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Acculturation gaps in Vietnamese immigrant families: Impact on family relationships

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Abstract

Vietnamese immigrants in the United States face acculturation challenges involving the individual, family, and community. Experts suggest that immigrant family members acculturate at different rates resulting in an acculturation gap, which negatively influences family adjustment. In this study we examined the degree and patterns of acculturation differences between 104 first generation immigrant Vietnamese adolescents and their parents, and whether acculturation gap affected family relationships. Operationalizing the “gap” as both absolute value of differences in acculturation and interactions of parent and adolescent acculturation levels, we examined the impact of such gaps in Vietnamese and American language, identity, and behavioral acculturation on family relationships. Results revealed that family cohesion and satisfaction were predicted by gaps in Vietnamese identity acculturation, but not by gaps in other acculturation domains.

Keywords

Acculturation gap; Vietnamese families; adolescents; family relationship

1. Introduction

The relationships between acculturation and psychological adjustment for immigrant groups is an important area of research in the United States and abroad (Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2003). Acculturation can broadly be defined as a process of behavioral and attitudinal change that results when individuals make contact with a new culture (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), and has been noted as an important predictor of adaptation for immigrants (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Increasingly, researchers have not only been interested in how acculturation influences individual health and wellness (Pawliuk, et al., 1996), but also in how the acculturation process influences family relationships in immigrant families (Gil & Vega, 1996; Hwang & Wood, 2009; Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000; N. A. Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Portes & Hao, 2002). Previous studies have examined the link between acculturation of either the child or the parent and family relationships (Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Portes & Hao, 2002). When significant effects were found, authors inferred that the link exists because one family member’s acculturation level (such as the child’s) can imply a smaller or wider acculturation gap with the other family member (such as the parent),

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which in turn impacts on family relationships. The present study aims to contribute to this literature by exploring how actual acculturation gaps may influence family relationships in a sample of Vietnamese immigrant adolescents and their parents.

The focus of the study is on the acculturation gaps between first generation immigrant (foreign-born) adolescents and their parents. This is in contrast to past studies on this topic (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; Lau, et al., 2005) that included second or later generation families or adolescents, which may have different patterns of acculturation and face distinctive challenges in family adjustment. In order to assess actual acculturation gaps, adolescents and one of their parents reported on their own acculturation. We conceptualized acculturation to ethnic (Vietnamese) and American cultures to be orthogonal in nature, and measured the extent of acculturation to each of these two cultures independently. Following the work of important scholars in the field (Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986; Phinney, 1990), we conceptualized acculturation as “changes in cultural attitudes, values, and behaviors that result from contact between two distinct cultures”, with ethnic identity being an aspect of acculturation. In fact, individual experiences in acculturation have been shown to differ by domain (Costigan & Su, 2004). Thus, acculturation is a multi-domain phenomenon that includes language, identity, and behaviors (Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001). While most prior acculturation gap studies have included only one or two acculturation-related dimensions (such as language, values or generational status) (Gil & Vega, 1996; Rick & Forward, 1992), or have combined measures of different aspects of acculturation into a single index (Lau, et al., 2005; Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000), we chose this approach to provide a more specific description of acculturation gaps and to determine whether particular kinds of gaps are related to family adjustment.

1.1 Studies of Acculturation Gaps

The process of acculturation may create discrepancies in values between children and adults that affect family relationships (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Some researchers have specifically examined acculturation gaps, which are thought to develop between parents and children and negatively affect family relationships (Lau, et al., 2005; Sluzki, 1979). Immigrant parents who are more oriented toward their native culture may find traditional parenting styles to be ineffective with children who are quickly adopting the host culture (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003). Acculturation gaps may also cause language and communication difficulties among family members (Luo & Wiseman, 2000), which in turn affects the bonding process (Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003). As a result of such gaps, immigrant children are often called upon to serve as language and culture brokers between their parents and members of the host culture, at the expense of their own adjustment (Jones & Trickett, 2005). At times familial roles are reversed, which may affect power and control dynamics within the family (Buki, et al., 2003; Kibria, 1996).

More recently, studies that assess acculturation gaps have begun to emerge (Dina Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Lau, et al., 2005). A number of studies have assessed a *perceived* acculturation gap between family members (Hwang & Wood, 2009; Lee & Hao, 2002; Luo & Wiseman, 2000). In these studies researchers asked either adolescents or parents to report on the acculturation levels of both, or on extent of discrepancies between them. While some of these studies demonstrated a negative impact of the acculturation gap, these results may not provide sufficient support for the acculturation gap hypothesis because measures of perceived gaps may confound reports of acculturation disparity with perceptions of quality of family relationships (Merali, 2002). For example, adolescents may attribute the conflicts they are experiencing with their parents to acculturation discrepancies rather than to other reasons. One way to disentangle such potential confounds is to assess acculturation of parents and children independently.

Studies that assess *actual* acculturation gaps from the perspectives of both parents and adolescents are now emerging (Dina Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Farver, et al., 2002; Lau, et al., 2005; Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, & McCabe, 2009), although diverse methods are being used to compute the gaps. One study of Asian Indian immigrant families in California found that parents and adolescents who were matched on acculturation styles (i.e. both having the same acculturation style of assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization as in the Berry framework (1980)) have less frequent and less intense conflict than families with a “mismatched” acculturation style (Farver, et al., 2002). Two other studies also used this match/mismatch definition of acculturation gaps: in a sample of mostly U.S.-born Mexican American adolescents (Lau et al. 2005) and one of Chinese-American parents and adolescents (Lim et al, 2009). The Lau et al. study also added a second approach which is a generalized distance score calculated as youth acculturation minus parent acculturation, squared. These two studies did not show a significant relationship between the acculturation gap and intergenerational conflict. Both of these studies included, or were comprised solely of, U.S.-born adolescents, which may have contributed to this lack of significant relationships. Further, they suggest that acculturation gap may have a stronger impact on *immigrant* adolescents and their parents. In this study, we aim to contribute to these research efforts by examining the impact of acculturation gaps on family relationships among a sample of Vietnamese immigrant families where all of the parents and their adolescent children are foreign-born.

Recently, Birman (2006) reported on a study of acculturation gaps among immigrant adolescents and parents from the former Soviet Union resettled in the U.S.. The study used an orthogonal (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990) and multi-dimensional approach to measuring acculturation to the adolescents’ and parents’ native and host culture. The results of that study suggest that when acculturation is assessed along multiple dimensions, and with respect to both the native and the host culture, the patterns of differences between parents and children are more complex than the literature assumes. In fact, it was not always the case that parents were more acculturated to the native culture, and adolescents to the host culture, particularly with respect to the identity dimension of acculturation. Further, using two different ways of operationalizing the acculturation gap, the study found that in some cases the acculturation gap operationalized as a discrepancy between acculturation of parents and children was related to family discord, while in others it was either the parent’s or the child’s acculturation, or their interaction that was linked to family disagreements. The present study was designed to contribute to this literature by extending it to a sample of Vietnamese immigrant adolescents and their parents. As in the Birman (2006) study, we employed a multidimensional measure of acculturation to both Vietnamese and American cultures to assess the gaps, and used the same methods to test whether the gaps have a negative impact on family relationships.

1.2 Vietnamese Immigrant Families in the United States

Since the Fall of Saigon in 1975, the United States has received more than 800,000 immigrants and refugees from Vietnam (Center, 2003; Services, 2004). While many other Asian immigrants emigrated by choice or left due to economic reasons, a large proportion of Vietnamese refugees fled their home country involuntarily due to war and may have spent months or years residing in camps, without any idea of where they would resettle (Rumbaut, 2000). Many were also unprepared to deal with dire economic circumstances once settling in the United States, and did not have the comfort of co-ethnic communities established by earlier immigrants (Rumbaut, 2000). Due to these special circumstances, as early as the late 1970’s there has been keen research interest on the adaptation and acculturation experiences of Vietnamese adults, adolescents, and families in the United States (Lin, Tazuma, & Masuda, 1979; Masuda, Lin, & Tazuma, 1980).

Studies of Vietnamese immigrant families have reported family relationship challenges, especially intergenerational conflict between parents and their adolescents (Boehnlein, et al., 1995; Dinh, Sarason, & Sarason, 1994; N. A. Nguyen & Williams, 1989). In addition to generation gap challenges experienced in all families with adolescents, for Vietnamese immigrant parents and adolescents there may be cultural conflicts between traditional Asian values that are collectivistic in nature, and American cultural values of individualism (N. A. Nguyen & Williams, 1989). Vietnamese adolescents are expected to maintain family connectedness, valued in Asian cultures, while dealing with the tasks of acculturation and individuation. Vietnamese immigrant families also face the practical necessity to master English and adapt to the American way-of-life. These divergent pressures can create particularly challenging acculturation gaps between adolescents and their parents, which may impact family-level relationships and adjustment. In fact, U.S. studies have found that Vietnamese immigrant families with adolescent children experienced a lower quality of family relationships (Dinh, et al., 1994) and had greater generational gaps (N. A. Nguyen & Williams, 1989) when compared to non-immigrants.

For these reasons, Vietnamese families in the United States are an interesting group to study with respect to the link between parent-adolescent acculturation gap and family relationships. This still relatively new immigrant group is undergoing dynamic changes in adjustment and acculturation challenges on the individual, family, and community level (Rumbaut, 2000). This study examined whether such gaps may influence family relationships.

1.3 A Dual Method Approach of Assessing Actual Acculturation Gaps

Building on prior work with former Soviet refugee adolescents and parents (Dina Birman, 2006) we used a dual method approach to conceptualizing the acculturation gap: as a score denoting the size of the acculturation gap, and as an interaction of acculturation of parents and children. To assess the size of discrepancy in acculturation between parents and children, regardless of the direction of the gap, we used the absolute value of the difference in their acculturation levels. The interaction approach (Dina Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Lee, et al., 2000) enters each family member's continuous acculturation scores in a moderated regression model as predictors of family functioning. In this way the interaction approach takes into account sample-based mean levels of acculturation and also allows for the testing of "main effects", or the notion that it is the child's acculturation level irrespective of that of the parent, or the parent's acculturation level irrespective of the child's, that contributes to quality of family relationship.

The two hypotheses were as follows:

1. That acculturation gaps operationalized as size of the discrepancy in acculturation between parents and adolescents would be related to lower family adjustment as reported by adolescents (lower cohesion and satisfaction with parents).
2. That acculturation gaps operationalized as the *interaction* of parent and adolescent acculturation would predict lower family adjustment (lower cohesion and satisfaction with parents).

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, we did not hypothesize about which specific gaps in American or Vietnamese language, identity, or behavioral acculturation would be related to negative family relationships.

2. Method

2.1 Procedure

A sample of convenience was collected through researchers' ties to the Vietnamese community in Maryland. A Vietnamese American community agency helped locate community-connected bilingual Vietnamese research assistants, who in turn identified an initial sample. The initial sample was then asked to nominate 12–19 year old Vietnamese adolescents for the remaining study cohort. Questionnaires were administered in the homes of the participants, in English to the adolescents and in Vietnamese to the parents. All of the adolescents considered themselves sufficiently proficient to complete the English questionnaire. Bilingual research assistants were on hand to answer any questions and Vietnamese translations of the measures were available when needed. Research protocols and procedures were approved by a University IRB.

Informed consent forms fully describing the study in Vietnamese and English were presented in written form, and explained verbally by the research assistants. Parents signed consent forms for themselves and their children, and adolescents signed assent forms.

2.2 Participants

The present sample included 104 first generation immigrant Vietnamese adolescents and their parents (86% mothers, 14% fathers), a total of 208 participants. Although the initial sample had 159 Vietnamese adolescents, adolescents who had been born in the US were removed from the sample to keep it homogenous for interpretation of findings. In addition, those whose parents did not complete a questionnaire were also removed from the study. As a result, all parents and adolescents in the study were born in Asia (either in Vietnam or in refugee camps) and had lived in the U.S. for a mean of 8.2 years (range = 8 months – 18 years, $SD = 3.6$) at the time of the study. The mean age of the adolescents was 16 years ($SD = 1.9$), and 54 % were male. Parents were on average 47 years of age ($SD = 5.7$) and only two parents reported that they were not married. All parents had immigrated to the United States as adults.

2.3 Measures

Measures were translated, and then back translated by the research assistants, and the resulting discrepancies were discussed by the research team following well established procedures (Brislin, 1986). Focus groups were conducted with participants from the Vietnamese community to determine the applicability of the resulting questionnaire to the adolescent and adult Vietnamese refugee population. Changes in the questionnaires were made as indicated below.

2.3.1 Demographics—The demographics questionnaire ascertained adolescents' and parents' age, gender, date of arrival in the United States, place of origin in Vietnam, language(s) spoken, family composition, and parental education and occupation.

2.3.2 Acculturation—The Language, Identity and Behavioral Acculturation Scale (LIB, Dina Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002) consists of 44 items measuring acculturation to Vietnamese and American cultures independently. Originally developed for use with former Soviet refugee samples and adapted for use with the Vietnamese refugee populations, the measure consists of three domains: (1) Language Competence, (2) Identity, and (3) Behavioral acculturation. The LIB was developed based on an acculturation model that conceptualizes language and behavior acculturation to be separate yet strongly related, and identity as an aspect of acculturation (Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001). Research using the LIB on diverse samples has excellent reliability of each subscale as well as moderate correlations among the subscales, supporting the notion that these are inter-related but distinct dimensions of the same construct (Jeltova, Fish, & Revenson, 2005; Miller & Chandler, 2002; Roytburd & Friedlander, 2008; Trickett & Jones, 2007).

2.3.2.1 Language Competence: This subscale consists of nine parallel items asking adolescents to rate their ability to speak and understand Vietnamese and English across different social settings, and parents to rate their ability to speak and understand English. Ratings are made on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 4 = “very well, like a native.” Focus group participants from the Vietnamese community suggested that asking Vietnamese adults about fluency in Vietnamese would be insulting to them. Further, in our multiple prior studies with refugees from the former Soviet Union we found adults almost always marking “4” in response to all questions about their native language competence, regardless of length of residence in the U.S., resulting in almost no variability in these data (Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001). As a result, we assumed Vietnamese language fluency for parents, assigning them a score of “4”. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the remaining 8-item parent English subscale and adolescent Vietnamese and English subscales were all .95.

2.3.2.2 Identity Acculturation: This scale consists of 7 parallel statements regarding identification attitudes with Vietnamese and American cultures. The items assess both the degree of identification with each culture (“I consider myself American/I consider myself Vietnamese”), and the respondent’s positive attitudes toward each culture (“I am proud to be American/I am proud to be Vietnamese”, etc.). Ratings are made on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 4 = “very much”. Alpha reliability coefficients are as follows: parent Vietnamese and American identity subscales were both .82, adolescent Vietnamese identity was .89, and adolescent American identity was .86.

2.3.2.3 Behavioral Acculturation: The Behavioral subscale of the LIB asks participants to rate the extent to which they engage in behaviors associated with each culture, including: frequency of speaking American/Vietnamese at home and with friends, reading American/Vietnamese books, watching American/Vietnamese movies, eating American/Vietnamese food, and socializing with American/Vietnamese friends. The response format consists of a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 4 = “very much.” Reliabilities for parents’ and adolescents’ Vietnamese behavioral acculturation subscales were .76 and .78, respectively. For American behavioral acculturation the alpha coefficients were .76 and .80 respectively for parents and adolescents.

2.3.3 Family relationships—Adolescents completed the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Evaluation Scales III, a 20-item questionnaire that assessed the degree of family cohesiveness and adaptability (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985). For the Cohesion subscale, two items each represented five concepts: emotional bonding, supportiveness, family boundaries, time and friends, and interest in recreation. Sample items are: “We approve of each other’s friends.”, “We can easily think of things to do together as a family”, and “Family members feel very close to each other”. Alpha coefficient was .83. The Adaptability subscale was not used in these analyses due to poor internal consistency (alpha= .54). A “Satisfaction with Parents” scale, comprised of 7 parent-specific items from the Adolescent Family Life Satisfaction Index (Henry, Ostrander, & Lovelace, 1992; Henry & Plunkett, 1995) was also used to assess the extent to which adolescents are satisfied with their parents. This seven-item subscale asks adolescents to respond to the statement “I am satisfied with...” different aspects of their relationships with their parents (e.g. “the amount of freedom my parent(s) give me to make my own choices”). Responses are on a five-point Likert scale that ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The scores on the items were averaged to create a range of scores from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). For this sample, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the scale is .84.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting analyses to answer the research questions, correlations among dimensions of the acculturation and family adjustment were examined. Family cohesion was significantly correlated with the Satisfaction with Parents scale ($r=.30, p<.001$), suggesting that they represent related but distinctive aspects of family adjustment. Importantly, none of the demographic variables, including gender, adolescents' age, or length of residence in the U.S., were correlated with the family adjustment variables, thus we did not control for them in subsequent analyses.

As a way to validate the multi-domain acculturation model the LIB measure is designed to assess, we conducted Pearson correlations comparing acculturation by domain among adolescents as a group, and then among parents as a group. As seen in Table 1, parents' language and behavior were strongly correlated with each other, for both Vietnamese and American acculturation. The same pattern was observed among adolescent (r s between .45 and .72, $p < .01$). Further, there were moderate size relationships found between behavioral and identity acculturation (r s between .28 and .44, $p < .01$). Finally, for parents, American language and identity were not significantly correlated ($r = .04$). Many of the parents who reported that they did not speak English at all ($n = 17$) reported high American cultural identification (Mean = 2.8, $sd = 1.1$, range = 1–4).

3.2 Direction and Size of Acculturation Gaps

The primary focus of this study is to compare adolescents' acculturation patterns with their parents, so that gaps in acculturation between family members can be explored. As seen in Table 2, paired sample t -tests revealed significant differences in mean acculturation scores between parents and adolescents at a $p < .01$ level, in each of the language, identity, and behavioral domains and for both American and Vietnamese cultures. In each domain, as a group the parents were more Vietnamese acculturated than their children, and children were more American acculturated than their parents. Specifically, parents endorsed a higher identification with Vietnamese culture, and engaged in more Vietnamese activities compared to their adolescents, while adolescents endorsed a higher English language ability, higher identification with American culture, and engaged in more American activities compared to their parents.

Still, examination of differences in acculturation scores between parent/adolescent pairs revealed noteworthy exceptions. In 31.7% ($n = 33$) of the families, parents reported a *higher American identity* than their children, while in 25% ($n = 26$) of the families, adolescents reported *higher Vietnamese identity* than their parents. Moreover, in 14.4% ($n = 15$) of the families, adolescents reported *higher Vietnamese behavioral* acculturation than their parents.

3.3 Size of the gaps

To compute the size of acculturation gaps with respect to each of the 5 culture/domains, we subtracted adolescents' acculturation scores from those of the parents and computed the absolute value of these differences. In this way, the resulting scores documented the size of the gap between parents and adolescents regardless of the direction of the gaps. As seen in Table 2, the absolute value of the gap in American language between parents and adolescents was 1.56 on average (on a 4 point scale). In contrast, the absolute value of the gap in Vietnamese identity between parents and adolescents was only .50 on average.

3.4 Hypothesis 1: The size of the gap and family relationship

Pearson correlations between each of the five acculturation gap scores (and adolescent Vietnamese language score) and cohesion and satisfaction with parents were conducted to assess the relationship between acculturation gaps and family relationships. We present significant correlations in Table 3, which showed that higher adolescent Vietnamese language competence ($r = -.23, p = .018$) and larger gaps in Vietnamese identity ($r = -.30, p = .002$), were both associated with lower adolescent reported cohesion. No other significant correlations were observed.

3.5 Hypothesis 2: Interaction of parent and adolescent acculturation levels and family relationships

We conducted hierarchical moderated regressions for each acculturation dimension to predict cohesion and satisfaction with parents after centering all variables to reduce non-essential multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The parent and adolescent acculturation variables were entered on Step 1, followed by the interaction term on Step 2. Thus, these regressions allow for the examination of main effects, or the extent to which the adolescent's or the parents' level of acculturation impacted on family relationship independent of each other. For regressions using Vietnamese language as predictor, only adolescent scores were entered, and no interaction was tested, since the parent Vietnamese language score was assumed and not measured. In all, 12 multiple regressions were conducted for the six acculturation domains and 2 family relationship variables (cohesion and satisfaction with parents). Due to the exploratory nature of this research, we did not correct for the inflation of error rates given the number of analyses conducted.

3.6 Main effects and interactions

As seen in Table 3, adolescent Vietnamese language competence ($\beta = .23, \text{Adj } r^2 = .05, p = .018$) and adolescent Vietnamese identity ($\beta = .39, \text{Adj } r^2 = .14, p = .001$) were found to positively predict cohesion as main effects. Adolescent Vietnamese identity also predicted satisfaction with parents but the R square change was not significant for this step ($\beta = .24, \text{Adj } r^2 = .04, p = .018$).

The interaction of parent and adolescent Vietnamese identity significantly predicted cohesion ($\beta = .22, \text{Adj } r^2 = .18, p = .02$), and satisfaction with parents ($\beta = .22, \text{Adj } r^2 = .08, p = .03$). In Figure 1, we plotted the interactions following procedures proposed by Aiken and West (1991) which revealed that for adolescents who reported relatively low Vietnamese identity, parent Vietnamese identity was negatively associated with cohesion; for adolescents who reported high Vietnamese identity, parent Vietnamese identity was positively associated with cohesion. Similarly, for adolescents who reported relatively low Vietnamese identity, parent Vietnamese identity was negatively associated with satisfaction with parents, while for adolescents who reported high Vietnamese identity; parent Vietnamese identity was positively associated with satisfaction with parents (Figure 2). No significant main effects or interactions for American acculturation were found in the moderated regressions.

4. Discussion

In this paper we sought to provide a differentiated portrait of acculturation gaps between Vietnamese immigrant adolescents and parents in examining their link to family relationships. We measured acculturation to American and Vietnamese cultures independently, obtained both parents' and adolescents' reports, and examined acculturation as three domains of language, identity, and behavior. Further, we considered two different ways of operationalizing the gap: as the size of the parent-adolescent acculturation discrepancy and as interaction of parent and adolescent acculturation scores. Overall, our findings suggest that the patterns of acculturation

gaps and relationships to family relationship are much more complex than previously considered in the literature.

4.1 Inter-correlations among Acculturation Variables

Even though the orthogonal nature of acculturation to host and co-national communities, and the need to measure them as such, are now well-accepted, we could not find any previous study on Vietnamese immigrants that measured acculturation by culture and domain separately and reported intercorrelations of the domains. Thus, comparison of our results to previous studies of Vietnamese immigrants in Western societies is difficult given the variability in methods and measures. Our results differed from our prior findings using the LIB acculturation scale with former Soviet adult refugees where the relationship between American language competence and identity is concerned. These findings suggest that the acculturation experiences, even within the same receiving country, can differ by ethnic group (Phinney, et al., 2001). In particular, it is possible that adult Vietnamese refugees are more strongly identified with the American culture than the former Soviets, regardless of their level of English language competence. In contrast, for former Soviet refugees English language competence was significantly correlated with identification with American culture. Since Vietnamese refugees entered the U.S. as a consequence of American involvement in Vietnam, these adult refugees may be more likely to feel welcomed in the country and to embrace American identity than former Soviet refugees. This identity then may stem from political and ideological factors rather than level of competence in the American culture as reflected in their English language fluency. Indeed, the level of American identity for the parents in this sample (Mean = 2.44) was higher than for the parents in the former Soviet sample (Mean = 2.25) (Birman, 2006). This highlights the important role of context (i.e. ethnic group, immigration conditions, and receiving society) in the formation of ethnic identity (Phinney, et al., 2001).

The significant relationship between language and behavior acculturation was also observed in the adolescent respondents in our study. A study on Vietnamese adolescents in the US has also demonstrated such positive correlations between language competency and an acculturation index (comprised of behavior and values) (H. H. Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999). Unfortunately, this study by Nguyen et al. did not report findings on the behavioral subscale separately. These findings underscore the value of gathering data using comparable measures across populations to identify similarities and differences in acculturation for diverse immigrant and refugee populations.

4.2 Direction of Acculturation Gaps

While as a group parents were more Vietnamese and less American than the adolescents on each of the three acculturation domains, a particularly unexpected pattern emerged with Vietnamese and American identity. Specifically, a substantial number of parents scored higher on American identity than their adolescents, and a substantial number of adolescents reported a higher Vietnamese identity than their parents. These findings confirm similar results in studies of former Soviet refugee families (Dina Birman, 2006; Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001). Thus, contrary to what is generally believed about family level acculturation processes, immigrant adolescents are not always more oriented to the host culture, or less oriented to the ethnic culture, when compared to their parents, at least where identity is concerned. A study of Chinese-American mothers and adolescents also showed some mothers to be more Western identified than their children, and some children to be more Asian identified than their mothers (Lim, et al., 2009).

Recent cross-cultural studies on patterns of ethnic versus national identity in immigrant adolescents observed considerable variability across immigrants in different countries (Berry, et al., 2006), and further pointed to the important interactional effects of context in immigrant

youth identity formation (Phinney, et al., 2001). While these studies did not focus on the difference in ethnic or national identity between immigrant adolescents and their parents, it is possible that exploring and embracing an *ethnic* identity may be particularly important for adolescents who are struggling with issues of identity more broadly. As a result, there may indeed be a substantial number of immigrant families where the adolescent's ethnic identification is stronger than that of the parents. The meaning of Vietnamese and American "identity" may also be different for parents and adolescents who represent different generations, and were of different ages at the time of immigration (Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2001). Adolescents may struggle to preserve self-identification and pride of being "Vietnamese" in response to a peer group that singles them out as being "ethnic." In fact, adolescents may adapt most positively when they can be successfully involved in both ethnic and national cultures (Berry, et al., 2006). On the other hand, parents may not experience conflicts with their Vietnamese identity, which they take for granted, since they were adults when they left Vietnam. Similarly, the meaning of identifying as "American" may represent to parents their decision to leave Vietnam and success in resettlement. Thus, as noted above, parents may have a stronger sense of American identity than their children due to the parents' reliance on ideological and political issues surrounding the American-South Vietnamese relationship rather than other markers of identification with the host culture. This interpretation is consistent with research on Vietnamese adult immigrants in Australia who also demonstrated a high degree of host-country identification, which was in turn related to the extent they found it important to adopt Australian standards and practices (Nesdale, 2002).

The above unexpected differences posed a challenge with respect to methods of computing acculturation gaps. Computing absolute values of acculturation gaps between the parents and children regardless of the direction of the gap could produce misleading results if, in fact, there were generational differences in the *meaning* of acculturation questions for the parents and their children. To address this issue, in this study moderated regressions conducted to test the interaction between adolescents' and parents' acculturation used scores that were centered for each group. In this way, the meanings of "high" and "low" acculturation tested in these regressions could be interpreted for each group.

4.3 Acculturation gaps and family relationships

There has been much debate on the conceptualizations and measurement of acculturation in the last decades. As suggested by Birman (1994) research on immigrants has operationalized acculturation in behavioral terms (c.f. Szapocznik, 1978), whereas studies of U.S. born ethnic minorities have focused more on identity (Phinney, 1990). In this paper we suggest that behavior and identity, as well as language competence, are all important aspects of the acculturation experience of immigrant adolescents. Our approach demonstrated a much richer understanding of acculturation gaps than would have been obtained had we relied on a measure of behavioral acculturation alone, or on an overall index of attitudes and behaviors. Overall, our findings underscore the relative importance of gaps in identity for family relationships.

Study results partially supported our hypotheses regarding acculturation gap and family relationships, and demonstrated the value of adopting two ways of operationalizing acculturation gap. Larger Vietnamese identity gaps calculated as a difference score were shown to be related to lower family cohesion in the bivariate analyses. Moderated regressions and interaction plots further revealed that when adolescents have low Vietnamese identity, parents' higher Vietnamese identity was related to lower family cohesion. The reverse pattern is observed for adolescents who have high Vietnamese identity. Furthermore, a similar pattern emerged in regression models with satisfaction with parents as the dependent variable: lower satisfaction with parents was related to parents' higher Vietnamese identity only when adolescents have low Vietnamese identity. These are consistent with the prediction of

acculturation gap models since for adolescents with low Vietnamese identity, higher Vietnamese identity in the parents mean a larger difference in acculturation between them, and this “gap” is related to less cohesion and satisfaction. Of course, the correlational nature of our study does not allow us to infer causality in this relationship. Thus it is also possible that a low sense of family cohesion or satisfaction with parents may cause adolescents to not embrace a strong Vietnamese identity, the ethnic identification of their parent.

It is interesting that of all the acculturation variables, only discrepancies in Vietnamese identity acculturation predicted less family cohesion and less satisfaction with parents. Since identity is the most psychological of the acculturation variables, reflecting attitudes and values of the respondents, it is possible that acculturation gaps in this area are more important for family adjustment than language and behavior. These findings lend support the recommendations by Szapocznik and colleagues to design interventions that can help families bridge such acculturation gaps. For example, the Bicultural Effectiveness Training (Szapocznik, et al., 1986) is an intervention designed to help parents and adolescent children better understand each other's cultural assumptions. Such an intervention for Vietnamese immigrant adolescents and their parents that focuses on discussions of Vietnamese identity may indeed be helpful in bridging this gap, and potentially improving family relationships.

Adolescent Vietnamese language competence was found to be positively related to family cohesion in the correlational analyses. This finding is somewhat similar to what was previously reported in a sample of former Soviet refugee families, where adolescents' Russian language competency was related to lower parent reported family disagreements (Dina Birman, 2006). These results also support previous studies on Chinese American children that linked ethnic language proficiency with family adjustment (Luo & Wiseman, 2000; Portes & Hao, 2002). For adolescents whose parents immigrated as adults, fluency in the native language may be necessary to maintain effective family communication, which may in turn improve family relationships. Interestingly, adolescents' Vietnamese language competence was not related to their satisfaction with their parents. While adolescents' report of family cohesion is an index of overall family functioning, satisfaction with parent is more of a one-sided evaluation by the adolescents about their parents. Thus, cohesion may reflect a level of relational transaction with their parents that is likely Vietnamese language-based, while satisfaction with parents may not have as much of a connection to Vietnamese language competence. Overall, the implication of these findings is that interventions with Vietnamese immigrant youth that support their Vietnamese language learning may improve their family relationships. In this case, interventions with the adolescents without the parents may be sufficient at reducing this “gap” and enhancing their ability to communicate with their parents in their native language.

Interestingly, as in several previous studies (Dina Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Lau, et al., 2005; Lim, et al., 2009) in this sample acculturation gaps between parents and adolescents did not always predict quality of family relationships. It is possible that while acculturation gaps indeed exist in immigrant families, whether such gaps negatively affect family relationships depends on the ethnic group, outcome, and domain of acculturation studied. For example, Lau et al (2005) examined acculturation as a composite score (i.e. not discriminating between acculturation domains such as language, behavior and/or identity) and did not find significant relationships with family conflict. It is possible that gaps in particular acculturation domains are more important for family adjustment than a general acculturation gap. These findings also demonstrated the value of examining acculturation gaps along separate acculturation domains so that domain-specific relationships with outcome variables can be discerned.

4.4 Implications for Measurement of Acculturation Gap

We proposed two approaches to measure acculturation *gap*. One, computing a difference score, allowed us to operationalize the “gap” as a discrepancy in acculturation between parents and adolescents, and the other as the interaction of these variables to account for sample-based mean levels of parent and adolescent acculturation. The interaction approach also allowed us to examine the potential impact of the main effects of acculturation variables on family adjustment. In addition, the advantage of the moderated regression approach was the ability to account for potential main effects of individual acculturation levels before testing the contribution of acculturation gaps on family relationships. Similar to previous researchers (Dina Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006), we favor this method as it makes conceptual sense to take individual contributions to the family relationship into account as well as the contribution of dyadic acculturation differences.

Using both approaches also revealed complexities in the relationships between individual acculturation, acculturation gaps and family adjustment. While there were instances (such as with Vietnamese identity and cohesion) when the interaction approach affirmed the impact of the gap found by using difference scores, at other instances (such as with Vietnamese identity and satisfaction with parents) the interaction approach showed significant acculturation gap relationships that would have been obscured if only difference scores were used. These findings confirm previous work (Birman, 2006), suggesting that the interaction approach is a more sensitive method of analyses when examining acculturation gap and family relationships.

4.5 Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

Unlike some other studies, we assessed acculturation levels and family adjustment independently from adolescents and parents. Although we feel this is a contribution of this study, there are limitations to every approach that quantifies such deeply held attitudes among diverse participants. It is possible that using the same measure to assess acculturation of adolescents and their parents may lead to somewhat misleading results as American and Vietnamese acculturation may hold different meanings for adolescents and their parents. For example, as suggested elsewhere (Dina Birman & Trickett, 2001; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000), when parents and adolescents endorse statements such as “I consider myself American” or “I consider myself Vietnamese,” they may be responding to different constructions of these terms. As a result, computed acculturation “gaps” may not reflect true discrepancies between parents and children. Studies that assess acculturation and adjustment from a single reporter’s perspective avoid this problem, although the risk is potential inaccuracy in assessing someone else’s acculturation (e.g. Merali, 2002). In this study we centered acculturation scores for the moderated regressions, which partially solved the issue in that parents’ individual acculturation scores are compared to other parents, and adolescents’ to their peer group. This is merely a mathematical solution, however, and does not truly deal with the potential that immigrant parents and adolescents differ not only in the degree of acculturation, but also in how they construe acculturation. In order to fully address this important issue, qualitative research is needed to better understand how latent constructs of acculturation compare between parents and adolescents, and the kinds of acculturation gaps that emerge in immigrant families. We also included both mothers and fathers in our sample, who may have different parenting styles and acculturation patterns. The potential qualitative difference in how Vietnamese adolescents interact with their mothers and fathers may also have either contributed to our findings, or masked by the aggregate nature of our analyses.

Since this study relied on adolescent-report of family adjustment, another limitation is potential shared method and source variance contributing to the results. It is important for future research to also include the perspectives of parents and other family members. Specifically, it will be important to evaluate how parents’ reports of family adjustment may relate to acculturation

differences with their children. Finally, our error rate may have been inflated due to the numerous statistical analyses conducted, thus, all of the findings reported should be treated with caution. Our aim is that by reporting multiple approaches to this type of data we can help stimulate future conversations about how to best approach this complex and important research topic.

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Figure 1. Interaction between parents' and adolescents' Vietnamese identity and association with family cohesion.

Figure 2. Interaction between parents' and adolescents' Vietnamese identity and association with adolescents' satisfaction with parents.

Table 1

Correlations of acculturation dimensions and family adjustment

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Parent Report													
1. American language	-	.04	.45**	-.11	-.37**	.32**	.12	.19*	-.15	.08	-.13	.20*	-.10
2. American identity		-	.44**	.08	-.18	-.01	-.03	-.02	.04	.07	-.04	-.02	.06
3. American behavioral			-	-.08	-.25*	.09	.08	.12	-.08	.01	-.15	.12	.07
4. Vietnamese identity				-	.28**	.16	.05	.07	-.10	.10	-.12	-.13	.03
5. Vietnamese behavioral					-	-.17	-.05	-.23*	.17	.07	.29**	-.23*	.24*
Adolescent Report													
6. American language						-	.41**	.72**	-.24*	.20*	-.28**	.06	-.05
7. American identity							-	.34**	-.14	.12	-.18	.02	.13
8. American behavioral								-	-.32**	.06	-.37**	.09	-.13
9. Vietnamese Language									-	.36**	.76**	-.07	.23*
10. Vietnamese Identity										-	.34**	-.21*	.40**
11. Vietnamese Behavioral											-	.06	.25*
12. FACES III Cohesion												-	.39***
13. Satisfaction with Parents													-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

Descriptives of acculturation for this sample of immigrant adolescents and their parents (n=104).

Variable	Parent Group Mean (SD)	Adolescent Group Mean (SD)	Paired <i>t</i> test value (<i>df</i>)	Mean Absolute Value of Acculturation Gap
Vietnamese Acculturation				
Language ^a	4.0 (.00)	3.04 (.83)	-	-
Identity	3.70 (.45)	3.51 (.55)	2.72 (101)**	.50 (.49)
Behavioral	3.51 (.47)	2.90 (.64)	9.03 (102)***	.70 (.57)
American Acculturation				
Language	1.81 (.58)	3.37 (.62)	-22.5 (103)***	1.56 (.68)
Identity	2.44 (.81)	2.81 (.68)	-3.39 (100) **	.90 (.69)
Behavioral	2.01 (.59)	3.21 (.54)	-16.27 (103)***	1.23 (.70)

^a Acculturation gap for Vietnamese language was not calculated due to lack of variability in parent's Vietnamese language score.

Table 3

Significant regression models of family adjustment and parent-adolescent acculturation gaps operationalized as absolute value of parent-child difference scores (Hypothesis 1) and as main effects and interactions of parent and adolescent acculturation variables in moderated regressions (Hypothesis 2)

Dependent variables:	Hypothesis 1		Hypothesis 2		
	Gap as Difference Score		Gap as Main Effects and Interactions		
	Cohesion	Satisfaction with Parents	Cohesion	Cohesion	Satisfaction with Parents
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	β	β	β
Vietnamese Language					
Parent ^a	-.23*		n/a		
Adolescent			.23*		
Vietnamese Identity					
Parent	-.30**			-.01	
Adolescent				.39***	
Interaction				.22*	
Vietnamese Identity		-.19			
Parent				-.03	
Adolescent				.24*	
Interaction				.22*	
Step 1: ΔR^2			.05*	.14***	.04
Step 2: ΔR^2			n/a	.18*	.08*

^aModel using adolescent Vietnamese language as predictor was conducted as a simple regression, with no interaction entered.