Are ethnic minority adolescents at risk for problem behaviour? Acculturation and intergenerational acculturation discrepancies in early adolescence

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The present study investigated the adjustment of Indian adolescents living in Britain as well as the links between parents’ and adolescents’ acculturation styles and the adolescents’ problem behaviours. The sample consisted of 68 young adolescents (31 Indian and 37 English) between the ages of 10 and 13, and their mothers and fathers. Mothers, fathers and adolescents reported about their own acculturation style, and parents also reported on their adolescents’ problem behaviour. Overall Indian adolescents exhibited more internalizing problems than did their English peers. Furthermore, within the Indian group, the more Westernized mothers were in their acculturation style, the higher the level of externalizing problem behaviour their adolescents exhibited. In addition, the more traditional adolescents were the more internalizing problems they displayed. Finally, Indian adolescents experienced more internalizing problems when their parents were more Western or less traditional than the adolescents themselves. These findings highlight the importance of examining not only parental acculturation style, but also the parent–child acculturation discrepancy as a risk factor for problem behaviour.

With increasing numbers of immigrants around the world, ethnic minority children become a salient group that merit better understanding. Ethnic minority children grow up exposed to two different cultures, often resulting in conflicting demands. The first aim of this study was to examine whether Indian ethnic minority adolescents living in Britain are at higher risk for problem behaviour than their English peers. Furthermore, the psychological consequences of the immigration process and of minority group status may vary (Berry, 1997). Ethnic minority parents and children decide on the extent to which the original cultural identity and characteristics are considered to be important and maintained, as well as the extent of involvement and adaptation in the host cultural group (Berry, 1994, 1997).
Our second aim was to investigate the associations between adolescents’ problem behaviour and parental and adolescents’ acculturation style as well as parent-child intergenerational acculturation discrepancy within the Indian families.

India’s historical association with Britain has resulted in a relatively large immigration of Indian people into Britain. Today, Indians are the biggest ethnic minority group in Britain (Berthoud, Modood, & Smith, 1997; Office of National Statistics, 1996; Owen, 1995), and the number of Indian people settling in Britain is greater than all other countries in the West (Sachdev, 1995). Therefore, the socialization of children of Indian origin who are living in Britain is particularly salient. Indian and British cultures are diverse in many respects. The core values of both cultures are different, and tend to represent opposite extremes of several dimensions. One of the main differences is the relationship between the individual and the community. British culture is individualistic, whereas Indian culture is more collectivistic (Ghuman, 1999). We suggest that this difference in the relationship between the self and the community seen in collectivist (where the collective is more important than the self) and individualist (in which the self has more importance than the collective) societies is related to children’s expression of problem behaviour, as explained below.

Minority children and adjustment

Across the age span from preschool to adolescence, two major classes of problem behaviour have been identified in children (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978, 1981). The first class has been termed ‘externalizing’ because these behaviours are expressed outwardly against others, or have an impact on the child’s environment (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978; Campbell, 1990). These include a range of behaviours characterized by under control that typically are disruptive and/or have the potential to hurt others. Examples include overactivity, tantrums, fighting, destructive behaviour and disobedience. The second class of behaviours has been labelled ‘internalizing’ because they have their major impact on the child himself or herself. These behaviours are characterized by overcontrol, and appear to be an expression of social withdrawal, fearfulness, unhappiness and anxiety (Campbell, 1990). We suggest that children from different cultural backgrounds may express their problems through different kinds of behaviours. Specifically, children from more collectivist societies are implicitly urged to express their difficulties through more covert behaviours such as internalizing behaviours, whereas children from more individualistic cultures are encouraged to express their difficulties through more overt behaviours, such as externalizing behaviours.

Acculturation and problem behaviour

Until recently, few studies have investigated the effects of immigration on the psychological well-being of children (Munroe-Blum, Boyle, Offord, & Kates, 1989; Rutter, Yule, Berger, Yule, & Bagley, 1974). These older investigations resulted in inconsistent findings. Evidence for ethnic minority children not being at risk for problem behaviour comes from several sources. For example, Fuligni (1998) reported that based on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a representative study of more than 20,000 adolescents in the USA, first- and second-generation adolescents of Asian and Latin American origin were less likely to engage in delinquent and violent acts, to use drugs and alcohol and to have sex than their peers from ethnic majority families. In addition, they were less likely to have missed school because of
health or emotional problems. It may be that unlike majority children, ethnic minority children may be exposed to values and traditions that provide them with a clear direction, a responsible role and a strong cultural identity (Fuligni, 1998). On the other hand, there is also evidence that ethnic minority children are at risk. For example, Rutter and colleagues (1974) conducted a large population survey in 1970 of all 10-years-old children residing in an inner London borough. They found that Caribbean children showed more problem behaviour, especially conduct disorder, than did ethnic majority children.

A recent book edited by Berry and colleagues (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) details the adaptation of ethnic minority youth (aged 13–18) in 13 different countries of settlement (the International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth; ICSEY). The results were remarkably consistent: the minority adolescents demonstrated more favourable adjustments than did the majority group adolescents, but these differences were small in magnitude. For the purposes of the present paper, we examined the appendices of the book (p. 285) in order to calculate the significance and effect sizes of the differences between ethnic minority Indians living in the UK and their English majority group peers. For psychological problems (internalizing symptoms of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic symptoms), the effect size was large (equivalent $r = 0.56$), and of course highly significant ($p < .001$), indicating that the Indian adolescents suffered from less internalizing problems than did their English peers. Similarly, the Indian adolescents reported substantially less antisocial behaviour (equivalent $r = 0.48$; $p < .001$).

A result inconsistent with these findings from the ICSEY project was reported by Atzaba-Poria, Pike, and Barrett (2004). They investigated the adjustment of 7- to 9-years-old Indian-minority and English-majority children living in Britain. It was found that being part of the minority group put children at higher risk for problem behaviour, but only for internalizing problems. In the current study, we examined the adjustment of children from this same ethnic group living in Britain during the early adolescent period. As such, the present study involved children between the ages of the two conflicting studies reported above. Early adolescence is a particularly relevant period to explore ethnic minority adjustment. This developmental period is a formative period for children’s self-identification (Harter, 1998). In addition, during this developmental stage, children’s extra familial environment becomes increasingly important, gradually outstripping the time children spend in the company of their families (Brown, 1990). Thus, young adolescents may perceive increasing conflicts between the demands of their home environment vs. the ‘outside’ or majority culture environment. In-turn, such conflicts may affect well-being during early adolescence.

An important factor that has been related to the level of problem behaviour for ethnic minority children is the parental acculturation style (e.g. Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004). Two dimensions of acculturation style are proposed: traditionalism or cultural maintenance, which refers to the extent that the original cultural identity and characteristics are considered to be important and maintained; and Western attitudes or contact and participation, which refer to the extent of involvement in the dominant cultural group (Berry, 1997). Phinney described the acculturation model as ‘a two-dimensional process, in which both the relationship with the traditional or ethnic culture and the relationship with the new or dominant culture must be considered, and these two relationships may be independent’ (Phinney, 1990, pp. 501). For example, there are individuals who may develop bicultural identities (sometime termed as integration; Berry, 1994) – maintaining the original culture and interacting with the host
Parental acculturation style has been linked to children's adjustment (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Barankin, Konstantareas, & de Bosset, 1989; Pawliuk, et al., 1996). Evidence suggests that children of more traditional parents are better adjusted (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Fuligni, 1998), perhaps as a result of the greater sense of obligation children have in more traditional families, which provides them with a clearer set of expectations and direction that may assist in their adjustment (Fuligni, 1998). This finding has been found in the US as well as within Britain. Furthermore, children of assimilated parents (high in Western attitudes and low in traditional attitudes) have been found to have more behavioural and disciplinary problems (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998; Pawliuk et al., 1996), possibly as a result of parents avoiding disciplining their children.

In the current study we examined not only links between children's adjustment and parental acculturation style, but also links with children's own acculturation style. This is especially relevant during adolescence when one of the main psychological developments is the achievement of self-identity including attitudes and identification with the culture of origin and culture of settlement (Erikson, 1968). The few studies examining adolescents' own acculturation style and adjustment have revealed mixed findings. Farver, Narang, and Bhadha (2002) in a study with American-born Indian adolescents found that adolescents who adopted the attitudes of the host culture had higher self-esteem than did adolescents who did not have any contact with the host culture. However, no significant differences were found in anxiety between the acculturation groups. In addition, Lau and colleagues (2005) found that among Mexican-American adolescents, American and traditional cultural affinities were not significantly correlated with conduct problems (using a psychiatric diagnosis).

The ICSEY project (Berry et al., 2006) reports extensive analyses of adolescent adjustment according to the adolescents' own acculturation, however this is reported pooling across all of the countries, and results specific to the U.K. are not included. The ICSEY findings were also not robust to differences in analytic technique. Specifically, when cluster analysis was used, those minority adolescents reporting 'integration' attributes scored most highly on psychological (i.e. life satisfaction, self-esteem, and psychological problems) and sociological adaptation (i.e. school adjustment and behaviour problems). This was followed by 'ethnic' profile adolescents, which includes the separation acculturation style, with Westernized and marginalized adolescents lagging behind. Somewhat contradicting, correlational analyses (combining several variables into factors, rather than several people into clusters) indicated that the degree of ethnic orientation, including separation acculturation style, was the most important 'predictor' of adaptation, that is, minority adolescents who were more highly oriented towards their ethnic group (regardless of their attitudes towards the host culture) had fewer adaptation problems.

These scant and inconsistent findings highlight the need for further examination of the links between adolescents' own acculturation style and adjustment, particularly within a British context.

**Acculturation discrepancies and problem behaviour**

As children and parents may go through a different process of acculturation, an intergenerational acculturation discrepancy may emerge. It is unknown, however,
whether such gaps are normative in the process of immigration (Sluzki, 1979) and therefore may not negatively affect the children, or whether they may lead to family conflict, and in-turn to children's problem behaviour (Lee, Choe, Kim, & Ngo, 2000). Evidence thus far is contradictory. On one hand, there are findings suggesting that although intergeneration acculturation discrepancies were linked to parent-child conflicts, these conflicts were not related to children's problem behaviour (Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, 1995) or to children's self-esteem (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that intergenerational gaps in acculturation are related to higher levels of children's anxiety and lower levels of children's self-esteem (Farver et al., 2002). Similarly, in a recent study of Mexican-American families, Lau et al. (2005) found that acculturation gaps were related to children's adjustment but in a more complex manner. Specifically, it was found that children who were more traditional than their parents exhibited more conduct problems. However, no significant association was found between parent-child differences in Western acculturation style and conduct problems.

Although they did not report on acculturation discrepancies per se, the ICSEY project did investigate discrepancies between ethnic minority parents' and their children's value judgements concerning adolescent rights and family obligations. As expected, parents valued family obligations more strongly than did their children, and adolescent rights less strongly. Most critical to the present study, the ICSEY book (Berry et al., 2006) reports that the families with larger parent-child discrepancies in terms of family obligations, contained the adolescents with poorer psychological and sociological adaptation. Again, however, these analyses are only reported as pooled results across all 13 countries, rather than providing specific results for each country of settlement.

The current study expands previous research in two main ways. First, most studies focus on children and their mothers, ignoring the important influence that fathers can have (Lamb, 2004). The current study included fathers and explored the links between both mothers' and fathers' acculturation style as well as father-child and mother-child acculturation discrepancies and children's adjustment. Second, there has been very little research written focusing specifically on ethnic minority families in Britain. Furthermore, most of the extant research has focused on late adolescence (e.g. Berry et al., 2006). The current study focuses on families with young adolescents from the Indian ethnic minority group living in Britain. Specifically we aimed to:

(1) examine ethnic group differences between the Indian and English adolescents in problem behaviour.
(2) explore associations between both parents' and adolescents' own traditional and Western acculturation attitudes and adolescents' problem behaviour.
(3) investigate associations between mother-child and father-child acculturation discrepancies and adolescents' problem behaviour.

Method
Sample & Procedure
Sixty-eight adolescents and their parents participated in this study. Thirty-seven families were English (18 boys and 19 girls) and 31 were of Indian origin (17 boys and 14 girls). All children were living in West London and were recruited from local schools. In particular, 81% of the sample had been recruited for a previous study 3–4 years previously (see Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004 for details). This represented a minority of the
previous study's participants due to being unable to locate the families (50), refusal to participate (7) or failure to return the questionnaires after repeated reminders (19). In order to augment the sample, two schools within the same geographical area agreed to distribute information letters to their students. This resulted in an additional 10 families. Finally, two additional families were recruited by way of snow-balling from participating families. It is impossible to estimate accurate refusal rates for these families because of the opt-in procedure. That is, we do not have accurate information as to how many letters were distributed to the students, how many of these letters were actually read by the parents, and how many families were eligible to participate. However, it was clear that the participating families represent a small minority of those eligible. The adolescents' ages ranged from 9.92 to 13.68 years ($M = 12.56, SD = .61$). Families were diverse in terms of parental education and occupation, ranging from working- to middle-class. Preliminary analyses revealed no differences between the Indian and the English children's ages. A small difference did emerge for the families' socio-economic statuses as indexed by occupational status, indicating that the English families were of higher socio-economic status than were the Indian families ($M = 3.70, SD = .64; M = 3.14, SD = 1.06$, respectively).

Questionnaires were posted to the families, and in almost all cases data were collected from both parents as well as the target child. Family members were instructed to complete the questionnaires independently, and separate envelopes were provided for each family member to facilitate confidentiality. Families also returned their questionnaire via post, and were then sent a £10 voucher as a small thank you for participating.

**Measures**

In order to obtain a more representative sample within the Indian group, parental questionnaires were translated into Gujarati. Gujarati is one of the languages spoken in India, in the area of Gujarat (i.e. West India). This language was chosen as it is the principal language used among most of the Hindu families in Britain (Modood, 1997). The translation was done by two people fluent in both languages. A native speaker of Gujarati translated the English version of the questionnaires into Gujarati and then it was back translated into English by another translator fluent in English and Gujarati. All disagreements were discussed until a consensus was reached. As all children were born in the Britain and had received all their education in British schools using the English language, children's questionnaires were given in English.

**Child problem behaviour**

The Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) is a parental report of problem behaviour for children 4-18 years of age. Parents were asked to indicate how true different statements of behaviours were about their child within the past 6 months, using a 3-point scale ranging from (0) 'Not true', through (1) 'Somewhat true or sometimes true' to (2) 'Very true or often true'. The 113 items forming this questionnaire cover eight scales including Delinquent behaviour, Aggressive behaviour, Withdrawn, Anxious/Depressed, Attention problems, Social problems, Thought problems and Somatic problems. These eight scales form two second-order scales: Externalizing behaviour problems (items from the Delinquency and Aggression scales) and Internalizing behaviour problems (items from the Withdrawn, Somatic complaints and Anxious/Depressed scales).
The CBCL has been used to document behavioural and emotional problems among children from diverse culture backgrounds. Similar age and gender patterns have been shown across 12 different cultures for externalizing and internalizing problems (Crijnen, Achenbach, & Verhulst, 1997). Furthermore, extensive research supports the reliability, stability and validity of the CBCL (Achenbach, 1991). Internal reliability for the two clusters as well as for Total problem behaviour was excellent for both parents’ reports in the two ethnic groups. Internal reliability coefficients were high for Externalizing behaviours ($\alpha = .85$, $\alpha = .87$) and for Internalizing behaviours ($\alpha = .84$, $\alpha = .85$) for maternal and paternal reports, respectively.

Correlations between mothers’ and fathers’ reports were calculated for each of the clusters. Mother–father agreement was substantial for the Externalizing ($r = .63$) and Internalizing ($r = .55$) scales. On the basis of these inter-reporter correlations, reports from both parents were averaged to form externalizing and internalizing composites. This strategy was used in order to increase the reliability and validity of these indices (Epstein, 1984; Rushton, Brained, & Pressley, 1983).

Acculturation style
Ghuman’s Acculturation Scale (Ghuman, 1975) was used to measure Indian parents’ and adolescents’ acculturation style (i.e. traditional and Western beliefs and attitudes). This 29-item questionnaire assesses the acculturation of Asian people into British culture. The questionnaire includes items across the following domains: food and clothes, the role of women, religion and entertainment and community life. Two factors are indexed via this questionnaire: traditional attitudes (i.e. retaining Asian attitudes) and Western attitudes (i.e. adapting to British cultural norms). Indian parents and adolescents indicated on a 5-point scale their degree of agreement, ranging from (1) ‘Strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘Strongly agree’. Fifteen items measured the ‘traditionalism factor’ (e.g. ‘Marriages should be arranged by the family’), and 14 the ‘Western attitudes factor’ (e.g. ‘Our women should wear English (European) clothes’). Due to low inter-item reliability, four items were omitted from the Western scales. Following this procedure, Cronbach alpha was acceptable for the traditional scale ($\alpha = .80$, $\alpha = .69$, $\alpha = .63$ for mothers’, fathers’ and child reports, respectively) as well as for the Western scale ($\alpha = .65$, $\alpha = .63$, $\alpha = .67$ for mothers’, fathers’ and child reports, respectively). Higher scores indicated higher traditional or higher Western attitudes, accordingly. This acculturation scale has good face validity (Ghuman, 2000) and evidence supports its content validity as reported by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE, 1978) on a sample of 1,117 Asian individuals (Ghuman, 1991).

Results

Ethnic differences in problem behaviour between the English and Indian adolescents
Descriptive statistics for all study measures were first calculated and are contained in Table 1. Next, gender and ethnic group differences were examined for the problem behaviour scales. Two (gender) $\times$ 2 (ethnicity) ANOVAs were used for parental reports. These analyses did not reveal significant gender differences for internalizing ($F(1, 68) = .01$, ns) nor externalizing behaviours ($F(1, 68) = 1.57$, ns).

These same ANOVAs revealed significant ethnic group differences in internalizing problems ($F(1, 68) = 4.15$, $p < .05$). Specifically, Indian children displayed significantly
more internalizing problems than did the English children ($M = 7.56$, $SD = 5.31$; $M = 5.15$, $SD = 4.18$, respectively). No significant difference emerged for externalizing problems ($F(1, 68) = .22$, ns; $M = 6.27$, $SD = 5.01$; $M = 5.81$, $SD = 4.47$, for the English and Indian children, respectively).

**Acculturation style and problem behaviour**

In order to examine acculturation within the Indian group, correlations between mothers’, fathers’ and children’s traditional and Western attitudes were first examined. Positive substantial correlations were found between child and paternal traditional ($r = .43$, $p < .05$) and Western ($r = .47$, $p < .05$) attitudes. Insignificant correlations were, however, found for child and maternal traditional ($r = .06$, ns) and Western ($r = -.11$, ns) attitudes. In addition, moderate positive correlations were revealed between maternal and paternal traditionalism ($r = .38$, $p < .05$) but not for paternal and maternal Western attitudes ($r = .02$, ns).

Pearson’s correlations were calculated in order to examine whether children’s problem behaviour varied according to parental as well as their own Western and traditional attitudes. As can be seen in Table 2, positive moderate correlations were found between maternal Western attitudes and children’s externalizing and internalizing problem behaviour. Specifically, the more Westernized mothers were, the more externalizing and internalizing problem behaviours their children exhibited. Furthermore, a correlation nearing significance was also revealed for paternal Western attitudes and children’s externalizing problems. In addition, a moderate positive correlation was also found between children’s traditional attitudes and internalizing problems, meaning that the more the traditional children, the more internalizing problems they exhibited.

**Acculturation discrepancies and children’s problem behaviour**

In order to examine whether mother–child and father–child acculturation discrepancies were related to children’s internalizing and externalizing problems, difference scores were first calculated. These scores were obtained by subtracting the children’s Western or traditional attitude scores from the parental scores. For example, in the case of mother–child traditionalism discrepancy scores, the adolescent’s traditionalism score
was subtracted from the mother’s traditionalism score. Thus, a score of 0 indicates that mother and child hold the same level of traditionalism; negative scores indicate that the child is more traditional than the mother and positive scores indicate that the mother is more traditional than her child. This method enables the examination of the distance between parents’ and adolescents’ acculturation and also the direction of this discrepancy. We found that 39% of mothers and 56% of fathers reported being more traditional than their children, and 46% of mothers and 41% of fathers reported being less Westernized than their children. Interestingly, there was a large distribution of the discrepancies scores, indicating no systematic pattern characterizing parent–child acculturation differences. Specifically, mother–child Western gap varied between $-16.00$ and $9.00$ ($M = -1.10, SD = 6.53$); mother–child traditional gap varied between $-17.00$ and $27.00$ ($M = -1.15, SD = 10.07$); father–child Western gap varied between $-11.00$ and $8.00$ ($M = -.47, SD = 5.07$) and finally, father–child traditional gap varied between $-15.00$ and $16.00$ ($M = .58, SD = 7.05$).

As for the links between acculturation gap and children’s problem behaviour, correlations revealed moderate positive correlations between mother–child Western acculturation discrepancies and children’s internalizing problems, and moderate to substantial negative correlations between mother–child and father–child traditional acculturation discrepancies and children’s internalizing problems. In addition, a trend was found between mother–child traditional acculturation discrepancies and children’s externalizing problems (see Table 3). Specifically, children who were less Western than their mothers exhibited more internalizing problems. Furthermore, children who were more traditional than their mothers and fathers displayed more internalizing and to some extent more externalizing problems.

### Discussion

**Differences in problem behaviour between ethnic groups**

The growing proportion of minority group families in Britain (Modood, 1997; Office of National Statistics, 1996) stresses the need to investigate the daily lives of ethnic minority children and its impact on their adjustment. The results indicate that Indian adolescents are at higher risk for exhibiting internalizing problems. This result supports previous findings indicating that during middle childhood ethnic minority children are at higher risk for problem behaviour (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Bradley & Sloman, 1975; Pawliuk et al., 1996; Rutter et al., 1974). This may be due to the Indian children
experiencing conflict between the two cultures, which is then expressed in their behaviour. In addition, it may be that the higher levels of internalizing problems are a reflection of the prejudice and discrimination that they experience (Ghuman, 1999; Modood, 1997). However, these results do contradict the findings suggesting that Indian adolescents suffer less than English adolescents of internalizing problems, as reported in the ICSEY study (Berry et al., 2006).

We suggest that internalizing problems are a natural expression of identity confusion, contradicting demands and perhaps the prejudice that ethnic minority children experience. That is, adolescents’ feelings of not ‘fitting in,’ as may happen when experiencing conflict between the home and school environments, are shown through internalizing behaviour, such as depression and withdrawal (Pawliuk et al., 1996). In addition, we propose that adolescents’ behaviour should be interpreted within their cultural context. That is, internalizing behaviours are a culturally dependent expression for the Indian adolescents. Specifically, Indian adolescents are part of a culture in which obedience and respect are two major principles (Ghuman, 1999; Laungani, 1999). Children learn from an early age that they should obey and respect adults. Thus, inappropriate behaviour that has a negative impact on others – and may embarrass the family, such as aggression and delinquent behaviours (i.e. externalizing behaviours) – is unacceptable. Consequently, it may be that Indian adolescents experiencing difficulties are implicitly urged to express these difficulties through internalizing behaviours. Due to their nature, internalizing problems are not as readily apparent and are less prone to have a negative impact on others. This idea is supported by previous evidence indicating that Gujarati-Indian parents have more strict expectations of their children’s behaviour than do English parents: they show less tolerance towards physical aggression, and higher expectations of obedience (Hackett & Hackett, 1993).

### Differences in problem behaviour within the Indian group

Supporting findings concerning younger children, it was found that parental acculturation style did correlate with adolescents’ problem behaviour (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2004; Aycan & Kanungo, 1998; Pawliuk et al., 1996). We found that the more Westernized mothers were, the more externalizing as well as internalizing problems their children exhibited. In addition, in order to increase the reliability and validity of these indices, mothers’ and fathers’ reports of children’s problem behaviour were averaged (Epstein, 1984; Rushton et al., 1983).

These findings may be as a result of parents avoiding disciplining their children. This can happen if parents mistakenly believe that exerting little or no discipline in child rearing is a characteristic of Western culture (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998).

### Table 3. Correlations between mother–child and father–child acculturation discrepancies and child problem behaviours

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<td>Mother–child traditional attitude discrepancies</td>
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<td>Father–child western attitude discrepancies</td>
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<td>.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father–child traditional attitude discrepancies</td>
<td>−.23</td>
<td>−.31*</td>
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Note. *p < .10; **p < .05.
A novel finding was that young adolescents’ own acculturation style was linked to their adjustment. Specifically, adolescents who held more traditional attitudes experienced more internalizing problems. Our result may be best understood by considering peer groups as well as cultural identity in the adolescent period. During this developmental stage, friends and the peer group become more salient (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Immigrant children, especially during adolescence, may want to ‘blend in’ with most other adolescents, including adolescents from the majority group (Connolly, 1998). Therefore, knowing that they differ from other children around them may cause them anxiety and perhaps depressive feelings. This result, however, contradicts previous findings indicating that adolescents who adopted integration and/or separation acculturation attitudes displayed less behavioural problems (Berry et al., 2006).

In our examination of the interplay between parents’ and their adolescents’ acculturation style, it emerged that adolescents’ acculturation style was significantly linked to paternal but not maternal acculturation style. We suggest that this may be because fathers worked in the outside Western World and adolescents went to school in that context, and therefore became more similar in their attitudes towards the host culture and the culture of origin. However, many of the mothers spent their time within the Indian community, and therefore may have developed different attitudes towards the culture of origin and the culture of settlement.

Finally, we also found that the gap between parents’ and adolescents’ acculturation was linked to the adolescents’ problem behaviour. Indian adolescents experienced more internalizing problems when their parents were more Western or less traditional than the adolescents themselves. These results expand previous findings suggesting that when children are more aligned with traditional culture than their mothers, they exhibit more conduct problems (Lau et al., 2005). In the current study we found that being more traditional than their mothers or fathers was linked to more internalizing problems. Two different explanations may be suggested. First, similar to the findings reported at the ICSEY study (Berry et al., 2006), it may be the acculturation gap itself that is related to adolescent maladjustment. That is, when parents and children become acculturated to different degrees, acculturative stress may raise (Farver et al., 2002), thereby affecting children’s adjustment. Second, it may not be the acculturation gap per se that affects children’s adjustment, but the deviation from normative acculturation development. This explanation proposes that an intergenerational acculturation gap is a normative process for immigrants and that a deviation from this normative acculturation process may reflect a problem. A typical pattern of acculturation process is seen when adults have less contact with the larger society than their children, who are exposed to new values in school. Therefore, adult adaptation to the culture of settlement is normally slower than children’s adaptation (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). This has been labelled ‘dissonant acculturation’ (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). For example, in a study conducted in the US, it was found that Vietnamese adolescents endorsed traditional cultural values less strongly than did their parents (Nguyen & Williams, 1989). The results in this study suggest that a deviation from this normative pattern may be reflected in children’s behavioural problems.

The question remains as to why such deviation from the normative pattern happens for some adolescents and not for others. One possible explanation is that children who are more traditional and less Western than their parents struggle with their cultural identity. That is, it may be that these children feel that being a ‘visible minority’ they are not completely accepted by members of the larger culture (Phinney, 1990). Therefore, they may react to the feeling of not belonging to the British culture by an opposing
behaviour, reflected in their resistance to become more Western and instead striving to be more traditional. Belonging to Indian culture may be more appealing to adolescents struggling to form a clear sense of identity. Thus, being part of one culture, the Indian culture, especially if their parents become more Western and less traditional, may reflect an adolescent cultural identity crisis, due to feelings of ‘not fitting in’ with the dominant English culture. These suggestions are tentative, and require further investigation.

Comparisons with the ICSEY Project
The differences between our findings and those reported from the ICSEY study may not be surprising. Whereas, we focused on a particular ethnic group – Indians living in Britain – the ICSEY study included multiple countries and ethnic groups, suggesting different degrees of cultural distance. Only one of their multiple comparisons was of Indian adolescents and their majority group peers living in the north of England. Furthermore, we focused on a more homogeneous group, Indian families of Hindu religion, whereas in the ICSEY study, the Indian group was more heterogeneous, including immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh and including Muslim as well as Hindu families. Although these groups come from the same subcontinent and share many characteristics, they have distinct languages and different ways of life (Stopes-Roe & Cochrane, 1991). Thus, although both studies document the reality of Asian children’s lives in Britain, the (somewhat) contradictory findings indicate the rich complexity of these Indian families.

It is also the case that the measures for the two studies were similar, but by no means identical. For example, the externalizing problem behaviour scale used in the present study was a larger scale examining mainstream delinquency and aggression. The ICSEY project used an antisocial behaviour scale including far more serious problems. In addition, in the current study parents provided the reports of the young adolescents problem behaviours, whereas in the ICSEY project adolescent self-reports were utilized. Finally, the children in the present investigation were considerably younger than the ICSEY youth. It remains to be discovered which of these methodological differences is responsible for the distinct nature of the two sets of results. Schneider (1998) proposes, ‘there is a pressing need for cross-cultural research as a doorkeeper, preventing ideas from being incorporated too easily into accepted knowledge before they have weathered the test of replication in societies with different values and social structures’ (p. 796). Although we would not like to forsake all ideas of generalizability, it may be that Schneider’s sentiment should be further refined to include replication across distinct developmental periods and among distinct minority cultures within the same host cultures.

Limitations and future directions
Although we found many moderate to substantial effects, replicating this study with a larger sample size would enable the detection of smaller (though systematic) effects. In addition, the process by which parent–child acculturation discrepancies is related to adolescents’ internalizing problem has yet to be identified. Future research focusing on possible mediators, such as parent–child conflict, may reveal important information for intervention. In addition, the current study has demonstrated that children who are more traditional and less Western than their parents are at risk for internalizing problems, but the question remains – why do some families deviate from the normative parent-child acculturation pattern? Future investigation focusing on adolescents’ identity and peer
acceptance may reveal links with cultural identity or problematic relations with majority group children. Finally, in the current study we focused on the Indian ethnic minority acculturation. However, acculturation may involve the majority group as well, especially in such an ethnically hyperdiverse city as London. Future research can investigate acculturation among ethnic majority group as well as the match–mismatch between minority strategies and majority expectations of minority strategies.

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References


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