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## Conversation at work: The effects of leader-member conversational quality

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# Does Culture Matter? An Examination of the Association of Immigrants' Acculturation With Workplace Relationship Quality

Guowei Jian<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In spite of immigrants' growing role in the workforce of the United States and other developed countries, organizational communication research about the experience of immigrant employees in the host culture is still very limited. Drawing on the bidimensional acculturation theory, the purpose of this study was to investigate the association of acculturation of immigrant employees with three types of workplace relationships: leader–member exchange (LMX), coworker, and mentoring relationship. Based on a survey of immigrant employees in a U.S. Midwestern city, the study reveals that the two dimensions of acculturation, adjustment to one's host culture and retention of one's original culture, are differentially related to the three types of workplace relationships. Both theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed in the study.

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acculturation, leader–member exchange, LMX, mentor, coworker relationship, socialization, immigration, immigrant, organizational communication

Recent *Census Bureau* statistics indicate that immigration to the United States continues at its record level with an average of nearly a million new immigrants a year from 2000 to 2007, surpassing the last surge of immigration over a hundred years ago (Camarota, 2007). Results of the *Current Population Survey* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009) show that in 2008, foreign-born workers accounted for 15.6% of the jobs among all occupations ranging from low-skilled and low-paid jobs, such as building, cleaning, and maintenance jobs (34.3%), to high-skilled and high-paid professional jobs, such as computer (22.4%), health care practitioners (14%), and architecture and engineering (15.6%). In spite of immigrants' growing role in the U.S. workforce, communication research about the work experience of immigrant employees in the host culture is still very limited.

One of the most significant challenges facing immigrants is acculturation (Berry, 1994; 1997; Kim, 2001, 2005). Researchers in other fields have linked acculturation to immigrants' health (e.g., Arcia, Skinner, Bailey, & Correa, 2001; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003), consumer behavior and marketing (e.g., Ownbey & Horridge, 1997), and media use (e.g., Lee & Tse, 1994). Extending our understanding about acculturation and its correlates, this study investigates the association of acculturation of immigrant employees with their organizational socialization (Jablin, 2001), specifically, with the workplace relationships they develop with their leaders, coworkers, and mentors.

The study makes contributions at both conceptual and practical levels. Conceptually, it brings into theoretical focus an area that deserves much needed scholarly attention. In spite of the fact that work has been one of the primary reasons a growing number of immigrants enter the United States and that acculturation is a central process that immigrants go through, how acculturation plays out in association with work relationship has been largely undertheorized. The theoretical linkage proposed in this investigation innovatively bridges acculturation theories with organizational communication research. The exploratory findings have the potential to stimulate greater theoretical interest and efforts in this area in the future. At the practical level, managers could use the findings as tentative guidelines in counseling and helping the increasingly diverse immigrant workforce. Immigrants may find the research outcomes to be practical self-knowledge toward better understanding and conducting their own relationship development at work.

This article first reviews the literature on acculturation and introduces a conceptual framework to be used in the rest of the study. The following section conceptualizes work relationships and establishes the theoretical connection between acculturation and workplace relationship development. The article then presents the methods of data collection, data analysis, and results, followed by a discussion of the findings and their implications for both theory and practice.

## **Acculturation of Immigrant Employees**

Acculturation refers to a process in which individuals experience cultural change when interacting with and adapting to another distinct culture (Berry, 1994, 1997). A theoretical perspective toward acculturation that is gaining wider acceptance and adopted in the present study is a bilevel or bidimensional model (Berry, 1994; Mendoza, 1989). According to Berry (1994), acculturation takes place along two dimensions. One dimension refers to the degree to which immigrants adjust to the host culture while the other is the degree to which they adhere to their original culture. The two dimensions are conceptualized as orthogonal. The combination of these two dimensions results in four modes of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation is the result of high level acceptance of host culture and low level adherence to their original culture. Integration is also known as a bicultural mode in which individuals acquire high levels of host cultural characteristics and equally high levels of their own cultural traits. Separation refers to the situation where individuals strongly adhere to their original culture and obtain low levels of host cultural characteristics. Finally, marginalization, also known as alienation, is a state in which individuals cannot reconcile the conflicts and inconsistencies between the host culture and their original culture and feel alienated from both.

Although acculturation as a significant life-changing process has been extensively investigated in relation to mental health and counseling (e.g., Arcia et al., 2001; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003), marketing (e.g., Ownbey & Horridge, 1997), and mass media (e.g., Lee & Tse, 1994), its association with workplace behavior has only begun to receive some scholarly attention in recent years. For instance, a study by Alkhazraji, Gardner, Martin, and Paolillo (1997) of Muslim employees in the United States indicated that both willingness to accept U.S. national culture and retention of their original culture are positively associated with their acceptance of the U.S. work culture. In a recent study among Asian American employees, Leong (2001) found that acculturation was positively related to job satisfaction and supervisors' performance ratings and negatively associated with

occupational stress and strain. Leong's (2001) study implies that employees in the separational mode of acculturation are more likely to experience career adjustment problems than those in the assimilation or integration modes of acculturation. Amason, Allen, and Holmes (1999) studied the relationship between acculturation and social support in a workplace comprised of Hispanic and Anglo-American employees. Their study found significant negative association between Hispanics' acculturation stress and the social support with personal problems that Hispanics receive from their Anglo-American coworkers. In sum, these initial empirical findings suggest a potentially significant association of acculturation with organizational experiences and outcomes of immigrant employees.

The particular theoretical linkage between the acculturative process and workplace relationship has been only briefly suggested in Kim's (2001, 2005) integrative theory of cultural adaptation. The theory posits six dimensions that ultimately influence an individual's "intercultural transformation" (Kim, 2005, p. 393), including the host interpersonal communication process dimension, which encompasses interactions taking place in the workplace. Because her theory aims to articulate a general framework of cultural transformation that encompasses both interpersonal and mass communication processes, what await further substantial development are more detailed theoretical accounts on how acculturation takes place in relation to interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This study takes the initial step in this direction. The following section will conceptualize workplace relationships and provide theoretical rationale on the association between acculturation and workplace relationships.

## **Acculturation and Workplace Relationships**

This study conceptualizes workplace relationships as constituted by three types of interpersonal contacts: leader–member relationship, coworker or peer relationship, and mentoring relationship. The remainder of this section will briefly review literature on each of these relationships and conceptualize its association with acculturation, followed by several research questions.

### *Acculturation and Leader–Member Relationship*

The theory of Leader–member exchange (LMX) has been an influential framework in understanding leader–member relationship (Sias, 2009). Research of LMX focuses on the dyadic relationship. It is argued that leaders

develop differential relationships with different members in the course of having task-related and relational exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Fairhurst, 2001, 2007). High LMXs are marked by such characteristics as mutual trust and respect, higher negotiation latitude, and extra contractual exchange while low quality relationships (low LMXs) demonstrate the opposite. Past research has shown that LMX plays an important role in affecting many organizational outcomes. These outcomes include employee job satisfaction, perceived organizational justice, performance ratings, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (for comprehensive reviews see Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Llies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Organizational communication scholars have examined LMX in relation to upward influence tactics (Krone, 1992), discourse practices (Fairhurst, 1993, 2007), and organizational communication satisfaction (Mueller & Lee, 2002) among other communication practices at work.

Recently, research on LMX in cross-cultural contexts and non-U.S. cultural contexts has begun to emerge and suggests that different cultural orientations may be related to LMX. For instance, Law, Wong, Wang, and Wang (2000) compared LMX with the Chinese *guanxi* (relationship) between subordinates and superiors and found significant amount of extraorganizational behaviors in the Chinese leader-member relationship. A recent study by Schyns, Paul, Mohr, and Blank (2005) compared research on LMX from Germany with studies from the U.S. Schyns et al. (2005) suggested that managers from the two countries may value relationships with, and participation from, their employees at different levels.

In spite of our growing understanding about LMX in both the U.S. contexts and other national cultures, much remains to be learned about how LMX functions in an intercultural context where cultural strangers join an organization in a host culture. The congruence theory of LMX (Ashkanasy & O'Connor, 1997; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994) suggests that perceived value, attitudinal, and behavioral similarities would predict higher levels of LMX quality. Fairhurst (2001) suggests that in the development of LMX, "interactional patterns are produced within relationships not only by drawing on private and restricted knowledge but also on shared cultural knowledge (societal and organizational) including that of language" (p. 419). For immigrant employees, attaining the cultural knowledge and values in the host country may help produce the cultural congruence and ultimately influence LMX quality in a positive way. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that,

*Hypothesis 1 (H1):* The level of adjustment to the host culture is positively associated with the level of perceived LMX quality.

As the bidimensional model of acculturation states, one's adjustment to the host culture operates in a different dimension from the retention of one's original culture. In other words, the two dimensions are not mutually exclusive. If this is the case, how is retaining one's original culture related to one's perceived LMX quality? In addition, although sociolinguistic studies on code switching (e.g., Arnfast & Jorgensen, 2003; Jan, 2003) suggest that people are capable of strategically alternating linguistic codes based on social contexts, less is known about the potential effects resulting from the potential interaction of the coexisting sets of different cultural values and scripts. Therefore, I propose the following research questions:

*Research Question 1a (RQ1a):* Is the level of retention of one's original culture correlated with his or her perceived LMX quality?

*Research Question 1b (RQ1b):* Do the adjustment to one's host culture and retention of one's original culture interact in predicting his or her perceived LMX quality?

### ***Acculturation and Coworker Relationship***

Coworker relationship refers to a relationship formed among peers in a work organization "who have no formal authority over one another" (Sias, 2009, p. 58). Sherony and Green (2002) indicated that coworker relationships had been largely overlooked in empirical research in comparison to vertical relationships, such as leader-member relationship. Among studies that do focus on coworker relationship, its significance in the workplace has been found to affect various aspects of employee work experience and organizational outcome variables. For instance, in a study of telecommuters in a large telecommunication organization, Golden (2006) revealed that coworker relationship mediates the relationship between the extent of telecommuting and job satisfaction (Golden, 2006). Studies by Leiter and Maslach (1988) and Beehr, Jex, Stacy, and Murray (2000) found significant impact of coworker relationships on employee stress and burnout. In addition, Sherony and Green (2002) studied 110 coworker dyads and revealed that higher variance in coworker relationship quality is associated with lower organizational commitment. The association between coworker relationship and organizational commitment was also supported by Leiter and Maslach (1988) in their study of hospital staff.

The importance of coworker relationship, as shown above, demands further research that identifies antecedents and processes that influence coworker relationship development. This study argues that acculturation is one of the processes that may exert such influence on the coworker relationships of immigrant employees. There has been research that largely focused on the demographic similarities or dissimilarities and their effects on coworker relationships (e.g., Chattopadhyay, 1999; Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004). Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this line of research argues that demographic similarities will directly or indirectly lead to positive relationship outcomes. However, in the case of immigrant employees, although they may share the same ethnic identity, the level of adjusting to the host culture, as well as the level of retaining their original culture, varies. If the ethnic diversity of organizations is held constant, it is worth questioning whether the variation in acculturation has varying association with perceived coworker relationship quality. Hence, I propose the second research question:

*Research Question 2 (RQ2):* What is the relationship between acculturation of immigrant employees and their perceived coworker relationship?

### ***Acculturation and Mentoring Relationship***

A mentoring relationship is one in which an employee senior in rank and/or experience offers a new or junior employee with both career-related (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004) and social-psychological advice and assistance (Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Kram, 1985; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). As with research on LMX and coworker relationships, research has shown that the mentoring relationship is a significant relationship factor that is associated with employee development (Allen et al., 2004) and other organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment and turnover (e.g., Payne & Huffman, 2005; Phornprapha & Chansrichawla, 2007) and organizational learning and knowledge creation (e.g., Bryant, 2005).

To understand what factors predict high quality mentoring relationship, research has examined several variables including both organizational and personal attributes. For instance, Hegstad and Wentling (2005) found that organizational factors, such as top management support and involvement, open work space, and multichannel communication, tend to produce more effective mentoring results. Other scholars have examined the effects of personal attributes, especially race and gender, on mentoring relationship and

effects. However, as Wanberg et al. (2003) indicated, the findings with regard to these factors are far from being conclusive.

A few studies of mentoring relationships in non-U.S. cultures suggest that cultural differences and adaptation could be associated with mentoring relationship outcomes. For instance, Bozionelos and Wang (2006) investigated the association of mentoring and protégés' career success in the Chinese workplace. Their study revealed that mentoring is far more prevalent in the Chinese workplace than in the Anglo-Saxon workplace but is not tied directly to extrinsic career success of the protégés. Most importantly, their study suggests that mentoring be an integral part of the Chinese culture. Another recent study by Manwa and Manwa (2007) examined mentoring in African organizations and concluded that mentoring in African countries tends to be more communal and based on informal networks than in the western countries and that mentoring relationships are prohibited from crossing gender or racial lines. The implication about the connection between national culture and mentoring is a significant one because it suggests that immigrant employees may bring different cultural expectations about mentoring to the workplace in the host culture and that, depending on the acculturation levels employees attain, their perceived mentoring relationship quality may well be different. Therefore, I propose the following research question:

*Research Question 3 (RQ3):* What is the relationship between acculturation of immigrant employees and their perceived mentoring relationship quality?

## **Method**

### *Data Collection and Participants*

The study adopted a network sampling method (Granovetter, 1976; Schrodt & Afifi, 2007) due to the difficulty in reaching immigrant employees through other channels. Both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in classes of the author's university were asked to identify through their own personal networks two first- or second-generation immigrants currently working in U.S. organizations for at least 6 months. First generation is defined as people born in a country of origin other than the United States and second generation as those born in the United States but with either parent born in a country other than the United States. (Husted, Nielson, Rosholm, & Smith, 2001; Ordovensky & Hagy, 1998). The first and second generations of immigrants

were included because the second generation of immigrants continue to report experience of acculturation stress (Roysircal-Sodowsky & Maestas, 2000).

A paper questionnaire was delivered and collected by students with the reward of extra credits. The questionnaire was presented in English. A total of 500 surveys were disseminated and 255 returned with a response rate of 51%. Students were asked to submit survey participants' phone numbers for verification purpose only. To ensure anonymity, their phone numbers were documented separately from their questionnaires. To verify participation, the author's research assistant randomly selected and called 20% of survey participants ( $N = 51$ ), among whom 49 were confirmed and two could not be reached and were eliminated from the sample. A question in the survey asked participants to report whether they were first, second, or third generation (and beyond) generation immigrants. After eliminating participants who were not first or second generation, a total of 235 usable surveys were retained for statistical analysis.

Among the participants, 45% were males and 55% females. The average age was 34 years old ranging from 18 to 71 and the average organizational tenure was 5.28 years. In addition, 42% of participants worked in organizations of fewer than 100 people, 21% in organizations with 100 to 500 employees, and 37% in organizations with more than 500 employees. Participants work in a wide variety of industries, including health services (14%), retail and wholesale (14%), professional services (13%), educational institutions (12%), leisure and hospitality (12%), manufacturing (10%), banking and finance (5%), government agency (4%), transportation (3%), and others (13%). Participants occupied various organizational ranks with 48% at the junior level, 22% at lower management level, 20% at middle management level, and 10% from upper management. As to their countries of origin, 48.7% of participants came from Europe with a majority from Eastern European countries, 19.6% from Asia, 14.8% from Central and South America and Caribbean countries, 10% from the Middle East, 6.5% from Africa, and less than 1% claiming more than one origin.

### *Survey Instruments*

*Acculturation.* A 10-item acculturation instrument was adopted from Alkhazraji et al. (1997) to measure the two dimensions of acculturation: adjusting to the American culture (AAC) and retaining one's original culture (ROC). The scale includes such items as "I try to interact with American people" and "I try to convince Americans of the strength of my culture." Participants responded

on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*), indicating to what extent they behaved in the manner as described in each item.

**LMX.** A seven-item measure of LMX known as LMX7 was adopted in this study. Although multiple measurement instruments exist for LMX, a meta-analysis of LMX studies by Gerstner and Day (1997) suggests that LMX7 offers “the soundest psychometric properties of all available LMX measures” (p. 836). A sample item from the instrument is “Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work?” Participants responded on a 5-point scale from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*very high*).

**Coworker relationship quality (CRQ).** An instrument was adopted from Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, and Rouner (1989) to measure CRQ. The measure consists of eight items, measuring two dimensions, coworker social relationship (CRQ-social) and coworker task relationship (CRQ-task), with four items on each dimension. A sample item is “My co-workers and I frequently exchange compliments and positive evaluations.” Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Mentoring relationship quality (MRQ).** To help participants identify a mentor they may have, a brief description of mentorship was presented in the first survey question related to mentoring relationship, that is, “either formal or informal, someone who actively assists and helps guide your professional development in some significant and ongoing way.” A seven-item instrument for mentor-relationship (MRQ) was adopted from Hill et al. (1989) consisting of two dimensions: career advancement (MRQ-career) and coaching about work rules and politics (MRQ-politics). For instance, an item asks, “My mentor frequently devotes extra time and consideration to me.” Participants responded on a 5-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Control variables.** Existing research suggests that ethnic diversity of an organization may influence various organizational outcomes and relationships (Ogbonna & Harris, 2006; Pitts & Jarry, 2007). Ethnic diversity was measured by a 3-item summated scale. A sample item is “Just like me, many of my co-workers have unique ethnic backgrounds.” Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strong agree*). In addition, prior research suggests that organizational tenure (e.g., Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Kramer, Callister, & Turban, 1995), organizational size (e.g., Ghobadian & Gallear, 1997; Lee & Xie, 2006), and employee rank (e.g., Koberg, Boss, Chappelle, & Ringer, 1994) tend to associate significantly with various organizational outcomes. Organizational tenure was measured by the number of years working for an organization. Organizational size was determined and categorized by the number of employees: small (less

than 100), medium (between 100 and 500), and large (more than 500). Employee rank was determined according to four levels: junior-level associates, lower level management (e.g., team leader or section supervisor), middle-level management or senior associates, and upper level management.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of preliminary and primary analyses. In preliminary analyses, first, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using AMOS (version 17.0) to verify the underlying dimensionality of each measurement instrument as conceptualized by the original authors, and then scales were constructed according to the CFA results. Second, *t* tests were performed to compare the two generations on key variables with the purpose of checking whether data between the two generations of immigrants differ significantly on predictor and outcome variables and whether two separate sets of primary analyses were necessary. Third, because the study is based on self-report survey data from the same source, the extent of potential common method bias caused by common method variance (CMV) was assessed (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Finally, bivariate correlation analyses were performed.

The primary analyses consisted of three sets of hierarchical regression analyses, testing the hypothesis and research questions as proposed earlier. Predictor variables were mean-deviated before being entered into regression analyses to avoid multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991; Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990).

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analyses**

Preliminary analyses started with a CFA test on the 10 items adopted from Alkhazraji et al. (1997) measuring the two dimensions, AAC and ROC, of acculturation. The results from the initial CFA test did not indicate a good model fit,  $\chi^2 = 153.78$  (34,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .83, CFI = .86, RMSEA = .12. After deleting two items that loaded low on each dimension, a second CFA test yielded a good model fit,  $\chi^2 = 5.72$  (8,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .99, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, and all six items resulted in loadings varying from .64 to .94. Based on this model structure, two summated scales were then constructed to produce the composite measures of AAC ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = .90$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ) and ROC ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .99$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ). For the seven items measuring LMX,

existing research on the instrument has consistently shown unidimensionality (Gerstner & Day, 1997). A CFA test offered confirmation,  $\chi^2 = 40.17$  (14,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .089. An average score of the seven items was computed as a composite measure of LMX ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .86$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ).

For the relationship measures, an initial CFA test was performed on the instrument of CRQ (Hill et al., 1989). It only yielded a marginal model fit,  $\chi^2 = 61.24$  (20,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .92, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .09. After reexamining the items, one item, "my co-workers and I frequently exchange compliments and positive evaluations," was moved from the "coworker social relationship" dimension to the "task relationship" dimension. This modification resulted in a good model fit to the data,  $\chi^2 = 47.05$  (20,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .94, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08. Based on this result, a composite measure for the coworker social relationship dimension (CRQ-social) was computed based on the average of three items ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ,  $\alpha = .82$ ), and the measure for the task relationship dimension (CRQ-task) was the average of five items ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .91$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ).

Finally, a CFA test was performed on the seven items for mentor relationship (MRQ; Hill et al., 1989). Test results confirmed the two dimensional structure,  $\chi^2 = 26.61$  (13,  $N = 235$ ), NFI = .95, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .07. A composite measure was created for each dimension, MRQ-career ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ) and MRQ-politics ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = .95$ ,  $\alpha = .60$ ).

Following scale analyses and constructions, independent-samples  $t$  tests were conducted, comparing two generations on predictor (AAC and ROC) and outcome variables (LMX, CRQ-social, CRQ-task, MRQ-career, MRQ-politics). Results did not show any significant difference with regard to all the variables. Therefore, data on the two generations were pooled and treated as one data set for the following analyses.

To assess CMV, first, CFA tests were performed on a one-factor model and a seven-factor model. The seven-factor model consisted of two predictor variables and five outcome variables loaded with their respective indicators (28 in total), demonstrating good model fit,  $\chi^2(329) = 518.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , NFI = .85, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .05. However, the one-factor model with 28 indicators loaded directly onto one single common factor resulted in very poor fit,  $\chi^2(350) = 1910.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , NFI = .42, CFI = .46, RMSEA = .82. The comparison of the two tests confirmed the distinctiveness of the seven latent variables. To further assess CMV, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), an additional CFA was conducted on a model that had not only the seven latent predictor and outcome variables but also one common variance factor linking to all 28 indicators,  $\chi^2(301) = 416.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , NFI = .88, CFI = .96, RMSEA

= .04. In comparison with the seven-factor model, the model with the common variance factor demonstrated improved model fit  $\Delta\chi^2(28) = 101.77, p < .001$ . However, except for  $\chi^2$ , changes in other fit indices were rather limited. In addition, the variance estimate for the common variance factor appeared to be nonsignificant. These tests suggested that common variance bias did not pose a serious threat to the study.

Finally, correlation matrix was computed (Table 1). Because correlations of each of the three dependent variables with organizational tenure and size were small and nonsignificant, organizational tenure and size were eliminated as controls from the model in the following regression analyses so as to increase power and model parsimony (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Organizational rank and ethnic diversity were retained as control variables.

### *Primary Analyses*

H1 and RQ1a examine the association of AAC and ROC with LMX, and RQ1b examines the interaction effect of AAC and ROC on LMX. A hierarchical regression analysis was performed involving 3 steps. Control variables, including organizational rank and ethnic diversity, were first entered in Step 1. To test main effects, AAC and ROC were entered in Step 2. Finally, the product term AAC  $\times$  ROC was added in Step 3 to test the interaction effect. As shown in Table 2, the model in Step 2 demonstrated significant increase in the explained variance of LMX,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ , *adjusted*  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $\Delta F(4, 197) = 5.73, p < .01$ . H1 predicted that AAC has a positive correlation with LMX. The results showed that, controlling for the effects of other variables, AAC demonstrated a significant positive effect on LMX ( $\beta = .23, t = 3.38, p < .01$ ). Therefore, H1 was supported.

RQ1a asked whether ROC has significant association with LMX. The test of main effect of ROC in Step 2 didn't yield significant results. When the AAC  $\times$  ROC product term was added in Step 3, the overall model yielded significant increase in the explained variance of LMX,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ , *adjusted*  $R^2 = .12, F(5, 196) = 8.67, p < .01$ . Specifically, both the product term ( $\beta = .20, t = 2.94, p < .01$ ) and the main effect of AAC ( $\beta = .22, t = 3.31, p < .01$ ) were significant. RQ1b asked whether an interaction effect between AAC and ROC exists. It was clear that, controlling for the effects of other variables in the model, the interaction effect was significant, suggesting a moderating role of ROC on the relationship between AAC and LMX (Figure 1). After examining the coefficients of AAC, ROC, and the product-term, it became evident

**Table 1.** Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Matrix (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, *r*)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Scale reliability <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1. AAC	233	4.02	0.90	.82	—											
2. ROC	233	3.71	0.99	.81	-.02	—										
3. LMX	227	3.68	0.86	.91	.25***	.02	—									
4. CRQ-social	230	3.50	1.05	.82	.12	.13*	.23**	—								
5. CRQ-task	229	3.48	0.91	.80	.24***	.12	.38***	.69***	—							
6. MRQ-career	190	3.26	1.14	.86	.22**	.13	.44***	.47***	.44***	—						
7. MRQ-politics	229	2.79	0.95	.60	.06	.13 <sup>b</sup>	.19**	.38***	.41***	.38***	—					
8. Diversity	231	2.72	0.99	.57	.07	.25***	.06	.20**	.31***	.19**	.32***	—				
9. Tenure	224	5.28	6.29	—	.01	-.14*	.08	-.12	-.03	-.12	-.13	-.05	—			
10. Rank	212	1.93	1.06	—	.13	-.03	.22**	.11	.21**	.21**	.13	.03	.16*	—		
11. Size	229	1.95	0.89	—	-.01	-.20**	-.07	-.09	-.11	-.13	-.05	.07	.28***	-.13	—	

Note: AAC = Adjusting to American Culture; ROC = Retaining Original Culture; LMX = Leader-Member Exchange quality; CRQ = Coworker Relationship Quality; MRQ = Mentoring Relationship Quality; SD = Standard Deviation.

a. Cronbach's alpha.

b. *p* = .054.

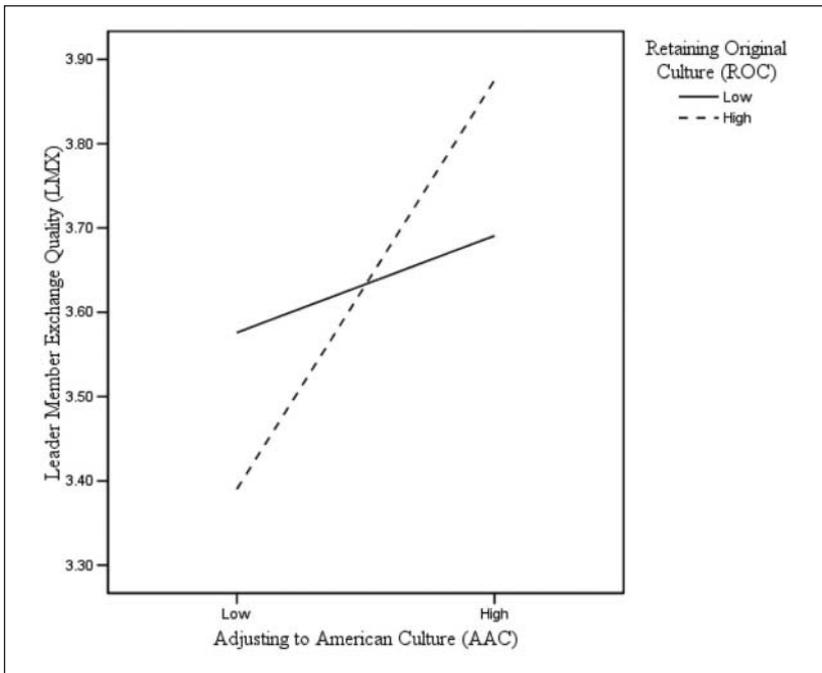
\**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001, two-tailed.

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Regression Analyses

	LMX			CRQ-social			CRQ-task			MRQ-career			MRQ-politics		
	Step			Step			Step			Step			Step		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Beta															
Diversity	.05	.03	.04	.19***	.16*	.16*	.29***	.26***	.26***	.18*	.14	.13	.32***	.31***	.31***
Rank	.22**	.20**	.21**	.10	.09	.09	.21**	.19**	.19**	.20**	.18*	.18*	.12	.11	.11
AAC	.23**	.22**	.22**	.12	.12	.12	.22**	.23**	.23**	.18*	.18*	.19*	.01	.02	.02
ROC	.02	.03	.03	.07	.07	.07	.04	.04	.04	.10	.10	.09	.03	.02	.02
AAC × ROC			.20**			-.02			-.03			-.05			-.07
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.09	.12	.04	.05	.04	.12	.16	.16	.06	.09	.09	.11	.10	.10
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.05	.05	.04	.05	.02	.00	.13	.05	.00	.08	.04	.00	.12	.00	.01
ΔF	5.49**	5.73**	8.67**	4.88*	1.91	.09	15.10***	6.13**	.22	7.17**	3.90*	.39	13.55***	.09	1.17
df	2, 199	4, 197	5, 196	2, 202	4, 200	5, 199	2, 203	4, 201	5, 200	2, 178	4, 176	5, 175	2, 202	4, 200	5, 199

Note: AAC = Adjusting to American Culture; ROC = Retaining Original Culture; LMX = Leader-Member Exchange quality; CRQ = Coworker Relationship Quality; MRQ = Mentoring Relationship Quality.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .00.



**Figure 1.** The interaction effect between AAC and ROC on LMX

that as ROC increased, the positive relationship of AAC–LMX relationship became more pronounced.

RQ2 examines the relationship of AAC and ROC with CRQ. Hierarchical regression procedures were performed with CRQ-social and CRQ-task as outcome variables respectively, following three steps similar to the tests of H1, RQ1a, and RQ1b (Table 2). For CRQ-social, neither Step 2 (main effects of AAC and ROC) nor Step 3 (interaction effect) resulted in significant changes in the overall model prediction. This result means that AAC and ROC have no significant association with CRQ-social. For CRQ-task in Step 2, however, the main effect model demonstrated significant change in prediction,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ , *adjusted*  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(4, 201) = 6.13$ ,  $p < .01$ . In particular, AAC demonstrated significant positive main effect ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $t = 3.46$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but the main effect of ROC was nonsignificant, controlling for the effects of other variables. The addition of the product term AAC  $\times$  ROC in Step 3 did not produce significant results. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the

acculturation process, only AAC had significant positive association with CRQ-task; ROC and the interaction of AAC and ROC did not have significant association with either of the two dimensions of CRQ.

Finally, RQ3 investigated the association of AAC and ROC with MRQ. Again, a hierarchical regression analysis with 3 steps similar to previous analyses was performed predicting MRQ-career and MRQ-politics, respectively (Table 2). For MRQ-career, the model testing main effects in Step 2 showed a significant increase in overall model prediction,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ , *adjusted R*<sup>2</sup> = .09,  $F(4, 176) = 3.90$ ,  $p < .05$ . Particularly, AAC had a significant main effect ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.54$ ,  $p < .05$ ) on MCQ-career, controlling for the effects of other variables in the model, but the effects of ROC and the product term were nonsignificant. With MRQ-politics, AAC and ROC did not demonstrate any significant association.

## Discussion

Immigrant employees constitute a growing portion of the U.S. workforce. Their successful socialization in the U.S. workplace could have consequential impact on various organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment, turnover, and productivity. Although acculturation theories (e.g., Berry, 1994; Kim, 2001, 2005) indicate the potential relationship between acculturation and workplace socialization, substantive theoretical accounts and empirical investigations of this association have rarely been attempted, with the exception of a few studies (e.g., Alkhazraji et al., 1997; Leong, 2001). To further the theoretical development in this area, this study examined the association between acculturation and a significant aspect of workplace socialization, workplace relationships. Specifically, the study revealed that adjustment to the host culture and retention of the original culture, being the two dimensions of acculturation, are *differentially* associated with three types of relationships that immigrant employees develop in the workplace: leader-member relationship, coworker relationship, and mentoring relationship. The survey investigation produced several interesting findings that both challenge and contribute to our existing knowledge about cultural adaptation and workplace socialization.

First of all, the study establishes the theoretical linkage between acculturation and work relationships of immigrant employees. Many studies that incorporate variables such as ethnicity and race tend to treat them as static demographic control factors. By contrast, the present study demonstrates that immigrants' cultural orientations are dynamic (Berry, 1997). Employees coming from foreign cultures obtain different levels of familiarity and acceptance of the host culture and demonstrate varied relationships with their original

culture. As the present study shows, such variation and change are associated with employees' relationship development at work, and the associations differ by the type of work relationship in question. Specifically, a higher level of adjustment to the host culture tends to be associated with higher task relationship quality with coworkers. Also, with more advanced adjustment to the host culture comes better mentoring relationships related to career advancement. Also noticeable is that better leader-member relationships are associated with higher levels of adjustment to the host culture, but this association is moderated by the level of retention of one's original culture.

What is particularly interesting and even somewhat counterintuitive in these findings is the role of retention of one's original culture. Conventionally, people may assume that retaining one's original culture could interfere with the learning and acceptance of the cultural norms and behaviors in the host culture. Looking at acculturation from a one-dimensional view, learning new cultural knowledge is associated with unlearning the cultural knowledge of one's original culture. The present finding challenges this conventional thinking and suggests that retaining one's original culture may not have any adverse effect on work relationship development in the host culture. Rather, increased level of retention of one's original culture may heighten the positive association of adjustment to the host culture with leader-member relationships. It should be cautioned that such causal inference remains speculative because the associational research design in this study does not allow any causal conclusions.

One tentative explanation for the differential associations of the two acculturative dimensions with work relationships may lie in people's ability to compartmentalize cultural knowledge and to draw boundaries quite effectively between front- and backstage in interactional contexts (Goffman, 1959). Workplace as the public front region or frontstage is the domain where immigrant employees adjust to the host culture and where values and behaviors from their original culture are temporarily suspended or suppressed, whereas home is the private back region or backstage where one's original cultural norms and behaviors can still be displayed and maintained to varied degrees.

This compartmentalization may have explained why retaining one's original culture does not show predictive effects on the coworker or mentoring relationship. Then how should its moderating effect on the association of adjustment to the host culture with leader-member relationship be explained? One explanation may have to do with the uniqueness of leader-member relationship. Unlike a coworker or mentoring relationship, the leader-member relationship is built on the formal authority structure. According to the LMX literature, the increase in LMX quality is marked by the increase in mutual

influence and exchange of resources. Among immigrant employees who achieve the same level of adjustment to the host culture, those with higher degrees of original culture retention may have a stronger dual-cultural awareness. This dual-culture awareness may serve as an additional resource that assists immigrants in accomplishing work tasks successfully. This speculation certainly demands fine-grained empirical research in the future. In addition, as Goffman (1959) suggested, the boundary between front and back regions is rather permeable and prone to spillage. The boundary has to be actively managed and achieved. Future research could certainly examine such boundary management enacted by immigrant employees and the consequences resulting from particular ways of enactment.

In addition, the study offers further evidence that adjusting to the host culture and retaining one's original culture are two orthogonal dimensions of acculturation (Berry, 1994), which coexist but are not necessarily correlated. Separating them allows not only a more nuanced look into the acculturation process but also a more pointed examination of their differential effects on organizational behaviors and outcomes. This finding suggests that future research adopt this bidimensional view of acculturation in examining the association of acculturation with other organizational variables, such as job satisfaction, stress, and career development.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

As an exploratory study in linking cultural adaptation with workplace socialization, limitations exist and call for future research in several directions. First, although several findings are statistically significant, it is noticeable that the size of the effects is rather small. The small effect size could have originated from the nature of the sample, which consisted of a wide range of cultures of origin and mixed together a large variety of professions or industries. Cultural differences may influence the process and outcome of relationship maintenance. Due to the sample size, the study was unable to conduct cross-cultural or cross-industry comparisons. The lack of specificity and cultural homogeneity in the sample may have masked the effects of significant relationships and differences. Hence, the small effect size may indicate nontrivial differences. Future research could test the relationships by focusing on immigrant employees from specific cultures and professions, especially cultural groups that have witnessed large growth in recent decades.

Second, the study could be further improved by introducing additional control variables, which are perceived cultural distance and perceived similarity. Perceived cultural distance (PCD), also known as *psychic distance* in the

international business literature, refers to the individual-level perceived differences between cultures in the home country and host country (Sousa & Bradley, 2008). Unlike “cultural distance,” which is a national-level construct (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Shenkar, 2001), PCD measures individual level differences. It is reasonable to speculate that greater PCD may hinder relational development at work. In interpersonal relationship research, both demographic similarity and perceived similarity have been shown to be significant predictors of liking and attraction (Byrne, 1971). In LMX studies, Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993) found perceived similarity to be a significant predictor of LMX quality with more pronounced effects than demographic similarity. To further validate the findings in this study, future studies should consider incorporating perceived similarity and PCD as control variables.

Third, the present study combined data from first- and second-generation immigrants because of nonsignificant statistical differences in the test variables between the two groups. In spite of similar quantitative acculturation measures, the acculturative *processes* of the two generations could be qualitatively different in significant ways due to education and childhood socialization. Therefore, each generation deserves more in-depth look in future research into their qualitative acculturation processes in relation to their work socialization experience.

Fourth, each of the three workplace relationships deserves more in-depth treatment in future research in relation to acculturation. For example, mentorship may be formal or informal. As discussed earlier, cultural expectations of mentorship may vary significantly across cultures. Such variations may complicate both the process and outcomes of mentoring activities. Also, this study is limited to a focus on the protégé’s perspective and on relational outcomes. Using interaction as the unit of analysis and attending to relationship construction through discourse would offer more in-depth, qualitative understanding about immigrants’ cultural adaptation and mentoring relationship development. Similarly, LMX was also studied only from members’ perspective on their perceived LMX quality. Fairhurst (2007) argues that LMX research in general should reclaim its root in discourse, such as the narratives and stories used in constructing LMX. Comparing survey methods, Fairhurst (2007) contends that a discourse-oriented approach allows us to examine how “sensemaking and meaning get worked out in *communication*” [emphasis in original] and to “reveal the ways in which narrative is used to construct LMXs as they happen” (pp. 122-123). This approach is especially important in understanding LMXs consisting of immigrant employees. Because of the lack of common cultural scripts and discursive repertoire, an investigation of actual dialogue would reveal rich insights into the active construction and

negotiation of cultural and relationship identities at societal, organizational, and interpersonal levels simultaneously.

Finally, the sampling and survey administration could also be improved in future studies. For example, due to the constraints in research resources, the present study did not obtain a representative sample. Though challenging, future studies should strive for representative samples to enhance the generalizability of research findings. Also, because English was used for the questionnaire, some potential participants with no or very limited English proficiency were excluded. As a result of language bias, people who have higher level of acculturation may have been oversampled. However, because the study focused on the employed population and most organizations require basic English proficiency, the effect of oversampling may not be of significant concern.

### *Practical Implications*

Although this study only begins to understand the association of immigrant employees' acculturation with their workplace relationships, the findings could already have significant implications for organizational practices. First, the positive main effects of adjustment to the host culture on all three types of work relationships suggest that employers would benefit by assisting immigrant employees in orienting and adjusting not only to the workplace, as organizations traditionally do in new employee orientations, but also to the larger host culture. Organizations that employ a large number of immigrant workers may consider partnering with community organizations in accelerating and facilitating workers' cultural adjustment instead of overlooking or treating the matter as extraorganizational responsibilities.

Second, the finding about the orthogonal relationship between retaining one's original culture and adjusting to the host culture helps dispel the concern that values and practices of foreign cultures maintained by immigrant employees would inhibit their successful development of work relationships in the host culture. Rather, retaining one's original culture while adjusting to the host culture showed a positive effect. Earlier in this article I presented the four modes of acculturation by combining the two dimensions, one of which is integration, describing those immigrants who try to maintain the integrity of their original culture while moving toward becoming an integral part of the host culture (Berry, 1994). The research findings imply that work organizations may take the integrationist strategy as an organizational approach to developing immigrant employees. This approach entails that organizations, on one hand, assist immigrant employees in adjusting to and becoming part of the host culture, as

mentioned earlier, and on the other, make efforts to develop an environment that tolerates the maintenance of an identity from their original culture. Research has found that acculturative stress, resulting from the tension in adjusting to the host culture while maintaining one's original culture, could have debilitating effects on immigrants' mental and physical health (e.g., Arcia et al., 2001; Roysircai-Sodowsky & Maestas, 2000; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003). An integrationist approach may help offer social support and reduce acculturative stress. Such efforts will pay off at the organizational level through attracting and retaining high-quality immigrant employees in a hypercompetitive labor market.

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## **Bio**

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