

**“Adaptation Orientation and the Mental Outlooks of Young First and  
Second Generation Mexicans and Koreans”**

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## **Introduction**

Research on the children of immigrants has become a new field of study. With the increase of immigration to the U.S. from Asian and Latin American countries, this arena is quite warranted. Past studies on Asian and Latino first generation have produced paradoxical results on the relationship between the degree of integration and mental satisfaction in these two groups. This juxtaposition has raised questions of whether such factors like context of reception, race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status influence differing outcomes on the relationship between the mode of adaptation and mental outlook. With the utilization of quantitative data, this research attempts to compare young first and second-generation Koreans and Mexicans and examines the possibility that such specific factors play an important role in how the relationship between adaptation levels and mental outlook is defined by social context. This study concludes that a positive relationship exists between the two variables, with Koreans demonstrating more positive mental outlooks with an assimilationist orientation, and Mexicans demonstrating more positive mental outlooks with a bicultural orientation.

## **Straight-line versus Segmented Assimilation**

The process of assimilation at a macro-level can affect immigrant adaptation on a micro-level. Macro-level processes, such as the degree of incorporation or integration of migrants into the host culture, can influence micro-level processes, such as how specific immigrants integrate into the dominant society, and in turn, affect mental outlook outcomes. The idea of assimilation was initially defined as “ a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” ( Park and E.W. Burgess 1921: 735). As argued by

the straight-line assimilation model and the bumpy-line theory, each succeeding generation moves closer to complete assimilation of its group into the dominant culture (Gordon 1964; Warner and Srole 1945), or argued by the bumpy-line theory, these assimilation patterns change with certain disruptions, however, they still resemble patterns of complete assimilation (Gans 1992).

Unlike immigrants of the past, new second generation persons, primarily from post-1965 migration flows, face different obstacles as they attempt to adapt and assimilate within the dominant culture. Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that in the U.S., post-1965 immigration patterns differ from other migration patterns due to changes in the origin of migration, and the structural transformation of the economy. The new second generation experiences segmented assimilation, different levels of adaptation within the host culture, because there are divergent paths to assimilation; assimilation is no longer a linear process because of “segmentation” into different spheres, which are dependent upon what they bring with them from their country of origin and what they come to face within their new host country. Assimilation, or the mode of adaptation, becomes segmented, promoting divisions within the young migrants and the new second generation, along the lines of race/ethnicity, geographic location, and context of reception. For this reason, the straight-line form of assimilation cannot be germane to new migrants.

Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999:946) critically evaluate segmented assimilation and affirm that there is an omission in this menu of options---the minority culture of mobility. The minority culture of mobility is the “borrowing of cultural elements from the middle class.” Unlike segmented assimilation, the minority culture of mobility is

pertinent for adaptation because it also addresses middle-class immigrants and differentiates them from lower socioeconomic groups. The minority culture of mobility is used to combat problems that occur for minority middle-class individuals, such as interacting with the dominant white society while maintaining relations with poorer co-ethnics. This means that such specific factors as socioeconomic status will also shape the degree to which individuals will adapt to the dominant culture<sup>1</sup> because of the process of “segmentation” that occurs in assimilation.

As a consequence of these changing demographic factors, the second generation can be segmented into three distinct modes of adaptation: 1) parallel integration into the white middle-class, 2) permanent poverty and integration into the underclass, and 3) upward mobility with the preservation of the immigrant community and their strong affiliation to it. The first form of adaptation process depicts consonant acculturation, where the learning process of English and American ways occurs at the same time the parent and child experience a loss in their ethnic culture and language. The second form of adaptation, dissonant acculturation, transpires when the children’s learning of English and American ways, and a loss of their ethnic culture and language, surpass that of their parents’ level. Lastly, the third form of adaptation, selective acculturation, occurs when the learning process of both the parent and child are integrated within the co-ethnic community, and thus have the effect of preventing complete loss of the parental language and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience distinct types of adaptation. For example, middle-class individuals will experience different incorporation into the dominant culture than lower-class individuals because of their greater exposure to whites from primary sector jobs, whereas lower-class individuals will not because of their concentration in secondary jobs.

These distinct paths illustrate how such factors as socioeconomic status, income, religiosity, and education can trajectory the second generation into one of these different forms of adaptation, and later affects their mental outlook outcomes. For example, in previous studies, individuals who experience selective acculturation have exemplified the highest psychological satisfaction levels, higher educational and occupational expectations, higher academic achievements, and are argued to experience favorable outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In contrast, dissonant acculturation results in opposite effects as lower academic achievements and lower mental satisfaction. “A strategy of paced, selective assimilation may prove the best course for immigrant minorities. But the extent to which this strategy is possible depends on the history of each group and its specific profile of vulnerabilities and resources” (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 96). Thus, selective acculturation is posited as the ideal even if it is not achieved or practiced by groups.

In this discourse of straight-line versus segmented assimilation, as proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993) and Portes and Rumbaut (2001), I assert that the segmented assimilation theory has relevance for present adaptation trends, especially for young migrants and the second generation. However, the benefits and meanings of selective assimilation varies for groups because of different group-specific factors, and how individuals also define themselves in relation to their group. This is especially the case with the second generation, because of segmented assimilation and the minority culture of mobility. Different factors like socioeconomic status/ income, education and religiosity track second-generation individuals into distinct modes of adaptation and mental outlook.

I argue that generalizations about universal advantage of bicultural adaptation require further specification with reference to different immigrant groups.

### **Adaptation Orientation and Mental Outlook**

Portes et al (1993; 2000) and Neckerman et al (1999) emphasize differential retention of ethnic culture as characterizing different routes to mobility and socioeconomic incorporation. This retention is revealed in adaptation orientation defined by the degree to which individuals adapt to the dominant culture and/or retain their culture of origin, as adapted from Berry's "four types of acculturation" model. Berry's model of acculturation describes the intensity of association with both the dominant culture and the culture of origin. Individuals and groups face two significant issues. The first relates to how the individual retains his/her ethnic distinctiveness in a society by maintaining cultural values and customs (cultural maintenance). The second pertains not only to how an individual integrates his/her cultural norms within the dominant society but also to which new values should be acquired (contact). The intensity or degree to which the immigrant maintains their culture and, at the same time, integrates his/ herself into the dominant society, results in different segments of adaptation (or adaptation orientations):

1. The Integrated Mode (bicultural): an individual having a high identification with both cultures
2. The Marginalized Mode: an individual has weak identification with both cultures

3. The Separated (Ethnic-dominant) Mode: an individual has strong identification with ethnic culture and weak identification with the dominant culture
  4. The Assimilated Mode: an individual has a strong identification with the dominant culture and a weak identification with the ethnic culture
- ( Berry, Berry, Kim, Power, Young and Bujaki, 1989).

Depending upon their experiences from their country of origin and their experiences in their country of destination, individuals adopt different modes of adaptation, which place them into distinct segments of mobility. To illustrate, the integrated mode exemplifies the segment of upward mobility that preserves and maintains the immigrants' ethnic culture, the marginalized and separated modes demonstrate the segment of permanent poverty and integration into the underclass, and lastly, the assimilated mode exhibits horizontal integration into the white-middle class. At issue in this paper is how the mode of adaptation and the segment of mobility immigrants are placed will affect an individual outcome, namely mental outlook.

Mental outlook is delineated by different measures, such as state of well-being and self-satisfaction. For this study, I define mental outlook as the self-reported degree of optimistic or pessimistic perceptions of self in relation to the world. Prior studies have often used the concept of mental health to study immigrants. However, mental health can be the product, in part, of serious psychological disturbances. The measures used here are not meant to reflect psychological impairments so much as general positive and negative perceptions of possibilities in the world. Therefore, this research uses the term mental outlook, which is composed of three factors---self-esteem, successful coping skills, and overall psychological well-being.

Self-esteem is defined as the expression of the ability to perceive oneself and to evaluate these self-perceptions according to a variety of standards ( Zastrow et. al 1987). For example, a negative perception of self has been seen traditionally as a sign of emotional problems, as well as a symptom of mental illness. A positive perception of self has been linked to happiness and a high level of mental satisfaction (Wilson 1967). Successful coping skills enable an individual to function properly and reflect the individual's ability to concentrate, make decisions, and so forth (Goldberg 1978). Finally, overall psychological well-being is defined as the relative combination of positive and negative affect in the individual (Bradburn 1965). For instance, a person's psychological well-being is related to a predominance of positive affect in an individual's life (Bradburn 1969).

Contradictory research results have been found for the effect of adaptation orientation on mental health. For example, studies have found that longer residence or greater assimilation levels provides better mental satisfaction for male Korean immigrants, whereas being bicultural increases self-esteem for Cuban immigrants.<sup>2 3 4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although this study could address other national origin groups within the Latino and Asian categories, such as Cubans and Koreans or Salvadorans and Japanese, this research will assess Koreans and Mexicans because they are ideal subcategory groups that represent the overall character traits of their larger pan-ethnic group. Moreover, these two groups are virtual opposites of each other, with relation to income/educational attainment. Mexican-origin individuals earn lower incomes than the overall American population. In 2000, the average median income for a Hispanic household is \$33,447 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). In comparison, the average median income for Asian household is \$55,521, which is higher than the average median income for white households. Mexicans also represent the lower end of the income/education gradient, while Koreans represent the higher end (Min 1996; Romo 1996). Mexicans represent the permanent poverty segment of mobility, whereas Koreans represent the horizontal segment of mobility. Being that they represent contrasting segments of the mobility scale, they are good groups to compare against each other.

Moreover, there is easy access of this population on the UC Irvine campus, and is thus convenient for this research. These two specific groups are ideal types for this research because they not only address the theoretical arguments of this research, however, they are large enough groups that are easily accessible on the UC Irvine campus.

<sup>3</sup> Hurh (1989) analysis on the patterns of Korean male immigrants' mental health in relation to their length of residence in the U.S. concludes there is a linear association between these two variables: the mental

Prior studies have also focused on other domains of mental outlook such as self-esteem and overall mental health, but this study focuses on mental outlook. These studies have prompted inquiry as to how recent migrants in different populations differ not only in their adaptation to their host country, but also in their self-perceptions that arise from different adaptation trajectories.

If the relation between adaptation orientation and mental outlook differs by group, it also causes us to ask whether different factors affect the specific relationship between these two variables. Such factors include race/ ethnicity, context of reception, socioeconomic status/ income, and religiosity. Prior studies have demonstrated that both socioeconomic status and level of religiosity, independently, have strong associations with mental satisfaction (Ferrari and Koch 1994; Ellison, et al 2001; Schnittker 2001; Boardman et al 2001; Peterson et al 2001). Persons from lower socioeconomic positions tend to have lower levels of mental satisfaction than persons from higher socioeconomic positions ( Piko 2000). This transpires because SES is the most influential component of health in the United States, and is inversely correlated to physical health (William and Collins 1995; Kreiger, Williams and Moss 1997). In addition, individuals who come from lower socioeconomic statuses often look to religion as a coping mechanism for depression and low self-esteem. As a result, religious individuals<sup>5</sup> from low SES and religious individuals, in general, have a positive association with well-being and an inverse association with distress (Ellison et al 2000). Context of reception and

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satisfaction of the immigrant increases as the length of residence increased (472). In effect, as an immigrant assimilates into the dominant society, their mental health increases.

<sup>4</sup> Gomez (1990) clarifies the relationship between biculturalism and subjective mental health within the Cuban immigrant population. He asserts that higher levels of being bicultural would mutually enhance the level of psychological well-being, and that there is a positive relationship between biculturalism and the level of self-esteem, and the degree of job satisfaction among Cuban-Americans.

<sup>5</sup> Individuals who exemplify frequent church attendance, frequent prayer and other religious practices (Ellison et al 2001; Harker 2001).

race/ethnicity are also significant factors relating to mental outlook, because they are markers of experiences in the country of origin and present paths of incorporation in the host country, such as Vietnamese refugee trauma (Rumbaut 1991). The combination of positive and negative experiences is likely to influence mental satisfaction levels among immigrant groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). That is, it is important to determine whether the effects of mode of adaptation orientation on mental outlook can be fully explained by other factors thought to impact such outlooks, such as religiosity, SES, education and income.

### **Mexicans and Koreans**

The process of segmented assimilation has trajected minority groups into distinct pathways of adaptation into the United States due to their past and present destinations. Due to large migration from persons of Asian and Latino ancestry predominate within present migration streams, this study attempts to compare two sub-categories of these pan-ethnic groups---Mexicans and Koreans, as they represent two types of entrants that reflect the segmented process. The first are unskilled labor migrants. Most Latino immigrants fall into this category, especially the vast majority of persons from Mexico. These migrants come to the United States primarily in search of jobs. Such individuals are motivated to move in large part due to limited work opportunities in Mexico. These people relocate for the purpose of finding employment in order to seek “much improved” standards of living (Portes & Rumbaut 1996). They often start off with an impoverished means of subsistence, and are negatively received by the host society because of their lower status and background as labor migrants.

The second kind of entrants are mostly middle-class/ professional/ entrepreneurial immigrants. Many Asian immigrant groups fall into this category. While such migrants can contribute to “brain drains” from their countries of origin, many depart due to low wages and poor working conditions in their home countries. Such migrants often assimilate quickly because of their prior occupational success in their countries of origin and because of their membership in communities that provide resources and co-ethnic networks that help to fortify their adaptation to their host society (Waters 1994; Portes & Rumbaut 1996). For this reason, they are successful and experience much upward mobility. Therefore, in contrast to the Mexican migrants, Korean migrants are positively received by the host society as a “model minority” group.<sup>6</sup>

The predominance of the first type of unskilled migrant among Latinos and the second middle-class type among Asians indicates that these two groups have divergent backgrounds and motivations for migration. This, in turn, suggests that these groups will have distinct patterns of adaptation in the host society. If this were the case, it would cause us also to ask whether different factors affect adaptation orientation and its relation to mental outlook. This is because distinct trajectories for mobility emerge from different employment backgrounds, which not only influence how the social environment receives immigrants, but also impinges upon subjective evaluations of their lives (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). It is important to examine the type of adaptation into the host country. This study will examine how and to what degree particular modes of adaptation orientation, namely being bicultural or assimilationist, relate to Korean and Mexican mental outlooks in first and second-generation youth. This is important because “very little work has addressed the relationship between adaptation and the psychological well-

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<sup>6</sup> An immigrant group who has both high median earning power and education (L.A. Times May 7, 2000).

being of young migrants” (Harker, 2001: 970). The relationship between adaptation and psychological outcomes of migrants is essential, as these results display how these migrants not only adjust to the host society, but the consequences that occur from their migration process. This means that adaptation and mental outlook may influence different pathways to mobility, and thus distinct economic achievements by individuals.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between adaptation and mental outlook helps us to understand why some groups succeed and others do not, and how the process of segmentation affects mental outlook prospects.

Studies conducted by Portes, Rumbaut and Zhou discuss the different incorporation trajectories that young migrants embark upon and term this process “segmented assimilation.” They argue for the advantages of selective assimilation/acculturation (i.e. bicultural assimilation). This study plans to take on a revisionist perspective to their approach. It will expand upon why certain young migrants and the children of migrants not only take different avenues to assimilation, but also how their choice of pathway, in turn, affects their overall mental satisfaction. I argue that selective assimilation is not always the most beneficial for groups because there is no exhaustive category that truly represents what encompasses “selective assimilation” for different groups. Selective assimilation varies for groups due to factors that may be related to the modes of adaptation among immigrants, socioeconomic status/ income, education and religiosity. These factors, inadvertently, impact their co-ethnic reference group (the group to which individuals compare themselves to), and their relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook. Finally, this study will also assess the

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<sup>7</sup> To do this, it is important to explore the distinct patterns that exist with the first generation in the relationship of mental outlook on adaptation levels and assess whether these patterns will still persist within succeeding generations.

degree to which socioeconomic status/ income, education, and religiosity shape the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.

### **Hypotheses**

Researchers have illustrated that there is a strong connection between mental outlook and such variables as religiosity, SES, education and income. However, they have not really examined the combination of these factors and compared the results in specific second generation groups, nor studied these groups in relation to adaptation and mental outlook. To display this phenomenon, this research utilizes Mexican and Korean groups to portray how similar circumstances yield more positive results for a lower SES/ income group than a higher SES/ income group, how different backgrounds transform the definition of what constitutes positive mental outlook for a group, and how the type of adaptation, independent of SES, religiosity, income and education, affect mental outlook. These various insights suggest the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Mexicans will show more positive mental outlooks than Koreans.*

Overall, Mexicans have a more positive outlook than Koreans for two main reasons: 1) because four-year college enrollment is a valued, but less common achievement in the Mexican community and 2) because Mexicans and Koreans' reference groups differ due to different socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, Mexicans attending a university will experience more positive mental outlooks than their Korean counterparts, because enrollment in a four-year college is a more significant achievement in the context of their ethnic reference group. So, in combination with their overall background, context plays an important role in the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.

**Hypothesis 2:** *The bicultural orientation will be associated with more positive mental outlooks for Mexicans than marginalized and assimilated orientations. However, the assimilated orientation be associated with more positive mental outlooks for Koreans than marginalized and bicultural orientations.*

This difference results because Mexicans, due to their unskilled labor migrant status, experience more upward mobility than Koreans, who tend to come from middle-class backgrounds and may even see downward entry into U.S. society. Mexicans' overall situations improve from higher wages and more job opportunities in the U.S. Mexicans are a much larger group in the U.S. due to their close proximity to their country of origin. Being bicultural is a greater asset to them and is also facilitated by transnational movements. Koreans, on the other hand, come from middle-class backgrounds and have more interaction with native-born Americans, particularly whites. This means that because they have more contact with the dominant culture than minorities who do not, they are more likely to become assimilated instead of being bicultural. Furthermore, given the extraordinary preoccupation of Koreans with elite college attendance, the assimilationist orientation buffers against demoralizing comparative evaluation for Korean students at a good but not elite, university. As a result, an assimilationist orientation is more advantageous to them.

**Hypothesis 3:** *Income, socioeconomic status and religiosity will not fully account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.*

For both Mexicans and Koreans, mental outlooks will be positively associated with income, socioeconomic status, and religiosity, but these will not fully account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook. There is a positive

association between level of adaptation to the host country by the immigrant and their mental outlook, which is not explained by independent factors such as socioeconomic status, context of reception, and religiosity, although these factors do explain the level of adaptation into the host country. Hence, it is crucial to explore why group differences exist before comparing within group variation.

### **Methodology**

To investigate how different modes of adaptation within the host society impact mental well-being in different ethnic/racial groups, this project will explore the Korean-American and Mexican-American student populations at the University of California, Irvine. This location is most suitable for the purposes of this study because of easy access to both the Korean and Mexican groups. Because of the “high-quality of education”<sup>8</sup> within this particular institution, this project considers whether there are different effects on the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook for Mexican and Koreans with similar levels of education. While the sample may not be representative of the total Mexican and Korean youth population because it does not comprise of students who have not yet surpassed structural barriers to attend such a university, this research would like to note that the sample does include individuals who come from a lower socioeconomic background. College students are a valid sample for this particular research, as college attendance is a determinant of structural assimilation, and is a special group, worthy of attention.

This study utilizes a survey approach to examine the overall patterns and processes that are occurring in the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental

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<sup>8</sup> In U.S. News, the University of California, Irvine is rated one of the top ten public universities in the U.S., although such schools as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles, rated above it.

outlook. It executes this out by sampling larger populations, and thus allows the researcher to have more accurate results that are representative of the population/s in question. This approach will be most useful for this study, as it attempts to capture the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook in college-attending Mexicans and Koreans at the University of California, Irvine.

### **Data**

This research attempted to gather recipients for this project through several steps, which will be outlined in this section. Due to the similar format in which Mexican and Korean respondents were sampled, this paper will address how the larger sample, the Koreans, was collected.

This research sampled individuals of Korean heritage through the use of the campus phone directory to identify common Korean last names, such as Park, Kim or Lee. A method of gathering a Korean sample by their surnames is validated by Shin and Young Yu (1984) who claim that the collection of a Korean sample by the surname Kim are an “excellent representative sample of the total Korean American population” (358). Prior studies using surnames for the purpose of gathering a sample collection, such as Annalee Saxenian’s work on “Silicon Valley’s New Immigrant Entrepreneurs,” have yielded exploratory results for future research, thereby verifying this approach. Despite the omission of Korean origin students without common Korean last names, this method provides a good representation of Korean students.

Due to the low response rate from the sample surveys, administered via email, Korean club members at University of California, Irvine, were also administered this survey. Korean Clubs were not initially used due to the presumption that responses would

be biased towards individuals with a “strong Korean identity,” meaning that these individuals would be more inclined to display Korean mono-cultural characteristics. Instead, when Korean club members were analyzed, they showed variance in their responses, as to what type of identity they affiliated with, placing them into different adaptation orientation categories, such as being assimilated or separated. That is, these results were no different than the email sample. The email and club procedure were then utilized for the Mexican sample as well.

Data from students in a sociology class at UC Irvine were also added to the sample to: 1) increase the sample size, and 2) compare a self-selecting sample obtained through clubs and emails with a sample that was not self-selected. The sociology class was initially compared to the club and email results to observe whether there were differences between groups. However, due to the fact that these three groups did not exhibit statistically significant differences between one another, all groups were merged into one data set to examine adaptation orientation and mental outlook. In total, there were 56 respondents for the Mexican sample, and 159 respondents for the Korean sample. The Mexican population was comprised of 24 individuals recruited through email, 8 solicitations through clubs, and 19 individuals who were gathered through the separate class at UC Irvine. For the Korean population, there were 52 individuals through email, 81 individuals through clubs, and 24 through the class.

## **Measures**

In this study, the dependent variable is mental outlook and the independent variable is adaptation orientation. Based upon Berry’s model, this study classifies individuals within four distinct categories to demarcate adaptation modes. A scale

constructed by Lena Alexander (1997) to study Armenian adaptation is implemented to categorize the two samples into these four categories of adaptation orientation. Her scale used the mean scores of the American identity and the ethnic identity to define categories:

1. Integrated (bicultural): above the median score on both ethnic and American identity
2. Marginalized: score below median on ethnic identity and above on American identity
3. Separated (ethnic-dominant): above median on ethnic identity and below on American identity
4. Assimilated: below median on Armenian identity and above median on American identity.

There were a total of twelve questions on adaptation orientation. Six were for the American orientation and six were for the Mexican or Korean orientation. All adaptation orientation questions were on a five-point Likert scale. A +2 is the highest score an individual could receive for each item of the American orientation, and -2 is the highest score an individual could receive for each factor of the Mexican or Korean orientation. Thus, the highest total an individual could obtain for the American orientation would be a +12, and the highest score for the Mexican orientation was a -12.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> An individual would still be considered to have a high score for a particular adaptation orientation question, if they answered "agree," which had a score of 1 for the American orientation questions, and -1 for the Mexican orientation questions. If they had a high American orientation score their total would be a score of 6, and a -6 for the Mexican orientation score. Because the researcher defined an individual as having a high American orientation score if they acquired a score from +6 to +12 and a high Mexican orientation score from -6 to -12, the mean score for the American orientation was a +3(cont'd on next pg) and the mean score for the Mexican orientation was -3. Hence, an individual received a score that was < or equal +3, he/she would be considered to have a low American orientation. The individual would have a

The indicators used to measure the dependent variable, mental outlook (one's subjective perception of self), were questions about self-esteem, successful coping skills, and overall psychological well-being. There were 26 mental outlook items with three-point likert scale response categories of "not true," "somewhat true," and "true," coded as 2, 1, and 0 respectively. "True" showed the highest degree of positive mental health. On a summated scale, the scores ranged from 0 to 52.<sup>10</sup>

After categorizing individuals by mode of adaptation, such as marginalized or bicultural, and calculating mental outlook scores, SPSS statistical analysis was carried out with OLS regression analyses run on the dependent variable, mental outlook, and independent variable, adaptation orientation. The analyses were conducted to investigate correlations between the type of adaptation and mental outlook.

Dummy variables for religiosity, parent's education, and household income were produced as control factors for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook in the Mexican and Korean sample. The level of religiosity was broken into four categories: 1) very religious, 2) somewhat religious, 3) not religious, and 4) not religious at all. Dummy variables were constructed by separating the categories into two main groups: being religious, not being religious, with 1 being religious, and 0 not being religious.

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high American orientation, if he/she had a score of 4 or higher. Individuals would have a low Mexican orientation score if he/she had < or = to -3, and a high score if they had a -4 to -12.

<sup>10</sup> The survey establishes a score of "more negative," "intermediate," or "more positive" mental outlooks by getting an individual's score and dividing it with the total number of points. For illustration, if an individual received a score of 40 out of a possible 52 points, 40 would be divided out of 52 to get a score of 76%. This score would represent an intermediate score on mental outlook. This fact results because a code of a "more positive mental outlook" would range from 80% and up, an "intermediate mental outlook" would range from 60% and up, and a "more negative mental outlook" from 60% and below. Hence, the scoring of the responses progresses in one direction with a higher score representing a more positive mental outlook. These different codes were merely constructed for the purpose of comparing both samples to similar break points, and thus do not represent any significant demarcation with regard to the degree of mental outlook.

The break point for parents' education falls below or above college education, and were classified under four main groups: 1) less than high school education, 2) some or completion of high school, 3) some or completion of college, and 4) post college. 1 defined variables that grouped some or completion and post-college together, whereas 0 equaled variables that were below some or completion of college.

Household income was defined as parents' income, in conjunction with the students'. It was categorized by five variables: 1) less than \$20,000, 2) \$20,000-\$35,000, 3) \$36,000-\$49,000, 4) \$50,000-\$65,000, and 5) more than \$65,000. Because both populations fell either below \$50,000 or above it, 1 delineated income greater or equal to \$50,000, and 0 was equivalent to incomes below the \$50,000 break point.

## **Results**

Data in Tables 1a and 1b show that assimilated is the largest category of adaptation orientation for both the Mexican origin (58.9%) and Korean origin (42.1%). Although the two groups are comparable in terms of the population falling into the bicultural and marginalized categories, they differ for the groups for whom ethnic identification dominates. Although 16.4% of Koreans are Korean-dominant, only 3.6% of Mexicans are Mexican dominant. This may reflect the fact that more Koreans than Mexicans were solicited from ethnic clubs.

Mexicans are, in general, more positive in their mental outlooks than Koreans. For example, as shown in Tables 2a and 2b, only 30.2% of Koreans are classified as positive compared with fully 66.1% of Mexicans. Conversely, only 10.7% of Mexicans fall into the negative category as compared to fully 47.2% of the Koreans.

Does adaptation orientation affect mental outlook for the two groups? Tables 3 and 4 suggest it does. Although Mexicans have a generally positive outlook, the bicultural group is more likely to be positive compared with others (64.6%). Although Koreans are less likely to be positive, (75%) those with an assimilated orientation are more positive than their co-ethnics. Although 58.3% of the assimilated Korean students were negative in mental outlook, the figure was 62.7 % for other Koreans. As hypothesized, assimilated Koreans and bicultural Mexicans enjoy more positive mental outlooks.

One can argue that such factors like socioeconomic status, education and income also affect the level of mental outlook. For both Mexicans and Koreans, more positive mental outlooks will result from higher levels of income, socioeconomic status and religiosity.<sup>11</sup> Factors such as religiosity, parents' education and household income are added to observe whether these variables would account for the independent relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.<sup>12</sup> If they do, this indicates the lack of a strong independent relationship between these two variables. If they do not, this indicates that these factors do not account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook, and that there is an independent relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.

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<sup>11</sup> These factors will not fully account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.

<sup>12</sup> If these variables did account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook, this would indicate a spurious relationship between these two variables, and therefore would demonstrate that socioeconomic status, parents' education and religiosity do not explain adaptation orientation. If they did not, this would indicate that these factors do not account for the relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook, and there is an independent relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook, denoting that the experiences of the country of origin and the host country relate to mental outlook.

In the Mexican population, a dummy variable is created for the bicultural orientation, with 1 being bicultural orientation, and 0 as “other” to examine the positive relationship between being bicultural and having a more positive mental outlook. Table 5a implies that a positive relationship between bicultural orientation and mental outlook, although the relationship does not achieve statistical significance, perhaps due to the small sample size.

In the Korean population, a dummy variable is created for the assimilationist orientation, with 1 being of assimilationist orientation, and 0 as “other.” For the Korean population, Table 4 shows that there is a significant relationship between the two variables ( $p < .05$ ).

For the Mexican population, Table 5a shows that only religiosity has the expected positive relation to mental outlook. The relationship between bicultural orientation and positive mental outlook is statistically insignificant. (unstandardized coefficient = .229;  $p < .20$ ). Religiosity is positively associated with outlook, net of adaptation orientation, and religiosity is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). As shown in model 5, when all four factors are controlled at the same time, the relationship of bicultural orientation and outlook increases to .265 ( $p < .20$ ) but remains statistically insignificant. In effect, religiosity, parents’ education, and household income do not explain adaptation orientation or the correlation or lack of thereof between adaptation orientation and mental outlook.

Because the assimilationist orientation relates to a more positive mental outlook in the Korean population, a dummy variable is created for this variable as well. So 1 equals being assimilated, and 0 equals other. First, the overall mental outlook variable is regressed. Table 5b depicts a strong positive relationship between the two variables run

on the assimilated dummy variable (unstandardized coefficient= .293;  $p < .05$ ), as specifically displayed in model 1. Once again, different demographic variables, such as religiosity, parents' education, and household income, are controlled. In model 2, when religiosity is controlled, the relationship between the orientation and outlook variables remains statistically significant, increasing the unstandardized coefficient to .300 ( $p < .05$ ). In model 3, when education is controlled, it increases the relationship to .320 ( $p < .05$ ). Conversely in model 4, when income is added, the relationship decreases to .243 ( $p < .05$ ). Lastly, in model 5, when all demographic variables are controlled, the coefficients lessens to .280 ( $p < .01$ ).

## **Discussion**

Mexicans and Koreans, because they come from different backgrounds, experience different mental outlooks when they compare themselves to their reference group. What may be defined as success in one group is not defined as such in the other. Overall, Mexicans do show more positive mental outlooks than Koreans. This may be because four-year college enrollment is a valued, but less common, achievement in the Mexican immigrant community (Saldana 1994; Romo 1996). The National Center for Education Statistics (1989) reports that the national status dropout rates for Hispanics is 38%, 15% for Blacks, and 13% for Whites. In the West, where Mexicans are concentrated, the dropout rate increases to 58%. Hispanic immigrants often do not make into a four-year college because of their labor migrant background. They have higher rates of dropping out before this even occurs. More so, the probability that they will attain educational levels at a "higher quality of education" as the University of California, Irvine is quite constrained because they are negatively perceived by society as lower

migrant workers. Mexicans at the University of California, Irvine, however, are connoted with the ideas of success and prestige, in comparison to their overall group. As Crocker and Major (1989) argue, stigmatized groups (i.e. individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) protect their self-esteem by making comparisons within their group. This means that in reference to their overall racial/ ethnic group, attendance at the University of California, Irvine is considered to be a high achievement, especially since this institution is recognized to provide such a “high quality of education” for its students. Mexicans students who attend this particular campus not only go through a selection process vis-à-vis in their racial/ethnic group, but these individuals also demonstrate a high level of mental outlook in recognition of the fact that this path means upward mobility for these students. Attendance at a “high quality” institution signifies upward mobility and success; it is considered to be an exceptional feat by these young migrants because so few attend four-year colleges. This leads them to obtain higher mental outlooks and positive self-evaluations of themselves, although perceived to be a stigmatized minority group.

Conversely, Koreans come from a professional/ entrepreneurial background in which four-year college attendance is considered to be a norm (Min 1996). They are often considered to be a “model minority” and are highly regarded by the dominant group due to the supposition that they acquire higher academic achievements than their non-Asian counterparts (Faulk 1995; L.A. Times May 2000). As a result, they are often praised for being accepted into the white middle class because of their hard work and preserverance (Endo et al 1980). However, there are some negative ramifications that are being experienced by these individuals because of their role as “high academic

achievers”--- they experience greater emotional stress, anxiousness, alienation and dissatisfaction than other racial and ethnic groups ( Sue and Wagner 1975; Endo et al 1980; Faulk 1995). It has been reported that Koreans express more depression than Caucasians, and more academic stress than other Asian groups (Faulk 1995). In addition, it has been argued that they experience more racial discrimination than Hispanics, and more anxiety about interacting with Caucasians than Hispanics because of their assimilation into the white middle class (Faulk 1995).

The increase in depression and anxiety among the Korean population can be attributed to outside and inside forces from society. Outside forces entail how this group is perceived by outside groups. For example, because Koreans are perceived to be a “model minority” within society, they may often be perceived by the white majority as a form of competition, when applying for similar job positions or college admissions due to their higher expectations, in their definition of success, than other groups. This elicits more hostility and discrimination from the majority group than other minority groups due to this “sense of competition.” The hostility that they face from dominant society, in combination with their high expectations of themselves, leads them to have lower mental satisfaction, when compared to other ethnic groups (Faulk 1995).

Inside forces encompass the stress that is placed upon them by their families to not only obtain a good education, but to give the family a good name. This supposition results because Asian Americans have perceived education and hard work as means of obtaining upward mobility, and is thus culturally valued (Sue and Wagner 1973; Endo et al 1980). Negative behavior, such as low academic achievement, is often interpreted as bringing shame on the family name, and is prevented through parental authoritarianism

and pressure (Bankston and Zhou 2002). To control their children from displaying such negative characteristics, parents use guilt-arousing techniques, which include threats to disown them, and verbally censuring them as individuals. This often makes the individual feel helpless, and, therefore, leads them to experience greater anxiety and depression (Sue and Wagner 1973; Seligman 1975).

Due to the strong emphasis on high academic achievement in the Korean population, when Koreans attend an institution like the University of California, Irvine it is not considered to be an exceptional feat, but rather a routine accomplishment. Excellence, defined by the Korean reference group, is considered to be attending at an IVY league institution or the most competitive state universities, such as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles, which are ranked within the top five (U.S. News 2000). This high expectation, made by both the dominant group and by their inside ethnic group, may cause many Korean students to be dissatisfied with their achievements within a public “high quality institution” because they do not perform as well as their reference group; they have brought shame upon their family for this very reason. This sense of helplessness causes them to have lower mental outlooks than Mexicans at the University of California, Irvine. Koreans may be perceived to be “well-adjusted to the structural demands of American society, while they struggle for psychological adjustment” (Bankston and Zhou 2002: 395). This illustrates how there is a difference between “doing well, and “being well,” (Bankston and Zhou 2002), meaning there is a paradoxical relationship between academic achievement and psychological well-being. This relationship needs to be further looked upon, as to examine whether there is “actual trouble stirring” in the model minority, and what this

means to the well-being of these young migrants, in comparison to another minority group who comes from a more impoverished subsistence, yet is faring better mentally.

This portrait also depicts how socioeconomic status, context of reception and race/ ethnicity affect the accommodation to a host country by the group. Such factors can segment how the particular group adapts in the host country, which in turn affects how the overall group is perceived by individuals within the group,<sup>13</sup> and defines group norms. Because their close proximity to their country of origin, and their large population in the United States, the bicultural orientation would be useful and advantageous for they benefit from accessing both cultures in order to succeed within the dominant society, and therefore facilitate transnational movements. For Mexican college students, I argue, biculturalism offers these advantages in addition to linking them to a reference group of co-ethnics that value their accomplishments. Due to the small Mexican sample in this study, the results on bicultural orientation and mental outlook are not statistically significant. With a larger sample, this result might prove to be significant.

The Korean population, on the other hand, exemplifies a strong relationship between assimilation and overall mental outlook. The assimilationist orientation characterizes the majority of the sample, because most Korean individuals have more contact and interaction with native whites, allowing them to constitute higher levels of education within the dominant society. As a result, attendance at a prestigious institution is the expected norm. The assimilationist orientation is beneficial to Koreans because of the extreme emphasis of education and upward mobility within the Korean culture. This orientation toward values of the dominant culture may insulate them from demoralizing high expectations of their ethnic community and shield them from hostility

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<sup>13</sup> This is defined as the reference group phenomenon.

from the dominant society. Each group varies in the relation of adaptation orientation and mental outlook. Dependent upon the reference group, different types of adaptation orientation correlate with a better mental satisfaction. Selective acculturation is expressed differently for groups because of such factors like socioeconomic status, household income and parents' education, that become "segmented" by the process of assimilation in the United States today. This is displayed by higher mental outlooks for bicultural Mexicans, and higher mental outlooks for assimilated Koreans. Selective acculturation varies with relation to such specific factors that encompass groups' backgrounds, and in turn, influence mental outlook outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a strong independent relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook at least for Koreans, not explained by such factors as household income, parents' education and religiosity. The Mexican group would prove this relationship to be significant with a larger sample. Due to segmented assimilation, different factors also play a role in groups. For example, religiosity and mental outlook have a strong relationship for Mexicans, whereas parents' education and mental outlook have a strong relationship for Koreans. Perhaps due to the low socioeconomic background of Mexican migrants, religiosity, not parents' education or income, plays a significant role in affecting how these individuals perceive their mental outlook.

Religion, or a sense of religiosity, is important to Mexicans because it provides social support through resources and a form of community for its members (Ellison 2001). This is important for Mexicans<sup>14</sup>, as they tend to come from a labor migrant background and often lack such options (Romo 1996). This relationship, however, necessitates further

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<sup>14</sup> Research has also shown that minority groups look to religion more so than native whites because of their inferior status within society. In addition, there is a stronger link between religion and health for such groups (Ferraro and Koch 1994).

research on why religious Mexicans exhibit more positive mental outlooks than those who are not religious. Koreans, due to their middle-class status, have greater contact with the dominant population. It is not surprising that parents' education operates as a strong component of mental outlook for the Korean population, as they are more pressured to assimilate into the dominant society than other minority groups, such as Mexicans. Equally, this finding demonstrates the influence of the minority culture of mobility and how different socioeconomic classes have divergent trends in their progression toward mental outlook because middle-class minorities face a different culture and a way of life than lower-class minorities.

## **Conclusion**

With the proliferation of migrants into the U.S. from Asia and Latin America, it is important to investigate the connection between adaptation orientation and mental outlook perception for such immigrant groups as Koreans and Mexicans. This is an important area to examine as previous research has shown different outcomes for distinct groups. This research examines young immigrants and second-generation university students from the Korean and Mexican population for the purpose of understanding how adaptation orientation impacts upon the individual is subjective. This paper specifies the relationship based on ethnic group. This study takes on a revisionist view of the segmented assimilation perspective, as discussed by Portes, Rumbaut and Zhou. They stress the positive aspects of retaining some ethnic culture, as expressed by the theoretical argument of selective acculturation and how it enhances positive mental outcomes. Initially, Berry Model of Acculturation stated that there were four main modes of acculturation: 1) bicultural mode, 2) assimilated mode, 3) ethnic-dominant, and 4)

marginal mode. This model links with the selective acculturation argument because, based upon group background factors, different modes of acculturation display selective acculturation for a group. This study asserts how socioeconomic backgrounds, contexts of reception, and race/ethnicity not only traject groups into divergent pathways, but also segments the norms and expectations of their group. This explains why, put into a certain context of a public educational institution, an unskilled labor migrant group fairs better, with respect to mental outlook, than a group from a professional/entrepreneurial background. Group comparison plays a crucial factor in the mental outlooks for Mexicans, whereas outside group and inside group factors play a more significant role for mental outlooks for Koreans. The reference group, defined by the distinct group, strongly influences groups in their mental outlook outcomes. As a result, Mexicans have a more positive mental outlook than Koreans.

Because of these different backgrounds and definitions of norms in relation to the reference group, what constitutes a positive mental outlook in one group will be defined differently in the other. Varying factors transform the social context in which selective acculturation is delineated by groups, as demonstrated by the Mexican and Korean samples, and whether assimilated and bicultural patterns, respectively, are more beneficial for these distinct groups. In addition, how separate factors play a role in mental outlook satisfaction, defined by the particular group. For example, how religiosity plays an important independent role in mental outlook for Mexicans, whereas parents' education explains higher mental outlook for Koreans. Likewise, there is an independent relationship between adaptation orientation and mental outlook, although independent

factors also play a significant role for different groups due to the process of segmented assimilation.

The new second-generation is different than other migrants in the past because of external and internal factors that have changed the scope of assimilation today.

Therefore, “the process of growing up American oscillates between smooth acceptance and traumatic confrontation depending on the characteristics that immigrants and their children bring along with and the social context that receives them.” (Portes and Zhou, 1993: 75). Some individuals will have a smoother process of integration than others due to the factors that they bring with them from their country of origin and the factors that they come to face in their new country of destination. Results in this study ask, however, what it really means to be experiencing “a smoother process of integration”---if being well-adjusted structurally correlates with being well-adjusted psychologically; it brings up the paradoxical relationship of how “doing well,” is not the same as “being well,” thus questioning further the future paths of these particular migrants. For future research, this study would look more meticulously at a larger, more representative Mexican sample to test the hypothesis on bicultural orientation and overall mental outlook on Mexicans, and to assess the reliability of the mental outlook questions for cultural bias. This study would expand this research to diverse areas to compare and contrast Koreans and Mexicans to examine how geographic location molds and fragments the types of adaptation as well. Moreover, future research should consider how religion may play a role within the Mexican population, and how it facilitates overall mental perception within the Mexican population. Finally, this study would like to further inspect the other adaptation orientation categories, such as the ethnic-dominant and marginal groups, for

the purpose of explicating causal factors for mental perception, specifically by their distinct mode of adaptation to the dominant culture.

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