Expanding acculturation theory: Are acculturation models and the adaptiveness of acculturation strategies generalizable in a colonial context?

Violet L. Cheung-Blunden and Linda P. Juang

International Journal of Behavioral Development 2008; 32; 21
DOI: 10.1177/0165025407084048

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jbd.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/32/1/21
Expanding acculturation theory: Are acculturation models and the adaptiveness of acculturation strategies generalizable in a colonial context?

Violet L. Cheung-Blunden
University of California, Berkeley, USA

Linda P. Juang
San Francisco State University, USA

Most acculturation research has been conducted in immigrant settings. The present study examined the generalizability of acculturation models and the adaptiveness of acculturation strategies in another bicultural environment – a colonial setting. The sample included 138 girls (M = 13.8 years) and their parents from Hong Kong, a former British colony. Results verified that both Chinese and western acculturation occurred on individual psychological levels and that the bidimensional model was a suitable acculturation framework. Using hierarchical multiple regression, results suggested that acculturation towards Chinese (majority) culture was related to better adaptation in terms of higher academic achievement and positive family dynamics (parental nurturance and closer family relationships). Acculturation towards western (minority) culture was related to poorer adaptation in terms of engaging in greater misconduct and negative family interactions (larger intergenerational value discrepancies and family conflicts). Thus, acculturation towards the majority culture held adaptive implications, whereas acculturation towards the minority culture held maladaptive implications.

Consideration of the bicultural composition (e.g., status, prestige, strength of cultural networks of each culture) should be incorporated into acculturation theory to better understand adjustment implications across a wide range of contexts.

Keywords: acculturation model; adolescent adjustment; bicultural context; Hong Kong Chinese; immigrant and colonial settings

Acculturation is the phenomenon of the value, attitudinal, and behavioral changes of individuals who come into continuous contact with another culture (Berry, 1980; Child, 1943; Cross, 1980; Lambert, 1977; Park, 1928; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1926; Stonequist, 1937). The criterion for acculturation is the presence of bicultural influences, regardless of the relative strengths of the two cultures. Thus, one possible scenario is in an immigrant setting, where a person migrates into another culture. Another possible scenario is in a colonial setting, where a person’s own culture becomes subsidiary to another culture. In fact, establishing a new life in another country and living with a new culture introduced by colonizers were two cases mentioned by Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) as examples of bicultural settings. Although there is a growing body of research on acculturation in immigrant settings, colonial settings have not received much research attention.

There are several important reasons to study acculturation in a colonial setting. If a colony is a valid acculturation setting, then the existing theories and frameworks derived from immigrant research should hold under colonial conditions. Another issue, on a more practical level, concerns whether acculturation strategies can predict psychological well-being in a colonial setting as they do in an immigrant setting. The present study sought to clarify both the theoretical and practical issues in a former British colony – Hong Kong. First, we established whether acculturation occurs in Hong Kong and tested the generalizability of unidimensional and bidimensional models. Second, we investigated which type of acculturation is related to better psychological adjustment in the colonial setting. Third, we examined acculturation from an additional angle – levels of family functioning – in order to confirm the adaptiveness of each strategy.

Unidimensional and bidimensional acculturation models

One of the challenges in studying acculturation is finding a suitable theoretical framework to model the phenomenon. Both unidimensional and bidimensional models have been postulated. The unidimensional model posits that if a person becomes more affiliated with the host culture, his/her affiliation towards the heritage culture weakens correspondingly (Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Joy, 1996). Conversely, the more a person retains his/her heritage culture, the less that person adopts the host culture. Assimilationists in the unidimensional framework refer to people who adopt the host culture rather than their own. Separationists refer to those who retain the...
heritage culture but not the host culture. Occasionally, the term marginalist is used to refer to a person who borders between one's heritage and host culture and who does not particularly acculturate towards either culture.

In contrast, the bidimensional model posits that a person's affiliation with the host culture is independent of his/her affiliation with the heritage culture (Berry, 1980; Child, 1943; Cross, 1980; Lambert, 1977; Park, 1928; Redfield et al., 1926; Stonequist, 1937). A common bidimensional approach creates a four-fold typology by placing the two cultural attitudes in an orthogonal arrangement. Individuals can then be classified as acculturation towards both (integrationists) or neither (marginalists) cultures, in addition to acculturation towards only one's own (separationists) or the other (assimilationists) culture (Berry, 1980). Another treatment of the bidimensional approach is to measure acculturation to the two cultures independently without assuming an interaction between the two dimensions (i.e., without the a priori assumption of a typology). Each dimension is assumed to have predictive power independent of one another (Costigan & Su, 2004; Nguyen, Messé, & Stollak, 1999; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

Besides strict adherence to either the unidimensional and bidimensional models, some researchers recognize that both models hold merits for certain types of contexts (Birman, 1998; Oppedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004). Different cultural contexts demand different skills and knowledge, such that acculturation dimensionality may differ across contexts. Researchers might want to first measure acculturation with a bidimensional scale, and then let empirical evidence determine whether a uni- or bidimensional model best depicts the acculturation process for a particular group (Birman, 1998). In this study we let the data determine which model is more appropriate for acculturation in a colonial setting.

**Diverse adaptive implications by acculturation strategies**

Immigrants' mental health can be understood from many research angles. Difficulties with the acculturation process are one way to explain some of the maladjustments observed among immigrants. For example, *acculturative stress theory* proposes that when an individual is exposed to two or more cultures, he or she must negotiate and adapt to cultural differences (e.g., in languages, customs, values, norms for appropriate behaviors; Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). This adaptation process can be challenging and may lead to increased stress. Greater acculturative stress, then, can lead to psychological maladjustment.

Typical mental health disturbances included a variety of outcomes such as depression, symptom distress, negative affect, and poor academic achievement among acculturating adolescents and adults (Berry & Sam, 1997; Sam, 2000). For comparison purposes, we include similar adjustment measures in our study.

Earlier bidimensional studies that assumed a typology, found that the most adaptive acculturation style was integration, followed by assimilation, separation, and finally, marginal (Berry et al., 1987; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). There is evidence to support the idea that integration is an optimal acculturation strategy in terms of adjustment and adaptation. For example, one study of Chinese Americans in San Francisco found that integrationists experienced the least amount of negative affect relative to other groups (Ying, 1995). In another study of Chinese adolescents, integrationists reported higher self-esteem than their peers who were separationists or marginalists (Eyoud, Acdair, & Dixon, 2000). Finally, a study of Asian, Hispanic, and Vietnamese adolescents found a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and integration attitudes (Phinney, Chavira, & Williamson, 1992). The success of the integrated group has been attributed to their bicultural competence (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980), referring to the wide behavioral and attitudinal repertoire that facilitates successful negotiations in both cultures.

Findings on assimilationists also lent some support to the typology approach in that their outcomes were somewhat less ideal than integrationists. For example, Phinney et al. (1992) found that greater assimilation was correlated with lower self-esteem. Assimilation has also been predictive of psychological distress among Asian-Indian immigrants (Krishnan & Berry, 1992). Perhaps the attempt of leaving one's own group by "passing" as a member of mainstream society fosters a false sense of self and therefore may result in less favorable adjustment, such as lower self-esteem (Tajfel, 1978).

Separation was also thought by the typology approach to be less adaptive than integration. This strategy group showed psychosomatic stress among Asian-Indian immigrants (Krishnan & Berry, 1992), and negative affect and life dissatisfaction among Chinese immigrants (Ying, 1995). These adjustment problems are thought to result from isolation and exclusion from the mainstream culture in the society (Berry, 1980).

Theorists using the typology approach agreed that the last acculturation strategy, marginalization, has the lowest adaptive value across well-being indices (Stonequist, 1937). High acculturative stress (Krishnan & Berry, 1992) and low self-esteem among Chinese (Eyoud et al., 2000) and Vietnamese, Pakistani, Turkish, and Chilean adolescents in Norway (Sam, 2000) were found in this strategy group. An individual who leaves his/her own social group, but at the same time is unable to adjust to the new cultural group, will find him/herself on the margin of both cultures (Stonequist, 1937).

More recent research adopting a bidimensional approach did not make the a priori assumption of a typology (Costigan & Su, 2004; Nguyen et al., 1999; Ryder et al., 2000). In these studies, each acculturation dimension was first used to predict psychological adjustment separately. Then, the interaction effect between cultural attitudes was checked. If significant, further adjustment differences among the strategies were discerned. Two recent studies conducted with immigrants exemplified the usefulness of considering acculturation without a priori classifications (Nguyen et al., 1999; Ryder et al., 2000). Findings along this line suggested that, in general, acculturation towards the host culture held adaptive implications, and acculturation towards the heritage culture held maladaptive implications.

Among a sample of Chinese-Canadian college students, the main effect of adopting the host culture was related to lower depression, fewer reported symptoms, lower symptom distress, and fewer health, social, and academic maladjustments (Ryder et al., 2000). By contrast, the main effect of retaining the heritage culture was related to more symptom-related distress. No interactions between the two acculturation dimensions were found, suggesting that a typology of the four acculturation strategies was not appropriate.
Another study of Vietnamese-immigrant adolescents found that the main effect of adopting the host culture was associated with higher self-esteem, better grade point average (GPA), and lower levels of depression in a sample of Vietnamese-immigrant adolescents (Nguyen et al., 1999). In contrast, the main effect of retaining the heritage culture was associated with more symptom-related distress. Furthermore, there was a trend towards lower self-esteem and greater depression. A test of interaction effects revealed that an interaction predicted only one of the adjustment indices, namely, self-esteem. Adolescents who scored high on involvement in Vietnamese culture and on U.S. culture reported the highest levels of self-esteem. Here again, the four-fold typology was only modestly useful in predicting psychological adjustments.

In general, the more recent studies indicate that greater involvement in the host culture was linked to positive adjustment, whereas greater involvement in the heritage culture was linked to more negative adjustment. The recent studies arrived at slightly different conclusions about immigrants’ adjustment from the earlier acculturation research. Although one of the reasons for this divergence is methodological due to making the a priori assumption of the four-fold typology, it is also worthwhile to explore other reasons for the inconsistent adaptive implications of acculturation strategies.

The term “adaptation” comes from the Darwinian tradition, which originally refers to possessing certain morphological features that enhance an organism’s chance of survival when facing the demands of a specific environment. The term suits studies of acculturation, because bicultural environments demand psychological changes in a person due to the presence of another culture. The original set of psychological features possessed by a bicultural habitant (the ways a person perceives, thinks, feels and behaves) may no longer fit the new environment. Making changes in a large number of psychological domains can be difficult. Acculturative stress, then, is partly a function of the degree to which a person has to change in order to fit the environment. Not all bicultural environments pose the same demand on their residents, and contexts inevitably vary in this regard.

Context matters when it comes to understanding the adaptive value of acculturation in various immigrant neighborhoods (Birman, 1998; Oppedal et al., 2004). The immediate context, such as the home or school, often varies in its cultural composition. Some studies have demonstrated how the link between acculturation and psychological adjustment shows sensitivity to a change in the cultural composition. For example, Schmitz (2002) found that in a predominantly Chinese neighborhood, self-esteem was predicted by retaining heritage culture (Chinese cultural participation), whereas in a predominantly non-Chinese neighborhood, self-esteem was predicted by adopting the host culture (English language use). Fuligni, Yip, and Tseng (2002) did not measure acculturation directly but assessed the degree of involvement in heritage culture in terms of family obligation. Heavy involvement in family obligation did not predict psychological distress on a daily basis. This did not support the hypothesis that children from immigrant families experience difficulties and psychological distress in balancing family obligation and other activities. The authors used neighborhood ethnic composition to explain the non-deterrimental effect of fulfilling family obligation demands. They suggested that perhaps in predominantly Chinese neighborhoods, youths encounter smaller intergenerational differences and experience fewer negotiation difficulties than those living in areas in which they are a distinct minority.

The earlier studies suggest the importance of considering the cultural composition of the micro-context to understand what is most adaptive (psychologically and socially) for an individual. We can extrapolate the findings from previous research on micro-contexts to argue more generally that acculturating to the predominant surrounding environment can be the most adaptive. For example, in a context where the host culture is prevalent (e.g., school), adopting the language, behaviors, and attitudes of the host culture should predict the best adaptation. In contrast, in a context where the heritage culture predominates (e.g., the family), retaining the practices of the heritage culture should be adaptive.

Context dictates not only what kind of acculturation is adaptive, but also what kind of acculturation is maladaptive. For example, recent immigrant findings suggest that retaining heritage values and behaviors in the USA was associated with maladaptive outcomes. These findings ought to be interpreted in a context-variant manner, because it is unlikely that the practices and values of the heritage culture are maladaptive in all contexts. American society places great demands on its immigrants to acculturate, making the task of change challenging for some individuals. In particular, the host (American) and heritage cultures do not enjoy equal status in terms of power and prestige, such that practicing the heritage culture may subject one to prejudice and discrimination. When an environment poses such demands on immigrants, retaining the heritage culture may be costly and psychologically distressful.

Past studies attempted to clarify the effect of context by recognizing that the micro-context varies from one immigrant neighborhood to another. However, the macro-context remained the same across all of these neighborhoods, introducing confounding effects. We chose to study acculturation in a colony, because it offers a clear contrast to immigrant settings on a macro-level. In our study situated in Hong Kong, the host and heritage cultures are reversed from the traditional immigrant setting. Specifically, Chinese culture is the heritage culture and yet the majority, and western culture is the colonizing culture and yet the minority. Our hypotheses could be formulated based on either context-invariant or context-variant view points. If context does not matter, we expect the same findings as immigrant studies – acculturation towards western culture holds adaptive implications, and acculturation towards Chinese culture holds maladaptive implications. This hypothesis is essentially eugenic, by suggesting that western culture is universally superior to any other heritage cultures. Instead, we take a context-sensitive approach and hypothesize that in Hong Kong, retaining Chinese culture (the majority culture) would be associated with adaptive outcomes and adopting western culture (the minority culture) would be associated with less adaptive outcomes.

**Acculturation and family relationships**

To paint a more complete picture of adolescent adjustment, it is useful to also examine how acculturation relates to relationships within the family in addition to individual adjustment. One set of studies suggests that parental warmth and nurturance may coincide with greater identification with parent cultural values among adolescents. The other set of studies suggests that intergenerational value discrepancies and family
conflict may lead adolescents to identify with a different set of values from their parents. Taken together, these studies suggest that family relationships, particularly with parents, are relevant to the acculturation experiences of adolescents.

Studies of internalization allude to the causal pathway from warm parenting to internalization of parental goals. Of particular relevance to the present study, Kochanska and Aksan (1995) found that parental warmth prospectively predicted children's willingness to adopt parental values. Children, as young as 2–3 years, who shared positive affect with their mothers showed a high level of compliance to requests and prohibitions (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). The behaviors were internalized and did not vary when monitored versus when not monitored. Block (1972) studied which parenting styles led to similar political values between college students and their parents. Some of the parenting characteristics accounting for the continuity in values belonged to the nurturance dimension, including encouraging reflection, curiosity, and questioning. In addition, parents who derived great satisfaction in their roles and expressed interest in and appreciation of their children's accomplishments had children more similar in values. These studies may be relevant to the acculturation process.

If the heritage culture is a set of values that parents abide by, then children's adherence to this set of values may depend on the quality of the parent–child relationship. Children living in a home that is warm and connected might be more willing to accept the parental values wholeheartedly than children surrounded by coldness and rejection. For example, Nguyen et al.'s (1999) study of Vietnamese-American immigrant families found that higher quality parent–child relationships were related to greater adoption of the heritage culture for adolescents. Rosenthal and Feldman's (1992) study of Chinese-American and Chinese-Australian immigrant families found that greater parental warmth was related to higher levels of cultural pride among adolescents. Similar to the reasoning provided by Kochanska and Aksan (1995), a close parent–child relationship may foster a greater willingness among children and adolescents to identify with their parents and their parents' cultural background. As such, we predict that positive family variables such as parental nurturance and parent–child connectedness will be associated with greater Chinese acculturation among Hong Kong adolescents.

Another set of family relations are relevant to the acculturation of adolescents, namely, intergenerational value discrepancies and family conflict. In the context of the colonial setting of Hong Kong, children may be more likely than their parents to adopt the western culture (Huque, Tao, Wilding, & Wilding, 1997), resulting in greater intergenerational value discrepancies among these families. These greater intergenerational differences pose a risk by potentially erupting into family conflict (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). For example, Lee, Choe, Kim, and Ngo (2000) found that greater acculturation differences between Asian immigrant parents and their children were related to higher family conflict. Furthermore, in Qin's (2006) study of Chinese-American families, she described how cultural misunderstandings between adolescents and their parents could lead to more conflict and alienation, resulting in a vicious cycle in which adolescents turned further away from Chinese culture and more towards mainstream American culture. Thus, intergenerational value discrepancies and family conflict can push some adolescents to turn to “outside” family influences (in our case, western culture in Hong Kong). As such, we predict that intergenerational value discrepancies and family conflict will be associated with greater western acculturation among adolescents.

Local meaning of adaptation indices

It is important to understand the local meaning of adaptation indices particular to the Hong Kong context to ensure that our notions of what is “adaptive” and “maladaptive” are culturally relevant. The adaptation indices we focus on are GPA, depressive symptoms, misconduct, parental nurturance, family conflict, and intergenerational value discrepancies. Achieving a high GPA means earning university diplomas, social status, and financial security. Thus, doing well in school is adaptive in order to survive Hong Kong society. Depression, by contrast, is considered maladaptive in Chinese culture and appears as a diagnostic category in the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders, the Chinese “equivalent” of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Misconduct is also considered maladaptive in Hong Kong. For example, in Chinese culture maintaining interpersonal harmony and social order are the primary concerns of socialization and sanctions against misconduct may be especially strong (Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999). Parental warmth and nurturance are considered to be adaptive for children across many cultures (Kagitcibasi, 1996). In studies of Chinese adolescents from Hong Kong, parental warmth and nurturance have been linked to less parent–adolescent conflict (Yau & Smetana, 1996) and greater life satisfaction (Chang, McBride-Chang, Stewart, & Au, 2003). Finally, family conflict and intergenerational value discrepancies may be considered maladaptive in Hong Kong. Because Chinese culture places great emphasis on respect for parents and family harmony (Fulgini & Zhang, 2004), holding discrepant values may be disturbing to Chinese families.

The colonial setting for acculturation research

Hong Kong, as an ex-British colony, provides a platform to investigate whether acculturation findings hold up in a different, but theoretically valid, alternate context (Berry et al., 1992). Sociological studies assure us that powerful bicultural influences are present on the societal level, which promote acculturation on individual psychological levels (Redfield et al., 1926). Hong Kong was a British colony from 1843 to 1997. Bicultural influences are evidenced in many aspects of life. Despite English being the official language in government and schools, Chinese language and Chinese history, taught in Chinese, are required in schools. Street names and announcements on public transit are bilingual. Furthermore, Buddhist temples and Christian churches, as well as architecture in traditional Chinese and British styles, are cultural symbols commonly seen in daily life.

The two cultures not only exist in form and style, but are also interwoven into a single fabric. Colonization brought about implementation of British-type infrastructures in government, politics, social care, and education (Huque et al., 1997). Prior to the Second World War, Hong Kong remained a small and insignificant outpost of the British Empire serving as an access to the Chinese market. During 1952–1956, there was a rapid growth of manufacturing industries which was accredited to the existing British-type infrastructure, growing world demand for products, and the large-scale influx of capital and entrepreneurs who escaped from the newly erected communist regime in Mainland China. The following 30 years
saw the gross domestic product (GDP) grow at an average rate of 7.5% in Hong Kong; more than twice the rate of the world economy in general. The evidence suggests that societal progression in Hong Kong is the result of inseparable bicultural contributions.

Other social institutions such as education and religion also reflect the intertwining of the two cultures. For example, the education system in Hong Kong is shaped by both British meritocracy and Chinese family values (Chan & Leung, 1997). The importance of education can be seen in the tremendous effort required of students in order to advance through multi-tier public exams and to compete for the opportunity of university entrance. Religion is one of the fundamental rights enjoyed by Hong Kong residents. There are a large variety of religions represented in Hong Kong, including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity (“Religion in Hong Kong,” n.d.). This freedom allows people to practice their faith more easily than in Mainland China, especially when compared with the early days of communist rule in China. The freedom in cultural practices and religious rights is a characteristic of Hong Kong that facilitates biculturalism. In some regards, maintaining Confucius tradition is relatively easier in Hong Kong than in Mainland China, especially during the era of the Cultural Revolution. While books were sold and burnt in Mainland China during the Cultural Revolution, Hong Kong residents were able to maintain Confucious beliefs at will. In sum, the democratic infrastructure allowed all traditions to flourish, regardless of their Chinese or western origins.

The present study was conducted in July 2001, 4 years into the post-colonial era. Our particular view of Hong Kong as a bicultural society is secured by the 50-year no-change promise issued by the Chinese government. Pursuant to an agreement, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the whole territory of Hong Kong under British colonial rule would become the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 July 1997. In the Joint Declaration, the PRC promised that under the “One Country, Two Systems” policy, the socialist economic system in mainland China would not be practiced in Hong Kong and Hong Kong’s previous capitalist system and life-style would remain unchanged for 50 years or until 2047. In July 2001 when the present study was conducted, post-colonial Hong Kong had remained politically, economically, and culturally quite similar to colonial Hong Kong.

Hypotheses

First, we hypothesize that a Hong Kong sample should report some degree of “acculturation towards Chinese culture” and “acculturation towards western culture,” demonstrating that acculturation towards both cultures occurred on an individual psychological level. We also hypothesized that the bidimensional model will be supported in Hong Kong. As such, we do not expect the correlation between the two subscales to be significant. Second, we hypothesized that, in general, the main effects in Hong Kong would be reversed from the main effects found in an immigrant setting in that retaining the heritage culture (Chinese) would be associated with adaptive psychological outcomes and adopting the colonizing culture (western) would be associated with less adaptive psychological outcomes. Third, we hypothesize that acculturation would be associated with family relationships. More specifically, adolescents scoring higher on Chinese acculturation will report closer parent–child relations and higher parental nurturance and adolescents scoring higher on western acculturation will report greater intergenerational value discrepancies in family obligation and more family conflicts.

Method

Participants

Participants were 138 Chinese girls ($M = 13.8$ years, $SD = 1.08$) from an all-girl campus and their parents (130 fathers and 131 mothers). Approximately 96.2% of the students that we contacted were able to obtain parental permission to participate in the study. The school was located on Hong Kong Island, which has a longer established colonial history than the other two districts, Kowloon and the New Territories. The school is a subsidized school, run by Christian organizations with government funding. This is the most prevalent type of school and constituted 95% of all schools in Hong Kong in 1999/2000 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006). The teaching medium was English for all subjects except Chinese subjects, such as Chinese and Chinese history. The school was able to demonstrate English proficiency, and obtained permission from the Education Commission to continue to use English as the teaching medium.

The sample was recruited from three consecutive class levels (forms I, II, III) with a mean age of 12.81 years ($SD = 1.08$), 13.49 years ($SD = .56$), and 14.61 years ($SD = .66$), respectively. Although all students self-reported a Chinese ethnicity, birth places varied. A majority of the students were born in Hong Kong (85.1%), and China (13.5%), followed by Southeast Asia, UK, and the USA. The family histories varied from being able to trace back one to four, but rarely five or more generations of residency in Hong Kong—a reflection of the 150-year colonial and immigrant history. Although the foreign-born students had lived in Hong Kong for most of their lives, with their length of residence in Hong Kong averaging 10.65 years ($SD = 3.66$), their data were excluded from the analysis ($n = 21$). The present study exclusively focuses on the acculturation of students who were born in Hong Kong ($n = 117$), spent most of their lives under colonial rule, and the last 4 years under post-colonial rule.

In terms of socio-economic status (SES), 17.8% of parents were from the upper, 45.8% the middle, 21.2% the working, and 15.3% the poverty class. Concerning living arrangements, 88.8% of the students resided in nuclear families and the rest in extended families, typically with grandparents, aunts and/or uncles. Concerning family structure, a majority of households were two-parent homes (92.7%), and the remaining, single-parent homes (7.3%).

The response rate of the parents was 96.2%. The fathers’ mean age was 45.55 years ($SD = 6.38$) and the mothers’, 41.57 years ($SD = 4.67$). Most of the parents were born in Hong Kong (71.5% of the fathers, 73.9% of the mothers). China was the second most common birthplace (22.7% for fathers, 21.6% for mothers). The parents of Hong Kong-born students whose data were retained for analysis were either born in Hong Kong or China. This means that the Hong Kong-born students most likely experienced a predominantly Chinese influence in the familial context. Therefore, all Hong Kong-born students remained in the data set without being further excluded based on the criteria of parental birth places.
The education levels of the parents were low, with 80.5% of fathers completing elementary school, 17.5% completing high school, and 2% completing college. For the mothers, 74.2% completed elementary school, 24.7% completed high school, and 1.1% completed college. Fewer than half (42%) of the fathers were unskilled or skilled blue-collar workers, a small proportion (13.1%) were clerical or professional white-collar workers, and the rest were business owners or involved in various service industries. A majority of the mothers were housewives (53.9%), followed by white-collar workers (21.2%), blue-collar workers (13.9%), and business retailers (11%). The distribution of religions was similar for both fathers and mothers with atheists at 77.6%, Christians at 11.7%, and Buddhists at 10.6%.

Our sample seemed to represent the indigenous population, who had a longer family history in Hong Kong. In the current Hong Kong population, only 57% of people were born locally. In comparison, over 70% of the parents in our sample and all of the adolescents were local born. The lineage to Hong Kong’s humble origin in fishing and agriculture was probably the reason why the education levels of the parents in our sample were lower than the population average: no formal schooling 18.4%, primary 35.6%, lower secondary 15.5%, upper secondary 18.4%, and higher 12.1% (Atlapedia, 1995).

Instruments

Four types of measures were used. The first included the background variables (demographics of the adolescents and their parents). The second included the acculturation variables. The third included a set of commonly used adjustment indices for adolescents (GPA, misconduct, and depressive symptoms). The fourth set of measures included family relationship variables, with some positive factors (connectedness to parents, paternal and maternal nurturance), and some negative factors (family conflicts and parent-child discrepancies in family obligation beliefs). The following list of instruments is organized by the four types. All measures were self-report. Adolescents filled out all of the questionnaires and some demographic information. Parents filled out just the demographic information for themselves and their adolescents.

Background variables

Demographics of the adolescents. Adolescents provided information on their age, place of birth, SES, district in Hong Kong when growing up, length of stay in Hong Kong for non-locals, numbers of generations that had resided in Hong Kong, birth order, and their current living arrangements. Parents filled in portions of adolescent demographics if the adolescents felt unsure of certain information.

Demographics of the parents. Parents provided information about their age, place of birth, place of growing up, length of stay in Hong Kong (for non-locals), occupation, religion, current family structure, education level and SES of their families of origin.

Acculturation variables

Acculturation measure (Nguyen et al., 1999). The original scale measured the level of involvement (in terms of values and behaviors) in American culture and the level of the involvement in Vietnamese culture separately. We adapted this measure for colonial residents in Hong Kong by substituting the words “western” for “American” (21 items) and “Chinese” for “Vietnamese” (21 items). The rationale for choosing the broader term of “western,” rather than a narrower term “British” was based on the openness of Hong Kong to western influences in general. For example, a behavioral measure is food preference. Although British food can be found in Hong Kong, other western varieties are also widely available. The same can be said of other behavioral domains such as entertainment preference. Instead of finding only British TV programs and movies, entertainment comes from a broader range of western countries. A sample question for Chinese entertainment was “How often do you watch Chinese TV programs or movies?” A sample question for western entertainment was “How often do you watch western TV programs or movies?”

The value items measured individualistic and collectivistic ideologies. None of the items were altered as they tap the western and Chinese components in Hong Kong appropriately. Similar to the behavioral items, value items had a pair, one asking about Chinese, and another asking about western acculturation. It is worth mentioning that the pairing was not always symmetrical. For example, an item might be phrased in a more extreme tone towards Chinese tradition, “The oldest girl in the family should help take care of the house and the younger children, whether she wants to or not.” Its western counterpart would read less extreme, “Daughters over the age of 18 should be allowed to move away from home, to go to college or to take a job somewhere else.” Other value items were phrased in a more extreme tone towards western tradition, such as, “It is okay to put one’s elders in nursing homes when they are old enough.” The Chinese counterpart was milder, “It is the children’s responsibility to take care of their elders (parents, etc.).” Therefore the scores on the two cultural dimensions should not be taken as absolute indices for “Chineseness” and “westernness.” Rather, they were relative to how extreme the questions were phased.

The language items of Nguyen et al. (1999) tapping the preferences of heritage and host country languages were retained considering that both Chinese and English are the official languages in Hong Kong. Furthermore, English is widely understood and spoken by more than one-third of the population (“History of Hong Kong, 2005”). Nonetheless, the original language questions were modified. Measuring English speaking, particularly at home, is a viable index of acculturation in an immigrant setting but not necessarily a suitable index in a colonial setting. Instead, a common practice in Hong Kong is mixing English and Chinese in the same sentence. As such, it is more reasonable to tap a common practice (mixing English words) rather than a rare practice (speaking English sentences). The items now read “When I speak at home, I do not like to use any English words,” and “I like to mix English words in Chinese sentences at home.” The response set was a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = never to 5 = always for the behavioral items and 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree for the value items. Mean scores were calculated so that a higher score indicated more Chinese or western acculturation. The internal consistency of the subscales reported by Nguyen et al. (1999) was .92 for “acculturation Vietnamese culture” and .90 for “acculturation U.S. culture.” The alpha coefficient for the present study was .82 for the Chinese subscale and .80 for the western subscale.
Adjustment variables

School achievement. Adolescents self-reported the average letter grade obtained at school on a scale from "A" to "F." The 6-point scale was then reversed such that higher scores represented better school performance. Self-reported grades have been highly correlated (.76) with actual GPA obtained from school records (Dornbusch, Ritter, & Leiderman, 1987).

Depressive symptoms (Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression, CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). Adolescents responded to a widely-used 20-item scale measuring depressive symptoms. Respondents were asked how often they felt, or behaved in certain ways during the past week, on a 4-point scale from 1 = "less than 1 day" to 4 = "5 to 7 days." A sample item is, "I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor." Mean scores were calculated so that a higher score indicated higher levels of depressive symptoms. The scale had a .85 internal consistency in a sample of Chinese adolescents (Greenberger, Chen, Tally, & Dong, 2000). In the present study, alpha was .92.

The Misconduct Scale (Feldman, Rosenthal, Mont-Reynaud, Leung, & Lau, 1991). Adolescents responded to a seven-item scale concerning a range of problem behaviors from copying homework to threatening a teacher. A sample item is, "How often have you stolen from a store?" The response format was a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = "never" to 3 = "often." Mean scores were calculated so that a higher score indicated more misconduct. Alpha coefficients were between .82 and .86 in a sample with three groups of adolescents from the USA, Hong Kong, and Australia (Feldman et al., 1991). Alpha for the present study was .81.

Family relationships

Connectedness to parents (Statman & Lich, 1984). This 11-item scale measured the extent to which the adolescent felt close to and supported by his or her parents. Adolescents indicated how strongly they disagreed or agreed with statements using a 4-point scale. Sample items are, "My parents and I feel like strangers to one another" and "When I am feeling bad I can count on my parents to remind me of my worth." Negatively worded sentences were re-coded and mean scores were calculated so that a higher score indicated more connectedness with parents. Alpha for the present study was .90.

Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR; Bloch, 1965). Adolescents reported the perceived nurturance of both parents. Rickel and Biasatti (1982) applied Bloch's original 91 items with a 6-point Likert format and extracted 18 items for the nurturance dimension (factor loadings from .40 to .68). In the present study, the sample 18 items for nurturance were used. A sample item is, "My father/mother found being with his/her children interesting and educational – even for long periods of time." Mean scores were calculated so that a higher score indicated more nurturance. Alpha was .91 for fathers, and .92 for mothers.

Family obligation (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). All three subscales from the original version were used – (a) current assistance to the family (11 items), (b) respect for the family (7 items) and (c) future support to the family as adults (6 items). Sample items are, "Run errands that the family needs (7 items) and (c) future support to the family as adults (6 subscales from the original version were used – (a) current obligation (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999).

Order of presentation

The scales were presented to the adolescents in the following order: GPA, Child Rearing Practices Report for fathers and mothers, connectedness to parents, acculturation, depressive symptoms, misconduct, Asian American Family Conflicts Scale, adolescents’ family obligations, and adolescents’ perception of their parents’ family obligations. Scales presented to the parents were demographics of the students, demographics of fathers and then demographics of mothers.

Procedure

The consent form and the survey were translated into Chinese by a professional translation agency in Hong Kong and the accuracy was verified twice, first by a bilingual Chinese in Hong Kong and then, a bilingual Chinese American.

Teachers at the high school were contacted and involved in all aspects of the research process from recruiting participants to administering the questionnaires. Adolescent participation was on a volunteer basis. Chinese parent/guardian consent forms and parents’ own consent forms were distributed in the week prior to data collection to obtain signatures. The adolescent assent form and the survey were administered in classrooms of 20–30 students. Teachers introduced the survey as a psychological study of culture and adolescent development. The participants were instructed to use the class period to fill out the survey. If students could not finish in time, they could continue to work on it at home. Adolescents were
encouraged to clarify questions with the teachers. Those who did not participate were instructed to work on their homework. The average time taken to complete the survey was approximately 50 minutes. At the end of the session, adolescents were asked to take the questionnaires home for parents to finish the adolescent and parent demographic sections. The demographic information for adolescents could be filled out by either parent. Fathers and mothers separately answered questions about their background and current family. Teachers later collected the completed sets within the week.

**Results**

**Preliminary analyses for Hypotheses 1 and 2**

We first examined whether the demographic variables contributed to adjustment. If the variables were ordinal, bivariate correlational analyses were used and if they were nominal, one-way ANOVAs were used. Results showed that the SES of mother’s family ($r(106) = .25, p < .05$) was a significant predictor for GPA. Class level ($r(111) = -.26, p < .01$) significantly correlated with misconduct. In light of these significant relationships, these demographics were used as control variables in the subsequent analyses.

**Hypothesis 1: The bidimensional model depicts acculturation in Hong Kong**

Descriptive statistics showed that on a scale from 1 to 5 with 3 representing a neutral attitude, the Chinese acculturation subscale had a mean of 3.16 ($SD = .43$) and the western subscale, 3.63 ($SD = .37$). It seems that both Chinese and western acculturation have occurred on psychological levels, mirroring the bicultural forces on the societal level. Furthermore, the Chinese and western subscales showed independence with a Pearson $r$ at .09 ($ns$). The lack of a strong negative correlation between the two subscales indicated that the unidimensional acculturation model was unsuitable in Hong Kong. The subscales’ independence suggested that, as hypothesized, the bidimensional acculturation model was more appropriate.

**Hypothesis 2: Acculturation has implications for psychological adjustment**

Hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted in order to test the effects of acculturation on adjustment above and beyond the effects of demographic variables. The advantage of using regressions over ANOVA was the retention of the continuous acculturation attitudes rather than dichotomizing them into discrete levels. Also, MANOVA was not used largely because of a lack of theoretical overlap among adjustment indices. Table 1 shows some mild correlations among the measures of psychological adjustment, but again, the theoretical overlap was weak.

In the first step, the significant demographics for the dependent variable under examination were entered. In the second step, the two acculturation dimensions were entered (centered by the means, Aiken & West, 1991). In the third step the product of the two acculturation dimensions was entered to test for an interaction. The first step was skipped if no demographic variable was found to be significant during the preliminary analysis for a particular dependent variable.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. Acculturation predicted GPAs, $F(4,103) = 2.60, p < .05$. Those who were higher on Chinese acculturation had better GPAs. Another notable result was the significant acculturation model, $F(4,100) = 4.03, p < .01$, indicating that higher levels of western acculturation was related to more misconduct. Acculturation did not constitute a significant model, $F(3,104) = 1.38, ns$, for depressive symptoms (the means of all items are included in Table 3). There were no significant interactions between the two acculturation dimensions for any of the models.

To summarize the adjustment results, adolescents who adopted Chinese culture to a greater degree demonstrated better adjustment by obtaining higher GPAs at school. Adolescents who adopted western culture to a greater degree demonstrated poorer adjustment, in terms of engaging in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bivariate correlations and descriptive of main study variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Depressive symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Father’s nurturance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mother’s nurturance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Parental connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Obligation discrepancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Family conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

*Obligation discrepancy is the difference between adolescent and perceived parent obligation, both measured on 1–5 scales.
Table 2
Psychological adjustment as a function of acculturation attitudes in a hierarchical multiple regression analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step and variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: GPA (N = 103)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Mother's SES</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Chinese acculturation</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western acculturation</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Chinese × western</td>
<td>−1.23</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>−.20</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: Misconduct (N = 100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Class level</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.24*</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Chinese acculturation</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western acculturation</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Chinese × western</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: Depressive symptoms (N = 104)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Chinese acculturation</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western acculturation</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Chinese × western</td>
<td>−.74</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>−.21</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01.

Preliminary analyses for Hypothesis 3

Table 1 shows that the five family variables formed two conceptual clusters. The first three family variables – father’s nurturance, mother’s nurturance, and parental connectedness – shared positive correlations. The other two family variables – intergenerational obligation discrepancy and family conflict – shared positive correlations. Table 1 also shows that the adolescents’ reports of the paternal and maternal scores on nurturance were highly correlated. Thus, a composite nurturance score was calculated. As such, the number of family variables was reduced to four.

To prepare for the analysis of the association between acculturation and family relationships, demographics that could explain the differences in the family relationship variables were first examined. Mother’s education (r(109) = .23, p < .05) significantly contributed to the parent–child family obligations discrepancies. Thus, mother’s education would be a control variable in some of the upcoming analyses.

Hypothesis 3: Acculturation is related to family relationships

To examine family relationships as a function of Chinese and western acculturation, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. In each analysis, family relationship was the dependent variable; demographics, Chinese and western acculturation (centered by the means), and the product of the two acculturation dimensions were the independent variables.

Table 4 illustrates the models for nurturance, F(3,104) = 7.29, p < .001, and parental connectedness, F(3,107) = 7.50, p < .001, and how Chinese acculturation, but not western acculturation, significantly contributed to these positive family relationships. Youths with higher levels of Chinese acculturation perceived their parents to be more nurturing. Youths who showed high levels of Chinese acculturation also had closer relationships with their parents. Thus, high Chinese acculturation homes could be characterized by the cluster of positive relationships.

Table 3
Item-by-item report of the depressive symptoms scale (CES-D)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
family relationships, showing high nurturance and close parent-child relationships.

Besides the main effects, the other significant term in the models for the parental nurturance and connectedness was the Chinese × western interaction. Meaning, we could not say that the effect of Chinese acculturation was the same along all degrees of western acculturation. Although a unit increase in Chinese acculturation generally translated into 0.40 units of increase in parental nurturance, low western acculturation tended to discount this prospect, and high western acculturation tended to enhance this prospect. Specifically, 1 SD below the average western acculturation cut the increase in parental nurturance down to 0.31 units, whereas 1 SD above the average western acculturation boosted the increase to 0.49 units. The same interpretation held for the main and interaction effects found for parental connectedness. While a unit increase in Chinese acculturation generally corresponded with 0.35 units of increase in parental connectedness, 1 SD below the average western acculturation discounted this prospect to 0.25 units, whereas 1 SD above the average western acculturation boosted this prospect to 0.45 units. In sum, adolescents who acculturated towards both Chinese and western acculturation reported the highest parental nurturance and connectedness. In contrast, adolescents who were low on both Chinese and western acculturation reported the lowest parental nurturance and connectedness.

Table 4 also illustrates the regression models for family obligation discrepancies, F(4,103) = 3.37. p < .05, and family conflict, F(3,107) = 3.04. p < .05. Western acculturation, but not Chinese acculturation, contributed to these negative family relationships. Homes of youth who acculturated towards western culture had larger family obligation discrepancies and higher family conflict. In other words, the high western homes were captured by the two negative family relationships, showing very different family obligation beliefs between parents and children as well as the occurrence of conflicts over disagreement.

In sum, youth who affiliated more with Chinese culture reported better family relationships, as indicated by perceiving their parents as more nurturing and feeling more connected to their parents, than those affiliating less with Chinese culture. Finally, youth who affiliated more with western culture reported more disharmonious family relationships, as indicated by higher levels of family conflicts and greater intergenerational differences concerning family obligations, than those affiliating less with western culture.

**Discussion**

This study investigated acculturation in a theoretically valid, yet somewhat overlooked, context – the colonial setting. Our primary goal was to establish an empirical anchor to the idea that acculturation occurs in a colonial context. We also tested which theoretical model (unidimensional or bidimensional) was suitable in the colonial setting, by taking the conservative approach of measuring each subscale separately and not assuming a four-fold typology a priori. Finally, we examined whether the link between acculturation and adjustment, evident in immigrant settings, also held in our colonial setting. In the course of examining adjustment implications, we included family variables to better interpret adolescent adaptation in Hong Kong.

**Generalizability of the bidimensional model in Hong Kong**

Based on the initial formulation by Berry et al. (1992), our hypothesis that acculturation occurs in a colony was validated. Our Hong Kong sample demonstrates the existence of psychological acculturation on an individual level accompanying the bicultural influences on a societal level. Moreover, the bidimensional framework is a more suitable model to depict the various acculturation strategies than the unidimensional framework. Therefore, the bidimensional acculturation framework is robust under the new colonial condition.

**Adaptiveness of acculturation in Hong Kong**

We found that adolescents reporting greater acculturation towards Chinese culture did better in school. In a place like Hong Kong, where a multi-tier exam system is implemented to limit the number of high school students entering the handful of universities, achieving a high GPA gives adolescents considerable adaptive advantages. Acculturation towards Chinese culture coincided with an adaptive ontogenetic choice, and a better chance of survival in Hong Kong.

We also found that adolescents reporting greater acculturation towards western culture engaged in more misconduct, an indicator of maladaptation in the Hong Kong context. Cross-cultural studies have found that Asian youth are less likely to engage in physical aggression, misconduct, and problem behavior than western youth (U.S. and Australian; Feldman et al., 1991; Greenberger, Chen, Beam, Wang, & Dong, 2000; Jesser et al., 2003; Weisz, Chaiyasit, Weiss, Eastman, & Jackson, 1995). One explanation is that cultures characterized by an individualistic orientation are conducive to acting out behaviors (i.e., expressing deviance) compared with cultures with a more collectivistic orientation such as Chinese (Feldman et al., 1991). This could explain why, for Hong Kong adolescents, those who adopt more individualistic, western values are more likely to engage in more misconduct.

In our study, neither Chinese nor western acculturation was predictive of depressive symptoms. Theoretically, acculturation could be related to depressive symptoms through acculturative stress (Berry & Kim, 1998). In our study, however, we did not measure the pressure to acculturate and the resulting distress. Instead, we measured the degree of cultural involvement and depression, whose operationalization might be too distal to tap the central mechanism in acculturation processes. Thus, future studies should include a direct measure of acculturative stress in order to expose the pathway acculturation to psychological stress.

We found that the relation between acculturation and outcomes are domain-specific. Because the bidimensional acculturation model postulates that the two acculturation dimensions are independent of one another, we should expect some level of domain specificity. In other words, if GPA was related to Chinese acculturation, it may not necessarily relate to western acculturation as the Chinese and western acculturation dimensions are not dependent on one another. Furthermore, acculturation researchers have emphasized the importance of examining different kinds of adaptation, namely, psychological (emotional well-being and mental health) and sociocultural (acquiring culturally appropriate skills) (Ward, 2001). In our study, acculturation did not relate to depressive symptoms (a measure of psychological...
adaptation), however, acculturation did relate to earning high grades and engaging in misconduct (two measures of sociocultural adaptation). These findings are in line with other evidence that the antecedents of these two types of adaptation may be different (Ward, 2001).

A further look into adaptiveness through the lens of family relationships

We anticipated that family variables would provide a deeper understanding into how adolescents’ acculturation relates to their adaptation in Hong Kong. The results showed that affiliation with Chinese culture was associated with better family relationships. The youths who were more acculturated towards the Chinese culture came from more closely connected and nurturing homes. This finding on family relationships reinforces the notion that youth who acculturate towards Chinese culture experience more positive adjustment on an individual and family level. Although we could not test the causal directions, the coherence among Chinese acculturation, nurturing parents, close family relationships and high school performance were supported by past literatures. Research shows that children in warm family environments are more likely to adopt the values held by their parents (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995), and one value endorsed by Asian parents is the emphasis on education (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1992; Lin & Fu, 1990). Therefore, a close family relationship and nurturing parenting style may facilitate the transmission of a specific set of goals (such as education) from one generation to the next.

The homes of western-acculturated youths, however, were characterized by disharmony. Adolescents who acculturated towards western values experienced higher levels of family conflict and more pronounced intergenerational differences. With the results from the previous section taken together, we conclude that adolescents demonstrating greater acculturation towards the western culture in Hong Kong are not as well adjusted as those demonstrating greater acculturation towards Chinese culture. Although we could not test the causal directions, the pattern of maladjustment in terms of family conflict, intergenerational differences, and misconduct are coherent according to past literatures. For example, Ary et al. (1999) found that high family conflict, low parent–child involvement, inadequate parental monitoring, as well as the association with deviant peers, accounted for 46% of the variance in children’s problem behaviors. The present study found a similar pattern – more family conflict, greater intergenerational value discrepancies, and greater misconduct related to western acculturated youths in Hong Kong. It could be that youth who adopt more western values and engage in misconduct leads to more arguments and conflict with parents. Or, it could be that youth who experience more family conflict and engage in misconduct turn towards western culture as a way of redefining their parents’ traditional cultural background. Future research incorporating a longitudinal design is needed to disentangle the direction of effects.

We found that only two interactions between Chinese and western acculturation were significant – in predicting parental nurturance and connectedness. Adolescents with higher acculturation toward both Chinese and western cultures report more warmth and connectedness at home. Conversely, adolescents with lower acculturation towards both Chinese and western cultures report less warmth and connectedness at home. Experiencing close parent–child relationships has two ramifications according to past research. On the one hand, it induces children to inherit the values held by their parents (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995), which would explain why youth acculturate more towards Chinese culture. On the other hand, close parent–child relationships encourage children to explore and express themselves (Block, 1965), which would explain why adolescents, at the same time, acculturate more towards western culture.

Generalizability of adaptive implications

What prompted us to examine adolescent adjustment associated with acculturation was the inconsistent results found in immigrant settings, where: (a) earlier research suggested a decline in adaptive values from integration, to assimilation, separation and marginal; and (b) more recent research showed that, in general, retaining heritage culture was less adaptive while adopting the host culture predicted was more adaptive. Furthermore, findings from pockets of ethnic neighborhoods showed some effects of the micro-context. We attempted to clarify the question of context in Hong Kong, whose macro-context forms a clear contrast against immigrant settings. We wondered which set of adjustment implications was generalizable in Hong Kong.

Our results replicated the general findings by more recent immigrant research: the two cultural attitudes (Chinese and western) were predictive of adolescent adjustment. We now put the results from colonial and immigrant settings side by side in order to spell out the generalizability more explicitly. We found that acculturation towards the heritage (Chinese) culture held adaptive implications, whereas recent immigrant research found that acculturation towards the host culture had adaptive implications. Also, we found that acculturating towards the colonizing (western) culture had maladaptive implications, whereas recent immigrant research suggested that acculturation towards the heritage culture had maladaptive implications. Thus, the adaptive patterns found in colonial and immigrant settings are not carbon copies of each other, forbidding us to arrive at context-insensitive conclusions about, for example, what it means to acculturate towards the heritage culture. Whether acculturation towards Chinese culture is adaptive or not very much depends on the specifics of the context. Another way to state the context-sensitive nature is that the acculturation-adjustment link is moderated by the context.

A natural follow-up research question to pursue from here is which factor within the context is the key moderator. We venture to suggest one candidate based on theoretical considerations. Acculturation theories point out that the key to acculturation is the presence of two cultures. Although both immigrant and colonial settings involve bicultural environments, they differ in terms of the relative strengths of the two cultural components. Specifically, in Ryder et al.’s (2000) immigrant sample in Vancouver of British Columbia, and Nguyen et al.’s (1999) immigrant sample in Lansing, Michigan, the host culture outweighs the heritage culture both in terms of strength and population. In the Hong Kong sample of the present study, the heritage (Chinese) culture outweighs the colonizing (western) culture in terms of strength and population. Therefore, when it comes to suggesting a specific moderator for the acculturation-adjustment link, we gravitate towards the bicultural composition of the environment (which
A note on bicultural competence

We have examined adjustment implications in Hong Kong using a bidimensional acculturation instrument, which allows for an interaction effect. Yet, no Chinese by western interaction effect was found for any of the psychological outcomes (GPA, depression, or misconduct) and only two (parental nurturance and connectedness) of the four family variables. In general, we found that each dimension has predictive power independent of one another. Thus, our results are in concert with recent findings from immigrant settings, suggesting that researchers may not want to assume a typology (which includes biculturalism) a priori and first test for interaction effects.

The ramifications of the a priori assumption goes beyond how researchers decide to model acculturation phenomena, to how researchers understand psychological adjustment in bicultural habitats. With the a priori assumption came the notion of bicultural competence. Those who embrace both cultures were thought to be well-adjusted. Berry (1980) proposed that people engage in a benefit analysis by asking the two dimensional questions, “Is it of value to retain my culture?” and “Is it of value to acquire the other culture?” The problem with bicultural competence is that it is relatively insensitive to contexts. Meaning, it assumes that regardless of the context, as long as a bicultural resident embraces both cultures, his/her adjustment outlook is optimistic.

When the present study, as well as recent immigrant studies, abandoned the a priori assumption, the findings carried a context-sensitive message – that acculturation towards the majority culture may be beneficial and acculturation towards the minority culture may be costly. Thus, the process involved in bicultural adaptation may not be limited to the analysis of benefit alone (Berry, 1980) but also an analysis of cost as well, by asking, “Is it of disadvantage to continue to hold on to my own culture?” and “Is it of disadvantage to acquire the other culture?” In other words, we tend to assume that acculturating to at least one or especially both cultures is beneficial, or at least non-disadvantageous, and that continuing to hold on to one’s own culture is disadvantageous. This idea seems to be a common approach in acculturation literature (Berry, 1992).

Only now does acculturation literature reconcile with discrimination literature. Bicultural competence instills a sense of control among immigrants: if a person becomes fluent with the social rules and interpersonal interactions of both cultures, then he/she is at less risk for psychological maladjustment. However, only in the ideal world does acculturation toward both cultures come with benefit only. Most societies are far from the ideal, and there are some costs attached to the acculturation towards stigmatized cultures. The discrimination literature describes the costs minorities experience who, regardless of social skills, are at risk of maladjustment as long as the environment is discriminatory enough (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006). The present study enhances acculturation theory by incorporating a sensitivity to power differentials in a society. In other words, our findings suggest that we must be sensitive to differences in the size, prestige, and strength of the bicultural composition of the environment to understand how acculturation leads to psychological adaptation or maladaptation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One is the reliance on self-reports from only one source – the adolescent. It will be important in future studies to include other sources such as parents, especially for constructs dealing with family variables such as parent–adolescent discrepancy in family obligation. Another limitation is the correlational nature of the data. We argued theoretically that acculturation contributes to psychological outcomes. However, it may also be the case that those who are better adjusted are more likely to maintain Chinese culture than western culture. Furthermore, the role played by family relationships is unclear. Adolescents who have a close parent–child relationship may want to identify more with their parents’ cultural background (and thus show more acculturation to Chinese values and behaviors) compared with adolescents experiencing greater conflict with parents. Or, adolescents who experience more conflict with their parents may turn away from their parents’ cultural values. Only by studying the process of acculturation longitudinally can we elucidate the direction of effects. Another limitation was recruitment of students from an all-girl campus. Future studies are needed to test whether our findings are generalizable to boys as well as girls. Finally, one of the main limitations to our study is that we did not concurrently compare the Hong Kong sample with an immigrant sample to assess explicitly how context moderates the acculturation–adjustment link. If future studies could compare the adjustment of various acculturation strategies among contexts while identifying “context” with concrete measures, then the exact moderator(s) for the acculturation–adjustment link might emerge.

References


Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
International Journal of Behavioral Development, 23(6), 893–911.
International Journal of Behavioral Development, 2008, 32 (1), 21–33