Seeing Eye to Eye in Arab Canadian Families: Emerging Adult Perspectives

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Abstract

Using a narrative approach, we explored acculturation gaps, parent-child relationships, and conflict (intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict) in a sample of immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults. Our findings revealed that perceived acculturation gaps co-occurred with intergenerational conflict (Theme 1) and ethnocultural identity conflict (Theme 2). Furthermore, the parent–emerging adult relationship was observed to play a role in the co-occurrence of perceived acculturation gaps and conflict. Specifically, participants described strong parent–emerging adult relationships as minimizing the co-occurrence of perceived acculturation gaps and intergenerational conflict (Theme 3), as well as perceived acculturation gaps and ethnocultural identity conflict (Theme 4). On the other hand, participants described weak parent–emerging adult relationships as exacerbating the co-occurrence of perceived acculturation gaps and intergenerational conflict (Theme 3), as well as perceived acculturation gaps and ethnocultural identity conflict (Theme 4). We presented these analyses using thick and rich data extracts from the participants themselves.

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Immigrant Arabs in Canada are challenged to adapt to a settlement culture that has different norms (Hofstede, 2001) and values (S. H. Schwartz, 2006) than their heritage culture. As a result, many of these immigrants must negotiate conflicting demands and expectations from their family, peers, religion, and the larger settlement society (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Hedegaard, 2005). Generally, research has shown differences in how parents and their children acculturate. Specifically, immigrant children tend to be more oriented to the settlement society than their parents (Kwak, 2003), who are more likely to retain the heritage culture than their children (Costigan & Dokis, 2006). These differences, referred to as *acculturation gaps*, are associated with intergenerational conflict (Rasmi, Chuang, & Hennig, 2015) and can complicate identity development (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2011). Little attention has been given to Arab immigration and settlement (Beitin, Allen, & Bekheet, 2010) despite the relevance and salience of these issues and the growing populations in countries such as Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2010). We addressed this gap by examining acculturation gaps, the parent-child relationship, and conflict (intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict) among immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults using a qualitative approach. It is particularly important to use qualitative methodologies to advance our understanding of acculturation gaps (Phinney, 2010), as these inquiries provide a holistic representation of the participants' experiences, shift the focus from outcome to process, and privilege the accounts of minority populations (Li, 2009).

Acculturation

Acculturation refers to the process of adjusting to a new culture and can involve changes to an individual's cultural orientation, values, and identity (Tsai, Chentsova-Dutton, & Wong, 2002). Berry (1997) proposed that acculturation is a bidimensional process, reflecting an individual's preference for maintaining their heritage culture and/or acquiring the settlement culture. As a result, four acculturation strategies are possible: (a) assimilation, where individuals forsake their heritage culture and acquire the settlement culture; (b) integration, where individuals maintain their heritage culture and acquire the settlement culture; (c) separation, where individuals maintain their heritage culture and do not acquire the settlement culture; or (d) marginalization,

where individuals neither maintain their heritage culture nor acquire the settlement culture. Research has shown that integration is the optimum strategy as it is associated with the best psychological and sociocultural outcomes (for review, see Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). This strategy is promoted by multicultural immigration contexts, such as Canada.

The Canadian Immigration Context

In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to implement an official multiculturalism policy, which was ratified to protect the rights and liberties of all Canadians, irrespective of their heritage, language, or religious affiliation (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). In 1988, Canada enacted the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which aimed to "recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance, and share their cultural heritage" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988). This act seeks to ensure economic, social, cultural, and political equality, as well as inclusivity and understanding for all Canadians. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act is supported by the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada, as well as an extensive network of settlement agencies that is developed, funded, and delivered by all levels of Canadian government (Chuang, Rasmi, & Friesen, 2011). Together, Canada's official multiculturalism policy and settlement-specific services have contributed to a high naturalization rate (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Although Canada's policy and services make it a unique sociocultural landscape that is conducive to immigrant adaptation, the acculturation process and intergroup relations may be strained for some culturally distant groups, such as Arabs in Canada (Safdar, Dupuis, Lewis, El-Geledi, & Bourhis, 2008).

Arabs in Canada

The term *Arab Canadian* refers to those individuals who originate from an Arab country and migrate to Canada. Arab Canadians are a fairly young (Statistics Canada, 2007) and rapidly growing group, largely comprised of first-generation immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2010). Arabs who migrate to Canada encounter a culture that is markedly different to their heritage culture; these differences are reflected in family structure and socialization goals. For example, Arab families are patriarchal in structure, with the father serving as the head of household and the mother as the primary caregiver and disciplinarian (Abi-Hashem, 2008; Kazarian, 2005). This is in stark contrast

to family structure in Western countries, where women are more involved in the labor force and nontraditional families are more common (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Arab children are socialized to be obedient, prioritize their family relationships over their personal needs, and fulfill their family obligations (Kayyali, 2006; Khalaila, 2010). Therefore, the parent-child relationship is characterized as hierarchical, yet warm and interconnected (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, & Farah, 2006; Rasmi, Chuang, & Safdar, 2012). European Canadian children, on the other hand, are socialized to be independent and have more egalitarian relationships with their parents (Hofstede, 2001).

These cultural differences pose a unique challenge to immigrant and ethnic minority Arab parents: raising their children to maintain their heritage culture while living in a country with different cultural norms. For example, several studies have found that Arab parents restrict their children's activities, especially their daughters', in order to prevent them from assimilating to the settlement culture (Ajami, Rasmi, & Abudabbeh, 2015; Ajrouch, 1999; Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995). In cases like this, parents and children differ in their heritage and/or settlement culture orientation and may start to experience acculturation gaps.

Acculturation Gaps

Acculturation is an individual process that is experienced within the family context. As a result, it has the potential to disrupt the family equilibrium. For example, many studies have found that immigrant parents and children have different acculturation strategies, leading to the experience of acculturation gaps. These studies are grounded in the acculturation gap-distress model (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993), which is predicated on the assumption that parents are more oriented to the heritage culture than their children, and children are more oriented to the settlement culture than their parents. These acculturation gaps, in turn, are related to poorer individual and familial adjustment (see Tardif-Williams & Fisher, 2009; Telzer, 2010) including intergenerational and ethnocultural identity conflicts (Rasmi et al., 2015).

Acculturation Gaps and Intergenerational Conflict

Intergenerational conflict refers to disagreements that commonly occur between parents and their children. Intergenerational conflict is a normative developmental process that can be constructive for parent-child dyads, as it transforms the relationship into one that is more egalitarian (Collins & Steinberg, 2008), while also promoting the child's independence (Smetana,

2008). It can also be destructive when it is frequent, intense, and/or associated with clashing values (Juang & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Unfortunately, this trajectory is more likely to occur for immigrant and ethnic minority families, who often experience intergenerational conflict as a result of the opposing viewpoints that are associated with acculturation gaps (Ahn, Kim, & Park, 2008; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). Intergenerational conflict may also be particularly detrimental to Arab families, as research has argued that it is more destructive for families from cultures that emphasize interconnectedness (Juang, Syed, & Cookston, 2012). Given that intergenerational conflict is normative, yet problematic for families with clashing viewpoints, we explored how it co-occurs with acculturation gaps in immigrant Arab Canadian families.

Acculturation Gaps and Ethnocultural Identity Conflict

An individual's ethnocultural identity includes their personal and group identities. A large-scale, multi-country study identified four distinct adolescent identity profiles that are consistent with Berry's (1997) acculturation model. Specifically, Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) found that most adolescents preferred an integrated identity (i.e., maintaining their heritage identity while also acquiring a settlement identity, analogous to integration). Similar to acculturation strategy, an integrated identity is most adaptive (Stuart & Ward, 2011) and is facilitated by a multicultural immigration context (Phinney, 1990) such as Canada.

An integrated identity can also be associated with ethnocultural identity conflict, which tends to arise when an individual has a strong attachment to multiple identities that are irreconcilable (Ward, 2008). Ethnocultural identity conflict is likely to occur for Arabs in Canada who have an integrated identity, given their strong attachment to both Arab and European Canadian cultures. Previous research has shown that ethnocultural identity conflict is also reinforced by acculturation gaps (Ward, 2007) and intergenerational conflict (Stuart & Ward, 2011). Therefore, we explored the co-occurrence of acculturation gaps, intergenerational conflict, and ethnocultural identity conflict in a sample of immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults.

Acculturation Gaps and Parent-Child Relationships

The extant literature has tended to focus on the direct links between acculturation gaps and distress. Some recent research, however, has proposed and found that parent-child relationships play a role in the association between acculturation gaps and distress. For example, studies have shown that decreased family

functioning (S. J. Schwartz et al., 2015), relationship quality (Schofield, Parke, Kim, & Coltrane, 2008), communication (Kim & Park, 2011), and parental support (Weaver & Kim, 2008) exacerbate the effect of acculturation gaps on a number of internalizing (e.g., depressive symptoms) and externalizing (e.g., risky behavior) outcomes. Building on this research, we also investigated how parent-child relationships were described in relation to acculturation gaps, intergenerational conflict, and ethnocultural identity conflict in a sample of immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults.

Emerging Adults

We focused on emerging adults, a developmental stage that occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 years (Arnett, 2000), which has been largely overlooked by family research (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). One of the main features of this stage is identity exploration, as people consider various options with respect to their romantic relationships, education and career paths, and personal worldviews (Arnett, 2007). Emerging adults from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds also characterize financial independence and egalitarian parent-child relationships as key goals of this developmental stage (Arnett, 2003). Therefore, it is clear that emerging adulthood is a stage that is marked by a number of changes affecting individuals and families.

The effects of these changes may be especially pronounced for immigrant families, particularly those for whom the heritage and settlement cultures diverge, like Arabs in Canada. At the individual level, identity exploration may trigger ethnocultural identity conflict when emerging adults commit to ethnocultural identities with conflicting norms (Ward, 2008). As noted earlier, this would be the case for Arabs in Canada who have an integrated identity. At the family level, acculturation gaps may be experienced when parents and emerging adults have different worldviews and ideas about how they should relate to one another. For Arab families, this could occur if emerging adults become less interconnected to their parents, lose their sense of family obligations, and reject filial piety. Research has also shown that intergenerational conflict increases with age for emerging adults from Arab backgrounds (Rasmi & Daly, 2016). Therefore, emerging adulthood is a stage in which acculturation gaps, parent-child relationships, and conflict are salient and may be particularly relevant for immigrant Arab Canadians.

The Present Study

We conducted a qualitative inquiry to discover, represent, and interpret the experiences of immigrant Arab emerging adults in Canada (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2003). In particular, we used a narrative approach (Riessman, 2005) to privilege the accounts of immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults by presenting their experiences through their own eyes and words. This investigation was exploratory; however, we had several hypotheses based on the existing empirical literature. Specifically, we expected that immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults would describe acculturation gaps between themselves and their parents and that these acculturation gaps would co-occur with intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. In addition, we explored the ways in which the parent–emerging adult relationship was described in relation to acculturation gaps and conflict. Through this approach, we fulfilled Arnett's (2005) vitality criterion.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 12 emerging adults who self-categorized as "Arab" (or national identity; for example, "Egyptian") or "Arab Canadian." In addition, all participants were first-generation immigrants who had moved to Canada from an Arab country in the past 10 years. Given our focus on family dynamics, we only included unmarried emerging adults who lived with their parents. Participants were evenly distributed by gender and ranged in age from 19 to 25 years ($M = 21.33$ years, $SD = 1.72$). All participants were single and were either enrolled in ($n = 9$) or had recently graduated ($n = 3$) from a post-secondary institution. Participant demographics are presented in Table 1. All participants' names were changed. This study received approval from a university human ethics research board.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through university associations, settlement agencies and service providers, community organizations, and snowball sampling. Once the interviewer (first author) screened each prospective participant to confirm that they met the study criteria, they were invited to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview, which lasted between 45 and 133 minutes ($M = 83{:}02$ minutes, $SD = 21{:}51$). Each participant provided informed consent before each interview began. The interviewer was bilingual; however, all participants responded in English. Participants were asked to recount their experiences as an immigrant of Arab origin in Canada, with questions specifically formulated to capture perceived acculturation gaps (e.g., "Has moving to Canada contributed to any tension between you and your mother/

Table 1. Demographic Information.

Name[a]	Sex	Age	Years in Canada	Country of origin	Religion	Mother headscarf	Father's education	Father's employment	Mother's education	Mother's employment
Omar	M	21	4.00	Jordan	Atheist	No	Bachelor's	PT	Bachelor's	FT
Karina	F	22	9.75	Qatar[b]	Catholic	—	Some college	FT[c]	High school	—
Lana	F	25	9.75	Qatar[b]	Catholic	—	Some college	FT[c]	High school	—
Iskandar	M	21	7.83	Egypt	Coptic	—	—	—	—	—
Ahmed	M	19	9.75	Egypt	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT	Master's	FT
Khaled	M	20	9.00	UAE[b]	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT	Bachelor's	FT
Mostafa	M	21	4.83	UAE[b]	Muslim	Yes	Master's	FT[c]	High school	—
Mahmoud	M	23	4.83	Jordan	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT[c]	Bachelor's	—
Layla	F	21	10.42	Kuwait[b]	Muslim	No	Bachelor's	FT[c]	Bachelor's	—
Reem	F	19	10.00	Egypt	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT	Master's	FT
Amani	F	23	5.00	UAE[b]	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT[c]	Bachelor's	—
Dina	F	21	5.00	UAE[b]	Muslim	Yes	Bachelor's	FT[c]	Bachelor's	—

Note. PT = part-time; FT = full-time; UAE = United Arab Emirates.
[a]Names were pseudonyms.
[b]Family moved from an Arab country that was not their heritage country.
[c]Father works in home country, not living in Canada.

father, and if so, how?"), intergenerational conflict (e.g., "Parents and their children do not always see eye-to-eye. Are there any issues that you and your mother/father tend to disagree about?"), ethnocultural identity conflict (e.g., "How has your experience as someone of [nationality] origin living in Canada created difficulties or problems for you? For example, at home, with people your age, at school, or in the community?"), and facets of the parent–emerging adult relationship (e.g., "Have any aspects of the ways that you relate to your mother/father changed since moving to Canada? Have any aspects stayed the same?"). In exchange, participants were paid Can$20 for their time. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Speech disfluencies including false starts and fillers were removed to improve readability without compromising meaning.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process consisted of five stages prior to producing the report.

Stage one: Familiarizing yourself with the data. Each transcript was read multiple times so that the authors could gain familiarity with the data. The interviewer also wrote memos detailing overall impressions of each participant and interview. This stage was ongoing, as the transcripts and memos were reviewed throughout the process.

Stage two: Generating initial codes. Initial codes were generated by identifying similar statements within and between transcripts using a theory-driven top-down approach. For example, it was expected that emerging adults would discuss perceived acculturation gaps when describing how their relationship with their parents had changed post migration. However, these initial codes were built upon, modified, and refined using a data-driven bottom-up process, based on participants' responses (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). This process was repeated until the interviewer created a preliminary coding system. The preliminary coding system was then sent to two assistants (second and third authors), who along with the interviewer used it to code one random transcript. The interviewer and two assistants compared their coding and discussed all discrepancies until a consensus was reached. The interviewer and two assistants did not believe that any modifications were necessary to finalize the coding system. The team reviewed no further transcripts at this time.

Most codes were applied to data extracts that varied in length from one sentence to a small paragraph, tending to be longer when a participant was

describing a past experience. In some cases, multiple codes were applied to one sentence. When this happened, the sentence was broken into chunks that represented separate codes.

Stage three: Searching for themes. The interviewer began searching for themes, which consisted of two or more codes that could be woven together to form an overarching larger unit (or pattern) of meaning. Once preliminary themes were identified, the interviewer reviewed the transcripts searching for coded data extracts that supported each preliminary theme. This phase was repeated until all coded data extracts had been identified for each preliminary theme.

Stage four: Reviewing themes. The interviewer assessed thematic vitality in a two-stage process. First, the coded data extracts for each theme were read to ensure that they formed a clear pattern. Second, each transcript was reread to assess the relevance and credibility of each theme in relation to the data corpus, and also search for any additional non-coded data extracts that were missed in previous coding phases. This phase was completed when all themes had been reviewed.

Stage five: Defining themes. The coded data extracts associated with each theme were reread. These collated coded data extracts were then used to create an overall description of each theme that was both coherent and credible, reflecting and capturing the essence of the data corpus. The transcripts were then reread to confirm the relevance of the collated data extracts and to identify any non-coded data extracts that had been missing in the previous phases. This phase was completed when the themes and subthemes were finalized.

Validation

We validated our findings in three ways. First, we used thick and rich data extracts to support our themes. Second, an external audit was conducted with a random 50% subset of the transcripts. The independent coder was an academic who had been trained in thematic analysis but had no prior knowledge of the data corpus. Inter-rater reliability was assessed by the agreement between the primary and independent coders (range: 85.7%-95.2%; $M =$ 91.6%, $SD = 3.2\%$) and using Cohen's kappa coefficient ($\kappa = .90$). Any coding discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached. Third, a member of the Arab Canadian community (who was an emerging adult and personal contact of the first author) was asked to read the report and provide feedback regarding both the quality and interpretation of the data. This person found both the data and analysis to be sound and also stated that it

captured some of the issues that were relevant to their experience as an immigrant Arab in Canada.

Sample Size and Saturation

We acknowledge that the sample size is small. However, we determined that we achieved saturation because our participants stopped contributing new insights (Charmaz, 2006). We were able to achieve saturation with a small sample size due to the exploratory nature of our study and our use of purposive non-probability sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Saturation was also facilitated by the quality of our data, which was on target, provided experiential and shadowed data, and had very little dross (Morse, 2000).

Results

The interviews elicited hundreds of pages of rich text; thus, it was imperative to focus on key emergent themes. Therefore, the themes reported in this study are representative of some salient experiences that emerging adults described in their interviews and do not reflect the data in its entirety.

All 12 participants in this study perceived acculturation gaps with one or both of their parents around a variety of issues, including openness to new experiences ($n = 8$), curfew and going out ($n = 8$), dating and marriage ($n = 6$), recreation ($n = 4$), clothing ($n = 4$), as well as education and career ($n = 3$). Interestingly, two distinct forms of acculturation gaps emerged in this study. In some cases, parents were perceived to promote *cultural adoption* by encouraging their children to immerse themselves in Canadian society. In others, parents promoted *cultural retention* by encouraging their children to maintain behaviors and practices that sometimes kept them at a distance from their peers and the settlement society. All emerging adults in this study also experienced some form of intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict.

Main Findings

In this section, four themes are presented. The first two themes reflect the co-occurrence of perceived acculturation gaps and both intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. In contrast, the third and fourth themes suggest that parent–emerging adult relationships played a role in the co-occurrence between perceived acculturation gaps and both intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict.

Theme 1: Perceived acculturation gaps and intergenerational conflict. The first theme was that emerging adults who perceived acculturation gaps also seemed to experience intergenerational conflict. This theme emerged in almost all of the interviews ($n = 11$). Overall, perceived acculturation gaps co-occurred with intergenerational conflict when parents were perceived to promote cultural retention.

The emerging adults in this study perceived their parents' beliefs to align strictly with their Arab background, emphasizing conformity and obedience. Emerging adults, on the other hand, seemed to be more accepting of different perspectives and placed a greater value on independence. These acculturation gaps, in turn, often manifested into intergenerational conflict around a variety of issues including clothing choices, friendship choices, and dating and marriage. Karina, Lana, Amani, and Dina described intergenerational conflict with one or more of their parents around acculturation gaps relating to clothing choices. All of these emerging adults indicated that their parent(s) wanted their daughters to dress more conservatively than they did. For example, Dina said, "My mom doesn't really like us to wear really tight clothes. She tells us, 'Yeah, we live here—but remember your values, remember your traditions—that's not the way we dress.'"

Khaled, Mahmoud, Amani, and Dina indicated that they experienced intergenerational conflict with one or more of their parents around acculturation gaps relating to friendship choices. Some of these emerging adults described intergenerational conflict that arose from differences in their preferences for family interconnectedness. For example, Amani stated that she disagreed with her father about how much time she should spend with her family relative to her friends. She stated that her preference was to spend time with both, whereas her father wanted to limit her contact with friends to minimize the chance that they would influence her to violate her family and cultural values. Other emerging adults indicated that they held different views about cross-gender friendships. For example, Khaled stated that he had many female friends that his mother did not approve of because she believed that they ". . . would cause romantic feelings with the end result of adultery—which is wrong."

Finally, Karina, Layla, and Mostafa described intergenerational conflict with one or more of their parents around acculturation gaps relating to dating and marriage. Most of these emerging adults indicated that their parent(s) did not want them to date (particularly if they were dating someone from a different ethnocultural background) as it violated their cultural values. Emerging adults, on the other hand, viewed dating as developmentally appropriate and an opportunity for self-exploration. For example, Karina stated that her mother disapproved of her daughter dating:

I told her I liked this guy and I want to date him. She was arguing with me back and forth that I shouldn't date right now because I'm still too young for that. But I'm like, "Why? I'm 21—I should start dating and discover myself." She wouldn't understand that part because she's Arabic. She's like, "You need to marry him right away if you want to stay with him."

Karina suggested that the perceived acculturation gap around dating and marriage deepened when her mother learned that she was interested in a non-Arab, "she just freaked out on me just because he's not Arabic. 'No, no, no you can't do that.'"

Theme 2: Perceived acculturation gaps and ethnocultural identity conflict. The second theme was that emerging adults who perceived acculturation gaps also seemed to experience ethnocultural identity conflict. This theme emerged in most interviews (*n* = 9). Overall, perceived acculturation gaps co-occurred with more ethnocultural identity conflict when parents were perceived to promote cultural retention. Emerging adults in this study valued tradition and obedience less and openness and independence more than their perception of their parents. These acculturation gaps seemed to exacerbate emerging adults' ethnocultural identity conflict, as many reported feeling torn between the opposing norms and values of Arab and European Canadian culture. This tension manifested itself in several ways.

Acculturation gaps seemed to leave Iskandar, Khaled, Reem, and Karina feeling torn between their emphasis on obedience and personal choice. For example, Iskandar and his parents had different views around curfews and social interaction. On the one hand, he wanted to be obedient to his parents because this was consistent with his Arab cultural values. On the other hand, he did not agree with their perspective and wanted to assert his autonomy, "You have to follow rules. But there are some exceptions—you cannot follow a rule if it's wrong. You have to speak up."

Lana, Reem, Dina, and Iskandar suggested that perceived acculturation gaps made their Arab identity salient when they were in Canada. For example, Reem described feeling like an outsider when she was prohibited from attending a mixed-gender social event. At the same time, these emerging adults indicated that their exposure and commitment to Canada became much more apparent when they returned to the Middle East. Reem recounted an incident that occurred when she visited her family in Egypt:

We were buying ice cream. The person at the ice cream place was talking to us. He asked, "What's your name?" and my brother said, "Why do you want to know?" That's something you'd expect here—when you're buying something, people don't really ask about your name and your family. Then my

cousin said, "Yeah, don't mind them—they're not from here." We realized that we were so de-attached.

Taken together, these emerging adults seemed to feel out of place in both cultural contexts.

Finally, Ahmed, Khaled, Dina, and Mostafa identified a number of perceived acculturation gaps between themselves and their parents around maintaining their religious teachings. For example, Ahmed described feeling pressured by his parents to uphold his Islamic teachings without question, even in situations where it caused him to feel isolated from his peers and the new environment. He recounted several incidents in which his parents forbade him for socializing with other kids in his neighborhood, ". . . that happened at a time when I just came to Canada. I was just getting into the community and it was hard not being able to do everything that the kids around you were doing." Ahmed indicated that he felt torn between pleasing his parents and fitting into his new sociocultural milieu. These feelings seemed to trigger ethnocultural identity conflict as Ahmed tried to make sense of who he was within the context of both his family and the new environment, which he described as having very different norms and expectations.

Theme 3: Perceived acculturation gaps, parent–emerging adult relationships, and intergenerational conflict. The third theme was that parent–emerging adult relationships were observed to play a role in the co-occurrence between perceived acculturation gaps and intergenerational conflict. As noted previously, almost all of the emerging adults in this study experienced some intergenerational conflict with their parents around acculturation gaps. In some cases, emerging adults seemed able to minimize the experience of intergenerational conflict due to their close and supportive relationship with their parents ($n = 7$). In others, intergenerational conflict seemed to be exacerbated by distant and disconnected parent–emerging adult relationships ($n = 3$). In both conditions, emerging adults used three strategies, albeit in different ways: redressing the acculturation gap, actually obliging their parents' wishes, and promising to but not actually obliging their parents' wishes.

Participants with strong parent–emerging adult relationships indicated that they attenuated intergenerational conflict by redressing their perceived acculturation gap, which further bolstered their relationship with their parents. For example, Layla stated,

> Because she knows that I preserve my values and my religion and she knows that I know my limits and I wouldn't cross those limits. This is what made her change; there is a lot of trust between us now.[1]

On the other hand, participants with weak parent–emerging adult relationships described unsuccessfully attempting to redress the acculturation gap. For example, Amani described a situation when her father was unable to accept her perspective and coerced her to do what he wanted by threatening to cut her off financially. This approach seemed to arise from the fact that she had a very hierarchical relationship with her father, characterized by vertical parent-child communication. As a result, she seemed dissatisfied with the solution and resentful of her father.

Participants with strong parent–emerging adult relationships circumvented conflict by accepting and submitting to their parents' wishes and perspectives. These emerging adults indicated that they were motivated to buttress their already close relationship with their parents by submitting to their demands. For example, Lana, her father's self-anointed "favorite," stated that she actively avoided conflict with her father by acquiescing to his wishes, even if they were counter to her own. Her motivation was to maintain their relationship during the few months that her father was in Canada, ". . . because he's not here all the time, I don't want to do anything to disappoint him—or for him to leave mad at me." In contrast, Lana portrayed her relationship with her mother as very combative. As a result, she stated several times that she instigated conflict "just because I want to go against her word."

Finally, emerging adults with strong parent-child relationships seemed to reduce intergenerational conflict arising from acculturation gaps by selectively sharing information with their parents. For example, Khaled indicated that this behavior was driven by his desire to maintain a close relationship with his parents. Emerging adults with weak parent-child relationships also tried to use this strategy to avoid conflict. Their motivation, on the other hand, was to prevent additional intergenerational conflict. For example, Iskandar characterized his relationship with his father as unsupportive and distant, in part because he continues to "think like we're back home." To minimize additional conflict, Iskandar said that he was reluctant to share information about his life and activities.

Theme 4: Perceived acculturation gaps, parent–emerging adult relationships, and ethnocultural identity conflict. The fourth theme was that parent–emerging adult relationships were observed to play a role in the co-occurrence between perceived acculturation gaps and ethnocultural identity conflict. As noted previously, most of the emerging adults in this study experienced some ethnocultural identity conflict around acculturation gaps. In some cases, ethnocultural identity conflict seemed to be avoided or successfully resolved through warm and supportive parent–emerging adult relationships ($n = 5$). In others, ethnocultural identity conflict seemed to be prolonged by distant and strained parent–emerging adult relationships ($n = 1$).

Participants with a clear sense of their ethnocultural identity also appeared to have strong parent–emerging adult relationships. This was observed in two ways. Some emerging adults achieved a clear ethnocultural identity through exploration that was supported by their parents. Others were unwavering in their identity due to successful cultural transmission that was facilitated by close parent–emerging adult relationships.

Some emerging adults stated that their parents encouraged them to retain aspects of their heritage culture and religion, while also giving them some freedom to figure out who they were. The parental closeness, communication, companionship, and support that Dina, Amani, Khaled, and Omar described made them feel secure and confident enough to explore the world around them in different ways. Each of these ways involved experimenting with behaviors and taking opportunities reflecting acculturation gaps between these emerging adults and their parents. For example, Amani started dating, dressing less conservatively, and got two body piercings; Dina started going out with friends more, including an unsupervised trip to Miami; Khaled chose a university that his parents did not approve of and accepted a work opportunity that took him away from home for a week; and Omar started getting to know people from different ethnocultural backgrounds. Omar described how interacting with different people made him more open to new experiences and ultimately led to positive identity development:

> Since I moved here to Canada, it was also just spending some time and experience with people from different parts of the world and especially Canada. [My parents] are very, very into experiencing new things and new interests and they believe that just finding more interests is going to help you figure out who you are, what you really like, and how you think about things. This is definitely something I've become more into in the past two years.

All of these participants indicated that their parents were supportive of their decisions and subsequent identity development, which seemed to contribute to emerging adults' strong sense of their ethnocultural identity.

Mahmoud's strong relationship with his parents also facilitated his ethnocultural identity development, but in a different way. Specifically, his parents encouraged him to strongly adhere to his Arab heritage and never question his identity. For example, Mahmoud described his parents' disdain for Arabs who migrated to Canada and abandoned their heritage:

> All parents like sticking to their traditions and [my parents] believe that people have to stick to everything they used to do, anywhere they go. They have to represent their country, they have to represent their religion, wherever they go.

> And once [my father] came here, he saw many wrongdoings. He was really upset about it.

Similarly, he described his mother as "against people changing, and giving freedom to their children compared to our society." It appeared that Mahmoud's close relationships with his parents facilitated the transmission and internalization of these views.

On the other side of the spectrum, Mostafa expressed tremendous difficulty reconciling his desire to uphold his traditional beliefs and values with his life in Canada. This seemed to be exacerbated by his inability to talk to his parents about his struggle and their promotion of cultural retention. For example, Mostafa stated that he was dissatisfied with the fact that he had become less religious since moving to Canada. However, his displeasure seemed to be rooted in his inability to meet his parents' expectations rather than a desire to fulfill his religious commitments. He stated that his parents knew that he was no longer a "perfect Muslim" and his father tried to motivate him to resume his Islamic duties by reminding him of his religious obligations. However, Mostafa noted that his father neither acknowledged nor understood that his main concern was that he did not know how to reconcile these expectations with his new life in Canada. Mostafa expressed feeling like he could not talk openly with his parents about his concerns and that they would be either unable or unwilling to listen and support him. He described "some sort of gap [which] happened between me and my family—I don't see them as much or interact with them as much." As a result, Mostafa appeared to suffer from prolonged identity conflict, which left him feeling torn between his heritage and settlement cultures.

Multiculturalism

Emerging adults in this study were all living in a large urban center of Canada that is home to people from many different ethnocultural groups. This multicultural context seemed to play a role in emerging adults' experience of acculturation gaps and conflict. For example, most ($n = 10$) participants indicated that they had Arab friends. These ingroup peer relationships, in turn, seemed to provide participants with friends they could relate to on a deeper level due to their shared cultural and familial values. For example, Dina said, ". . . my close friends remain Arabs—it's a different comfort that I feel with them. I just feel like I can be myself with them." Similarly, Karina stated that

> . . . as soon as I know they're Arabic I feel closer to them because we're from the same culture. We understand each other. I would know exactly what struggles she went through with her parents because mostly all Arabs are strict

when they come here. I'll know how she was treated—[issues like] coming home late, the way she dresses. We'd probably have that in common too.

It appeared that these shared struggles and restrictions normalized their experiences and made the observed differences between their family and European Canadian families less salient. Indeed, Ahmed's parents seemed to use this strategy to minimize acculturation gaps and strengthen his commitment to his Arab and Muslim identity by removing him from his local, public school and enrolling him in a private, Islamic one instead. These patterns would be less likely to occur in immigrant-receiving contexts that discourage immigrants and ethnic minorities from maintaining their heritage culture and fostering their own communities.

Multiculturalism also seemed to play a role in shaping emerging adults' identity. The Canadian society provides immigrants and ethnic minorities with the opportunity to maintain their heritage identity. All participants in this study identified as Arab, but several noted that adopting a Canadian identity was challenging because of the country's multicultural composition. For example, Khaled said, "I remember when the Molson Canadian commercial came out—the "I am Canadian" commercial. I was reading an article that was like, 'What is Canadian? Who are Canadians?' Nobody knows anymore, it's sort of blended." Similarly, Reem tied this to her own experience, "I don't think I've really connected to the [Canadian] culture in the first place. But I guess it's hard to draw the line here since Canadian culture in general is a mix of so many cultures." It is possible that people from immigrant-receiving countries with an assimilationist model would be less likely to experience this identity conflict due to the increased homogeneity of the mainstream group that is facilitated by the expectation that immigrants and ethnic minorities assimilate.

Examining Mothers and Fathers Independently

Our findings suggest that immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults' relationships with their mothers and fathers are similar in a number of ways. Indeed, parental closeness, communication, and support emerged in comparable proportions and to similar extents. Therefore, this study identified mother–emerging adult and father–emerging adult relationships as factors that might affect the co-occurrence of perceived acculturation gaps and both intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict.

Discussion

This study presented narratives highlighting immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults' experience with acculturation gaps, conflict, and the

parent–emerging adult relationship. The themes that we presented support the empirical literature, including the acculturation gap-distress model (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993) and the moderating role of parent-child relationships (Kim & Park, 2011; Schofield et al., 2008; S. J. Schwartz et al., 2015; Weaver & Kim, 2008). Specifically, the emerging adults in our study described acculturation gaps between themselves and their parents that seemed to occur when they were more oriented to the Canadian society and their parents were more oriented to the Arab culture. These acculturation gaps, in turn, tended to co-occur with conflict. For many participants, the parent–emerging adult relationship was observed to intensify the co-occurrence of acculturation gaps and conflict: Strong relationships seemed to buffer the experience of conflict, whereas weak relationships seemed to exacerbate it.

Immigrant Arab emerging adults in this study provided insight into their life experiences by discussing the challenges they faced in Canada, as well as the strategies they have used to overcome them. These difficulties seemed to center around acclimating to a country whose normative cultural behaviors and values differ considerably to their country of origin. These emerging adults seemed to be more oriented toward Canadian culture than their parents. In some cases, these acculturation gaps seemed to lead to intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. However, despite perceiving different perspectives around a host of attitudes, behaviors, and values, most of these emerging adults characterized their relationships with their parents as strong. Indeed, those who expressed having close bonds, open communication, and support from their parents appeared to make them feel comfortable and safe while exploring their identities and new environment. As a result, participants who described strong parent–emerging adult relationships seemed to experience decreased intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict.

All participants in this study described the culture shock that they experienced when they first moved to Canada and attributed it to the significant differences between Arab and Canadian culture. They discussed their transition from a conservative and interdependent society to one that is liberal and independent (Hofstede, 2001). In their country of origin, the cultural values of embeddedness and hierarchy were prioritized, and autonomy was rejected. To reinforce these values, emerging adults were socialized to be obedient; imagination and exploration were discouraged. When emerging adults and their families arrived in Canada, they were confronted by a culture that emphasizes autonomy, egalitarianism, and mastery. In contrast to Arab culture, Canadian cultural values are consistent with the personal values of self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism (S. H. Schwartz, 2006). Emerging adults contrasted their socialization to their Canadian peers, who were encouraged

to express themselves and explore their environment, generating their own ideas and making their own choices (Hofstede, 2001).

For many of these emerging adults, perceived acculturation gaps appeared to lead to intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. This pattern was evident when emerging adults became more oriented to Canadian culture and values, and their parents interpreted this shift to signify an abandonment of Arab heritage and values. For some, they believed that their parents viewed autonomy-seeking as negative and immoral. For example, some emerging adults described intergenerational conflict that arose from their desire to date, a behavior that their parents viewed as a clear violation of their cultural and religious beliefs, consistent with previous research (e.g., Uskul, Lalonde, & Konanur, 2011). Similarly, some emerging adults indicated that they experienced difficulty reconciling the incompatible demands of their different cultural and social environments (i.e., inside and outside the home), particularly when they identified with both of them. Emerging adults who were attached to both cultures appeared to have a less clear and coherent self-concept, which is associated with ethnocultural identity conflict (e.g., Ward, 2008; Ward, Stuart, & Kus, 2011).

However, it is important to acknowledge that perceived acculturation gaps did not always co-occur with intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. Indeed, whether each type of conflict occurred seemed largely dependent on how parents and emerging adults reacted to acculturation gaps. This was further qualified by the nature and strength of the parent–emerging adult relationship.

The findings of this study revealed a continuum of parent and emerging adult responses and outcomes to perceived acculturation gaps. On one end, some families confronted gaps by openly discussing and negotiating them. In these cases, parents explained their position, but granted their children some autonomy in the decision-making process, and supported them irrespective of the path that they chose. This strategy was effective in reducing conflict if parents communicated regularly with their children; provided them with instrumental, emotional, and social support; and encouraged them to interact with the settlement society. On the other end, some families sought to stifle gaps, with parents trying to control, often successfully, their children. In these cases, parents continued to enforce rules and monitor their children's behavior to minimize the chance that they become oriented toward Canadian behaviors and peers. Parents seemed to instill a rigid adherence to their Arab heritage in their children if they also had a close bond and spent significant amounts of time together. This strategy was effective in reducing intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict because parents and emerging adults saw eye to eye on most things. Alternatively, emerging adults were

less willing to accept and internalize their parents' values and wishes if they were transmitted in the context of an emotionally distant and strained relationship. In these cases, emerging adults seemed to experience both types of conflict.

Generally, emerging adults in this study did not seem to experience intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict if their relationship with their parents was marked by trust, open communication, and support, and if their parents encouraged them to explore their new sociocultural environment by granting them personal freedom. This overarching multiple-case narrative is consistent with previous research suggesting that the negative effects of acculturation gaps can be mitigated by strong and positive parent-youth relationships (e.g., Kim & Park, 2011). Indeed, youth are more likely to be receptive to parental influence (Steinberg, 2001) if it occurs in the context of warmth and responsiveness. Moreover, previous studies have found that communication, trust, and support are particularly important aspects of the immigrant parent-youth relationship (e.g., Crockett, Brown, Iturbide, Russell, & Wilkinson-Lee, 2009). These relational qualities foster an emotional bond between family members (Qin, 2006; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000) that protects against acculturative stress (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007) and intergenerational conflict (Phinney, Kim-Jo, Osorio, & Vilhjalmsdottir, 2005), and is also associated with increased well-being (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2008), and a more coherent self-concept (Walsh, Shulman, Feldman, & Maurer, 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study had a number of limitations relating to sampling and procedure. First, we used a heterogeneous sample of Arab immigrants. We elected to include Arabs from different countries because there are many similarities across Arab subcultures, including a shared identity, language, and cultural traditions (Barakat, 1993). However, future research should examine intracultural variation with respect to acculturation gaps, conflict, and parent–emerging adult relationships. It is imperative that this research includes Arab immigrant and refugee populations, to examine the role that immigration status may play in these issues. This future research should adopt qualitative methodologies to probe these processes and represent participants' experiences using their own words.

Second, our research was limited by the use of a single informant, as we relied on emerging adult perspectives of acculturation gaps, conflict, and the parent-child relationship. Previous research has shown that parent and child perspectives of acculturation can differ (e.g., Merali, 2002). Therefore, future

studies should include parent perspectives, which will allow us to identify similarities and differences between parent and emerging adult viewpoints, as well as the implications of these similarities and differences. Collecting data from parents as well as emerging adults will also allow researchers to explore dyadic differences (i.e., mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, and father-daughter) with respect to these issues. Using a qualitative methodology to collect dyadic data is particularly important as it will facilitate an understanding of these similarities and differences through the provision of thick and rich data extracts.

Finally, we were limited by the amount of time our interviewees could commit to the study. As a result, we were unable to fully explore many interesting issues that arose in our interviews. Some of these issues were beyond the scope of this study, but related to our emergent themes. For example, most participants in this study had Arab friends ($n = 10$) and discussed the importance of religion ($n = 11$). Many emerging adults with a strong faith appeared to follow their religious code, which protected them from experiencing acculturation gaps and conflict around "forbidden" behaviors such as alcohol consumption and premarital sex. Similarly, emerging adults with Arab friends were surrounded by peers with similar values and parental restrictions. This seemed to normalize their experiences and made the observed differences between their family and European Canadian families less salient. Future research should explore these additional factors and how they relate to acculturation gaps, conflict, and the parent–emerging adult relationship. As noted throughout this article, it is especially important that future research extends this study using qualitative methodologies to allow for an in-depth and process-oriented examination of these issues in the words and through the eyes of the people who live them.

Conclusion

This study added to our understanding of the acculturation gap-distress model, conflict, and parent–emerging adult relationships by using a qualitative methodology to privilege and share the voices of immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults in Canada. Our data presented narratives from immigrant Arab Canadian emerging adults, which suggested that they experienced acculturation gaps with their parents. These acculturation gaps, in turn, co-occurred with intergenerational conflict and ethnocultural identity conflict. Furthermore, strong parent–emerging adult relationships were observed to diminish the co-occurrence of acculturation gaps and conflict, whereas weak parent–emerging adult relationships were observed to intensify the co-occurrence of acculturation gaps and conflict.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. Although this particular quote is about her mother, Layla made it clear throughout the interview that her relationship with both parents improved and that they both trust her more than they did in the first few years post migration.

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