

Network Composition, Social Integration, and Sense of Coherence in Chinese American Young Adults

Yu-Wen Ying
Peter A. Lee
Jeanne L. Tsai
Yu J. Lee
Malisa Tsang

SUMMARY. This investigation examined the network composition, social integration, and sense of coherence in a group of 353 Chinese American students at a public university. About half (55.5%) of the sample had a Chinese-only (ethnically same) network while the remainder had either ethnically and/or racially mixed networks. Late immigrants (arriving after age 12) were more likely to have close relationships with other Chinese only, and American-borns and early immigrants (arriving before or at age 12) were more likely to have non-Chinese Asian and non-Asian members in their network. Greater racial/ethnic similarity among network members was associated with greater network integration. Individuals with a racially/ethnically mixed network enjoyed the highest sense of coherence, followed by those with an

Yu-Wen Ying, Peter A. Lee, Yu J. Lee and Malisa Tsang are all affiliated with the University of California at Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, 120 Haviland Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-7400 (E-mail: ywying10@socrates.berkeley.edu).

Jeanne L. Tsai is affiliated with the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis.

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ethnically same network, and those with either a racially-same or mixed network reported the lowest sense of coherence. Altogether, the findings suggest ethnically/racially similar networks afford a sense of comfort, but more diverse networks offer the reward of increased competence and better person-environment fit. [Article copies available for a few from *The Haworth Document Delivery Service*: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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At the dawn of the 21st century, the United States is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse nations of the world. Five major racial groups are represented: European, African, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. Within each racial group, various ethnicities may be found. For instance, in the case of Asian Americans, major ethnic groups include the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. In 1990, of the entire American population, 75% were White, 12% were African American, 9% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1% were American Indian (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). It is projected that by the year 2000 the number of White Americans will decline by 4%, while the Hispanic and Asian and Pacific Islander groups will increase by 2% and 1.5%, respectively, with smaller gains in the African American and American Indian populations (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). The proportion of the non-White population will continue to grow such that within 50 years, it will comprise almost half of the American population: specifically, 16.2% will be Black, 21.1% will be Hispanic, 10.7% will be Asian, and 1.2% will be American Indian (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992).

With the growing diversification of the American population, the persistence of discrimination and prejudice toward cross-racial/ethnic groups poses a substantial threat to the unity of our nation. In *Race Matters*, Cornel West (1993, p. 4) stated, "There is no escape from our interracial interdependence, yet enforced racial hierarchy dooms us as a nation to collective paranoia and hysteria—the unmaking of any democratic society." The 1992 Los Angeles Race Riots pointed to the volatility of inter-racial anger in America. In 1997, a total of 4,710 hate crimes due to race and 836 hate crimes due to ethnicity/national origin were reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (*San Francisco Examiner*, 1999). These numbers are likely to be an underestimate, as not all race/ethnicity driven hate crimes were likely to be reported, and some were likely to be disguised and not identified as such. Due to cross-ra-

cial/ethnic mistrust and animosity, Americans cannot be said to share a sense of community as defined by Seymour Sarason (1974, p. 157), i.e., "the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure." To achieve this sense of community, the formation of cross-racial/ethnic alliances is crucial. Existing research suggests that the ability to appreciate and embrace racial/ethnic diversity emerges not from fleeting acquaintances and casual contacts, but close and long-term personal associations (Ellison & Powers, 1994; Pettigrew, 1997).

The current study contributes to the literature of intergroup relations by focusing on the largest group of Asian Americans in the United States, i.e., Chinese Americans, and examines three specific questions: (1) What is the racial/ethnic composition of social networks among Chinese American young adults? (2) How does the racial/ethnic composition of their social network contribute to their network's integration? (3) How does the racial/ethnic composition of their social network contribute to a personal sense of coherence, i.e., the degree to which the world is experienced as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful?

THE FOCUS ON CHINESE AMERICANS

The limited literature on interracial/ethnic relationships has focused primarily on White-Black associations (for review see Foster, Martinez, & Kurlberg, 1996; Schneider, Smith, Poisson, & Kwan, 1997). With the growing diversification of the American population, understanding of cross-racial/ethnic interactions needs to be broadened to include other racial/ethnic groups. As 31.1% of America's current population increase is attributable to immigration, primarily from Asia and Latin America (De Vita, 1996), the question arises as to whether these newly arriving Americans and their descendants are forming cross-race/ethnic relationships as they adjust to living in their new homeland. Roberta S. Sigel (1991, p. 3) noted that "hosts and newcomers alike have to *learn* what it means to live democratically in a multi-ethnic world and, to accept diversity without fear or rancor." Among the major racial groups in the United States, Asian Americans grew faster in size (by 31%) between 1990 and 1995 than any other (De Vita, 1996). Chinese Americans make up the largest ethnic group among Asian Americans, and two-thirds of them are immigrants. Given this variation in migration status, focusing on Chinese Americans allows us to examine change in the racial/ethnic composition of their social network secondary to increased contact with non-ethnic Chinese Americans.

Most research on cross-racial/ethnic relationships has focused on school age children (for review, see Schneider et al., 1997). In contrast, relatively

few studies have examined adults. In addition, it is particularly interesting to study Chinese American college students' interracial/ethnic relationships for two reasons. First, Western psychological theories suggest that during adolescence, significant exploration occurs across all life domains, including the social one (Erikson, 1968). This is a time when individuals may question their parents' and teachers' values and begin to form their own. As such, it is a time when their relationships, including the race/ethnicity of their intimate network, are more likely to result from conscious choice. While this exploration is usually associated with the junior high and the high school years for mainstream Americans, it may be delayed for many Chinese Americans until the college years due to pressures to conform to parental expectations. During college, they are exposed to members of other cultural backgrounds. As they share the common goal of an advanced education, Chinese American students may be likely to form cross-racial/ethnic associations. For those who live away from home to attend college, the physical separation further decreases parental influence. Thus, the social network of Chinese Americans is likely to better represent personal choice during college than at an earlier time.

Second, given the diversity of the student population at the study site, participants have ample opportunity to choose either same- or cross-race/ethnic relationships. Specifically, at the time of this investigation, 19.3% of this university's undergraduate population was Chinese American, 20.1% was non-Chinese Asian, 32.4% was White, 13.8% was Latino, 5.5% was African American, and 1.1% was American Indian, with the ethnicity of the remainder being other or unidentified. As such, the conditions promoting intergroup contact and reducing prejudice specified in Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis were present, i.e., (a) equal status contact between members of majority and minority groups (i.e., all are students) who are pursuing common goals (i.e., an education); (b) contact that is institutionally (i.e., university) sanctioned; (c) opportunity for majority and minority group members to interact as equals (i.e., all are students).

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Social Network

The first research question examined the racial/ethnic composition of the social networks in Chinese American young adults. The intergroup literature consistently shows a preference for same-race/ethnicity individuals due to apparent physical and cultural similarity (e.g., Antrobus, Dobbelaer, & Salzinger, 1988; Sagar, Schofield, & Snyder, 1983). Thus, it was hypothesized that Chinese American college students would show a similar preference for individuals most like themselves, i.e., other Chinese Americans (same ethnicity), followed by non-Chinese Asians (same race but different ethnicity), and the least preference for non-Asian Americans (different race).

In addition to identifying the distribution of same and cross-racial/ethnic networks, potential variation by migration status was of major interest. With increasing length of residence in the United States and exposure to diverse groups, individuals are more likely to form cross-racial/ethnic relationships. In addition, exposure to diversity during childhood enhances the probability of the formation of close cross-racial/ethnic relationship in adulthood (Ellison & Powers, 1994). Tsai, Ying, and Lee (2000) found that late immigrants (arriving in the US after the age of 12, or onset of adolescence) have the strongest sense of identification with being Chinese and the weakest identification with being American. This may be because of their childhood socialization (in particular, their primary school education) in a Chinese cultural context and their recency of migration. In contrast, American-borns have the strongest identification with being American, and the weakest identification with being Chinese, because they have lived their whole lives in the United States. Early immigrants (arriving in the US at or before the age of 12) occupied an intermediate position in their identification. Thus, we hypothesized that late immigrants would most prefer to associate with other Chinese Americans, while American-born Chinese would interact with both ethnically different (non-Chinese Asians) and racially different (non-Asians) individuals, with early immigrants falling in-between these groups. Age, socioeconomic status, and gender were included as control variables.

Social Network Integration

The second research question assessed the association of racial/ethnic composition of the social network and its integration. The ecological model of human development postulates that compatibility in role demands across settings promotes greater linkage and integration (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Adapting this model to our investigation, rather than focusing on linkage across settings, we examine linkage among individuals who make up the participants' social network. Network members who share the same ethnic (i.e., Chinese) or racial (i.e., Asian) backgrounds are more likely to form linkages due to similarity in values and behaviors than if such similarity is absent (i.e., a mix of Asian and non-Asian associations). For instance, Chinese and Asian cultures have been found to vary significantly from European American culture, with the former characterized as collectivistic and interdependent, and the latter as individualistic and independent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Collier (1996) found Asian American college students most valued caring and positive exchange of ideas while Anglo American students emphasized individual needs in their friendships. Thus, it was hypothesized that individuals with ethnically-same networks (all Chinese American) would enjoy the greatest social integration, i.e., the members of their network would be most likely to know and interact with one another, followed by ethnically-

different but still racially-same networks (all Asian, but not necessarily all Chinese American). In contrast, individuals with the most ethnically and racially diverse networks (i.e., including non-Chinese Asians and non-Asians) would be likely to report the least integration. As before, demographic characteristics, such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, and migration status were included as control variables.

Sense of Coherence

The third research question examined the relationship of racial/ethnic composition of social network and sense of coherence. Antonovsky proposed the construct of sense of coherence as a mediator of positive health and defined it as a "global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that: (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement" (Antonovsky, 1987: p. 19). These components of sense of coherence were identified as comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Studies have found coherence to be associated with positive physical and psychological well-being (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987; Ying & Akutsu, 1997; Ying, Akutsu, Zhang, & Huang, 1997).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that participation in culturally different settings promotes development by enhancing cognitive functioning and social skills. Again adapting this to our study, it is likely that compared to those with ethnically and racially similar networks, individuals with ethnically/racially mixed networks would enjoy a greater sense of coherence as their diverse relationships help them to better understand the world and negotiate their life challenges in the context of an increasingly culturally diverse United States. Thus, it was hypothesized that racial/ethnic homogeneity in social network would diminish sense of coherence while racial/ethnic diversity would increase it.

In addition, strong social integration reflects cohesion in one's social support network, which in turn, has been postulated to enhance sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). Thus, it was hypothesized that social integration would promote sense of coherence. As before, demographic characteristics, such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, and migration status, served as control variables.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 353 Chinese American college students at a major public university in the western United States. There were a total of 174 men and 179 women in the sample. Of these, 122 were American-borns (ABC), 121 were early immigrants (arriving at or before the age of 12), and 110 were late immigrants (arriving after the age of 12). More detailed sample characteristics are reported in the Results section.

Measures

Study participants completed three questionnaires. The Demographics Questionnaire assessed basic demographic background information, including age, sex, and father's education and occupation. The participant's socioeconomic status (SES) was calculated from their father's education and occupation using Hollingshead's (1957) method (where the possible range of scores is from 11 to 77, with 11 being the highest socioeconomic level).

The Social Participation and Integration Questionnaire (SPIQ) was developed specifically for this study. It examined the racial and ethnic composition of the participant's intimate network and its integration. Social network composition was assessed by participants identifying the five people they felt closest to in their life, including their race/ethnicity and relationship to the participant. Social integration was assessed by the extent to which each member in their network knew every other member of the same network. Specifically, the question stated: "Please describe the relationship these people have with one another. Would you say (1) they have never heard of each other and have never met; (2) they have heard of each other but have never met; (3) they have met less than five times but are not close to each other; (4) they have met more than five times but are not close to each other; (5) they have met more than five times and are close to each other." In the case where the respondent identified five significant people in his or her social network, this question was asked ten times, regarding the relationship of the first person with each of the other four, the second person with each of the next three, the third person with each of the next two, and the fourth person with the fifth. To derive the overall degree of social integration, the mean of these responses was calculated.

Sense of coherence was measured using the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (Antonovsky, 1987). The instrument consisted of 29 items which examined the extent to which the respondents felt their lives were comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. Some sample items are: (1) When you talk

to people, do you have the feeling they don't understand you? (reverse coded, measures comprehensibility); (6) Has it happened that people you counted on disappointed you? (reverse coded, measures manageability); (4) Do you have the feeling you don't really care about what is going on around you? (reverse coded, meaningfulness). Participants respond to the items on a seven point scale, expressing differential levels of endorsement. Items 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 25 and 27 were reverse coded. The total sense of coherence score was derived by summing the item scores—with a possible range from 29 to 203. In over twenty studies, the instrument's Cronbach alpha of internal consistency has ranged from .82 to .95 (Antonovsky, 1993). The alpha reliability in our sample was .89. The criterion validity of the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire has also been established in numerous investigations by the presence of significant correlation with health and well-being (Antonovsky, 1993).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the psychology subject pool, announcement at classes, Asian American student organizations, and dorms, by distribution of flyers, and by word-of-mouth. They completed consent forms for participation and the three paper-pencil questionnaires named above, either alone or in a group with other participants.

RESULTS

Sample characteristics by migration status are presented in Table 1. Inter-group variation was assessed using Analysis of Variance with Scheffe post-hoc tests and Chi-Square tests. Sample characteristics are presented by migration status. The groups varied significantly on age [$F(2,350) = 24.01, p = .0001$]. Scheffe post-hoc tests ($p < .05$) showed late immigrants were older (mean = 21.14, SD = 2.14) than the ABCs and early immigrants (mean = 19.71, SD = 1.48 and mean = 19.93, SD = 1.31, respectively). The groups differed significantly from one another in socioeconomic status or SES [$F(2,350) = 11.42, p = .0001$]. Scheffe post-hoc tests ($p < .05$) showed ABCs enjoyed better SES (mean = 23.38, SD = 13.74) than the early and late immigrants (mean = 31.23, SD = 15.40, and mean = 31.38, SD = 15.31, respectively), as a lower score reflected higher SES. The three groups did not vary by the distribution of gender, with roughly equal numbers of men and women represented in each group. The distribution of racial/ethnic composition of their network is reported in the next section.

TABLE 1. Descriptives of Study Variables by Migration Status

	Total (N = 353)	American-Borns (N = 122)	Early Immigrants (N = 121)	Late Immigrants (N = 110)	Significant Group Difference
Age	20.23 (SD = 1.77)	19.71 (SD = 1.48)	19.93 (SD = 1.31)	21.14 (SD = 2.14)	Late immigrants > ABC and Early Immigrants*
SES	28.56 (SD = 5.25)	23.38 (SD = 13.74)	31.23 (SD = 5.40)	31.38 (SD = 15.31)	ABC > Early and Late Immigrants*
Gender					
Male	49.3%	48.4%	46.3%	53.6%	
Female	50.7%	51.6%	53.7%	46.6%	
Composition of Social Network					
Ethnically Same	55.5%	33.6%	48.8%	87.3%	Late immigrants > Others**
Racially Same	19.3%	30.3%	22.3%	3.6%	Late immigrants < Others**
Racially Mixed	11.9%	13.1%	14.9%	7.3%	
Ethnically/ Racially Mixed	13.3%	23.0%	14.0%	1.8%	Late immigrants < Others**
Network Integration	3.52 (SD = .78)	3.51 (SD = .72)	3.52 (SD = .76)	3.52 (SD = .88)	
Sense of Coherence	127.55 (SD = 21.37)	129.20 (SD = 20.15)	125.42 (SD = 21.97)	128.06 (SD = 22.01)	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .004$

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Social Network

Of the 353 participants, 95.5% were able to name five people in their intimate social network. The remainder named two to four people. Of the sample, the overwhelming majority (79.6%) named both family and non-family members. 16.4% named only non-family members (mostly peers), and 4% named only family members. A total of 196 participants (55.5%) identified only Chinese people in their intimate social network ("Ethnically Same Group"), 68 (19.3%) named both Chinese and non-Chinese Asians ("Racially Same Group"), 42 (11.9%) named Chinese and non-Asians ("Ra-

cially Mixed Group"), and 45 (12.7%) named Chinese, non-Chinese Asians, and non-Asians ("Ethnically and Racially Mixed Group"). Only 2 individuals named non-Chinese Asian and non-Asians relationships, and they were included in the "Ethnically and Racially Mixed Group," making a total of 13.3%. The non-Chinese Asian ethnicities included Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and South Asian Americans. The non-Asian races included European, Latino, and African Americans.

As hypothesized, racial/ethnic composition of social network varied significantly by migration status ($\chi^2 = 76.31$, $df = 6$, $p = .00001$). Pairwise comparisons were conducted by migration status (ABCs vs. early immigrants, ABCs vs. late immigrants, and early vs. late immigrants) and social network composition category (each category vs. all other categories). A total of 12 pairwise comparisons were conducted, thus a more conservative p value of .004 (.05 divided by 12) was used. Late immigrants differed significantly from American-borns and early immigrants, but the latter two groups did not vary from each other. As Table 1 shows, while 87.3% of the late immigrants named only Chinese people in their network (Ethnically Same Group), only 33.6% of the American-borns and 48.8% of the early immigrants did so ($\chi^2 = 68.90$, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$, and $\chi^2 = 38.71$, $df = 1$, $p = .0001$, respectively). In contrast, only 3.6% of late immigrants had non-Chinese Asians members in their network (Racially Same Group), as compared to 30.3% of the American-borns and 22.3% of the early immigrants ($\chi^2 = 28.32$, $df = 1$, $p = .0001$, and $\chi^2 = 17.30$, $df = 1$, $p = .0003$, respectively). Also, only 1.8% of the late immigrants had non-Chinese Asian and non-Asian relationships (Ethnically and Racially Mixed Group), as compared to 23.0% of the American-born and 14.0% of the early immigrants ($\chi^2 = 22.94$, $df = 1$, $p = .00001$, and $\chi^2 = 11.42$, $df = 1$, $p = .0007$). The three groups did not vary on network integration (overall mean = 3.52, $SD = .78$) nor sense of coherence (overall mean = 127.55, $SD = 21.37$).

Social Network Integration

The contribution of racial/ethnic composition of social network to integration, controlling for demographic characteristics (age, socioeconomic status, gender, and migration status), was tested using multiple regression analyses. The deleted comparison group for migration status and racial/ethnic composition of social network was rotated to allow for exhaustive comparisons of all categories. As Table 2 shows, the overall model was significant (Adjusted $R^2 = .06$, $F[8,334] = 3.93$, $p = .0002$). Using the more conservative two-tailed test, only racial/ethnic composition emerged as a significant predictor. The "Ethnically Same Group" was better integrated than the "Racially Mixed" ($b = .38$, $SE = .13$, $p = .004$) and the "Ethnically and Racially Mixed" ($b = .65$, $SE = .13$, $p = .0001$) groups. The "Racially Same Group" was better integrated than the "Ethnically And Racially Mixed Group" ($b = .48$, $SE = .15$,

TABLE 2. Social Network Integration as Predicted by Demographic Characteristics and Racial/Ethnic Composition of Social Network

	b	(SE)	p (two-tailed tests)
Adjusted $R^2 = .06$, $F(8,334) = 3.93$, $p = .0002$			
Age	-.04	(.03)	.14
SES	.01	(.01)	.44
Male vs. Female	.03	(.08)	.72
ABC vs. Early Immigrant	.06	(.10)	.56
ABC vs. Late Immigrant	.17	(.12)	.16
Early vs. Late Immigrant	.11	(.11)	.33
Ethnically Same vs. Racially Same	.17	(.12)	.15
Ethnically Same vs. Racially Mixed	.38	(.13)	.004
Ethnically Same vs. Ethnically and Racially Mixed	.65	(.13)	.0001
Racially Same vs. Racially Mixed	.22	(.15)	.15
Racially Same vs. Ethnically and Racially Mixed	.48	(.15)	.001
Racially Mixed vs. Ethnically and Racially Mixed	.27	(.16)	.10

$p = .001$). These findings support our second hypothesis. None of the control variables were significant contributors to the model.

Sense of Coherence

The contribution of racial/ethnic composition of social network and social integration to sense of coherence, controlling for demographic characteristics, was also tested using regression analyses. As before, the deleted comparison group for migration status and racial/ethnic composition of social network was rotated to allow for exhaustive comparisons of all categories. As Table 3 shows, the overall model was significant (Adjusted $R^2 = .05$, $F[9,343] = 3.12$, $p = .001$). Using two-tailed tests, racial/ethnic composition of social network and integration emerged as significant predictors. The "Ethnically and Racially Mixed Group" had a greater sense of coherence than the "Racially Same" ($b = 13.91$, $SE = 4.05$, $p = .0007$) and "Racially Mixed" ($b = 9.13$, $SE = 4.49$, $p = .04$) groups, and marginally more than the "Ethnically Same Group" ($b = 6.40$, $SE = 3.78$, $p = .09$). The "Racially Same Group" reported a lower sense of coherence than the "Ethnically Same Group" ($b = -7.51$, $SE = 3.19$, $p = .02$). In addition, greater integration was

TABLE 3. Sense of Coherence as Predicted by Demographic Characteristics, Racial/Ethnic Composition of Social Network and Social Network Integration

	b	(SE)	p	(two-tailed tests)
Adjusted R ² = .051, F(9,343) = 3.12, p = .001				
Age	.53	(.68)		.44
SES	-.03	(.08)		.72
Male vs. Female	4.15	(2.26)		.07
ABC vs. Early Immigrant	3.65	(2.77)		.18
ABC vs. Late Immigrant	2.72	(3.27)		.41
Early vs. Late Immigrant	-9.33	(3.05)		.76
Ethnically and Racially Mixed vs. Ethnically Same	6.40	(3.78)		.09
Ethnically and Racially Mixed vs. Racially Same	13.91	(4.05)		.0007
Ethnically and Racially Mixed vs. Racially Mixed	9.13	(4.49)		.04
Racially Mixed vs. Ethnically Same	-2.73	(3.69)		.46
Racially Mixed vs. Racially Same	4.78	(4.13)		.25
Racially Same vs. Ethnically Same	-7.51	(3.19)		.02
Social Network Integration	4.88	(1.48)		.001

associated with greater sense of coherence ($b = 4.88$, $SE = 1.48$, $p = .001$). The control variables were not significant predictors of coherence.

DISCUSSION

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Social Network

The racial/ethnic distribution of social network composition in the Chinese American college sample reflected a strong preference, first, for ethnic similarity (55.5% had close associations with other Chinese Americans only) and, second, for racial similarity (19.3% had close relationships with Asians only). In spite of the racial diversity at the campus which served as the study site, only 11.9% of the participants reported a racially mixed network (Chinese and non-Asians), and only 13.3% reported both an ethnically and racially mixed network (Chinese, non-Chinese Asians, and non-Asians). These findings showed that, in general, Chinese American students in a multi-ra-

cial/ethnic context still preferred to associate with individuals of their own ethnic and racial background due to similar physical characteristics and cultural values, consistent with the existing literature (Antirobus et al., 1988; Sagar et al., 1983).

However, a longer length of residence in the United States increased the probability of association with non-Chinese Americans. Both American-born and early immigrants differed significantly from the late immigrants by being less likely to associate exclusively with other Chinese Americans and more likely have close relationships with non-Chinese Asians and non-Asians. However, American-born and early immigrants did not differ significantly from each other in their network composition. As no other variable emerged as a significant predictor, it appears that early exposure to diversity was crucial in enhancing cross-racial/ethnic associations in adulthood (Ellison & Powers, 1994). In addition, late immigrants may be more limited in their cross-cultural knowledge and English facility compared to their American-born and early immigrant peers, which further diminishes the likelihood of the formation of cross-ethnic and cross-racial relationships.

Social Network Integration

As hypothesized, social network integration was greater for ethnically and racially similar networks (i.e., Chinese only and Asians only) than for ethnically/racially dissimilar (Chinese, Asian, and non-Asian) networks, and was also greater for ethnically similar vs. racially mixed (Chinese and non-Asian) networks, suggesting that when members of the network were culturally similar, they were more likely to know of and interact with one another. This was consistent with Collier's (1996) finding of within-race consistency and across-race variation in what African, Asian, Latino, and Anglo American college students most valued in their friendships.

Sense of Coherence

As predicted, the "Ethnically and Racially Mixed Group" enjoyed the greatest sense of coherence. As their social network best mirrored the cultural diversity of their environment, they may be said to enjoy the best person-environment fit, which enhanced their sense of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness of their world. Unexpectedly, the "Ethnically Same Group" enjoyed greater coherence than the "Racially Same Group." This was likely to be due to a difference in reference group when responding to the sense of coherence items. Chinese Americans who associated only with other Chinese Americans (these were most likely students who migrated to the United States after the age of 12) may be separated from their ethnically-ra-

cially diverse context in other respects as well, and they may have been considering only this narrower Chinese American world when responding to the sense of coherence items. As such, their higher sense of coherence may not generalize to the larger environment, in which their score may be significantly lower. On the other hand, those with non-Chinese Asian associations (these were most likely to be American-born Chinese) may be more engaged with the larger non-Chinese American context. In spite of their lower sense of coherence score compared to the "Ethnically Same Group," because of the potential difference in reference, they may actually enjoy a higher sense of coherence in a broader, more diverse context. Clearly, this deserves further investigation.

Finally, also as hypothesized, controlling for the racial/ethnic composition of the network and demographics, a stronger social integration, i.e., a greater cohesion in the support network, promoted a positive sense that the world was comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful.

Study Limitations

By focusing only on college students, it is unclear whether the distribution of social network composition reported here generalizes to other Chinese American young adults. Further studies need to include a more diverse sample. Also, by choosing a campus where Asian American students represent the largest racial group (surpassing White Americans), it is possible that our findings are biased toward racial/ethnic similarity in social network composition. In a context with fewer same race/ethnicity individuals, Chinese Americans may tend to have more mixed networks. This deserves further investigation. Also, while this study makes a contribution by moving beyond the study of White-Black associations, much more research is needed to better understand not only how racial/ethnic minorities relate to Whites but also to one another. It is only by doing so that a complete picture of inter-racial/ethnic associations in our country will emerge.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, these findings show increased inter-racial/ethnic association with increasing length of residence in the United States among Chinese American young adults. Ethnically/racially-same networks afford a sense of comfort due to implicit understanding and sharing of values and expectations among its members, and yield better network integration. However, racially and ethnically mixed networks afford the reward of better person-environment fit and of an increased sense of competence in the world. Beyond the

personal benefit, cross-racial/ethnic relationships are likely to enhance a sense of community and common destiny among Americans across racial and ethnic lines, which contributes to unity among Americans.

With increasing diversification of the population, the challenge of cross-racial/ethnic understanding continues to gain importance for every American and for the United States as a nation. The study findings point to the need for increased opportunities for dialogue and exchange among Americans from different racial and ethnic groups to overcome our withdrawal from and fear of difference. Specifically, the finding that American-borns and early immigrants (who arrived at or before the age of 12) are more likely to associate with racially and ethnically different individuals than are late immigrants (who arrived after the age of 12) suggests that interventions which target children under the age of 12 may be particularly effective. However, as adults play a pivotal role in children's lives (especially as parents and teachers) and serve as important role models for future generations, it is important that they, too, be assisted to develop an empathy and appreciation for cross-racial/ethnic individuals through cross-racial/ethnic relationships.

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