Sudanese Adolescent Refugees: Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

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This study explored acculturation and acculturative stress in Sudanese adolescent refugees living in Brisbane. Twenty Sudanese adolescents participated in semi-structured interviews which revealed that the main source of acculturative stress was related to concern over English language proficiency, issues of parental control and conflicting cultural rules. However, optimism for the future was also evident in all the interviews. The results suggested the need for culture specific counselling practices and ongoing English language and cultural support for Sudanese refugee children in mainstream schools.

In the literature on adolescent resilience and wellbeing, the increasing number of studies on ethnic and immigrant groups acknowledges the need for greater cultural awareness (Barrett, Sonderegger, & Sonderegger, 2002; Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003; D'Anastasi & Frydenberg, 2005; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Sudanese refugees currently form the largest humanitarian group of immigrants in Australia, yet although there has been investigation of adult Sudanese experiences of migration (Schweitzer, 2006; Schweitzer, Kagee, & Greenslade, 2006), to the authors' knowledge, no such study of Sudanese adolescents has yet been published. As concerns over young Sudanese adolescents' behaviour are surfacing (Brown, Miller & Mitchell, 2006; Lloyd, 2006), research on stressors that affect Sudanese adolescents is both necessary and timely. Acculturation, which refers to the process of moving to, living in and adapting to a culture different from one's culture of origin, is a known stressor and risk factor that can affect the health and behaviour of immigrants (Bhugra, 2003; Clark & Hofsess, 1998; McKelvey et al., 2002) and was the focus of this study.

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Sudanese Refugees

The Sudan is a multicultural country with over 400 tribal dialects, 19 main ethnic groups and over 500 ethnic subgroups, several of which, such as Dinka, Nuer and Nuba, are represented in Australia. While acknowledging differences exist, this study refers to the Sudanese as a cultural group due to similarities that also exist among the Sudanese groups (Holdstock, 2000) and the common national Sudanese identity adopted by such groups (M.A. Aburas, personal communication, August 22, 2006). Most Sudanese refugees in Australia have spent some years in Egypt in transit to Australia and many of the adolescents have had little experience themselves of culture in Sudan, and their experience of it is through family and community life outside their country of origin. Like other cultures, Sudanese culture is both dynamic and adaptive, mediating the perceptions of problems and incorporating resolutions to these problems into the culture (Wilson-Oyelaran, 1989). However, acculturation in Australia, notwithstanding prior experience of multiculturalism and possible prior experience of belonging to a different nondominant culture (within the Sudan and Egypt), is not without ongoing difficulties (Lloyd, 2006). This study sought to understand better the difficulties that impact on Sudanese adolescents' wellbeing.

Cultural Context and Acculturation

Culture is a part of ourselves. It is how we make meaning in life, as it encompasses points of reference in our lives, values, perceptions, attitudes, language and learned behaviours, conditioned by a particular history and socioeconomic system. Just as psychological processes influence culture, culture influences psychological processes (Lehman, Chiu & Schaller, 2004). Thus, the cultural context (Sudanese–Australian) of any behaviour is important to understanding that behaviour (Holdstock, 2000). Even the understanding of trauma, stress and perception of stressors is culture based (Bryant-Davis, 2005), so without understanding the cultural context, we may incorrectly suppose a risk factor to exist or not exist (Rutter, 1990). The process of acculturation may differ according to cultural group (Hashim, 2003; Steinglass, 2001), and may include an erosion of traditional beliefs and a learning of new values that is acceptable or unacceptable to children and/or parents, in the new environment. In this way, the process of acculturation may impact on an individual's wellbeing due to the new cultural demands involved not only in the physical, social and economic environment, but in the identity and attitudes of the individuals and families (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2003).

The multifaceted, complex nature of acculturation with the many variables involved is highlighted in Berry's (1997) framework of acculturation (see Figure 1). The framework takes into account the empirically different, but related concepts of psychological wellbeing and sociocultural adaptation in daily life. It also points to influences from both the society of origin and the society of settlement, moderating factors prior to and during acculturation and the interrelationship of group and individual acculturation processes.

In addition to these factors, arrival at a level of adaptation that promotes psychological wellbeing is influenced by the individual's level of engagement in the accul-

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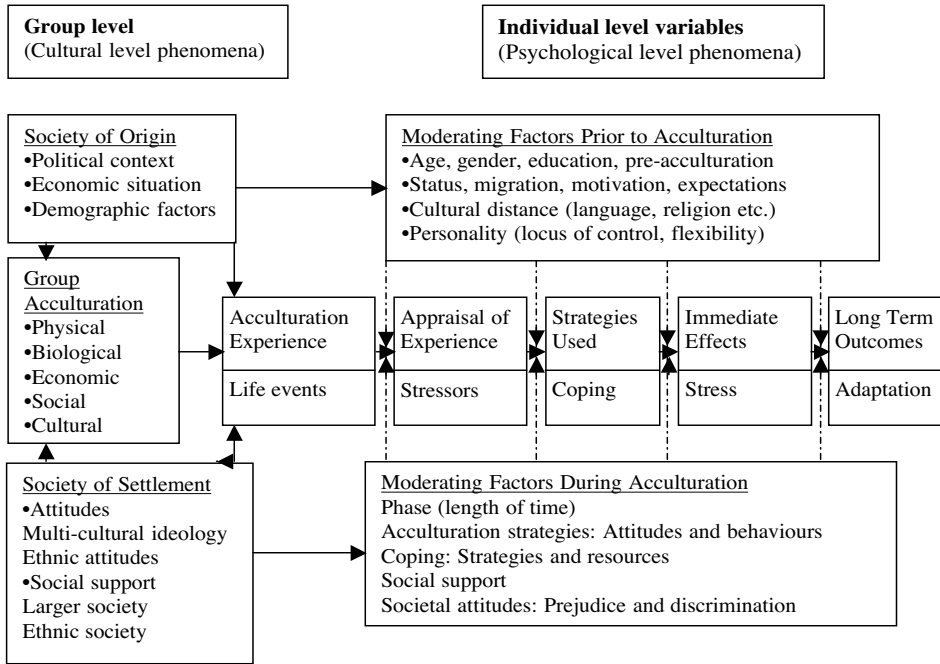
FIGURE 1

Berry's (1997) framework of acculturation

turation process in various contexts, such as school, work, mass media, religion and social interaction (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992). The level of engagement can depend on moderating factors such as the individual's status as a voluntary immigrant or a refugee (involuntary immigrant), which may reflect the level of motivation that exists to remain and participate in the dominant culture. Intention to return to live in one's country of origin may impede the acculturation process (Halcon et al., 2005) and although the reason for migration may contribute to the ease or difficulty of the acculturation process, it does not determine that process (Oppedal, Røysamb, & Heyerdahl, 2005). According to Berry (1997), the adaptation outcome is affected by the particular acculturation strategy used: *integration* (identifying with the host culture while continuing to identify with the culture of origin), *assimilation* (rejecting the culture of origin), *separation* (rejecting the host culture) and *marginalisation* (no sense of belonging to either culture). The latter is the weakest predictor of long-term health and wellbeing, and integration is the strongest (Schmitz, 1992).

This research will focus on two features of psychological acculturation in Berry's (1997) framework: stressors (appraisal of experience) and stress (immediate effects of experience and appraisal). Appraisal of experience involves culture-shedding: some aspects of culture lose their value in the current context when individuals learn about the new, host culture. Situations are appraised and if few difficulties in adaptation are perceived, stress is likely to be minimal and individuals are likely to expe-

rience more positive consequences of living in a new environment. Cultural conflict and subsequent psychological distress, of course, are not inevitable in the acculturation process and immigrant children are not necessarily more stressed than nonimmigrant children (Chiu, Feldman & Rosenthal, 1992).

Acculturative Stress

When there is conflict between learning new aspects of the host culture, and shedding aspects of the culture of origin, the acculturative stress paradigm becomes applicable (Berry, 1997) and coping strategies are needed to deal with physiological and emotional reactions. Acculturative stress is beyond general life stress and includes acculturation-specific issues such as ethnic identity, discrimination, culture competence, cultural values and second-language competence (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Oppedal et al., 2005). It follows that when immigration is not a choice, as in the case of refugees who are forced to leave their own cultural base, acculturation may impact to a greater extent on the stress already experienced by virtue of being a refugee (Schweitzer et al., 2006). High levels of acculturative stress have been correlated with the risk of depression and suicide ideation (Hovey & King, 1996) and if such stress occurs, it can be long term (Steel, Silove, Phan & Bauman, 2002). Greater risk of acculturative stress occurs when there is greater cultural distance (Berry & Annis, 1974; Yeh et al., 2003), that is, the amount of perceived disparity and compatibility between the immigrant's own culture and that of the host culture. Age is also a factor in the experience of acculturative stress. Mena, Padilla and Maldonado (1987) found age 12 to be the critical age for determining higher stress levels amongst immigrants, and according to Sam and Berry (1995, cited in Berry, 1997), adolescents in particular are more likely to experience acculturation problems. However, there are factors protecting against acculturative stress, such as culturally-integrated friendship choices (Bhui et al., 2005) and a high level of support and flexibility available from both cultures, family and community (Padilla, 1980).

Acculturation Specific Stressors

Ethnic Identity

This is the part of self that identifies with the culture of origin, its values and rules. Importantly, ethnic identity is linked to self-esteem (Nesdale & Mak, 2003) and in a two-culture context self-esteem acts as a mediator of ethnic identity crisis and mental health (Oppedal, Røysamb & Sam, 2004). Self-esteem is affected by discrimination (Rumbaut, 1994) and discrimination against immigrants in the form of ostracism, bullying and difficulties at school is not uncommon (Kunz, 2000, cited in Taylor & Doherty, 2005).

The feeling of ethnic belonging is not necessarily reduced when combined with a sense of belonging to a new culture (Phinney et al., 2001). In adjusting to a new culture, to identify primarily, but not exclusively, with one's culture of origin can be a sign of successful adaptation to bicultural living (Berry, 1997; Farver, Bakhtawar, & Narang, 2002; Yeh et al., 2003). This feeling of belonging to both ethnic and majority cultures is also part of social group identity which has been found to have strong predictive power for wellbeing in adolescent immigrants (Sam, 2000).

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Family

Culture and the experience of acculturation involve an interaction of variables that include adolescent perceptions of both individual stress and child-inclusive family stress (Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999). Sudanese adolescents in Australia usually live as part of a family structure, and within families the acculturation process can influence adolescents' appraisal of their parents' behaviour. Parental control and involvement can be perceived differently in the new cultural context and this can become a source of stress (Chiu et al., 1992). Parental control seems to be something of a paradox in that, within the context of acculturation, it causes both acculturation-specific stress and yet provides a sense of family security and ethnic belonging (Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie & Farah, 2006). Study of authoritarian style parenting in the west has found negative mental health effects on children (Barber, 1997). This is, however, not always the case in other cultures and it has been argued this is because the children perceive the authoritarian style differently (Dwairy et al.). Parental control in immigrant families is possibly a behaviour enacted to protect cultural values which parents feel will be threatened by the host culture (Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

A difference in the pace of acculturation can occur between parents and their school-aged children as acculturation proceeds faster in public settings than private settings where different coping strategies might be employed (Hepperlin, 1991; Smith, Bond & Kagitçibasi, 2006). Children, who attend school immediately after arrival in Australia, are faced with more rapid acculturation than their parents (who may take longer to learn English and find employment) in order to function on a daily basis in the classroom (Cox, 1989). This may be a source of tension within families where different and conflicting values and roles are adopted by the children, such as those related to individual freedom (Brough et al., 2003) and gender roles (Dion & Dion, 2001).

Gender

Studies have shown girls experience stress more often than boys as a result of gender constraints within immigrant families (Lee, 2001; Sarroub, 2001). Due to the different roles and subsequent different adaptation challenges and experiences of girls and boys, gender is an important variable in acculturation research, (Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006).

Culture determines both gender roles, learned through the cultural process of socialisation, and the acceptable ways in which individuals show dissatisfaction with those roles (Skinner, 1989). Thus, gender differences can make dissatisfaction and tension within the immigrant culture less visible to the host culture. This is especially true if immigrants are aware of host culture disapproval of their cultural practices. Social and moral support for such tensions will be sought from within the adolescent's own cultural group at school (Oner & Tosun, 1990) restricting motivation to participate at a more integrated level of cultural interaction. At a time when the young person is expected to adopt an identity approved by his/her culture, having to select another, perhaps conflicting, identity because of living in a new and even very different culture, can add another challenge to adolescent development (Adam & Van Essen, 2005; Oppedal et al., 2005; Phinney, 1990).

Language Acquisition

Language is central to acculturation as the means of integration through communicating and understanding in both cultures. Language proficiency is the key to educational achievement and career opportunities, yet literacy problems are experienced by those Sudanese children with interrupted schooling. This has led to tension in the classroom between the academic demands of the high school curriculum and the literacy needs of these students (Brown et al., 2006). Greater perceived second-language proficiency is related to greater self-esteem and less stress (Noels, Pon, & Clement, 1996) and second-language difficulties have been significantly associated with subcultural identity (Taylor & Doherty, 2005).

Aim and Hypotheses of Study

The purpose of this study was firstly to investigate possible acculturative stress in a sample of Sudanese adolescent refugees. This study asked Sudanese adolescents about their adaptation experiences to further understanding of possible stressors incorporated in those experiences. It was predicted that Sudanese adolescent refugees' perceptions of stress would reflect their special status in Sudanese and Australian cultures.

Conclusion

Participants

A total of twenty Sudanese adolescent refugees studying in two high schools in Brisbane at the time of the research (July, 2006) took part in the study. There were 10 female and 10 male students aged between 13 and 18 years (M = 15.25, SD = 1.34) who had been in Australia on average 2.55 years (SD = 0.78). All except one of the Sudanese adolescents (whose family was in Sudan), lived with family members at the time of the data collection. Students were included on the basis of perceiving themselves to be coping well and of not feeling depressed. Some Sudanese participants were unsure of father's previous occupation, however, there were participants from blue-collar and white-collar backgrounds. Five Sudanese participants had a parent currently employed. Sudanese students had had different amounts of formal school education prior to their arrival in Australia and of the 13 who stated their religion, 9 were Christian and 4 were Muslim.

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Design

In order to learn individual stories from a predominantly oral culture, qualitative research was used (Kindermann & Valsiner, 1989). This is important, as there is a notable discrepancy between Sudanese refugee children's high level of oracy and relatively low level of literacy (Hillier, 2002). In the light of what is known about the importance of cultural context, the qualitative nature of culture itself (Carey, 1993), and as there is no quantitative measurement geared to Sudanese culture, semistructured interviews gave students the chance to voice their own perceptions of their acculturation.

Measures and Procedure

There was one questionnaire to obtain demographic data and one semistructured interview composed by the researcher (Appendix A). Sudanese adolescents were notified of the research through their school and the Sudanese Community Association of Queensland, and asked to participate. The questionnaire was filled out individually with the researcher. After completing the form, each of the Sudanese adolescents participated in an individual, semistructured recorded interview for an average of 30 minutes. An interpreter was not used as it was thought the presence of a third party might inhibit the adolescent and encourage answers that were thought to be the 'right answer' (Edwards, 1998). Interviews took place over a two-week period. Interviews were transcribed and then analysed using N-Vivo 2. The authors read the transcripts several times and recurring themes were cross-checked for reliability.

Results

Several recurring themes emerged (for a list of themes and further exemplars, see Appendix B) and are presented here separately for clarity, although there is obvious overlap.

Acculturation

Ethnic Identity

All the adolescents said they identified as Sudanese, but when asked if that were 100% Sudanese, 12 of the 20 Sudanese participants currently felt 50 per cent or more Australian: 'I think of myself as both. Sudanese is always gonna be my background, and it's never gonna change, but I'm living in this country, so I declare myself as Australian'. Those who felt less all said they thought this would change in the near future when they would feel more Australian and eventually reach a balance of cultures to suit themselves. While recognising they would become 'more Australian' through living in Australia, going to school and developing friendships, they did not want to forget Sudanese culture: 'We still doing the same culture, still speak the same language and all that. That make you don't forget about Sudan'.

A few participants found it hard to articulate what their culture was, but the multicultural nature of the Sudan ('Every part of Sudan has different people'), the dances, languages and sociocultural rules were mentioned. Colour of skin was also a commonly mentioned factor of identifying as Sudanese. Although all but one of the participants thought Australians very friendly, comments surfaced in interviews, but were not dwelt on, about prejudice and avoidance of Sudanese by Australians: 'Australian kids … see you like you're stupid or something', '… talking to them and they pretend that they doesn't hear', and 'People they get me, but I still feel that I'm good, alright, but not that much, it doesn't bother me that much'. An awareness was shown by some Sudanese boys of their trying to find a place in Australian society. Comment was made on the tendency in schools for students to form a Sudanese ethnic group adopting black American music and expressions. This made it harder for Sudanese adolescents to mix with non-Sudanese students if thy wanted to do so. One participant expressed awareness of the history of conflict between black and

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white Americans and wanted to disassociate himself from this scenario, saying Africans were a new group in Australia and had the opportunity to have a good reputation and a peaceful existence.

Optimism/Future

All participants were quick to downplay any unpleasantness and a very definite optimism permeated the interviews. Participants spoke of how things would get better and they would have a good education: 'It's OK, but sometimes it's just a bit hard to, you know, when you get stressed out, like family things and cultural background and when … it's a bit different, but I'll work it out', and 'Australian place or the community that you live in is a very good place and you have to stick with it and get used to it and sometimes people do not get what you saying or what you doing, but you have to just get used to it ...'. The majority of participants intended to remain in Australia. A few wanted to visit the Sudan if possible, or expected to be sent there for a visit.

Acculturative Stress

Language

Language difficulties were seen as the major source of stress in adapting to life in Australia and managing education: 'It's hard to learn English, talk properly and all that"; "When it comes to schooling and these things, it's more difficult than I thought it would be". Language was seen as the key to better grades, friendships and level of desired integration. Different levels of language proficiency were seen as a difficulty between children and adults.

Between-Cultures

Eighteen of the twenty Sudanese participants said they felt 'between-cultures' and this was described as difficult. One student explained it: 'If I got two friends and they like fighting so the other one come and tell me that and the other one come and then I'll be in the middle and then they be like oh you're with her or you with her?' Some of the participants spoke about the difference between their own acculturation and their parents' and how this could cause stress:

> [Parents] need someone to come and talk to them, not even talk to them … but need one more someone to come and show them how is this going, how does it happen and why, like that, so they can understand more. But right now they cannot understand anything right!

At the same time, some showed an understanding of the adaptation process and the difficulty for parents:

> Some people come in a really difficult situation and seen a lot of bad things. Sometimes, it makes it easy and when they come to settle in Australia, they're too happy and all this, but in a little while, the stress comes back, all the bad things they have seen, the stress just gets back to them and they have nothing to do with it and it leads them facing on their own family, or doing something to their own family and that sometimes leading to bad things happening.

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Parental Control

Sudanese cultural rules were seen as conflicting with Australian rules and this was also difficult for several participants, particularly older participants, because they saw parental control in a more critical light. Many participants commented on the differences in their behaviour and how they showed respect at home and at school, with home being more authoritarian and more formal. Some of the adolescents felt they had no voice at home and wanted to be able to negotiate issues: 'In our country it's so difficult to talk to your father and tell him about your opinion and yeah, you only listen to him … You can't tell him how you feel'. The word 'quiet' was mentioned frequently as how children behaved at home in the presence of adults. The recognition that this quiet is part of cultural respect for their parents, and although they wanted to respect their parents, having to be quiet conflicted with how Sudanese adolescents felt they should be able to show respect in the Australian context. Discipline was an issue several interviewees were reluctant to discuss, seemingly because they were aware that physical punishment is often disapproved of in Australia, and also because many thought Australian children were disrespectful and more badly behaved. Participants were generally reluctant to talk about anything they thought might cause judgment against their parents; however, reference was made to physical punishment and related fear and upset feelings:

> Participant: Yes, it makes me upset!
>
> Interviewer: Yeah?
>
> Participant: Yeah, but they don't always treat you badly, just sometimes if you do something naughty.
>
> Interviewer: So you think you deserve it?
>
> Participant: Yeah, I deserve it.

Relationships/Social Life

The conflict of cultural rules for the participants was also seen within the context of their social life. Some participants mentioned the cultural rule of not being able to have a boyfriend/girlfriend and even friendships of the opposite sex until their education was completed, as a source of upset: 'Like if you tell your dad, "he's a friend of mine", he'll be thinking there's something else going on and you're not telling him'. The majority of girls and some boys commented on the comparative lack of equality between the sexes. Some girls accepted that they had to do more household chores, while others found it unfair and a source of frustration and anger as they noticed the comparative freedom of their brothers and Australian girls. Some Sudanese participants were allowed to go to some birthday parties and others were not, but when not allowed, this obviously affected the opportunity to socialise with Australians. The comment was also made that the equality of the sexes in Australia was a source of friction between Sudanese parents, which then affected the children. Opportunities for close friendships with Australians seemed limited, as comments about Australian friends when followed up seemed to refer to acquaintances. Close friends were

almost all Sudanese and were nominated as an important support system, but not all the boys said they had a close friend. Participants were upset that they were separated from family in the Sudan and spoke of how they missed the social and community norms such as being able to turn up at a family member's or neighbour's house without prior arrangement: 'Everyone feels at home like a family'. The different rules of hospitality and social and language uncertainty in Australia meant increased reliance on the nuclear family and reduced social activity which some participants found frustrating.

Coping

Participants generally seemed to want to deal with problems themselves, although some younger subjects said they would seek assistance from parents. There seemed a reluctance to use professionals, although teachers were acceptable if there was a problem at school. This may have been due to fear of family repercussions (see 'Parental control' in Appendix B). Accessible methods were used, so that outside of school, talking to friends, listening to music and exercise were common, but there was also a strong feeling of having to deal with the problem and not focus on it. Some things could not be changed and participants said they just accepted them for the present (such as gender roles). However, reference was made in interviews of those Sudanese children who were not coping so well:

Participant: When they come to school, I don't think they so they treat us so nicely and everything … there's a [Sudanese] boy he like has a problem with Australians and some people just treat him so badly.

Interviewer: Do you think that's an individual thing, that's his personality or do you think it's his situation that made him like that?

Participant: The situation I think.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore Sudanese adolescents' perceptions of acculturation and possible between-culture stressors through semi-structured interviews. All Sudanese participants were optimistic about their experience in Australia and their future, and identified as 'part Australian'. However, at the time of the interviews, as predicted, the majority felt pulled between certain aspects of both cultures and some main stressors were revealed. Language difficulties, parental control and relationships, and gender roles were prominent stressors that impacted on each other. The comments made by the Sudanese group suggest the Sudanese adolescents experience stress specific to acculturation. By definition, it is implied that such stress goes beyond non-acculturative, developmentally-related adolescent stress.

Stressors

Sudanese adolescents' perceptions of acculturative stressors were of two kinds: stress caused by an ongoing state or situation, or stress caused by single events. Remembered events such as incidents of perceived discrimination and racism,

occurred, and were dismissed or downplayed in the interviews, but may still be psychologically intrusive and affect wellbeing as previous research has found (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Oppedal et al., 2005). Ongoing stress was related to both loss and the between-cultures status of the Sudanese adolescents. Restricted social involvement and comparative lack of wider peer community were sources of stress resulting from loss. The loss of a supportive social structure, combined with the perceived communication barrier, lack of social confidence, gender roles and restricted social opportunity in Australia, meant the adolescents spent more time at home where they had to monitor what they said and be 'quiet' within the context of formal parental relationships, and often had less time for peer support.

Recent research has suggested that first-generation girls and second-generation boys may be especially vulnerable to mental ill health (Oppedal et al., 2005). In the interviews, gender differences emerged. Cultural distance seemed evident when Sudanese girls challenged traditional Sudanese gender roles and the subsequent lack of freedom for girls as excessively restrictive parental control against the backdrop of perceived gender equality values in Australia. Stress in immigrant girls relating to parental control and gender role expectations has been reported in other studies and is not limited to Sudanese culture. Different kinds of stressors each gender is exposed to in a particular culture can cause gender differences in stress levels as found by Wakil, Siddique & Wakil (1981).

The sense of being between cultures can be seen from two perspectives. First, the difference in the learning and shedding of culture between Sudanese adolescents and parents has meant adolescents view traditional cultural rules with a critical eye in the Australian context. This may be why parental control was nominated as a main source of acculturative stress while it is also not an uncommon source of conflict for adolescents across cultures. Sudanese parental control is compared to what is perceived, rightly or wrongly, as greater leniency in the host Australian culture. The loss of social support for parents may also be impacting on adolescents' wellbeing at home, which affects how children cope (Lustig et al., 2004; Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999). The ability of adolescents to adapt to a new social context has been shown to depend on the perceived security of the family atmosphere and of the parent–adolescent relationship, not the actual availability of supporting parental relationships (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). This may contribute to the feeling of 'between' that most of the Sudanese adolescents said they felt. The second side of feeling between cultures described by the sample referred to conflicting demands of school and home. This between-cultures stress is ongoing and depends not only on the individual adolescent, but on the integration of parents, home culture and cultural distance discussed by Berry and Annis (1974). According to some participants, such different cultural environments (at home and at school) means some adolescents are 'quiet' at home and go 'crazy' at school. It may be that these adolescents feel able to act out aggression or frustration at school (Brown et al., 2006; Lloyd, 2006), and such aggressive behaviour at school may be a responsive coping strategy in itself (Tremblay, 2005).

The findings of this study are consistent with previous findings about the importance of second-language learning to successful cultural integration. The main ongoing stressor, mentioned by the participants of this study was language difficulties. Language, as one interviewee said, speaks for a culture, and lack of proficiency in English was viewed as a barrier to further integration. Both genders felt their

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language would improve, but some struggled with the pace of acquisition which seemed to be required at the same time as they were having to fulfil family and first language commitments. It is conflicting for Sudanese adolescents to be told to practise English outside of school if they are expected to speak their first language at home, their friends are predominantly Sudanese and they have limited opportunity to socialise with Australians. The importance of second-language acquisition in the acculturation process is not culture specific and cannot be understated due to the relationship between perceived language proficiency, self-esteem and stress (Noels et al., 1996) and sub-cultural identity (Taylor & Doherty, 2005). It is therefore important to recognise the language practice constraints of this target group and although English support is given in schools, according to this research, current provision is not perceived as adequate by the Sudanese participants. This confirms findings in Brown et al.'s (2006) study. It is suggested that literacy support is not just a supportive, but also a preventative measure, to minimise future difficulties Sudanese adolescent refugees may experience as a result of low literacy skills, subsequent exclusion and frustration in both further education and the labour market.

Ethnic Identity

The combined strong sense of ethnic identity among the Sudanese sample and the feelings of becoming and identifying as Australian indicate a willingness to adapt to and a successful initial adaptation to Australian culture. However, this study indicates that the level of integration for adolescents seems dependent on the extent to which Sudanese and Australian cultural rules allow adolescents to integrate into the wider Australian culture. The level of parental control and gender segregation may make it more difficult for Sudanese adolescents to follow through Bhui et al.'s (2005) suggestion that integrated friendship choices are helpful to successful acculturation. Only one Sudanese participant reported having a close Australian friend. Lack of close Australian friendships, while understandable in the described context, makes it more difficult for Sudanese adolescents to increase their understanding of Australian culture, a point made by one of the participants.

Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) looked at ethnic identity in the United States, in relation to established American-born Mexican and African–American adolescents, to investigate how these groups dealt with being part of two cultures. Their research found adolescents identified in one of three ways, two of which were similar to those of Berry's strategies of *integrated* and *separated*. The third way, *alternating bicultural* differed in describing adolescents who identified more with the minority culture, operated comfortably in both cultures, but moved between nonoverlapping culture areas, such as home and school. Due to the factors that limit integration, alternating biculturals (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) perhaps best describes the majority of the sample at present, rather than Berry's (1997) integrated category, which is most closely associated with wellbeing. As alternating biculturals, the Sudanese adolescents operate in two separate areas of culture: Sudanese at home and Australian at school. There is a between-cultures dilemma that, in order to integrate further, Sudanese cultural rules need to be broken, but at what cost and to whom?

Analysis of the interviews with Sudanese adolescents supported Brough et al.'s (2003) findings of a striking optimism among a sample of adolescents of several cultures. Optimism has been found to help coping and wellbeing and vice versa, and may be a key to the Sudanese adolescents' perception of coping in this study (Scheier & Carver,

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1992). Positive affect (such as optimism for the future) is recognised as strengthening the adaptive function of coping (Folkman & Moskovitz, 2000). It is possible too that moderating factors prior to arrival in Australia, such as the bad experiences of the past, including those of discrimination in Egypt whilst in transit, cause Australia to be seen in a particularly favourable light. It is also possible that those experiences, combined with the experience of cultural and linguistic pluralism among Sudanese and the experience of having already lived within a minority culture, give the Sudanese refugees in the study insight into and skills in adapting and coping in those areas that allow a positive, optimistic focus in life.

Concerns and Recommendations

Optimism, however, may not last. An American study found the mental health and risk behaviour advantages of first-generation immigrant adolescents as measured against US-born Anglo–Americans is reversed by the third generation when ethnic minority groups have more mental health problems and risk behaviour (Hernandez & Charney, 1998). Optimism may be a temporary feature of early settlement, so that when, for example, some students in the current sample reach the critical period of Year 12, with the disadvantage of operating in a new second language, the hope of becoming competitive professionals in the near future (as expressed in interviews) may be lost. This loss may engender a sense of loss of control. How an individual copes with a stressful situation depends on the type of situation and how it is appraised (D'Anastasi & Frydenberg, 2005), and so previous coping strategies may no longer be effective.

As suggested at the beginning of this study, due to the relatively short period of Sudanese settlement in Australia, the impact of possible frustrations and acculturative difficulties are only beginning to surface. Recently, in Australia, unfulfilled expectations were found to fuel restlessness and violence among young Sudanese at school and at home (Brown et al., 2006; Lloyd, 2006), and it is important that the root of this potential problem is addressed in adolescents. Adolescent refugees who are older and have experienced broken schooling may be at greater risk. Funding for adequate English language support and counselling strategies that take into account cultural differences would help Sudanese adolescents reach a level of cultural integration and develop achievable goals. It is important that the adolescents and parents can reach a greater understanding of study and employment opportunities, so students can consider realistic short-term goals. This research supports Barrett et al.'s (2002) view that culturally specific counselling strategies are needed, so that the possible strengths and limitations of Sudanese cultural rules for Sudanese adolescents in Australian schools are recognised by all professionals involved with the welfare of these children. As acculturative stress that comes from the between-cultures situation involves the home, the parents also need an understanding of the Australian education process and culture.

Due to the type of problems already mentioned and constraints in negotiating these, guidance in emotion-focused coping might be more appropriate and effective, so that adolescents can achieve beneficial emotional control to deal with frustrations. Female Sudanese adolescents may be the most vulnerable to feelings of depression, and as previously discussed, counsellors need to be aware of this, although Sudanese adolescents currently appear to use professional counsellors very little. With the challenges of acculturation in Australia, and as research suggests that 14 to 16 years of age is the best time to intervene in psycho-social development of adolescents (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2002),

a look at coping programs developed with various focuses may help some Sudanese adolescents to sustain wellbeing (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2002; Jones et al., 2004).

Strengths and Limitations of Study

A strength of the research is that it is the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to focus specifically on Sudanese adolescent refugees' experience of acculturation. In research, there is the danger of sometimes glossing over cultural differences. A further strength was the use of qualitative methodology, so that a deeper understanding of acculturation and acculturative stress was possible. However, there were also limitations to the study. The sample was small and not random. The small sample, limited interview time and the complexity of acculturation make it more difficult to generalise from the findings. Other limitations are the possible response bias due to the differing language skills of participants, the self-reported data, desire to not embarrass parents, and the urge to give socially or culturally desirable answers. However, children do have the ability to change from culture to culture and respond accordingly to accommodate this latter point (Oppedal et al. 2005). Some interviewees showed reticence in discussing some topics and boys were less expansive on the whole than girls, which may have been partly due to the female gender of the interviewer. The different concept of privacy and confidentiality in Sudanese culture (Wal, 2004) may also have prevented or restricted some issues from being mentioned or fully explained. Also, according to Bemak et al. (2003), speaking of emotional distress is not culturally acceptable among southern Sudanese. Important moderating factors of acculturation prior to arrival in Australia (Berry, 1997), such as trauma experienced by all family members, and their impact on acculturation and acculturative stress of the sample were not known, so unable to be accounted for in this study.

Future Research

Further research on Sudanese adolescents and acculturative stress, with a larger sample is needed to build on the current findings. A larger sample and longitudinal design would also allow other variables in acculturation, such as age, or combinations of these variables, to be considered along with coping skills employed to deal with the stress. Further study with a control group using mixed methodology could continue to increase understanding of the role of culture through comparison. Research that combined both the perceptions of the adolescents and those of their teachers and parents would give a clearer picture of acculturation, acculturative stress and coping within the school and home contexts and increase understanding of behavioural difficulties that might occur.

Conclusion

Adolescence is an important developmental stage in its relationship to adulthood, and adolescent refugees are under-researched in Australia. This study focused on Sudanese adolescents who perceived themselves as functioning well within mainstream high school, and explored their acculturation. Main acculturative stressors such as language competency, traditional gender roles and cultural distance are stressors found for other immigrant groups. In spite of the current apparent optimism and wellbeing of the Sudanese group, acculturative stress in the Sudanese sample suggests the need for preventative support measures that would help to decrease the possible impact of such stress at times of increased future challenge. Knowledge of cultural differences in stress

and coping between groups and of differences in stress within the Sudanese group contributes to a greater understanding of vulnerability and wellbeing of the target group.

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Appendix A
Semi-structured interview questions (interviewer)

PERSONAL HISTORY

Country of birth   _____

Date of birth   _____

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Age   _____

Sex   _____

Date of arrival in Australia   _____

Year level at school   _____

Number of siblings   _____

Number/identity of people living at home   _____

Language(s) spoken at home   _____

Primary care-giver _____

Parent's occupation in Sudan (m) (f)_____

in Australia (m) (f)_____

Appendix A (CONTINUED)
Semi-structured interview questions (interviewer)

INTERVIEW

Introductions. Confidentiality, etc. Explain special situation of one culture at home and one outside home and want to find out about this situation and how culture affects it.

1. How do you describe yourself — Sudanese or Australian or both? Why? (If 'both', ask 'What percentage?')

   Do you ever feel between?

   Follow up/helps/alternatives: Can you explain that a bit more for me?

   (Would you say you are different being Sudanese? How are you different? How are you the same?) Are you the same person at home as you are at school? Do people know about Sudanese culture here?

   What is the most important thing to you about your culture?

2. **You say there are differences/similarities between Sudanese and Australian culture. How is your home life different or similar, do you think, from non-Sudanese Australian kids?** (roles, discipline, parental expectations, clothes …)

3. **So, to concentrate on the similarities, can you tell me what you think the similarities are?**

4. **I'd like to focus on the differences now, if that's ok? Let's start with home and then we'll go on to school.**

   With you living in two cultures, do the differences between cultures make things difficult for you sometimes, or easy? Is it difficult sometimes? (How often?) Can you give me examples and explain?

5. **How do you deal with these difficulties? What do you do when you get stressed?** What helps you feel good?

6. **Now in relation to outside the home — school** (friends, homework …) *Repeat questions 3 and 4.* **Did you expect any of these differences? Can you see yourself feeling more Australian in the future than you do now? Why?**

7. Do you see your family feeling more Australian in the future?

8. **Do you have any Australian/non-Sudanese friends?**

   Who is your closest friend and where does s/he come from?

Appendix B

List of Themes, Subthemes and Exemplars of Interviews with Sudanese Adolescents

	Theme and Subtheme	Main findings	Exemplars (individual speakers separated by semi-colon)
1	**Language** Symbolic of belonging and difference	English language seen as the main difficulty for most participants, and as both a way into feeling Australian and also an obstacle to their Sudanese identity within the home.	The language speak for your culture; [Australians] sometimes they doesn't under stand me and they get upset … and they walk away; sometimes when you learn English, you just mix everything and you forget a little bit …because at home … we don't use English … and it's very difficult to come to school and to speak both language at the same time and sometime take long time to learn the other; I'm the only one who speaks a lot of English at home…so I see a lot of difference between me and them; the language speak for your culture; my dad [says] don't forget your language.
	Education	Several participants seemed to have difficulty with the range and depth of language and concepts needed in class.	I think it's so difficult, need more maths and science and I haven't done that since I was young and it's getting more difficult and difficult to learn more things; I think it's difficult for all Sudanese because everyone has a problem with sub jects maths and science. And they really get upset when they wanna do some thing and they can't because of language …it's so difficult to learn from grade 10, you only have 3 years and it's so difficult.
2	Ethnic identity Multicultural Sudan	Colour, traditions, language featured strongly in interviews.	I'm like a brown colour and they're white. That's why I'm Sudanese from my country; … here there's not much experience with African people, so we have long way to go here and we can get ourselves a good reputation; my mum, she said, I can't marry a white person because, like, we're different, eat differently and stuff and … live differently; my colour is not the same as Australian colour, you know, and my English, the way I talk; Sudanese culture, they got different dances…every part of Sudan has different people … speak different languages; in Sudan there's like about hundreds of cultures;
3	Feeling between cultures	There were times when many of the participants felt 'pulled two ways'.	[Language as above]; mum wants to be like only Sudanese, she doesn't want anything else to change — all this stuff, and then outside we are different, so it's so hard for us; I don't really know … sometimes I don't know which one [culture] to go to, like it's hard to make a decision; …in the school, some teachers say do something. You go home like your mum says speak Arabic! You can't maybe do it together.
	Home/Cultural rules Activities	Most participants commented on the limited range of activities outside of school.The word 'quiet' was used often in relation to home.	But at home we don't play with friends; at home I have to be quiet; at school ou're yourself and then when you go home it's like 'behave'; at home I stay quiet in my room … but in school I make jokes; they all serious …we have to stay

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List of Themes, Subthemes and Exemplars of Interviews with Sudanese Adolescents (CONTINUED)

Theme and Subtheme	Main findings	Exemplars (individual speakers separated by semi-colon)
		quiet … and you have to be really behaved and every word you say, you have to concentrate, and have to watch out what you do; In Australia we just sit at home because we don't know that place well and in my country I know all of it; I can't go to birthday parties cos mostly people drink; in Sudan we play at night and I miss that.
Respect	Behaviour at home was linked to respect for parents and elders. Idea that parents tell, not listen.	… you can't speak when they're [parents] speaking, you have to listen what they say and you have to do it even if it's wrong. You can't say your opinion; [show respect] by not making noise and all that; In Sudan they have all these old people and sometimes they come to your house … and when your kid is rude, they will all talk about it, so respect is a really big thing; in Australia kids … think that they're having freedom and they forget all about respect; in our culture, you're not allowed to just come in and say what went on in your day and explain what fun do you have — you talk about that to your friends — when you go into the middle of the adults and you start talking like that, it's disrespect.
Parental control		In Australia over age of 16 they could do what- ever they want. I don't think it's well to do that; in Sudanese culture … if you hit your children, you think they will listen. I don't actually believe in that … cos when you hit them, they go to school unhappy, they won't learn anything and in a minute the counsellor is talking to them and they will explain the problem and … the Australian person will think this is too harsh, this is really too bad on the children, you have to move … but the problem is the relationship between the kid and his parents gets worse when you move away, gets much, much, much, much bad, because they don't understand, they just think 'we are following our culture'; Their [neighbours] kids are real naughty and they never get smacked …We're so different … because my little brother, if he does anything, he gets smacked and then he gets real scared and then he never does it again.
Gender	Gender differences in perceived freedom.	In Sudanese culture, boys have much, too much freedom … and the good part … you come home late; Girls have less freedom in Sudanese culture; in Australia the women are expected to be equal with you, but sometimes … it gets difficult for both of them [men and women]. The men … they're afraid that they'll go too calm and the women will overtake them … the girls say this is not fair … and all the stress is with the parents; girls have to stay home, clean the house and everything. That's how it is, we don't go nowhere.
4 Friends Social and segregation	Language, social uncertainty, cultural gender rules and lack of opportunity may block friendships with Australians.	Sudanese friends form support group. [since primary school] I don't have that much [white] friends, and I wanna have both friends; The most I spend with Sudanese families cos they know what's going on and they know what's the future and what we used to do back in Sudan … they understand more; I know friends who don't really care if I am Sudanese or whatever, they are just friends. They don't care about my skin colour; I have Australian friends, but not that

List of Themes, Subthemes and Exemplars of Interviews with Sudanese Adolescents (CONTINUED)

	Theme and Subtheme	Main findings	Exemplars (individual speakers separated by semi-colon)
			many; girls and boys are not meant to be friends in any kind of way [in Sudanese culture]; until you make sure that you know how to speak really good Australian, you can't talk to them; I can go to my cousin's to my friends' houses at any time instead of me calling and saying I'll come or something like that. They are open at any time I can go and stay there … [I am] welcome at any time even. That's the good thing.
5	Optimism		Here's cool. In Sudan there is not enough education; It's like you know, a bit different.... I don't see anything not real good; [in the future] I see them [my family] fitting in real well; [Australians] are friendly; They just want me to have a better future; yeah, I'm reaching the balance I really want to get up to, so I'm just working my way … the balancing two cultures; I'm sure I'll get there; I feel free more than before, everything's going good and better all the time.
6	Coping		Self-reliance Several participants wanted to work things out themselves or sought help from friends who knew more [difficulties] I deal with them myself; you just gotta work at it…you just got to figure out a way; you figure out how to deal with it; decide yourself; you have to stick with it and get used to it; I was just talking to my friends because they came here years ago and they know.
	Accept/ignore problems	Participants seemed to accept what they could not change.	[unfair task] I just do it; I just ignore it; it's just how it is; everyone has different mind and thinks different things; [What do you do?] nothing; you just want to let it go; its not my language so it's gonna be a bit hard; [When you're told to be quiet …] I usually leave to go to my room and do whatever I want to there.

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