, $p = .002$). Their cultural orientation also varied in the domains of language and social affiliation. In the case of language, the overall Chi-Squared = 95.11, $df = 3$, $p = .00001$. Six additional pairwise comparisons were conducted to further assess variation between American-borns and immigrants, and the more conservative p of .008 (.05/6) was used to determine presence of difference. American-borns were more likely to be assimilated while immigrants were more likely to be separated (Chi-Squared = 36.71, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$) and bilingual (Chi-Squared = 70.20, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$). In the case of social affiliation, the overall Chi-Squared = 50.80, $df = 3$, $p = .00001$. Again using a cutoff of $p = .008$, six pairwise comparisons showed immigrants were more likely to be separated while American-borns were more likely to be assimilated (Chi-Squared = 26.26, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$) and bicultural (Chi-Squared = 45.72, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$). The two groups did not differ in cultural pride.

The contribution of domain-specific cultural orientation and racial discrimination to sense of coherence in American-borns and immigrants was assessed using separate regression models. As variation on demographic characteristics of gender, age and SES may impact sense of coherence, they served as control variables in both models. For immigrants, years in the United States was also included as an additional control variable. For the language, social affiliation and cultural pride domains, exhaustive comparisons were made between the four cultural orientation categories (i.e., bicultural vs. separated, bicultural vs. assimilated, bicultural vs. marginal, separated vs. assimilated, separated vs. marginal, and assimilated vs. marginal) by varying the deleted comparison group. However, as no American-born participant was classified as separated in the language domain

Table 5. Variation between American-Borns and Immigrants on Sense of Coherence, Racial Discrimination, and Distribution of Domain-Specific Cultural Orientation

	Total (N = 353)	American-Borns (N = 122)	Immigrants (N = 231)	Significant Difference
Mean Sense of Coherence (SD)	127.55 (21.37)	129.20 (20.15)	126.68 (21.98)	
Mean Racial Discrimination (SD)	.83 (.94)	.63 (.84)	.94 (.98)	$p = .004$
Language Domain				$p < .00001$
Separated	10.2%	0%	15.6%	
Assimilated	60.3%	95.1%	42.0%	
Bilingual	28.3%	4.1%	41.1%	
Marginal	1.1%	.8%	1.3%	
Social Affiliation Domain				$p < .00001$
Separated	45.9%	21.3%	58.9%	
Assimilated	16.4%	23.8%	12.6%	
Bicultural	27.8%	45.1%	18.6%	
Marginal	9.9%	9.8%	10.0%	
Cultural Pride Domain				
Separated	30.0%	22.1%	34.2%	
Assimilated	6.8%	9.0%	5.6%	
Bicultural	56.9%	63.1%	53.7%	
Marginal	6.2%	5.7%	6.5%	

(i.e., primarily monolingual Chinese speaking), no contrast was made against this group. The more conservative two-tailed test was used.

As the first column of Table 6 shows, the model for American-borns was significant [Adjusted R-Squared = .20, $F(12, 109) = 3.47$, $p = .0002$]. Bilinguals reported higher coherence than those assimilated in language (i.e., primarily monolingual English speakers, standardized beta = .21, $p = .02$). In addition, racial discrimination emerged as a significant negative predictor for sense of coherence (standardized beta = $-.49$, $p < .0001$). As the second column shows, the model was also significant for immigrants [Adjusted R-Squared = .18, $F(14, 213) = 4.54$, $p < .0001$]. Again, bilinguals had a higher sense of coherence than the language assimilated, primarily monolingual English speakers (standardized beta = .18, $p = .03$). Those with bicultural affiliations (both Chinese and American) had a lower sense of coherence than those with primarily American affiliations (standardized beta = $-.18$, $p = .05$). Again, those who expressed pride in both Chinese and American cultures reported a higher sense of coherence than those who were separated, primarily affirming Chinese culture (standardized beta = .16, $p = .03$), those were assimilated pride, primarily affirming American culture (standardized beta = .43, $p = .002$), and those who were marginal, affirming neither Chinese nor American cultures (standardized beta = .44, $p = .0007$). Participants who were separated in cultural pride reported a higher sense of coherence than those who were marginal (standardized beta = .27, $p = .04$), and also marginally higher than those who were assimilated (standardized beta = .26, $p = .06$). Racial discrimination was negatively predictive

Table 6. Standard Beta Weights in Regressions Predicting Sense of Coherence for American-Born and Immigrant Chinese Americans

	<i>American-Borns</i>	<i>Immigrants</i>
Adjusted R-Squared	.20	.18
F	3.47***	4.54***
Male vs Female	-.09	.23***
Age	-.05	.06
SES	.01	-.03
Years in U.S.	—	-.04
Bilingual vs. Assimilated in Language	.21*	.18*
Bilingual vs. Marginal in Language	-.07	.09
Assimilated vs. Marginal in Language	.13	-.10
Bicultural vs. Separated in Affiliation	.02	-.11
Bicultural vs. Assimilated in Affiliation	-.04	-.18*
Bicultural vs. Marginal in Affiliation	.05	-.11
Separated vs. Assimilated in Affiliation	-.05	-.08
Separated vs. Marginal in Affiliation	.02	.01
Assimilated vs. Marginal in Affiliation	.08	.05
Bicultural vs. Separated in Pride	-.01	.16*
Bicultural vs. Assimilated in Pride	.01	.43**
Bicultural vs. Marginal in Pride	.20	.44***
Separated vs. Assimilated in Pride	.01	.26
Separated vs. Marginal in Pride	.17	.27*
Assimilated vs. Marginal in Pride	.11	.01
Racial Discrimination	-.49****	-.22***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; **** $p < .0001$; two-tailed tests.

of sense of coherence in immigrants (standardized beta = $-.22$, $p = .0004$). Finally, male immigrants reported a higher sense of coherence than female immigrants (standardized beta = $.23$, $p = .0003$).

DISCUSSION

Consistent with our hypothesis, American-born and immigrant Chinese young adults did not vary in their level of sense of coherence. This is likely to be because the multicultural environment of the San Francisco Bay Area provides enough validation and support for the experiences of both groups. In a less pluralistic context, American-borns may well surpass immigrant Chinese in sense of coherence given their stronger cultural orientation to mainstream American culture (as shown in Table 5).

As predicted, immigrants reported more encounters with racial discrimination than American-borns, consistent with previous reports (Sodowksy, Lai, & Plake, 1991). It is not clear whether this is due to actual differential treatment (e.g., immigrants may be at greater risk than American-borns because of lower English proficiency and less familiarity with American social rules) or a difference in perception (having been members of the majority group pre-migration, immigrants may be particularly sensitive to racial discrimination post-migration), and deserves further investigation.

Consistent with our hypothesis, American-borns were more likely to be primarily monolingual English speakers while immigrants were more likely to be either primarily monolingual Chinese speakers or bilinguals, reflecting the loss of Chinese language proficiency in the descendants of immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants were more likely to be separated in their social affiliation, while American-borns were more likely to be assimilated or bicultural. Both groups preferred to associate with people more like them culturally and/or in life experience; in the case of immigrants, primarily co-ethnic Chinese, and in the case of American-borns, either primarily Americans or a mix of Chinese and Americans.

The multivariate analyses showed that domain-specific cultural orientations and racial discrimination significantly predicted sense of coherence in both American-borns and immigrants. As hypothesized, domain-specific cultural orientation was a more powerful predictor for immigrants. Only one cultural orientation comparison in the language domain was a significant predictor for sense of coherence in American-borns, while cultural orientation comparisons across all domains examined were significant predictors for immigrants. As noted earlier, this reflects the salience of cultural orientation in the immigrants' sense of competent functioning in the new environmental context. In contrast, for American-borns, having lived in this society their whole lives, cultural orientation was less relevant to their sense of competence.

Bilingual American-borns reported a higher coherence than primarily monolingual English speakers. This is likely to be due to the large Chinese American population both on the Berkeley campus and in the San Francisco Bay Area, where Chinese language fluency is quite functional, facilitating not only communication with other Chinese-speakers but also access to the widely available Chinese language media. In some cases, bilingual ability represents an important asset on the job market. Bilingual immigrants also reported a greater sense of coherence than primarily monolingual English speakers, likely for similar reasons.

As predicted, an assimilated orientation in the social affiliation domain was associated with a higher sense of coherence in immigrants. Those who were assimilated (as-

sociated primarily with Americans) reported a higher sense of coherence than those who were bicultural (i.e., had a mix of Chinese and American friends). This finding is consistent with previous reports of the positive association of cross-racial diversity in social network and sense of coherence in college students in general (Ying, et al., in press) and Chinese American students in particular (Ying, et al., in press1). Affiliation with non-Chinese Americans facilitated immigrants' understanding and mastery of the demands of the new context. Similarly, Ying and Liese (1994) found a larger number of American friends promoted the functional adjustment in Taiwanese students the United States while strong co-ethnic ties promoted their emotional well-being (Ying & Liese, 1991).

As predicted, with regard to cultural pride, immigrants who were bicultural enjoyed a higher sense of coherence than those who were separated, assimilated or marginal. Again, given the presence of a strong Chinese American community on the Berkeley campus and in the San Francisco Bay Area, immigrants who valued both Chinese and American cultures were better matched with their environment than those who valued one but not the other or neither. In addition, those with a primarily separated Chinese cultural orientation in the domain of pride significantly surpassed those with a marginal orientation and also marginally surpassed those with an assimilated American orientation ($p = .06$) on sense of coherence. Even at Berkeley and in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chinese Americans remain a minority and Chinese culture represents a minority culture. As such, a strong sense of pride and affiliation with the ethnic culture contributes to a positive sense of self in these culturally diverse settings.

Also as hypothesized, racial discrimination had a deleterious effect on sense of coherence for both American-born and immigrants Chinese Americans. Chinese American youth are often promised that the American dream is attainable through educational achievement, thus they work diligently, often at a personal cost (Lee & Ying, in press). However, it is apparent that the acquisition of a sense of competence is not entirely within their control but mediated by external occurrences, such as racial discrimination. In addition, although immigrants reported experiencing racial discrimination more frequently than American-borns, their coherence was less affected by it. As previously noted, they may be more able to distance themselves from discrimination inflicted by other Americans because they retain a psychological connection to their country of origin. Future research should empirically assess variation in the meaning of racial discrimination to American-borns and immigrants, which may better inform its stronger association with sense of coherence in American-borns.

Finally, among the control variables, gender was the only significant predictor of coherence. Among immigrants, men enjoyed a higher sense of coherence than women. This may be due to the higher status accorded to men in Chinese culture (Hsu, 1981). For instance, within families, sons are valued because they carry on the family name, while daughters will eventually join another household through marriage. A Chinese expression likens a married daughter to "water that has been poured away." Immigrant men were likely to have received preferential treatment prior to migration, which may persist in the United States, both at home (headed by immigrant parents) and other immigrant Chinese American-dominant contexts.

The study findings hold implications for community-based interventions aimed at promoting competence in Chinese Americans living in a multicultural context. As cultural orientation develops over time, the promotion of Chinese/English bilingual proficiency in both American-born and immigrant Chinese American youth is likely to in-

crease their sense of competence as adults. For immigrant Chinese American youth, encouraging pride in both Chinese and American cultures and social affiliation with ethnically non-Chinese individuals will also increase their sense of coherence as adults. On a social level, efforts at eradicating racial discrimination are crucial in promoting a sense of competence in both American-born and immigrant Chinese Americans.

Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several study limitations are worthy of note and provide directions for future research. First, the study was conducted with a college sample at a highly prestigious university who, as a result of their Western education, may have been exposed to American culture more than Chinese American young adults without a college education. As such, the classification of domain-specific cultural orientations may not be generalizable to non-college-educated young adults. Although a recent Census report showed that among 25-34 year old Asian Pacific Islanders, 70.9% had at least some college (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1999), future studies should include young adults without a college education and at a variety of campuses.

Second, the study was conducted at a racially diverse campus situated in a multicultural community. In a less diverse setting, an assimilated orientation in language and cultural pride may result in a better person-environment fit and higher competence. Future studies ought to incorporate the racial/ethnic make-up of the setting as a moderating variable in assessing the relationship of cultural orientation and sense of coherence.

Third, due to poor internal consistency, we dropped the domains of food and cultural activities from further analysis. Conceptually, these domains captured cultural practices less likely to have bearing on sense of coherence than language, social affiliation and cultural pride. However, future studies should empirically assess the role of these and other domains in the study of competence in Chinese Americans.

Fourth, while we found sense of coherence to be better predicted by domain-specific cultural orientation in immigrants but better predicted by racial discrimination in American-borns, it is not clear whether beyond a certain length of stay, immigrants will approximate American-borns in cultural orientation, experience of discrimination, and their association with sense of coherence. Longitudinal investigations that follow immigrants from pre- to post-migration and their lives here over time are needed to more fully understand how immigrants enculturate and adapt to their new homeland. This design would also allow for the identification of a potential order in the modification of cultural orientation across life domains over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study identified domain-specific cultural orientation and racial discrimination as significant predictors of subjective competence in Chinese American young adults. As we have argued throughout the paper, the definition of competence is context-bound. Given our nation's increasing plurality, there is a need for all Americans, regardless of race and ethnicity, to develop a familiarity and appreciation for cultures other than their own in order to maintain a sense of competence. Not only is this likely to reduce racial discrimination in our society, but also to transform it into a truly united one.

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