

Exploring Communication Competence and Psychological Health: A Study of Cross-cultural Adaptation among Young Korean Immigrants (1.5ers) in the U.S.

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Abstract

The present study examines the communication experiences of young Korean immigrants and their psychological adjustment in the United States.

Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001) Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory provides the basis for offering an explanation of the theoretical linkage between host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication, host/ethnic mass communication and psychological adjustment in the United States. A self-reported structured survey questionnaire was collected from 81 young Korean immigrants. The results show that key research variables are significantly related to the psychological adjustment of young Korean immigrants. The findings of this study have theoretical implication that communication is at the heart of successful adaptation experiences among young immigrants. The practical implication is also discussed.

Keywords: Asian Americans, Immigrant adolescents, Cross-cultural adaptation, Communication competence, Psychological health

Introduction

Because of globalization, many people relocate across different cultural and national boundaries. To successfully resettle in the new host cultural environment, immigrants need a certain level of cross-cultural adaptation. Accommodating the new value systems, immigrants experience substantial (acculturative) stress, such as feeling a loss of control, feeling helpless, having less self-confidence (Torbiro, 1982), experiencing role conflict (Naditch & Morissey, 1976), surmounting verbal and nonverbal communication barriers (Dyal & Dyal, 1981), and coping with emotional difficulties due to personality types (Padilla, Wagatsuma & Lindholm, 1985).

Along with their parents, young immigrants experience the normative stresses in the new country, such as anxiety, stress, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor concentration, nervousness, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, feelings of inadequacy, depression, anger, tension, identity crisis, and poor physical health (Baptiste, 1993; Evans & Lee, 1998). The young immigrants are often caught in intercultural conflicts between their co-ethnic group and the dominant society.

Previous studies on cross-cultural adaptation have been mostly focused on adult immigrant samples (e.g., Chataway & Berry, 1989; Ghaffarian, 1987; Sam, 2000), and limited attention has been given to young children or adolescents of immigrant families. Particularly, study of Asian immigrant youth has been limited because of the "model minority" stereotype, which leads to the belief that Asian immigrant youths have few or no emotional or adaptive problems (Chiu & Ring, 1998). However, despite the limited nature of research on Asian American students, two studies reveal that the young Asian immigrant population experiences serious developmental, social, and emotional difficulties (Lee, 1996; Sue, Sue, Sue, & Takeuchi, 1995). The shooting incident at Virginia Tech brought temporary attention to Asian American youth, but the shooter was seen by many as an exception in a normally "model" minority.

Among Asian American ethnic groups, Korean Americans are one of the fastest growing. According to the census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001), approximately 1.1 million Korean Americans live in the United States. One-third of this population was made up of children and adolescents. The "1.5 generation" (*ilchomose*, in Korean) refers to Koreans who immigrated in childhood or adolescence with their parents, having been educated both in Korea and in America (Hurh, 1993, 1998), while "second-generation Korean Americans" refers to those who are born in the U.S. to Korean immigrant parents. Unlike their first-generation parents and second-generation peers born in the United States, 1.5ers have been socialized in both Korean and American cultures and share some cultural values and beliefs of each. Growing up in a bicultural world is more stressful than growing up in a monocultural society (e.g., Fernandez-Kelly & Schauffler, 1994; Harrison & Bluestone, 1988; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1996). The rapid growth of the Korean American population and the limited study about this group demonstrate that the Asian youth issue also needs close attention.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore communication competence and cross-cultural adaptation among young Korean immigrants (1.5ers) in the United States. In particular, the present study is to examine (1) the relationships between their host/ethnic communication patterns and their psychological adjustment, (2) the relationship between their host/ethnic interpersonal communication and their psychological adjustment, and (3) the relationship between their host/ethnic mass communication and their psychological adjustment.

Theoretical Grounding

Guiding this investigation is Y. Y. Kim's Cross-cultural Adaptation Theory (1988, 2001, 2005). Based on System perspective, Kim (2001) defines cross-cultural adaptation as "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (p. 31). In Kim's integrative model, communication is perceived as "a necessary vehicle without which adaptation cannot take place" (Kim, 2005, p. 379), because it serves as "an essential mechanism that connects" people from another culture to the host society (Kim, 1977, p. 407). In and through contact and communication, immigrants acquire knowledge of the host language, culture, worldviews, beliefs, norms, and rules of social conduct and interpersonal relationships; they learn to resonate emotionally and aesthetically with natives (Kim, 1997).

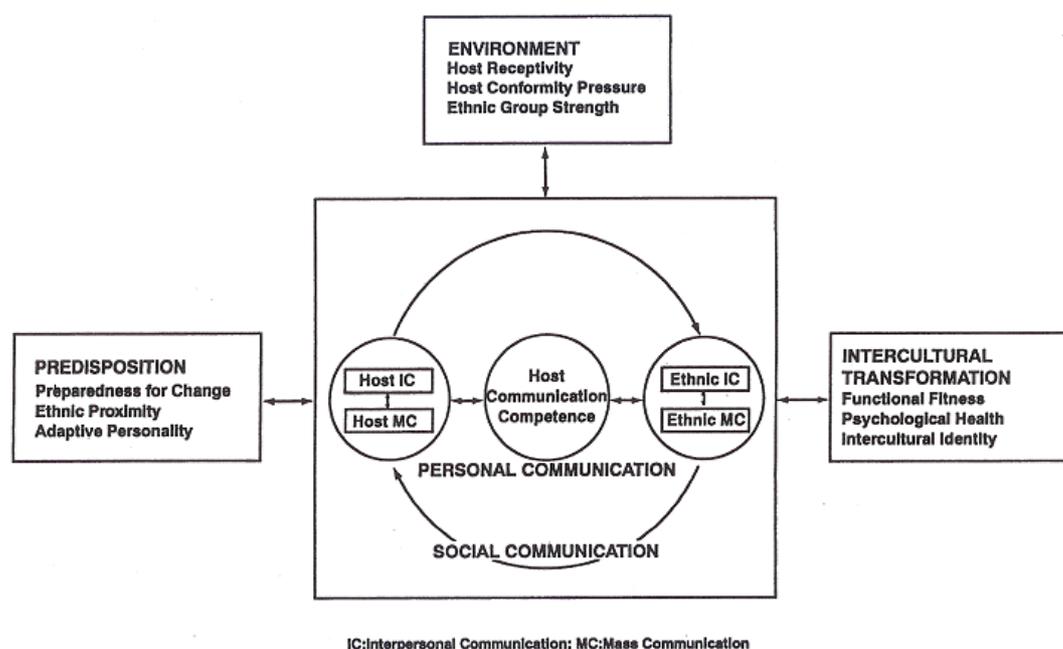
The core of this structure is the dimension of personal communication, or *host communication competence* (Dimension 1), which is defined as the cognitive, affective and operational capacity to communicate in accordance with the host communication symbols and meaning systems. This dimension serves as the very engine that pushes individuals along the adaptive path. Inseparably linked with host communication competence are the activities of *host social communication* (Dimension 2), through which strangers participate in the

interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host environment. Activities of *ethnic social communication* (Dimension 3) provide distinct, subcultural experiences of interpersonal and mass communication with their fellow co-ethnics. When immigrants can express their own cognitive and affective experience and communicate that experience to others in the host society, they have acquired a sufficient level of *host communication competence* (Kim, 1977, 1988). This communication competence can only be achieved through participating in social communication in the host society, including interpersonal communication and mass communication activities (Kim, 1977, 1988, 1997).

Just as it is through communication that immigrants acquire host communication competence, so it is through their host communication competence that their degree of cross-cultural adaptation is revealed. Interacting with these personal and social (host, ethnic) communication activities are the conditions of the *host environment* (Dimension 4), including the degrees of receptivity and conformity pressure in the local population as well as the strength of the immigrant's ethnic group. The individual's *predisposition* (Dimension 5) — consisting of preparedness for the new environment, proximity (or distance) of the individual's ethnicity to that of the natives, and the adaptive personality attributes of openness, strength, and positivity — influences their subsequent development in personal and social communication activities.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Y. Y. Kim's Structural Model: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Source: Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 87).



Together, all of the factors identified above directly or indirectly contribute to explaining and predicting differential rates or levels of *intercultural transformation* (Dimension 6) within a given time period. As the outcome of cross-cultural adaptation, the theory identifies three key facets of intercultural transformation: increased functional fitness, psychological health and the emergence of an identity orientation that reaches beyond a single culture.

The level of intercultural transformation, in turn, helps to explain and predict the levels of all other dimensions. The six dimensions of factors together constitute an interactive and functional model, in which all the linkages indicate mutual stimulations (and not unidirectional causations), identified in 21 theorems (see Y. Y. Kim, 2001, pp. 91-92).

Hypotheses

Y. Y. Kim's theory is a culture-general theory. Many existing concepts of cross-cultural adaptation from different interdisciplinary approaches are incorporated and the more generic concepts are adopted to explain the individual adaptation experience. For example, the term "strangers" incorporates various existing terms such as immigrants, refugees, and sojourners, and the term "adaptation" is used broadly, incorporating more specific terms such as assimilation, acculturation, integration, and adjustment, thereby integrating the two existing separate areas — studies of long-term and short-term adaptation (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 90).

In the structural model, the theoretical relationships among key constructs are presented in theorems. Particularly, as the core of the adaptation process, the predictive relationship among host communication competence, social communication (i.e., interpersonal/mass communication), and psychological health is formalized in three of Y. Y. Kim's 21 theorems: "The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation" (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity) (Theorem 3)

(Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p.91); "The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation" (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity) (Theorem 5) (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 91); "The greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the intercultural transformation (Theorem 6) (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 91).

To test the theoretical linkages among the theorem constructs involving host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, and psychological health, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

H1: The greater the degree of young immigrants' self-reported host communication competence, the less likely they will be to display psychological problems.

H2a: The greater the degree of young immigrants' self-reported host interpersonal communication, the less likely they will be to display psychological problems.

H2b: The greater the degree of young immigrants' self-reported ethnic interpersonal communication, the more likely they will be to display psychological problems.

H3a: The greater the degree of young immigrants' self-reported host mass media consumption, the less likely they will be to display psychological problems.

H3b: The greater the degree of young immigrants' self-reported ethnic mass media consumption, the more likely they will be to display psychological problems.

In addition, one research question was posed in this study to explore the relationship between identity orientation and psychological health:

RQ1: How is the self-described cultural identity of young Korean immigrants related to their psychological problems?

Methods

To collect the data, the present study employed a standardized and self-administered survey questionnaire to collect the numeric data from young Korean immigrants (1.5ers) in the United States.

Participants

The participants were young Korean-American immigrants (called 1.5 generation or 1.5ers) who were born in South Korea and came to the United States at a relatively young age. Thus, second generation Korean immigrants (who were born and raised in the U.S.) were not included in the present study. The minimum age of the participants was set at 12 years old, considering the level of maturity enough to respond to survey questions regarding their communication and adaptation experiences. A total of 81 Korean-American immigrants participated in the present study. Out of the 81 participants, 43.2 percent were male ($n = 35$) and 56.8 percent ($n = 46$) were female. At the time of the survey, nine respondents (11.1%) were attending middle school, forty-two (51.9%) were attending high school, twenty-eight (34.6%) were university students, and two (2.5%) were college graduates. The average age of the participants was 17.71 years, with a standard deviation of 4.01 years (range: 12-30 years). The average length of stay was 7.18 years, with a standard deviation of 4.21 years (range: 7 months-22.1 years). The average age when they first moved to the States was 10.51 years, with a standard deviation of 4.14 years (range: 1-17 years). Regarding the self-reported cultural identity, 38.3 percent of the respondents identified themselves as Korean ($n = 31$), 56.8 percent as Korean-American ($n = 46$), and 2.5 percent as American ($n = 2$). Regarding the percentages of Asian students in their school population, the respondents reported: less than 1 percent ($n = 15$); 2-10% ($n = 46$); 11-30% ($n = 10$); more than 30% ($n = 6$). Regarding cultural diversity events in their school, fifty-four respondents (66.7%) replied that their schools have cultural diversity events, while twenty-three (28.4%) replied there are no diversity events in their schools.

Data collection procedure

The survey questionnaire was originally written in English. This English questionnaire was translated into the Korean language by a Korean American bilingual interpreter. Then, following Brislin's (1980) suggestion, the Korean language version of the questionnaire was *back-translated* into English again by the bilingual interpreter to ensure equivalence of meanings across the two language systems (i.e., English and Korean). The questionnaire was pilot-tested by three Korean Americans in the local church where the investigator attends. Based on the pilot test results, the wording of the questionnaire was modified.

Because of the difficulty of obtaining a reliable complete list of young Korean immigrants in the area, this study employs convenience sampling combined with a snowball technique to recruit the participants. To recruit survey participants, the investigator contacted Korean church leaders (e.g., pastors, youth ministers, etc.) and parents in the central Tennessee area and asked them for a list of young Korean Americans, also asking them to encourage the youth to participate in the study. In addition, the investigator contacted colleagues in other states (New York and Florida) and asked for collaboration on this study. To collect the data, after getting consent from local church leaders, the investigator visited churches and administered the questionnaire. Upon the participants' written consent (signing the written consent form), the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the investigator in person. The respondents were then asked to suggest other potential participants for the survey. For the participants in New York and Florida, the survey questionnaires were mailed and the researcher's colleagues administered the questionnaires, collected them, and mailed them back to the investigator. In all cases, the respondents were allowed to choose between an English version and a Korean language version. Most of the respondents (98% of the respondents ($n = 92$)) chose the English version. It took 30-40 minutes to complete the survey. In total, 110 questionnaires were distributed and 94 questionnaires were returned, resulting in 86% return rate (69 from central Tennessee; 6 from Florida; and 19 from New York). Out of 94 returned questionnaires, after bad data were excluded, 81 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

The Measurements

The four theoretical constructs mentioned above were examined in the present analysis (i.e., host/ethnic communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication, host/ethnic mass media usage, psychological adaptation) and were mostly operationalized into a five-point Likert-type scale. The reliability of the scale was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

Host/Ethnic Communication Competence. The eight items measuring host and ethnic communication competence (four items for host communication competence and another four items for ethnic communication competence) were adapted from Lee & Chen's (2000) Host and Native Communication Competence (HNCC) scale. The answers were selected using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = poor, 5 =

excellent). The wording of the scales was slightly modified. The four items measuring host communication competence were: 1) "How well do you speak English?"; 2) "How well do you understand spoken English?"; 3) "How well do you read English?"; 4) "How well do you write in English?". The four items measuring ethnic communication competence concerned the same areas (i.e., speaking, understanding, reading, and writing) of Korean language competence. A higher score suggests a greater level of host/ethnic communication competence. The reliability test yielded an alpha coefficient of .95 for host communication competence and .91 for ethnic communication competence, clearly indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication. Host and ethnic interpersonal communication was measured in terms of the young Korean immigrants' interpersonal ties with host nationals and co-ethnics (i.e., other Koreans). Adapted from the study of Lee & Chen (2000) and slightly modified, the respondents were requested to indicate the frequency of their contact and feelings about their relationships with host and co-ethnic groups. The answers used a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = never; 5 = always). A higher score indicates a higher level of host/ethnic interpersonal communication, respectively. The three items measuring host interpersonal communication were: 1) "How often do you invite Caucasian friends to your house?"; 2) "How often are you invited to your Caucasian friends' gatherings?"; 3) "Do you actively participate in activities with Caucasians?". The three items measuring ethnic interpersonal communication were: 1) "How often do you invite Korean friends to your house?"; 2) "How often are you invited to your Korean friends' gatherings?"; 3) "How often do you feel isolated from others because of your race?". The composite scale yielded an alpha coefficient of .74 for host interpersonal communication and .68 for ethnic interpersonal communication, suggesting moderate but acceptable standards of internal consistency (cf. Nunnally, 1978).

Host/Ethnic Mass Communication. Host and ethnic mass media consumption were assessed. The scale items were adapted from Kim's immigration study (1977) and modified. The response categories mostly used four-point items scales (e.g., 1 = none; 4 = more than 3 hours a day or 1 = none; 4 = more than 3 hours a week). Items for host mass media consumption included: 1) "How much time do you usually spend using English-language websites daily?"; 2) "How much time do you spend listening to American music weekly?"; 3) "How much time do you usually spend reading English story books/novels/fiction/magazines/newspapers weekly?"; 4) "In a typical week, how much time do you spend watching American movies/TV/videos?"; 5) "In a typical week, how much time do you spend listening to American radio programs?". Items for ethnic mass media consumption included: 1) "How much time do you usually spend using Korean-language websites daily?"; 2) "How much time do you spend listening to Korean music weekly?"; 3) "How much time do you usually spend reading Korean story books/novels/fiction/magazines/newspapers (Korean language) weekly?"; 4) "In a typical week, how much time do you spend watching Korean movies/TV/videos (Korean language)?".

The composite scale yielded an alpha coefficient of .64 for host mass media consumption and .76 for ethnic mass media consumption, indicating moderate but acceptable standards of internal consistency (cf. Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

Psychological Health. Psychological health was assessed in terms of psychological problems in two ways, by measuring the degrees of reported "alienation" and "depression." Alienation and depression were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). To assess alienation, six items from the 10-item measure of Y. Y. Kim's (1980) Indochinese refugees study were slightly modified: 1) "My life in the U.S. has been very stressful"; 2) "I feel awkward and out of place living in the United States"; 3) "It is difficult for me to understand the American way of life"; 4) "I feel lonely"; 5) "I feel that American people do not like me"; 6) "I frequently have thoughts of wanting to leave America and just go back to Korea." A higher score implies a higher level of alienation, indicating a lower level of psychological health. The composite scale yielded an alpha of .70, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency. Depression was assessed by six items adapted from the How-I-Feel questionnaire (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984). Items were slightly modified: 1) "It is hard for me to make friends"; 2) "I have lots of friends"; 3) "It is hard to get other kids to like me"; 4) "I get along with my classmates"; 5) "I feel left out"; 6) "I feel that I have nothing to be proud of." Item #2 and item #4 have been recoded. Thus, a higher score implies a higher level of depression, suggesting a lower level of psychological health. The composite scale yielded an alpha of .77, suggesting an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Background information. Information was collected like gender, age, length of stay in the U.S., age when they first moved to the U.S., education, percentage of Asian students in their school, cultural diversity events in the school (yes or no) and self-described cultural identity ("Select one of the following that best describes the way you feel about yourself") with options of Korean, Korean-American, American, and Other. Finally, an open-ended question requested that respondents provide any comments about the survey.

Results

The results of the present analysis are presented based on statistical analysis of the structured questionnaire survey data testing the four research hypotheses.

Preliminary Analysis

This section reports the descriptions of the major research variables based on means and standard deviations. Host/ethnic communication competence shows a mean score higher than 3 (M [ethnic communication competence (i.e., Korean language competence)] = 4.02, SD = 0.96; M [host communication competence] = 3.90, SD = 1.01). For psychological problems, the mean score shows lower than 3 for alienation (M = 2.14, SD = 0.61) and for depression (M = 2.13, SD = 0.65). The mean scores for mass media consumption (host/ethnic) and interpersonal communication (host/ethnic) show less than 3 (M [ethnic (Korean) mass media] = 2.69, SD = 0.76; M [host mass media] = 2.62, SD = 0.61; M [host interpersonal communication] = 2.86, SD = 0.94; M [ethnic interpersonal communication] = 2.70, SD = 0.83).

Along with this general description, the effect of gender difference on the research variables was examined. A t-test analysis shows no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between male and female participants on key research variables (Refer to the table 1).

In addition, correlational analysis was conducted to examine relationships between the background variables and key research variables. Among the background variables, length of stay, the age when they moved to the U.S., the percentage of Asian students in their school, cultural diversity events in school, and self-described cultural identity were found significantly related to the key research variables. Length of stay was positively related to host mass communication (r = .30, p < .05), host communication competence (r = .36, p < .01), and ethnic interpersonal communication (r = .22, p < .05) while being negatively related to ethnic communication competence (r = -.43, p < .01), alienation (r = -.28, p < .05) and depression (r = -.21, p < .05). Clearly, the longer they stayed in the U.S., the less their ethnic language competence became, and they were less likely to have psychological problems as they came to understand the host culture more. At the same time, the longer their stay in the U.S., the better their host communication competence and the more host mass media consumption they are likely to have. Also, they tend to broaden their friendship with co-ethnics. Age when they moved to the U.S. was positively related to the use of ethnic (i.e., Korean) mass media (r = .33, p < .01) and ethnic communication competence (r = .48, p < .01) while being

negatively related to host mass media use ($r = -.29, p < .01$), host interpersonal communication ($r = -.31, p < .01$) and host communication competence ($r = -.53, p < .01$). Obviously, when they moved to the U.S. at an older age, the higher level of ethnic language competence they had achieved and they were more likely to use ethnic mass media. In addition, they were less likely to be competent in the host language (although there might be individual differences), were unwilling to use host mass media, and were less likely to be willing to establish and maintain wide interpersonal ties with host nationals. Age when they moved to the U.S. was also found to be related to alienation ($r = .33, p < .01$) and depression ($r = .45, p < .01$) (two indicators for psychological health). This suggests that those who moved to the States at older age tend to have more stress and more psychological difficulty adapting to the host culture. The percentage of Asian students in school was found to be positively related to only ethnic interpersonal communication ($r = .33, p < .01$). Obviously, a more ethnically diverse school environment tends to give a greater interaction potential with co-ethnics or other minority students. Cultural diversity events in school was negatively related to only ethnic mass communication ($r = -.20, p < .05$) and ethnic interpersonal communication ($r = -.21, p < .05$). It suggests that in the environment with less cultural diverse events, young immigrants tend to be less motivated to have encounters with co-ethnics and use ethnic mass media.

There were significant negative relationships between self-described cultural identity and key research variables such as ethnic mass communication ($r = -.39, p < .01$), ethnic communication competence ($r = -.51, p < .01$), alienation ($r = -.36, p < .01$), and depression ($r = -.27, p < .01$).

In addition, the self-described identity had a positive relationship with host mass communication ($r = .42, p < .01$) and host communication competence ($r = .26, p < .01$). Clearly if young immigrants tend to be closer to main stream American society (e.g., Korean-American or American) in their cultural identity orientation, they are more likely to show a greater level of host communication competence (i.e., English) and host mass media consumption while showing a lesser level of ethnic mass media consumption, ethnic communication competence, and a lesser level of psychological problems (i.e., alienation and depression).

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 posits that a greater level of young immigrants' host communication competence is related to fewer psychological problems. The results of the correlational analysis clearly support this hypothesis. Host communication competence is negatively related to alienation, with $r = -.35 (p < .01)$, and also negatively related to depression, with $r = -.57 (p < .01)$. This suggests that the greater the level of host communication competence (i.e., host language competence), the fewer psychological problems are displayed among young immigrants.

Hypothesis 2a posits that a greater degree of young immigrants' host interpersonal communication is related to fewer psychological problems. The results of the correlational analysis also support this hypothesis. Host interpersonal communication is negatively related to alienation, with $r = -.45 (p < .01)$, and also negatively related to depression, with $r = -.58 (p < .01)$. This result suggests that with a higher level of interpersonal networks with host nationals (e.g., having and interacting with more American friends), young immigrants exhibit fewer psychological problems.

Hypothesis 2b, predicting that a greater level of ethnic interpersonal communication is related to more psychological problems, was partially supported. Correlations show the significant relationship between ethnic interpersonal ties and alienation ($r = .21, p < .05$) while there is no significant relationship with depression ($r = .17, p > .05$). This suggests that personal networks with co-ethnics (i.e., Koreans) tend to lead to more psychological problems (e.g., alienation) among young Korean immigrants.

Hypothesis 3a posits that a greater degree of young immigrants' host mass media consumption is related to fewer psychological problems. This hypothesis was supported. Correlational analysis shows that host mass media consumption is negatively related to alienation ($r = -.34, p < .01$) and depression ($r = -.35, p < .01$). This result suggests that the more young immigrants use host mass media, the less likely they are to have psychological problems.

Hypothesis 3b, predicting that a greater degree of ethnic mass media consumption is related to more psychological problems, was supported. According to correlational analysis, ethnic mass media use is positively related to psychological problems: alienation ($r = .39, p < .01$) and depression ($r = .35, p < .01$). Clearly, those who use more ethnic mass media tend to show more psychological problems.

Multiple regression was performed to examine the overall influence of independent factors—host/ethnic communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication, and host/ethnic mass communication along with background variables on the dependent variables of alienation and depression, respectively. Together all these factors were found to explain 53% of the variance in alienation ($r^2 = .528$) and 63% in depression ($r^2 = .564$). Host interpersonal communication and educational background were found to be statistically significant predictive factors in alienation ($Beta [host interpersonal communication] = -.300, p < .01$; $Beta [educational background] = .561, p < .01$).

In addition, host interpersonal communication and host communication competence were found to be statistically significant predictive factors in depression ($Beta [host interpersonal communication] = -.248, p < .01$; $Beta [host communication competence] = -.221, p < .01$).

Research Question

One research question was posed regarding the respondents' self-described cultural identity (e.g., Korean, Korean-American, American) and its relationship to psychological problems. Korean ($n = 31$), Korean American ($n = 46$), and American ($n = 2$). Because of relatively small sample size of self-identified American ($n = 2$), t-test was conducted to compare means between self-identified Korean ($n = 31$) and self-identified Korean-American ($n = 46$).

There was a statistically significant effect of cultural identity orientation on "alienation" and "depression": Alienation (*Korean* [$M = 2.35, SD = .60$]; *Korean-American* [$M = 1.96, SD = .56$], $t(75) = 2.933, p = .004$) and depression (*Korean* [$M = 2.36, SD = .61$]; *Korean-American* [$M = 1.96, SD = .65$], $t(75) = 2.678, p = .009$), while this result needs to be interpreted with caution because of unequal sample size (Refer to the table 2).

As shown in the preliminary analysis, there were a significant negative relationship between self-described cultural identity and alienation ($r = -.36, p < .01$) and depression ($r = -.27, p < .05$). Overall, it suggests that the more the respondents identify themselves into the dominant society and culture, the fewer psychological problems they are likely to have.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study has been to explore the communication competence and psychological health of young Korean immigrants (1.5ers) in the United States. Three hypotheses have been derived from portions of Y. Y. Kim's (2001) integrative theory. As predicted, the hypothesized links between host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, and host mass media consumption and psychological health have been supported.

As proposed in [hypothesis 1](#), the better host communication competence (i.e., a host language) young Korean immigrants have achieved, the fewer psychological problems they might have, achieving better psychological health. Thus, the young Korean immigrants who have greater host communication competence (i.e., English competence) tend to adjust to the host cultural environment better. Obviously, as Kim's theory indicates, host communication competence is the primary vehicle for proper functioning in a different host cultural environment among young Asian immigrants.

Consistent with [hypothesis 2a](#), predicting the relationship between host interpersonal communication and psychological health, the more interpersonal ties with host nationals young immigrants maintain, the fewer psychological problems they are likely to have. Thus, the young immigrants who maintain high degrees of interpersonal ties with host nationals (i.e., Americans) tend to have fewer psychological problems, and better psychological adjustment to the host cultural environment. In addition, [hypothesis 2b](#), predicting the relationship between ethnic interpersonal communication and more psychological problems was partially supported. The ethnic interpersonal communication is significantly related to "[alienation](#)" (one of the indicators of psychological problems) while there is no significant relationship between ethnic interpersonal communication and "[depression](#)." This might suggest that while the ethnic interpersonal communication does not necessarily lead to depression, the tendency of maintaining the interpersonal networks with co-ethnics might confine the personal networks and reduce the chance of understanding the dominant culture, resulting in adjustment problems.

As [hypothesis 3a](#) proposes, a greater level of host mass media consumption is related to fewer psychological problems among young Korean immigrants. Obviously, the consumption of host mass media is an important channel through which young immigrants have indirect contact with the host society and acquire knowledge about it. Also, it might be assumed that the host media help them improve their host language (i.e., English), which in turn enhances their psychological adjustment. [Hypothesis 3b](#), which posits the relationship between greater ethnic mass media consumption and more psychological problems was supported. Thus, the more young immigrants are connected to ethnic media, the less likely they are to have an opportunity to have to access to the system of the mainstream society, resulting in psychological problems.

The findings from the present analysis have significant theoretical implications. Although studies of immigrants' adaptation have been widely conducted, study among young immigrants has been relatively scarce. This study might fill this gap and provide some insight about the rarely visited issue of young immigrants' adaptation. The present study was also conducted according to a fully developed, integrative theory. This suggests that Y. Y. Kim's (2001) theoretical concepts (host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, and host mass media consumption) provide a useful foundation for examining young immigrants' cross-cultural adjustment experience. The present study clearly demonstrates reciprocal influence between host language competence, interpersonal contact and interaction with host nationals, host mass media usage and a higher level of psychological experiences of stress and dissatisfaction in the host environment. These findings are consistent with the findings of many previous cross-cultural adaptation studies of various kinds of individuals including immigrants (e.g., Y. Y. Kim, 1977), refugees (e.g., Y. Y. Kim, 1980), international students (e.g., Maruyama, 1998; Zimmerman, 1995), and business expatriates (e.g., Bell & Harrison, 1996; Johnson et al., 2003; Kim & Kim, 2007; Y. S. Kim, 2001). As such, the study strengthens the central argument in Y. Y. Kim's culture-general theory, that is, that communication

is at the heart of all successful adaptation experiences regardless of the specificities of time and place.

Without doubt, communication plays a primary role in the cross-cultural adaptation process of young Korean immigrants (1.5ers). Thus, the better young immigrants acquire host language competence (i.e., English), the fewer psychological problems they are likely to have and the more likely they are to achieve a greater psychological adaptation. Also, the more actively they are engaged in interpersonal relationships with host nationals and the more they consume host mass media, the fewer psychological problems they might have, resulting in a better psychological adaptation.

In addition, the result of the research question regarding the relationship between the self-described cultural identity and its relationship with psychological problems, shows the effect of cultural identity orientation on psychological problems. Clearly, those who tend to connect themselves to dominant American culture (e.g., Korean-American or American) are less likely to have psychological problems, enhancing their psychological adjustment in the U.S.

One 19 year-old respondent included a comment about her cultural adjustment experience in an open-ended comment section in the questionnaire: "Feeling out of place in a foreign place is inevitable; you just have to make the best of it. I feel a sense of belonging here because I have made the effort to assimilate and to surround myself with Americans, but for those who are always around Koreans (Korean Americans) I'm sure it's harder to find this place their home." While the study needs follow-up interviews to acquire qualitative insights, this clearly indicates that the young immigrant's level of host communication competence and host interpersonal communication is the primary key to successful adjustment.

The present study has also practical implications. As Korean-American community leaders and professionals are in need of empirical data on the lives of these young immigrants in order to develop interventions and support programs, findings from this study could help community leaders, teachers, and parents have a better understanding of how young immigrants adapt to their new environment. As illustrated in the research findings, to help young immigrants psychologically adjust to their host environment, adults can help them establish host language competence (i.e., mastering English), educate them to broaden interpersonal networks with host nationals, and guide them to good quality host mass media. The findings will also help professionals to develop culture-specific knowledge and competency in providing services when working with clients from other cultural contexts.

Limitations and Suggestions

Limitations need to be mentioned. With the small sample size (i.e., 81 participants) and non-probability sampling method (convenience sampling combined with snow ball sampling), the results of the present study should be generalized with caution for all young Asian immigrants in the U.S. The cultural identity has been simply operationalized into self-identification of the respondent. Given that cultural identity is one of the important research agendas for young immigrant groups, in the future, to examine the cultural identity in more

detail, scale items including multiple questions need to be used.

The present study is based on the quantitative data collected by a structured survey. In the future, interviews could provide more qualitative insight to the study, which would help researchers understand the reality that young Asian immigrants face in different host cultural environments and their individual adaptation experiences.

The present study included communication competence variables to test theoretical linkages predicted in Y. Y. Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory. The future study could be beneficial if we incorporate other variables like host environment (i.e., host receptivity, host conformity pressure) and predispositional factors (e.g., personality). In addition, this exploratory study could be expanded into a similar study with different ethnic groups (e.g., Vietnamese adolescents, Hispanic adolescents, etc.), the results of which would provide culture-universal principles on how to promote communication competence and enhance young immigrants' effective adaptation to mainstream American society.

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Appendix

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Key Research Variables for Male and Female

Variable	Male		Female	
	M	SD	M	SD
Host/Ethnic Mass Communication				
-Ethnic (Korean) Mass Media Consumption	2.48	.73	2.68	.78
-Host Mass Media Consumption	2.61	.61	2.63	.61
Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication				
-Host Interpersonal Communication	2.91	1.05	2.82	.85
-Ethnic Interpersonal Communication	2.62	.86	2.76	.80
Host/ethnic Communication Competence				
-Host Communication Competence	3.87	1.00	3.91	1.01
-Ethnic Communication Competence	3.80	1.05	4.18	.86
Psychological Health				
-Alienation	2.13	.62	2.14	.61
-Depression	2.19	.66	2.08	.65

Note: Indicating no significant gender difference.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Key Research Variables for Self-identified young Korean and Korean-American immigrants

Variable	Korean		Korean-American	
	M	SD	M	SD

Host/Ethnic Mass Communication				
-Ethnic (Korean) Mass Media**				
Consumption	2.96	.64	2.33	.74
-Host Mass Media Consumption**	2.34	.59	2.84	.52
Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication				
-Host Interpersonal Communication*	2.63	.94	3.07	.90
-Ethnic Interpersonal Communication	2.63	.90	2.75	.79
Host/ethnic Communication Competence				
-Host Communication Competence**	3.55	1.06	4.20	.88
-Ethnic Communication Competence**	4.61	.55	3.60	.98
Psychological Health				
-Alienation**	2.35	.60	1.96	.56
-Depression**	2.36	.61	1.96	.65

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ indicating significant differences

Table 3. Correlations among Key Research Variables

Variable	EMM	HMM	HIC	EIC	HCC	ECC	Alienation	Depression
Host/Ethnic Mass Communication								
-EMM	-.01							
-HMM								
Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication								
-HIC	-.32**	.24*						
-EIC	.09	.04	-.07					
Host/Ethnic Communication competence								
-HCC	-.30**	.37**	.55**	.16	-.06			
-ECC	.32**	-.08	-.09	-.04				
Psychological Health								
-Alienation	.39**	-.34**	-.45**	.21*	-.35**	.20**		
-Depression	.35**	-.35**	-.58**	.17	-.57**	.15	.61**	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note:

EMM =Ethnic mass media

HMM=Host mass media

HIC=Host interpersonal communication

EIC=Ethnic interpersonal communication

HCC=Host communication competence

ECC=Ethnic communication competence

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