# Workplace Ostracism Among **Immigrant** Workers: The Moderating Effect of Cultural Identity Salience and Interpersonal Harmony Value

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**Immigrant** employees face unique stressors such as language barriers, sociocultural stressors (e.g., differences in culture), lack of understanding of social norms, and work restrictions (e.g., visa restrictions), etc. known as acculturation demands (Bhagat & London, 1999), which makes them particularly vulnerable in the host cultural working environment. Other examples of acculturation demands in the workplace include but are not limited to the following: Lack of promotional opportunities, insufficient pay to support one's family, lack of proper work skills, being expected to work harder, and lack of respect from others (Bhagat & London, 1999; Cervantes et al., 1991). Acculturation demands are chronic stressors as they present ongoing threats that can last for an extend period of time. For example, the above-mentioned factors could still be salient to **immigrants** who have been in the host country for over 10+ years (Berry, 1997).

As a chronic stressor, acculturation demands deplete an **immigrant** employee's resources, sense of belonging, and self-esteem that can be used to establish positive interpersonal relationships. It is also linked to various psychological impacts such as anger, anxiety, depression, and perceived workplace ostracism (Bhagat & London, 1999; Berry, 1997). Workplace ostracism is defined as "the exclusion, rejection, or ignoring of an individual (or group) by another individual (or group) that hinders one's ability to establish or maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, or favorable reputation within one's place of work" (Hitlan et al., 2006, p. 217). Workplace ostracism threatens an **immigrant** employees' need to belong (Bilal et al., 2021) and is associated with low workplace engagement,

counterproductive work behaviors, anxiety, anger, and depression (Chow et al., 2008; Yang & Treadway, 2018).

Due to the pervasive nature of workplace ostracism, some scholars have noted that culture determines an individual's response to perceived workplace ostracism; however, this concept is understudied (Bilal et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2018). In this study, we aim to fill this gap by exploring the moderating effect of two culturally interpersonal values (i.e., heritage cultural identity salience [HCIS] and harmony enhancement [HE]) on the positive relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. We test this theoretical model (Figure 1) using both belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and Conservation of Resources (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) theories.
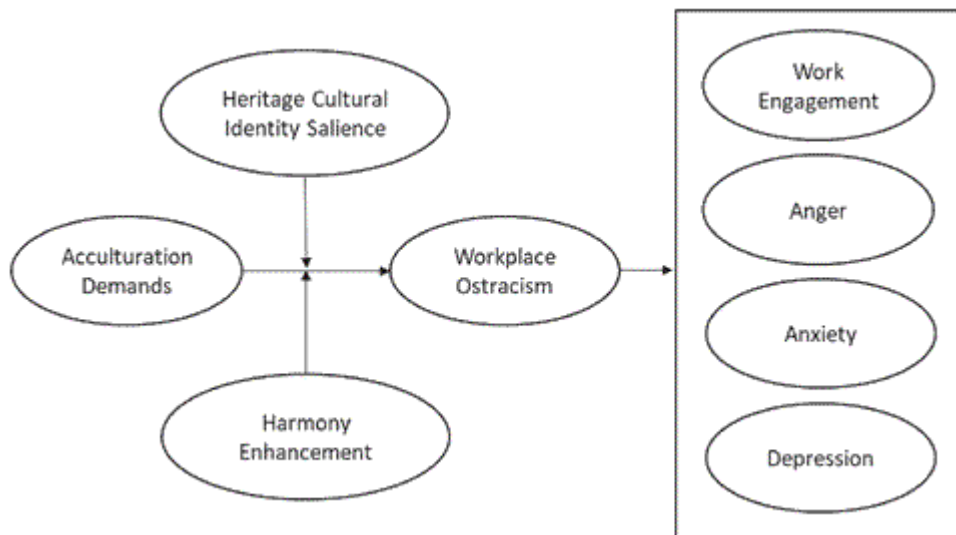

*Figure 1.*

Our study contributes to workplace ostracism literature in three ways. First, we add to the recently emerging research exploring predictors of workplace ostracism (Howard et al., 2020) by examining acculturation demands as unique antecedents for workplace ostracism experienced by **immigrant** workers. Second, we answer the call to explore the effect of culturally interpersonal values on workplace ostracism (Bilal et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2018). Third, at the practical level, workplace ostracism has unique consequences for **immigrant** employees, thus examining their experiences are crucial to develop a more culturally diverse workforce.

## Acculturation Demands and Workplace Ostracism Among Immigrant Workers

The existence of acculturation demands faced by **immigrant** workers is positively linked to their perceived workplace ostracism. Robinson et al. (2013) stated that workplace ostracism occurs when an individual or group fails to include another when it is socially appropriate to do so. However, what is considered socially appropriate may be individual and context specific (Robinson et al., 2013). Acculturation demands reduce the social and interpersonal resources that are necessary for **immigrant** employees to decipher what is socially appropriate (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). For example, acculturation demands such as language barriers and a lack of understanding of social norms/rules reduce an **immigrant** employee's social skills (a social resource) and ability to accurately interpret verbal and nonverbal cues during social interactions. According to the COR theory, individuals who lack resources are more susceptible to perceived or actual loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Theoretically, since acculturation demands deplete an **immigrant** employee's resources (e.g., social), they are more likely to

perceive workplace ostracism (e.g., interpersonal) in social interactions, even when those situations are harmless.

The belongingness theory ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)) explains the underlying mechanism to perceived workplace ostracism. Belongingness theory posits that human beings have an innate need to belong and maintain long-lasting positive relationships. Threats to an individual's need for belonging and social relationships lead to negative emotions, thought patterns, and behaviors ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)). Acculturation demands threaten an **immigrant** employee's need to belong because it depletes their social resources and weakens social connections. This may result in difficulties in coping and managing everyday encounters. **Immigrant** employees begin to experience feelings of invisibility and isolation coupled with low self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence ([Bhagat & London, 1999](#); [Sam & Berry, 2010](#)). Consequently, the likelihood of negatively interpreting ambiguous and benign social interactions as socially inappropriate increases, leading to perceived workplace ostracism. [Major and Setijadi (2014)](#) found acculturation demands such as unfamiliarity with social norms weakened social ties which led **immigrant** employees to feel socially invisible and perceive being ostracized from organizational activities. Taken together, we propose that acculturation demands are positively related to perceived workplace ostracism.

*Hypothesis 1:* Acculturation demands are positively related to workplace ostracism for **immigrant** workers.

## The Moderating Effect of Heritage Cultural Identity Salience

*HCIS* is the extent to which an **immigrant**'s heritage culture represents an integral part of their overall identity relative to other social roles ([Ting-Toomey et al., 2000](#)). Consistent with the COR theory, individuals experiencing resource depletion may attempt to protect existing resources from further depletion via various strategies such as acquiring new resources to minimize the risk of perceived workplace ostracism ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). As cultural identity plays a fundamental role in shaping social interactions and behaviors of **immigrants** ([Ting-Toomey et al., 2000](#)), the degree of HCIS may substantially affect the way **immigrant** employees perceive workplace ostracism. Thus, we propose for **immigrant** employees, HCIS might act as a buffer between acculturation demands and perceived workplace ostracism.

Specifically, compared with **immigrant** employees with low HCIS, those with high HCIS evaluate their heritage culture positively and are committed to maintaining strong interpersonal relationships with cultural group members ([Phinney, 1991](#); [Ting-Toomey et al., 2000](#)). When faced with acculturation demands, resources are a key mechanism that can ensure survival and positive well-being of **immigrant** employees. Cultural groups provide **immigrant**employees with resources and social support to replenish those that have been lost ([Sam & Berry, 2010](#)). For example, [Espinosa et al. (2018)](#) showed that strongly identifying with one's heritage cultural group can provide **immigrant** with both tangible and intangible resources, social resources to build relationships, as well as a shared perspective on the reality in the host culture. In line with several studies (e.g., [Cobb et al., 2019](#); [Espinosa et al., 2018](#); [Major & Setijadi, 2014](#)), we suggest that compared with **immigrant** employees low in HCIS, those high in HCIS are less likely to perceive workplace ostracism.

This is because the need to belong will determine an **immigrant** employee's sensitivity to perceive workplace ostracism ([Ward & Geeraert, 2016](#)). Ostracism implies the absence of a wanted behavior ([Robinson et al., 2013](#)). In the host cultural environment **immigrant** employees want to belong and since ostracism threatens that need, **immigrant** employees are likely to be sensitive to cues in the host cultural environment that they are accepted and fit in ([Berry, 1997](#); [Bhagat & London, 1999](#); [Ward & Geeraert, 2016](#)). [Baumeister and Leary (1995)](#) posits that individuals need a small amount of social connectedness to fulfill their need to belong. Cultural rituals, norms, and spiritual systems increase in importance of one's

heritage culture and reinforce a sense of cultural identity and pride in the **immigrant**. Thus, HCIS provides social connectedness needed to increase feelings of belongingness, purpose, self-esteem, and pride ([Ting-Toomey et al., 2000](#)). **Immigrant** employees high in HCIS have strong relationships and belonging with members of their heritage cultural group. They are less sensitive to perceive workplace ostracism because forming interpersonal relationships and belonging to the host cultural groups is of little interest to them ([Ting-Toomey et al., 2000](#)). Conversely, **immigrant** employees low in HCIS have a desire to belong to the heritage group and are consistently monitoring their social environment for cues that they fit in. As such they are more likely to perceive workplace ostracism. Taken together, we propose that HCIS has potential to buffer the positive relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism.

*Hypothesis 2a:* HCIS moderates the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. More specifically, the relationship will be stronger for individuals *low* in HCIS than for individuals high in HCIS.

## The Moderating Effect of Harmony Enhancement

[Leung et al. (2002)](#) proposed a dualistic view of harmony based on different harmony motives: Disintegration avoidance and harmony enhancement. Disintegration avoidance (DA) is defined as "avoiding action that will strain a relationship and lead to its weakening and dissolving," while HE is defined as "engaging in behaviors presumed to strengthen the relationships among the parties involved" ([Leung et al., 2011](#), p. 796). Although both DA and HE form the dualistic view of harmony, only HE is the focus of this article due to its approach-oriented nature ([Berry, 1997](#); [Leung et al., 2011](#)). The current literature has shown that interpersonal and approach-oriented coping strategies have a cushioning influence on the relationships between perceived workplace ostracism and its antecedents ([Berry, 1997](#); [Ward & Geeraert, 2016](#)).

Consistent with COR theory, interpersonal values like HE can influence how individuals conserve and replenish resource after loss and can help with coping by decreasing the occurrence of perceived workplace ostracism ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). Specifically, **immigrant** employees can activate HE to replace both social and personal resources. **Immigrants** high in HE seek to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., helping and working collaboratively on team projects) to collectively increase their resource pool and fit in, whereas **immigrants** low in HE are less interested in formulating positive relationships with others and may be more motivated by personal calculation and the pursuit of their self-interests ([Leung et al., 2002](#)). Theoretically, when **immigrant**employees face resource loss from acculturation demands, those high in HE are socially equipped to build their social network and increase their social and personal resources which in turn increase their inclusionary status and reduce perceived workplace ostracism. In contrast, **immigrant** employees with low HE are unable to build their social networks which further deplete resources, weaken social ties, and lead to perceive workplace ostracism more frequently.

Research on HE and workplace ostracism is relatively scare; therefore, we borrow from other areas to provide empirical support. Research that explores the moderating effect of acculturation strategies concluded that **immigrants** who establish strong interpersonal relationships within the host culture increased their social networks and reduced the impact of acculturation demands, perceived discrimination, and social exclusion. These findings show that establishing positive relationship within the host culture has a protective effect against negative factors for **immigrants** ([Gürlek, 2021](#); [Sam & Berry, 2010](#)). In addition, the belongingness theory ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)) helps explain **immigrant** employees' motivations toward perceived workplace ostracism. As suggested by the belonging theory, the need to belong serves as a motivation for goal-oriented behaviors when it remains unfulfilled. More specifically, if the need to belong is threatened, the individual will engage in reconciling behaviors to

demonstrate their value and be reinstated into the group or not ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)).Theoretically, when **immigrant** employees face acculturation demands that threaten their need to belong, those with high HE will activate pro-social behaviors because they want to reestablish positive relationships with their coworkers and others. They are less likely to perceive workplace ostracism because they will consistently be enacting those behaviors to ensure they fit in. On the contrary, when acculturation demands threaten one's need to control or meaningful existence, **immigrant** employees low in HE will engage in antisocial behavior (e.g., aggression or anger) and may be more likely to perceive workplace ostracism ([Gürlek, 2021](#); [Ryan, 2011](#); [Sam & Berry, 2010](#)). Taken together, we propose the boundary effect of HE on the relationship between acculturation demands and perceived workplace ostracism. *Hypothesis 2b:* HE moderates the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism for **immigrant** workers. More specifically, the relationship is stronger for **immigrant** workers *low* in HE than for **immigrant** workers high in HE.

### Acculturation Demands, Workplace Ostracism, and Immigrant Employees' Work Engagement/Job Strains

As an important stressor to **immigrant** workers, acculturation demands have been negatively associated with employee engagement and positively associated with job strains (e.g., [Bhagat & London, 1999](#)). Engagement is defined as a fulfilling and positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, absorption, and dedication ([Schaufeli et al., 2006](#)). Workplace ostracism has been known to affect organizational effectiveness and employee behaviors such as workplace engagement ([Ferris et al., 2007](#); [Leung et al., 2011](#)). Similarly, previous research has shown that acculturation demands are positively related to job strains, such as anger, anxiety, and depression for **immigrant** employees ([Bhagat et al., 2009](#); [Major & Setijadi, 2014](#)). Lastly, several studies have shown psychologically aversive reactions such as anger ([Chow et al., 2008](#); [Zadro et al., 2006](#)), depression ([Goodwin et al., 2010](#)), and anxiety ([Zadro et al., 2006](#)) to workplace ostracism including for **immigrant** employees ([Espinosa et al., 2018](#)).
As discussed previously, the general premise of COR theory is that individuals will experience negative psychological and workplace outcomes when they are unable to replenish their lost resources ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). Belongingness theory also posits that individuals experience negative psychological and work outcomes when their need for belonging is thwarted ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)). Workplace ostracism depletes resources and thwarts the need to belong ([Williams, 2009](#)) which are crucial to cope with acculturation demands. This will result in decreased psychological well-being and poor organizations outcomes. Drawing from both COR and belongingness theory, we propose the mediating effect of workplace ostracism.
*Hypothesis 3:* Workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between acculturation demands and **immigrant** workers' work engagement and job strains (i.e., anxiety, anger, and depressive symptoms).

### The Moderated Mediation Models

As per H2a, we predict that HCIS buffers the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. As per H3, we predict workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace outcomes. Taken together, we propose a first-stage moderated mediation model with HCIS moderating the *a* path.
*Hypothesis 4a:* Acculturation demands are related to **immigrant** workers' work engagement and job strains through workplace ostracism. The relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism is moderated by HCIS. The mediational relationship is stronger for employees *low* in HCIS than for those high in HCIS.

As per H2b, we predict that HCIS buffers the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. As per H3, we predict workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. Thus, we propose another first-stage moderated mediation model, with HE moderating the *a* path.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Acculturation demands are related to **immigrant** workers' work engagement/job strains through workplace ostracism. The relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism is moderated by HE. The mediating relationship is stronger for employees low in HE than for those higher in HE.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

**Immigrant** workers were recruited from a large health system in the Northeast of the **U.S**., from Amazon Mechanical Turk (mTurk) workers who were qualified for this research project and from the first author's personal social network. We used three criteria to select our participants. (a) **immigrant** workers who were 18 years or older, (b) worked in a **U.S**.-based organization, and (c) had full-time jobs at the time of the survey. We limited our participants to those who did not speak English in their home country. Data were collected at two time points with 1-month interval. We measured acculturation demands, HCIS, HE, and workplace ostracism at Time 1 (T1). We also measured anger, anxiety, and engagement at T1 because workplace ostracism has been shown to have immediate effect on anger, anxiety, and work engagement ([Hales et al., 2016](#); [Zadro et al., 2006](#)). In contrast, depressive symptoms take time to develop. Therefore, we modeled and measured depressive symptoms at Time 2 (T2; e.g., [Liu, 2019](#)). Participation was anonymous. We asked three unique personal questions in both T1 and T2 surveys and used the answers to link T1 and T2 surveys.

### Amazon's Mechanical Turk

mTurk is an internet service for researchers to recruit participants for research studies with the reward of an appropriate fee ([Barger et al., 2011](#)). Validity of participants from mTurk (mTurkers) has been questioned ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#); [Barends & de Vries, 2019](#); [Hydock, 2018](#)), and prior research has indicated that properly screened mTurk-based samples can improve the psychometric quality, making the samples comparable and in some cases superior to other convenient samples such as undergraduate students ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#); [Barger et al., 2011](#); [Landers & Behrend, 2015](#)).

To minimize the risk of poor quality mTurk data, we recruited participants using best practices outlined by [Aguinis et al. (2020)](#). First, to qualify to participate in the study, mTurkers had to be **immigrant** master mTurkers (i.e., individuals with considerable experience working on the platform; [Aguinis et al., 2020](#)), based in the **U.S**., with a prior approval rating of 95% or greater from at least 1,000 completed surveys. Second, we established a required sample size and accounted for the high attrition rate of 20–30% for mTurkers ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#)). We requested 240 participants from mTurk, accounting for a 20% attrition rate. Lastly, we had clear rules regarding compensation ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#)). For example, participants had to correctly answer all attention check questions ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#)) and complete both surveys to be compensated $5.

A total of 320 **immigrant** workers completed Time 1 (T1) survey. A majority of 54.4% were female, 49.7% were between the ages of 25 and 34 years, 36.9% had a bachelor's degree, and 39.7% were Asian. In this sample, 18.4% had a length of stay (LOS) in the **U.S**. of less than 5 years, 20.6% of 6–10 years, 20.3% of 11–15 years, 14.4% of 16–20 years, 8.8% of 21–25 years, and 17.5% more than 25 years.

### Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all measures were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*).

Acculturation demands were measured using 10 items from Acculturation Stress Inventory–**Immigrant** form ([Cervantes et al., 1991](#)). The scale was designed for Latino **immigrants** in the **U.S**. We slightly modified the items, so they applied to general **immigrant** employees. A sample item was, "I have felt unaccepted by others because of my **immigrant** culture." Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all stressful*) to 5 (*extremely stressful*). We selected this inventory to measure the acculturation demands experienced by **immigrant** employees in the workplace and daily life because it mirrors the nature of acculturation demands/stressors and previous studies also used this scale to measure various acculturation demands/stressors in racially/ethnic diverse **immigrant** populations ([Bostean & Gillespie, 2017](#); [Kelly et al., 2018](#)).

HCIS was measured using the six-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) ([Phinney & Ong, 2007](#)). A sample item was "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own cultural group."

HE was measured using 11 items by [Leung et al. (2011)](#). A sample item was "Having an ability to interact with others harmoniously is vital for achieving major successes."

Workplace ostracism was measured using the 10-item Workplace Ostracism Scale (WOS) developed by [Ferris et al. (2007)](#). A sample item was "Others left the area when I entered."

Employee engagement was measured using the nine-item short form of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; [Schaufeli et al., 2006](#)). A sample item was "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work." Participants rated those statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always/every day*).

Anger and Anxiety were assessed using the three-item anger subscale and the four-item anxiety subscale of the Emotional Strain Scale ([Caplan, 1975](#)). A sample item for anger was "I have gotten angry." A sample item for anxiety was "I felt jittery." Participants were asked to rate how often they experienced each item over the past month on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never or a little*) to 4 (*most of the time*).

Depressive symptoms were assessed with four items [Radloff (1977)](#) Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). A sample item was "I could not get going." Participants were asked to rate how they felt during the past week on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (*most or all of the time*).

**Control Variables**

Previous research has found that **immigrants**' age, gender, and LOS were significantly related to acculturation demands ([Berry et al., 1987](#)). More specifically, individuals who immigrated at a younger age may have less acculturation demands than those who migrated later ([Kuo & Roysircar, 2004](#)), and women more so than men ([Glazer & Güzel, 2019](#)) may experience more acculturation demands. Data were analyzed with and without the control variables of age, gender, and LOS. However, as results were consistent, we reported the results with the control variables.

## Results

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 7.2 ([Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996](#)) to examine the discriminant validities of acculturation demand, HCIS, HE, workplace ostracism, engagement, anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Data supported the eight-factor model: $\chi^2(1,511)$ = 3333.74, $p < .001$, root mean square error of approximation (*RMSEA*) = .06, comparative fit index (*CFI*)= .96, standardized root mean squared residual (*SRMR*) = .08. We compared the eight-factor to a six-factor model with anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms combined into one factor. The model fit decreased significantly from the eight-factor model to the six-factor model: $\Delta\chi^2(13)$ = 901.29, $p < .001$. We further combined HCIS and HE into one factor, the model fit decreased significantly from the six-factor

model to the five-factor model: $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 1329.39$, $p < .001$. Finally, we tested a four-factor model by combining all outcome variables (work engagement, anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms). The model fit further decreased significantly, $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 1301.12$, $p < .001$. Taken together, our data provided support to the discriminant validities of the study variables.

Variable descriptions and correlations are presented in Table 1. To test the research hypotheses, we applied bootstrapping analysis using the PROCESS statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) macro (Model 4 and Model 7; Hayes, 2013). We controlled age, gender, and LOS in the analysis. All predictors were centered. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1**
*Descriptives and Correlations Among Major Variables*

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Gender (T1) | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age (T1) | −.04 | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. LOS (T1) | .12* | .46** | — | | | | | | | | |
| 4. AccDemand (T1) | −.13* | −.22** | −.32** | — | | | | | | | |
| 5. HCIS (T1) | .12* | −.01 | .02 | −.07 | — | | | | | | |
| 6. HE (T1) | .15** | .23** | .16** | −.35** | .46** | — | | | | | |
| 7. WOS (T1) | −.13* | −.13* | −.21** | .60** | −.19** | −.44** | — | | | | |
| 8. Anxiety (T1) | .04 | −.21** | −.19** | .52** | −.04 | −.21** | .55** | — | | | |
| 9. Anger (T1) | −.00 | −.10 | −.00 | .32** | −.05 | −.18** | .42** | .53** | — | | |
| 10. Engagement (T1) | .01 | .29** | .18** | −.33** | .25** | .39** | −.38** | −.40** | −.35** | — | |
| 11. Depressive symptoms (T2) | −.02 | −.10 | −.02 | .28** | −.18* | −.19* | .25** | .25** | .22* | −.07 | — |
| n | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 320 | 122 |
| M | 1.54 | 2.63 | 4.26 | 2.18 | 3.78 | 4.14 | 1.93 | 1.8 | 1.78 | 5.02 | 1.52 |
| SD | .50 | 1.05 | 1.73 | .92 | .89 | .75 | 1.29 | .60 | .70 | 1.17 | .60 |
| α | — | — | — | .92 | .89 | .94 | .98 | .67 | .78 | .93 | .89 |

*Note.* For gender, males were coded as 1 and females were coded as 2. LOS = length of stay; AccDemand = acculturation demands; HCIS=heritage cultural identity salience; HE = harmony enhancement; WOS = workplace ostracism.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

*Descriptives and Correlations Among Major Variables*

**Table 2**
*The Path Coefficients*

| | Workplace ostracism | | Engagement (T1) | Anger (T1) | Anxiety (T1) | Depressive symptoms (T2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 |
| Variable | b (SE) | b (SE) | b (SE) | b (SE) | b (SE) | b (SE) |
| Intercept | −.52 (.71) | −1.50 (.96) | 5.30*** (.34) | .97*** (.20) | .95*** (.15) | .90** (.28) |
| Age | .03 (.06) | .07 (.06) | .27*** (.07) | −.06 (.04) | −.06+ (.03) | −.04 (.05) |
| Gender | −.08 (.12) | −.003 (.11) | −.07 (.12) | .06 (.07) | .15** (.05) | −.009 (.10) |
| Length of stay | −.04 (.04) | −.03 (.04) | −.01 (.04) | .06** (.02) | .004 (.02) | .03 (.03) |
| AccDemand | 1.56*** (.27) | 2.26*** (.35) | −.14+ (.18) | .11* (.05) | .18*** (.04) | .16* (.06) |
| HCIS | .23 (.17) | | | | | |
| AccDemand × HCIS | −.20** (.07) | | | | | |
| HE | | .41+ (.21) | | | | |
| AccDemand × HE | | −.37*** (.08) | | | | |
| Workplace ostracism | | | −.27*** (.06) | .20*** (.03) | .18*** (.03) | .13* (.05) |
| $\Delta R^2$ | .02** | .03*** | | | | |
| Total $R^2$ | .40*** | .46*** | .21*** | .21*** | .38*** | .18*** |

*Note.* $b$ = unstandardized regression coefficient; $\Delta R^2$ is correspondent to the interaction term. AccDemand = acculturation demands; HCIS = heritage cultural identity salience; HE = harmony enhancement; $N_{T1} = 320$. $N_{T2} = 122$.
+ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

*The Path Coefficients*

Consistent with H1, acculturation demands positively predicted workplace ostracism ($b = .82$, $p < .01$). Consistent with H2a, acculturation demands significantly interacted with HCIS in predicting workplace

ostracism ($b$ = −.20, $p$ < .01). The simple slope analysis indicated that when HCIS was low (−1 $SD$), acculturation demands positively predicted workplace ostracism ($b$ = .39, $p$ = .02). When HCIS was high (+ 1 $SD$), acculturation demands did not predict workplace ostracism ($b$ = .24, $p$ = .13). As shown in Figure 2a, acculturation demands were more positively related to workplace ostracism when HCIS was low (−1 $SD$) rather than high (+1 $SD$). H2a was supported.
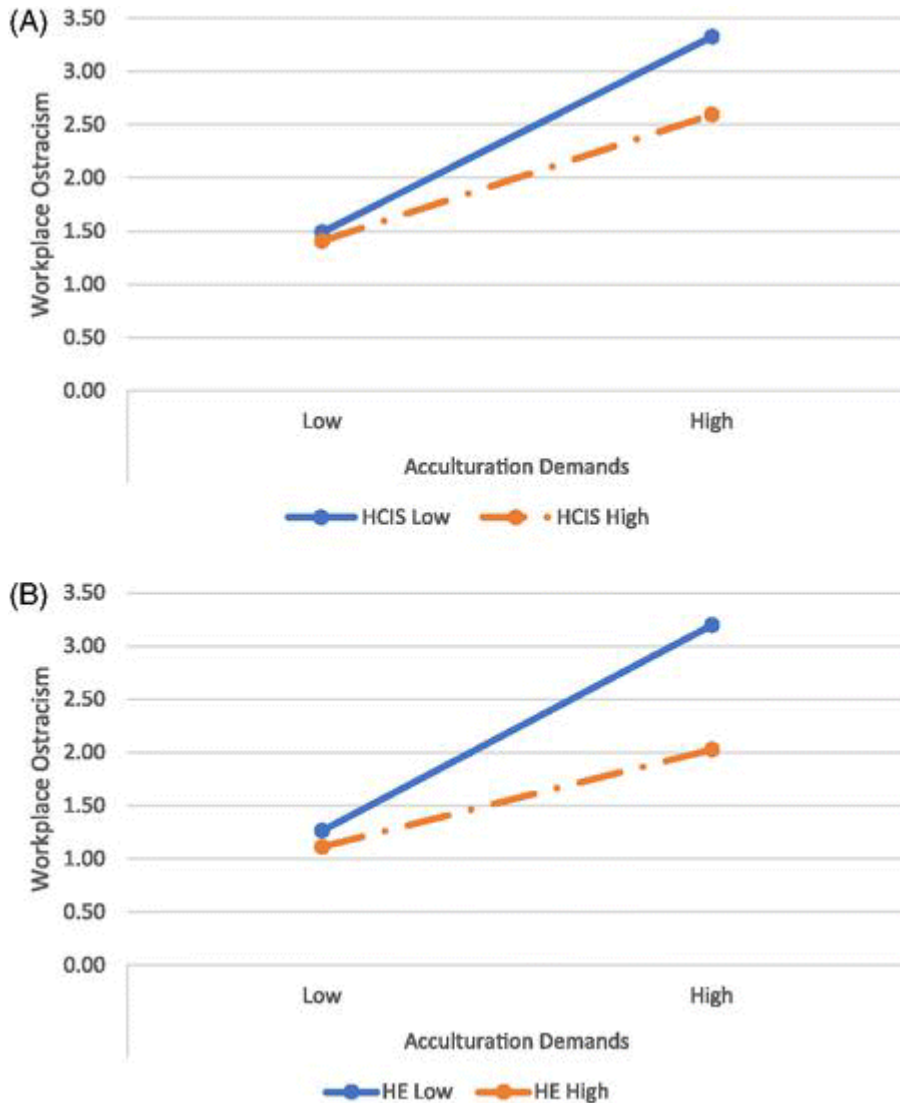


Figure 2. Note.   See the online article for the color version of this figure.

H2b stated that HE would moderate the positive relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. As shown in the bottom half of Table 2, acculturation demands significantly interacted with HE in predicting workplace ostracism ($b$ = −.35, $p$ < .01). The simple slope analysis indicated that when HE was low (<$M$), acculturation demands positively predicted workplace ostracism ($b$ = .63, $p$ < .001). When HCIS was high (≥$M$), acculturation demands did not predict workplace ostracism ($b$ = .05, $p$ = .86). As shown in Figure 2b, acculturation demands was more positively related to workplace ostracism when HE was low (−1 $SD$) rather than high (+1 $SD$). H2b was supported.

H3 predicted that workplace ostracism would mediate acculturation demands in relation to work engagement and job strains (anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms). We found significant indirect

effects of acculturation demands on work engagement ($M$ = −.20, 95% CI [−.31, −.11]), anger ($M$ = .15, 95% CI [.08, .23]), and anxiety ($M$ = .13, 95% CI [.08, .20]) via workplace ostracism. However, the indirect effect on depressive symptoms was not significant ($M$ = .06, 95% CI [.01, .11]). H3 was therefore partly supported.

Finally, H4a and 4b proposed that these indirect effects would be moderated by HCIS and HE, respectively. The moderated mediation index for HCIS was significant for work engagement ($M$ = .05, 95% CI [.01, .12]), anger ($M$ = −.04, 95% CI [−.09, −.01]), anxiety ($M$ = −.04, 95% CI [−.07, −.01]), and depressive symptoms ($M$ = −.03, 95% CI [−.08, −.02]). As shown in Table 3, the indirect effects were stronger when HCIS was low (−1 $SD$) rather than high (+1 $SD$). H4a was supported. The moderated mediation index for HE was also significant for work engagement ($M$ = .10, 95% CI [.04, .18]), anger ($M$ = .07, 95% CI [−.13, −.03]), anxiety ($M$ = −.07, 95% CI [−.11, −.03]), and depressive symptoms ($M$ = −.05, 95% CI [−.11, < −.001]). The indirect effects were stronger when HE was low (−1 $SD$) rather than high (+1 $SD$; Table 4). H4b was supported.

**Table 3**
*The Moderated Mediation Effects: HCIS*

| Variable | Index of moderated mediation (bootstrapping results) | | | Conditional indirect effect at different values HCIS | | | |
| | $M$ | 95% CI | 95% CI | $SD$ | $M$ | 95% CI | 95% CI |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Anxiety (T1) | −.04 | −.07 | −.01 | Low (−1 $SD$) | .18 | .11 | .25 |
| | | | | $M$ | .13 | .08 | .20 |
| | | | | High (+1 $SD$) | .10 | .05 | .17 |
| Anger (T1) | −.04 | −.09 | −.01 | Low (−1 $SD$) | .20 | .11 | .30 |
| | | | | $M$ | .15 | .08 | .23 |
| | | | | High (+1 $SD$) | .11 | .05 | .20 |
| Engagement (T1) | .05 | .01 | .12 | Low (−1 $SD$) | −.27 | −.41 | −.14 |
| | | | | $M$ | −.20 | −.31 | −.11 |
| | | | | High (+1 $SD$) | −.16 | −.26 | −.07 |
| Depressive symptoms (T2) | −.03 | −.08 | −.002 | Low (−1 $SD$) | .09 | .02 | .19 |
| | | | | $M$ | .06 | .01 | .11 |
| | | | | High (+1 $SD$) | .02 | −.01 | .06 |

*Note.* HCIS = heritage cultural identity salience; CI = confidence interval. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000.

*The Moderated Mediation Effects: HCIS*

**Table 4**
*The Moderated Mediation Effect: HE*

| Variable | Index of moderated mediation (bootstrapping results) | | | Conditional indirect effect at different values HE | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | M | 95% CI | 95% CI | SD | M | 95% CI | 95% CI |
| Anxiety (T1) | −.07 | −.11 | −.03 | Low (−1 SD) | .19 | .12 | .27 |
| | | | | M | .12 | .07 | .18 |
| | | | | High (+1 SD) | .08 | .03 | .14 |
| Anger (T1) | .07 | −.13 | −.03 | Low (−1 SD) | .21 | .12 | .31 |
| | | | | M | .13 | .07 | .21 |
| | | | | High (+1 SD) | .09 | .03 | .16 |
| Engagement (T1) | .10 | .04 | .18 | Low (−1 SD) | −.28 | −.42 | −.15 |
| | | | | M | −.18 | −.28 | −.10 |
| | | | | High (+1 SD) | −.12 | −.21 | −.05 |
| Depressive symptoms (T2) | −.05 | −.11 | −.00 | Low (−1 SD) | .09 | .01 | .19 |
| | | | | M | .05 | .01 | .09 |
| | | | | High (+1 SD) | .02 | .−01 | .05 |

*Note.* HE = harmony enhancement; CI = confidence interval. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000.

*The Moderated Mediation Effect: HE*

## Discussion

Our study focused on **immigrant** employees' workplace experiences and how their cultural and interpersonal values can shape these experiences. Specifically, we examined acculturation demands, workplace ostracism, and employees' work engagement and job strains among **immigrant** workers in the **U.S**. In this time-lagged research study, we found that acculturation demands were positively related to workplace ostracism among **immigrant** workers. HCIS and HE significantly *buffered* the relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. Our data supported two first-stage moderated mediation models in which the indirect effects of acculturation demands on **immigrant** workers' work engagement and job strains (anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms) via workplace ostracism were stronger when HCIS and HE were *low* rather than high.

### Theoretical Contributions

The present study fills several research gaps. First, while few studies have explored the antecedents and outcomes of workplace ostracism (Howard et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2011), none of those studies were conducted in a sample of **immigrant** employees. It has been noted that **immigrant** and visibly minority employees experience just as much if not higher incidences of workplace ostracism than local employees (Carter-Sowell et al., 2021; Goodwin et al., 2010; Gürlek, 2021). However, it is unclear beyond minority group membership what the predictors of workplace ostracism are for **immigrant** employees. In this vein, the findings from this study present acculturation demands as a predictor of perceived workplace ostracism for **immigrant** employees. Our findings are consistent with empirical evidence in the cross-cultural and migration studies that acculturation demands such as language barriers, weakened social networks, and racism/discrimination are linked to social exclusion of **immigrants** (Gürlek, 2021; Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Ryan, 2011).

Second, we advance the knowledge of boundary factors (Bilal et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2018), by revealing the buffering effect of cultural values HCIS and HE on the relationship between acculturation demands and perceived workplace ostracism. Most of the workplace ostracism literature have presented personal (e.g., Big 5 personality) and contextual (e.g., leadership) as moderators of workplace ostracism (Howard et al., 2020). In addition, recently, three recent meta-analyses explored cultural values (e.g., individualism vs collectivism; Bilal et al., 2019; Li et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2018) as moderators to workplace ostracism. However, the theoretical and practical utility of these findings is

limited for two reasons. First, they were not done in **immigrant**employee samples. Second, these empirical studies explored the effects of moderators on the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee outcomes. Identifying possible predictors and boundary conditions that may reduce workplace ostracism experiences will help extend the theoretical understanding of workplace ostracism and are also with more practical use. As far as we know, this study is the first empirical study to explore the moderating effect of cultural values on the relationship between an antecedent and perceived ostracism as an outcome.

We found that both HCIS and HE buffered the positive relationship between acculturation demands and workplace ostracism. Our findings suggest that cultural maintenance (HCIS) and relationship orientation (HE) are two of the most salient factors affecting how **immigrants** cope and adapt in the host cultural environment during the acculturation process ([Berry, 1997](#)). Specifically, **immigrant** employees with high HCIS cherish their cultural identity and heritage group while those with high HE values positive long-lasting interpersonal relationships. Both allow **immigrant** employees to acquire interpersonal resources and to meet their fundamental needs to belong because they are more resourceful in knowledge and skill to decipher social appropriateness and more proactive in gaining social acceptance and friendship with local employees. Hence, **immigrant** employees high in HCIS and/or HE are less likely to perceive and/or experience workplace ostracism, even though acculturation demands could predispose them to be socially excluded. In contrast, **immigrant**employees low in HCIS and/or HE care less about their heritage cultural identity and interpersonal relationships. When facing acculturation demands, they are mostly on their own and therefore are likely to be vulnerable to perceive workplace ostracism. These findings are aligned with research from the acculturation strategy literature that shows **immigrants** who maintain their cultural identity as well as establish relationships in the host culture do better at coping and adapting in the host culture than those who do not maintain their cultural identity or interpersonal relationships ([Berry, 1997](#)). Overall, these cultural and interpersonal values are important to **immigrant** workers who strive to fit into the host country.

Third, previous research on workplace ostracism has generally explored the impact of workplace ostracism on psychological and workplace related outcomes ([Howard et al., 2020](#); [Yang & Treadway, 2018](#)). However, this perspective is limited because it fails to take into consideration the process of how individuals detect or perceive workplace ostracism leading to incomplete conclusions on the true impact workplace ostracism ([Howard et al., 2020](#); [Yang & Treadway, 2018](#)) employees. Even more specific for **immigrant** employees, their experiences with workplace ostracism are often lumped with those of other racial/ethnic minorities; however, the process of acculturation and intersectionality makes their experiences even more nuanced ([Carter-Sowell et al., 2021](#)). A lack of understand how **immigrant** employee's experience and detect workplace ostracism leaves practitioners without a clear rationale of how to ensure a more inclusive culturally diverse workplace ([Carter-Sowell et al., 2021](#); [Gürlek, 2021](#)). Most importantly, our study addresses this research gap by demonstrating perceived workplace ostracism serves as the mediational mechanism linking acculturation demands and **immigrant** workers' work engagement and job strains (anger, anxiety, and depressive symptoms). Hence, our results show that the negative relationship between acculturation demands and outcomes of **immigrant** employees can best be understood via perceived workplace ostracism, which further underscores the robustness of both the COR ([Hobfoll, 1989](#), [2012](#)) and belongingness theories ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)). More specifically, during the acculturation process when **immigrant** employees are unable to replenish resources lost from acculturation demands, they are positioned to face further interpersonal resource loss, presented by workplace ostracism. Being ostracized is a particular painful experience, because it threatens one's fundamental need to belong ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#); [Williams, 2009](#)). Lastly, researchers have called for more holistic theoretical frameworks to explore underpinnings of workplace ostracism ([Howard et al., 2020](#)). Our present study fills this gap by applying both the COR and belongingness theories to further explore motivations and mechanisms behind the antecedents and subsequent consequences of perceived workplace ostracism. Our research findings confirm the predictions and provide strong support

to these two theories, which can inspire researchers to focus on the mediating role of perceived workplace ostracism in workplace mistreatment literature.


**Practical Implications**

To better understand workplace diversity and inclusion, organizational research should focus on attaining a more in-depth perspective of the acculturation and work experiences of **immigrant** employees ([Bhagat & London, 1999](#); [Gürlek, 2021](#)). During the acculturation process, **immigrant** employees face acculturation demands such as language barriers, visa-related issues, or lack of respect, which might position them with more interpersonal stressors and hinder their work achievement and occupational health ([Bhagat & London, 1999](#)). For **immigrant** employees, fulfilling a sense of belongingness or "fitting in" the host culture as well as acquiring interpersonal and social resources are critical to effectively cope with acculturation demands ([Masgoret & Ward, 2006](#); [Sam & Berry, 2010](#)). **Immigrant** workers can rely on their unique cultural identity to secure more interpersonal resources from their heritage groups. They should also be aware of their interpersonal values and be more proactive in promoting and maintaining workplace relationships ([Gürlek, 2021](#); [Masgoret & Ward, 2006](#)). The cultural and interpersonal values of HCIS and HE are both helpful for them to meet their needs to belong and avoid being excluded at work. Based on our research findings, we provide three ways that managers and organizations can improve **immigrant** employees work productivity and occupational health. First, managers and organizations should take steps to reduce acculturation demands for **immigrant** employees. Policymakers and managers should focus on developing effective and easily accessible training programs aimed at improving language proficiency, immigration and working visa processes, and cultural adaptation. Our findings suggest that **immigrant** workers can cope with acculturation demands both internally (HCIS) and interpersonally (HE). Organizations can assist **immigrant** workers with coping with acculturation demands by implementing business employee resource groups (BERGs), which are groups employees join based on common characteristics and shared life experiences. An **immigrant** employee can join an **immigrant**-centered BERG to get support from other **immigrants** who share the same experiences, or specific BERG (e.g., women BERG or African American/Afro Caribbean BERG) to build interpersonal relationships with local employees, as well as to maintain contact and participation with members who share their heritage cultures. Managers and organizations can also provide **immigrants** with the resources needed to cope with acculturation demands (e.g., language assistance and visa sponsorship). Second, organizations and managers should work on creating an inclusive culture for **immigrant** employees. Awareness training can help sensitize **immigrant** experiences through a series of role-plays, open and honest discussions, as well as case testimonies from **immigrants** ([Bhagat & London, 1999](#)). In organizations with a substantial number of **immigrant** employees, education on cultural expectations can be provided as well as opportunities to perform new cultural behaviors in a nonjudgmental/nonthreatening environment ([Bhagat & London, 1999](#)). In building awareness trainings, managers should also ensure that **immigrants**, particularly those with low HCIS who want to take part in the host culture do have the support and resources that they need. Lastly, the organization and managers can educate all employees on the harmful effects of workplace ostracism and create a culture that discourages workplace ostracism. Managers should have open-door policies that encourage open discussions among employees and provide advice on how to solve interpersonal issues as they arise.


**Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusion**

This study is not without limitations. First, the same size for T1–T2 dyads was relatively small. History effects such as the current political climate might have been the reason for the small sample size, despite using three recruitment methods. At the time of data collection, Donald Trump was recently elected as the president of the **U.S**. There were some uncertainties in immigration policies and laws. It was a **challenge**

to recruit **immigrant** workers to participate in this research study. For future research, researchers need to bear in mind about the response rate and survey attritions when collecting data from **immigrant**workers.

Second, we cannot determine causality based on time-lagged survey study. To understand to what extent acculturation demands cause workplace ostracism, future research should design experimental studies. For example, it would be interesting to manipulate acculturation demands, HCIS, and HE using different vignettes to further examine their main and interaction effects on workplace ostracism experienced and perceived by **immigrant** workers.

Third, we allowed for a 1-month lag between the administering of T1 and T2 surveys, considering possible attrition for T2 data collection. However, it would take a longer time for employees to develop depressive symptoms. It should also be noted that at the time Donald Trump implemented travel bans and restrictions on **immigrants**. We were not able to rule out this confounding effect. Future research should look into a longer time period in order to better understand the effect of workplace ostracism on **immigrant** employees' depressive symptoms.

Fourth, since we took extra care in protecting the privacy of our participants, at no point in time did we ask about their **immigrant** or legal status. It is highly possible that participants in our study are both documented and undocumented. For legal reasons among others, undocumented **immigrants** face more acculturation demands than documented **immigrants**. Future research should do comparison studies between undocumented and documented **immigrants**as it relates to acculturation demands and ostracism.

Despite the above limitations, the present study looked to examine the relationship between acculturation demands, HCIS, HE, workplace ostracism, and **immigrant** workers' work engagement and job strains. The results of this research study are timely as they provide useful insights into the interpersonal experiences of **immigrant** employees in the **U.S**. workforce. The general population can learn about the struggles and experiences of **immigrant** employees, a population that is widely spoken about in mainstream media but has not been sufficiently studied in the workforce. Further, the general population can learn more about the nature of ostracism and how to avoid engaging in such behaviors (purposefully or otherwise) which inflict psychological pain on to an already vulnerable population. This study will help raise awareness of the political and social issues affecting a diverse **immigrant** population and prevalent in America's society today.

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