# LIFE SATISFACTION OF ADOLESCENTS: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY IN MALTA AND AUSTRALIA

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**Abstract**

Life satisfaction research among adolescents is scarce especially at cross-cultural levels. The nature and the means to attain life satisfaction vary from one culture to another (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004; Lu & Shih, 1997). The current study examined life satisfaction in native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. It is argued that adolescents of Maltese origin come from a culture that is still predominantly oriented towards a traditional and collectivistic oriented culture, thereby being significantly different from the Australian culture. Besides developmental challenges, these adolescents are faced with additional cultural challenges especially Maltese-Australian adolescents. The present investigation was carried out over two stages. During the first stage, in-depth individual interviews were conducted among native Maltese (N=20) and Maltese-Australian (N=18) adolescents. These interviews explored issues that related to the home environment, social support, and coping strategies. In addition, ethnic identity and ethnic identification were explored among Maltese-Australian adolescents. The nature of the relationship and the support received from parents was a key element in detracting from their life satisfaction. In the second stage, a questionnaire was administered to native Maltese (N=113), Maltese-Australian (N=108), and Anglo-Australian adolescents (N=111). The questionnaire comprised these scales: the Family Environment Scale Form R, Short Form Social Support Questionnaire, Adolescent Coping Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. For Maltese-Australian adolescents, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure was also included in the questionnaire. According to the findings of the second phase, most adolescents were satisfied with life and there was no significant difference between the groups. Results also indicated that overall, male adolescents reported higher levels of life satisfaction with life than females but there was no interaction between gender and ethnic group. Regression analysis showed that the experiences of life satisfaction are similar for these two groups. In addition, the results indicated that different patterns of predictors of life satisfaction emerged for the three ethnic groups. The three models showed that a significant amount of variances remained unaccounted for by the current predictors. However, the qualitative study shed more light on these findings. Although both studies contributed significantly to our understanding of the experiences of life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures, more research is required, especially among adolescents of Maltese origin.

# Declaration

I, Victoria Borg, declare that the PHD thesis entitled “Life satisfaction of adolescents: A cross-cultural study in Malta and Australia” is no more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature: Date:

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Louie, my son Mark, my daughter Michelle, son-in-law Louis, and my grand-daughter Monique

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I would like to thank my husband, Loiue, for having supported me throughout this academic journey. His continuous support is greatly appreciated, especially during those critical times that I reached due to my medical condition. Special thanks are also extended to my two children, Michelle and Mark, for being there for me when I needed them and for believing in my potential.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 Context of the Research

Life satisfaction is a phenomenon that crosses cultural boundaries, both at societal and individual levels. For decades, social scientists have been intrigued by questions such as "What constitutes life satisfaction?" and "What are the conditions that facilitate life satisfaction?" Questions about satisfaction with life are not uncommon even among lay individuals. Many times parents, for example, in an attempt to understand their children, raise such questions. They are very much aware of a need/'something' that the children need – something that most likely goes beyond material things. Indeed, there is evidence that suggests that satisfaction with material things is not a long-term satisfaction (Eckersley, 2004). Once basic needs are met, material things start losing their salience (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999). Research also indicates that materialism is negatively related with life satisfaction (Abela, 1991), whereas satisfaction with life among adolescents is positively correlated with non-materialistic values (Casa, Gonzalez, Figuer, & Coenders, 2004). If it is not materialism, then what is it that individuals are striving for in their attempt to feel satisfied with life at a deep meaningful level?

Life satisfaction is a personal cognitive assessment that one makes regarding how satisfied he/she is with life (Diener, 1984). The criteria used for this judgment are set up by the individual, rather than by the researcher. At the core of life satisfaction are the most important values and goals embraced by the individual (Diener & Suh, 1997). Social scientists have used two approaches in examining life satisfaction. One is the global approach in which an overall judgement is made regarding satisfaction with life. The second approach involves the investigation of domain satisfaction, such as job satisfaction and academic satisfaction (Diener, 1999).

One group that has attracted the attention of social scientists in their attempt to understand life satisfaction is adolescents. The experience of adolescence is dynamic, complex, and exciting. It is a time of both opportunity and risk (Eckersley, 2004; Hamburg, 1993; Pittman, Diversi, & Ferber, 2002). As a pivotal experience, it is

characterized by change related experiences – physically, psychologically, and psychosocially. It is a period of growth and development that necessitates psychological adjustment (Borg, 1999), changes in relationships (Call, Riedel, Hein, McLoyd, Petersen, & Kipke, 2002; Eckersley, 2004; Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000), the establishment of self-concept and self-esteem (Muris, Meesters, van de Blom, & Mayer, 2005; Quatman & Watson, 2001) as well as the harnessing of a repertoire of effective coping strategies (Frydenberg, 1997; Frydenberg, Lewis, Bugalski, Cotta, McCarthy, Luscombe-Smith, & Poole, 2004). This time is also characterized by the adolescents' negotiations of identities (Erikson, 1968; Oppedal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004). The search for a new place in society becomes salient as the pieces of the puzzle that depicts who they are, are shuffled in their attempt to replace old roles with new ones – an experience that encompasses a great deal of both excitement and uncertainty. It also means new responsibilities which can be both challenging and threatening.

In addition to these challenges, youth in contemporary society need to come to terms with a rapidly changing world. Such changes include significant increases in information and communication technology, cultural globilisation, migration, and urbanisation (Larson, 2002). Throughout the world, changes are altering the daily social experiences of adolescents (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002). Although these authors continue to argue that globilisation and other worldwide changes are creating more opportunities for adolescents to develop an increasing repertoire of social resources, especially for middle class adolescents, they also argue that adolescents in the twenty first century are less likely to develop hierarchical relationships and that there are strong concerns for some groups of youth who are disadavantaged. Adolescents are now being confronted with unstable personal and social environment (Eckersley, 1995, 2004). Deep seated traditional values that endorse the integrity of the family, for example, are being constantly challenged (Larson, 2002) as western countries are becoming more secular, especially modern and post modern societies (Abela, 1991). Also, adolescents are becoming increasingly isolated due to a decrease in "meaningful contact with adults…. [resulting in] adolescence as an alien subculture" (Nightingale & Wolverton, 1993, p. 18).

According to Nightingale and Wolverton (1993) "Adolescents have no prepared

place in society that is appreciated or approved; nonetheless they must tackle two major tasks, usually on their own: identity formation and development of self-worth and self-efficacy" (p. 14). With the passing of time and the lengthening period of adolescence, role expectations both within the family and society at large are becoming more ambiguous (Price, Cioci, Penner, & Trautlein, 1993). Adolescents in contemporary society are facing increasing opportunities as well as pressures to engage in high-risk behaviours (Heller, 1993).

Adolescents in developing nations are faced with the additional challenge of living in coexisting traditional and modern worlds (Call et al., 2002; Ruggieri, 2001). Navigating between these two cultural worlds can be both challenging and threatening. The values and beliefs in these two cultures are at loggerheads with each other. For example, whereas the traditional culture promotes collectivistic orientated values, a non-traditional culture endorses individualistic orientated values (Triandis, 2000). Since adolescents are more likely to embrace the latter culture than their parents (Ruggieri, 2001) the generation gap can be quite broad, resulting in more parent-child conflicts and other related negative psychological outcomes.

Embedded in the changes (both individual and societal) is the need to adjust and adapt (Larson et al., 2002). The need for a repertoire of effective coping strategies (Frydenberg, 1997; Frydenberg et al., 2004) is, therefore, critical. The coping strategies that are likely to develop vary from adaptive to maladaptive, from functional to dysfunctional (Hess & Richards, 1999; Piko, 2001). Such strategies include reaching out to others, making a plan to deal with a difficult situation, ventilating feelings, and turning to alcohol. These strategies come into play in times of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although most adolescents are resilient (Eckersley, 2004), social trends indicate that many adolescents are not coping well enough with the increasing demands imposed upon them by social institutions in contemporary society. The increasing rates of psychosocial disorders (e.g., drug abuse, crime, depression, and suicidal behaviour; Eckeresley, 2004) indicate that many adolescents are not adequately equipped with effective coping skills. The types of strategies that they employ are a function of both internal and external factors (Griffith, Dubow, & Ippolito, 2000). These strategies, therefore, vary from one person to another and from one culture to another. The identification of these strategies is

important in order to examine how adolescents across cultures experience life satisfaction.

A resource related to life satisfaction is perceived social support through which the person feels a sense of being cared for, valued and accepted and a sense of security through the perception of availability of support when need arises. The literature consistently shows that adolescents need to have a perception that the people around them are supportive. Warm intimate relationships with parents, for example, tends to function as a protective factor against both internalising and externalising problem behaviour (Dekovic, Buist, & Reitz, 2004). It has been argued (Roberts, Seidman, Pedersen, Chesir-Teran, Aber, Duran, & Hsueh, 2000) that in perceiving social support among peers (and family members) adolescents view themselves as *worthy* of such relationships – a view that is likely to enhance their self-esteem and their level of acceptance by their peers (and family members). Adolescents need to feel supported in their attempt to undertake new challenges in life. A deficiency in their support network can jeopardise their psychological well-being, including satisfaction with life (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1995). Having a sense of being unsupported is likely to deter them from accomplishing the required tasks that are inherent during this stage of development (Erikson, 1968). In developing their identity, for example, adolescents need to break the emotional ties from their parents as they extend their social and psychological boundaries beyond the family environment. Adolescents need to feel free, but not alone, as they negotiate new interpersonal boundaries (Scabini & Cigoli, 1997). The inability to accomplish this, and other, tasks is likely to generate feelings of dissatisfaction with life.

During the last two decades, mental health issues among adolescents have been a major focus of concern for our health, education, welfare, and other services. The prevalence of depression, for example, is creating a concern. A major international review of time trends in psychological disorders in young people revealed an increase in depressive conditions over these last 10 years (Fombonne, 1995). A more recent study (Boyd, Kostanski, Gullone, Ollendick, & Shek, 2000) found that 14.4% of Australian adolescents were depressed and 13.2% were identified as anxious. When these findings were compared with other data from other countries similar trends emerged in Western and Asian countries. Suicide rates and attempts also seem to be increasing (Frydenberg et

al., 2004). Suicidal ideation was found to be widespread among Australian students during their first year of secondary school (Allison, Roeger, Martin, & Keeves, 2001), with 19% of males and 27% of females reporting suicidal ideation. Time trends using cross-national data have also revealed an increase in eating disorders and disturbances among adolescents over recent decades (Fombonne, 1995).

Surveys that have been conducted to examine mental health issues among adolescents in Australia also raise concerns regarding their subjective well-being. The findings of the Human Services Report on the lives of youth in Victoria, Australia (Bond, 2000) indicate that although the majority of adolescents will have a smooth transition to adulthood, about 10-20% of this population will engage in one or more serious problem behaviours, such as alcohol and drug use, between the ages of 12 and 18 years. This report also contends that one in five young people experience emotional problems that are likely to jeopardize their psychological and psychosocial well-being. Similar findings were identified by a national survey in Australia (Sawyer et al., 2000). This survey examined child and adolescent mental health and well-being. According to the findings, 19% of adolescents in Australia have mental health problems. Adolescents with mental health problems reported a high rate of suicidal ideation and behaviour. They also reported a high rate of health-risk behaviour, including smoking, drinking, and drug use.

These studies highlight the importance to understand how adolescents are faring with regards to aspects of subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction. Past research have mainly focused on negative psychological outcomes, such as depression, stress, and low self-esteem (Finkenauer, Engels, & Beaumeister, 2005), stress and depression (Heaven & Goldstein, 2001; Kobus & Reyes, 2000), depression and antisocial behaviour (Sim, 2000), alcohol abuse (Catanzaro & Laurent, 2004), eating problems (Muris, Meesters, van de Blom, & Mayer, 2005), and risk behaviour (Levy, 1997; Light, 2000). A strength-based paradigm (Larson, Bradford Brown, & Mortimer, 2002; Tate & Wasmund, 1999) is essential to examine the life experiences of adolescents. Young people have the potential to develop a number of favourable conditions that are likely to promote life satisfaction. Such conditions include intimacy (Larson et al., 2002; Scabini & Cigoli, 1999), autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 1996, 2001), independence and competence (Zwaanswijk, Van der Ende, Verhaak, Bensing, & Verhulst, 2003) and social and ego

identities (Erikson, 1968). The identification of these and other factors is essential in order to help them capitalize on these assets for their psychological well-being. In as much as it is important to acknowledge negative aspects of human behaviour, it is also important to identify its positive elements.

## 1.2 Research Problem

The literature is replete with evidence that suggests that adolescence is a critical developmental period, especially if adolescents come from an environment that is not conducive to their psychological and psychosocial growth. For example, exposure to arguments and fights at home are positively related to both depressed mood and anger among adolescents (Sigfusdottir, Farkas, & Silver, 2004). In addition, parent-child conflicts contribute to adolescents' levels of stress (Borg, 1999). Those adolescents who come from directive homes (both authoritarian and non-authoritarian) lack individuation, social consciousness, and autonomy (Baumerind, 1990; Foxcroft & Lowe, 1995; Shek, 1997). Research (e.g., Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000) shows that autonomy is positively related to life satisfaction. Adolescents from authoritarian homes, in comparison with those from authoritative and democratic homes experience more internalising problem behaviour (Dekovic, Buist, & Reitz, 2004). Families perceived as non-supportive are associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents (Heaven, Searight, Chestain, & Skitka, 1996).

Adolescents in modern and post-modern societies are confronted with rapid social changes in addition to their developmental changes. Through globalisation adolescents in both developed and developing countries are more subjected than previous generations to a world of instability and uncertainty that are creating increasing fear in adolescents as they look into the future (Eckersley, 2004). In addressing young people's well-being in Australia, this author continued to argue that "Pessimism is only one of the cultural traits of modern Western societies that are inimical to wellbeing, especially through their impact on values, meaning, belonging and identity" (Eckersley, 2004, p. 197).

Through globalisation, many traditional countries are continuously challenged with the infiltration of a non-traditional culture, thereby broadening the generation gap between parents and adolescents. One such country is Malta. Although Malta has been

identified as both traditional and non-traditional (Abela, 2001) it is more oriented towards traditional values and beliefs, especially the adults. Adolescents, on the other hand, have made a shift (albeit small) towards the end of the traditional-non-traditional continuum. This situation is likely to create many psychological and psychosocial threats for these adolescents. Ruggiero (2001), for example, argued that adolescents in traditional orientated countries in the Mediterranean that are in the process of modernisation are faced with acculturation issues without leaving their country of origin.

Although life satisfaction is a construct that crosses national boundaries, the means to attain it varies from one culture to another, especially between societies that embrace individualistic cultures and societies that are more orientated towards collectivistic cultures (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004; Lu & Shih, 1997; Oshi, 2000). Therefore, studying life satisfaction from a cross-cultural perspective is essential, especially at a time when the possibilities of migration are on the increase (Larson, Wilson, Bradford Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002). In May 2004, for example, Malta entered the European Union. This historical event opened new doors for migration, not only for native Maltese, but also for second-generation Maltese-Australian immigrants who are entitled to a dual citizenship – Australian and Maltese. These adolescents can now migrate to countries that are in the European Union, such as the United Kingdom. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) 54% of Australia's population growth was from net overseas migration during the period 2001-2.

The above-mentioned statistics in relation to the increase in psychological and social problems among adolescents reflect the subsequent implications inherent in their daily life experiences. Indeed, an examination of the adolescents' health and well-being in the twenty-first century from a global perspective (Call et al., 2002), for example, revealed that whereas adolescents around the world are physically healthier than they were 50 years ago, poor mental health is becoming one of the greatest obstacles to adolescents' well-being. This highlights the need to investigate the life satsfaction of adolescents in contemporary society. Given that it is the more personal domains of life that most influence subjective well-being (Eckersley, 2004) once basic needs are met (Oshi et al., 1999), the current study will explore a number of personal related areas that are influenced by culture among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-

Australian adolescents. These areas include the family environment, perceived social support, coping strategies, and ethnic identity and identification.

To date, no research has been conducted among both native Maltese (i.e., Maltese born and living in Malta) and Maltese-Australian adolescents (living in Australia) with regards to life satisfaction, even though it is a central component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Suh, 2000). The case of native Maltese adolescents is both complex and intriguing not only because the Maltese culture is unique, but also because these adolescents come from a 'Western country' that endorses a predominantly collectivistic culture that is usually found in Eastern countries (Triandis, 2000). Although Malta is both traditional and non-traditional, the Maltese strongly uphold traditional values and beliefs (Abela, 1991). A more recent study (Vassallo, Sciriha, & Miljanic Brinkworth, 2002), for example, has shown that Maltese women have the lowest rate in joining the workforce compared to other Europenean countries. Through globalisation and tourism the Maltese, especially younger generations, have started to embrace a non-traditional culture (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1995). As already argued, the psychological and psychosocial implications of this transition are taxing on the subjective well-being of adolescents who need to charter their way through both the traditional and non-traditional cultures. These adolescents, therefore, may be experiencing life satisfaction differently from other ethnic groups, such as Australians who live in a country that promotes an individualistic culture (Oshi, 2000).

The literature indicates that during the last three decades research in life satisfaction among adults has increased. However, life satisfaction research among adolescents is still scarce. It is even scarcer among ethnic minority groups. This is a matter of concern in a multicultural society such as Australia. In addition to their developmental tasks, adolescents from an ethnic minority group are faced with cultural related issues, including acculturation (Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996) and ethnic identification (Phinney, 1990, 1993; Rieckmann & Deyhle, 2004; Sam, 1998). In many cases, the culture of origin differs from the dominant culture, thereby giving rise to cultural conflicts. Reconciling these two cultures can be an arduous task for immigrant adolescents. These issues pose a number of challenges and/or perhaps threats that are likely to impact on their adaptation and overall life satisfaction. Indeed, studies (e.g.,

Borg, 1999; Rumbaut, 1997) have shown that second-generation immigrants are at risk in relation to psychological health.

As already argued, adolescents in developed countries, such as Australia, are dealing with many psychological and social issues at the turn of the twenty-first century. The situation is more complicated for ethnic minority groups. Indeed, "Growing up in an ethnic minority situation is not the same as growing up in a traditional culture…." (DeVos, 1980, p. 122). Acculturation disparity due to the discrepancy between the culture of origin and the dominant culture, for example, is associated with more frequent reports of mother-adolescent conflict (Tardif, 2004). Maltese-Australian adolescents, like many other immigrants, are faced with two sets of cultures: the old traditional one represented by family and friends and the new one which is transmitted through social forces, such as school, media, and peers. On one hand, their parents who mostly are first-generation immigrants are more likely to transmit the culture of origin to their children. Indeed, a study (Borg, 1999) showed that Maltese-Australian adolescents strongly identified with the Maltese culture. On the other hand, as second-generation immigrants, adolescents are more likely to embrace the dominant culture through peer pressure and conformity (Rambaut, 1997). The literature consistently shows that acculturation is more difficult when the culture of origin differs considerably from the host culture. For example, the discrepancy between the Maltese and Australian cultures is more likely to maximize parent-child conflicts, higher levels of stress, and lower self-esteem among Maltese-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999). Coming from a culture that is characterized by authoritarian parenting styles (Abela, 1991; Borg, 1999) the Maltese-Australian adolescents' needs for autonomy and independence may be exacerbated when these needs are incompatible with the parental demands, values, and cultural expectations (Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000; Rosenthal, 1982). These studies suggest that immigrant adolescents, such as Maltese-Australian adolescents are subjected to everyday life experiences that are affected by the original ethnic culture of their family, which in turn may influence their satisfaction with life.

The scarcity of research among Maltese-Australian adolescents calls for further research among this ethnic minority group. To date, only two studies (Borg, 1999; Proctor, 1998) were conducted among this population from a psychological perspective.

The first study examined adjustment of Maltese-Australian adolescents in relation to parent-child conflicts, self-esteem, ethnic identity, and gender. According to the findings, Maltese-Australian adolescents seemed to be at risk with regards to their psychological adjustment. They experienced more parent-child conflicts, more stress, and lower self-esteem than Anglo-Australian adolescents. The second study was an exploratory study among the Maltese community in Melbourne within the context of family therapy. The researcher who was a family therapist from another ethnic minority group, was prompted to conduct this study because of the fact that clients from the Maltese-Australian community, including adolescents, were not responding to family therapy, unlike those from other ethnic minority groups.

One of the problems that were highlighted in Proctor's study was the possibility that Maltese-Australian adolescents are concealing their 'Malteseness' in attempting to adapt to the Australian way of life. Briffa (1998), another family therapist also echoed that possibility. Borg (1999) in examining Maltese ethnic identification among Maltese-Australian adolescents identified only 4% of the sample as bicultural that is, embracing both the traditional and the dominant cultures. This is a matter of concern among the Maltese community in Australia. The literature (e.g., Berry, 1997; Soriano, Rivera, Williams, Daley, & Reznik, 2004; Ward, 1996) consistently indicates that biculturalism is the most adaptive acculturation strategy. Indeed, ethnic identification was negatively related to stress (Borg, 1999) and positively related to self-esteem (Borg, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1992). Borg's study was only a preliminary study in relation to ethnic identification. The present study explored this issue in more depth in relation to life satisfaction.

In view of the above mentioned issues, a number of central questions about the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures need to be addressed:

1. What roles do the family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies play in the experience of life satisfaction across cultures?
2. How does culture influence the daily life experiences of adolescents?
3. What are the factors that predict life satisfaction among adolescents across cultures?
4. How satisfied with life are adolescents across cultures?

5. What are the differences between male adolescents and female adolescents in relation to the experience of life satisfaction?
6. How does ethnic identity and identification influence life satisfaction among Maltese-Australian adolescents?

### 1.3 Significance of Research

The current study is significant both theoretically and practically. The experience of adolescence across cultures is different from that of childhood and adulthood and its influence on life satisfaction is different from that of the other two developmental stages. Hence, the generalisability of findings from children and adults remains largely unexplored. To bridge this gap, this study explores how adolescents feel about life in general and examines the factors that constitute life satisfaction across cultures. These factors include the family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies. In addition to these factors, ethnic identity and identification will also be examined among Maltese-Australian adolescents. Through this investigation of life satisfaction in adolescents this study moves towards addressing this gap in the current models and theories.

The literature reveals that there is no shortage of plausible models and theories that attempt to account for life satisfaction, both with particular domains and with life as a whole (see Diener, 1984, 1994 for a review). However, these available models are either not suitable for adolescents, or they are not adequate in explaining our understanding of the global life satisfaction of the population in question. For example, life satisfaction has mostly been examined in relation to a particular domain, such as job and financial satisfaction. The findings of such research may not be applicable for adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age, since most of them may still be at school. The current models will examine life satisfaction in relation to family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies. The literature review reveals that these variables are crucial in the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents. For example, both perceived social support and coping strategies play a fundamental role in the successful accomplishment of the required developmental tasks, thereby increasing the possibility of influencing the life satisfaction of the individual. Also, most past research

examined these three variables in relation to *some* aspects of life satisfaction, such as adaptation, self-esteem, and stress and not to global satisfaction as the current study is set to examine.

As already argued, there is a gap in the literature regarding aspects of subjective well-being of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents. It is important to point out that lack of research within the field of psychology amongst the Maltese is not only limited to immigrants, but also to native Maltese, living in Malta. The Department of Psychology at the University of Malta is still at its infancy. It has only existed for about 15 years. Consequently, research from a psychological perspective is still scarce. Indeed, the contents of the Journal of Maltese Studies (1999), for example, do not include any publications from psychological perspectives. Over the years, studies that have been conducted amongst adolescents are more from a sociological perspective. One study (Abela, 1992) for example, explored social values and the changing youth culture in Malta. Another study (Caritas, 1998) examined the prevalence of drug use among adolescents.

The current investigation involves 2 studies - a qualitative investigation of a number of daily life experiences of adolescents of Maltese origin and a quantitiative investigation of life satisfaction and other related factors among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. Since the phenomenon under investigation has never been examined both among native and Maltese-Australian adolescents, a qualitative method of inquiry was essential in order to examine the concepts and related issues in more depth. The first study, therefore, provides insights into child rearing practices and psychological and psychosocial experiences that are influenced by the Maltese culture. The second study provides a systematic study of some of the factors that enhance life satisfaction of the 3 ethnic groups.

Such studies are essential for a better understanding of life satisfaction among adolescents across cultures, especially in an era when on one hand most adolescents report that they are fairly satisfied with life (Diener, 1984; Eckersley, 2004; Rampichini & Schifini D'Andrea, 1997), and on the other, their daily life experiences, including their mental health are reflecting a different picture that raises a strong concern regarding the subjective well-being of adolescents (Call et al., 2000; Eckersley, 2004). Most

researchers of life satisfaction have only relied on a systematic method of investigation, thereby presenting an incomplete picture of this aspect of subjective well-being. Indeed, Eckersley argued that inconsistent findings have been found, sometimes even within the same study, between qualitative and quantitative studies. According to Oshi (2000) "Future cross-cultural research should move from an investigation of descriptive aspects of SWB to functions and processes of SWB" (p. 109). This study, therefore, will fill the gap that exists in the literature with regards to the fairly satisfied reported levels of life satisfaction among most adolescents and their daily contexts, especially the home environment.

It also bridges another gap, namely that of ethnicity in the possible explanation of the experience of life satisfaction across cultures. As already argued, although life satisfaction is a construct that crosses national boundaries the means to attain it varies across cultures. The Maltese culture is unique. Its implications in relation to subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction, are quite intriguing. Indeed, Professor Halsey from Nuffield College, Oxford pointed out in the Preface of the book Transmitting Values in European Malta (Abela, 1991) that "Malta has a vital lesson to teach to other European countries because of its distinctive familial and ecclesiastical history. Here is a country where family and church retain powerful influence over the shaping of personalities in the rising generation …. Malta is a country which seeks to find a modernised way of life while preserving its rootedness in strong family and community" (p. xxi-xxii).

The examination of how the Maltese culture relates to the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents will also fill another gap in the literature. Past research has mostly examined family environment, social support, and coping strategies in relation to some aspect of life satisfaction among adolescents from an ethnic majority group, such as Anglo-Australian adolescents. And when studies included adolescents from an ethnic minority group, the Maltese-Australian adolescents were not included, despite the significant number of Maltese immigrants in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Findings from research among other ethnic minority groups cannot necessarily be generalised to Maltese-Australian adolescents. According to the reviewed literature (Abela, 1991; Johnstone, 1984; Tonna, 1994; Vassallo et al., 2002) the Maltese culture may influence family environment, social support, and coping strategies, which in turn

may influence life satisfaction in different ways. As such, research in these areas is essential to obtain an understanding of life satisfaction among the Maltese-Australian adolescents.

The need to examine the life satisfaction of adolescents of Maltese origin is also highlighted by the decline of the mental health status of adolescents across nations (Call et al., 2000). There is already some indication that Maltese-Australian adolescents are at risk with regards to their psychological adjustment (Borg, 1999). The rate of suicide among adolescents in Australia is also of concern, not only at an individual level, but also at the level of society at large (Sawyer et al., 2000). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, suicide registered in the 15-19 years age group accounted for 19.9% of total male deaths and 13.1% of total female deaths in 2003. The Maltese community, both in Australia and in Malta is not immune from such a tragedy. The study of life satisfaction is beneficial in terms of gaining some insight into how adolescents of Maltese origin are faring with regards to their satisfaction with life and their environments-both within and outside the home environment. It will raise awareness of the social, psychological, and psychosocial issues that the adolescents in question are experiencing among the Maltese and Maltese-Australian communities. Such awareness will also be extended to educators and health professionals particularly in the areas of service delivery and policy making.

The adolescence experience is a huge domain and many questions that require further research will be raised. The qualitative study in the current investigation of the daily life experiences of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents, for example, will identify a number of social, psychological, and psychosocial issues that may impact their life satisfaction. A number of these issues will not be further examined by the quantitiative study due to the limitations of the latter study. On the other hand, the quantitiative study will also raise further questions that need to be addressed by future studies.

# Chapter 2

## The Experience of Life Satisfaction

The experience of life satisfaction is dynamic and complex. It has been widely acknowledged as a major component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984) and subjective quality of life (Cummins, 1996). This chapter examines a number of theories of happiness and life satisfaction, including Maslow's (1970) and Michalos' (1991). It also explores the different pathways to life satisfaction. The literature indicates that although life satisfaction has been identified as a universal phenomenon, the means to attain it vary from one culture to another.

### 2.1 Definition of Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a personal cognitive assessment that one makes regarding how satisfied he/she is with life (Diener, 1984). The criteria used for this judgment are set up by the individual, rather than by the researcher. At the core of life satisfaction are the most important values and goals embraced by the individual (Casa et al., 2004; Diener & Suh, 1997; Oshi, 2000). If, for example, adolescents value independence and intimacy, it is the attainment of these values, which in the long run become goals that are likely to bring them long-term satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is considered to have two components-a cognitive component and an affective component. As a cognitive construct, it refers to the judgmental process that the person undergoes in assessing how satisfied he/she is with life. Such cognitive processes include statements such as "The conditions in my life are excellent" and "In most ways my life is close to my ideal" (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985, p. 72). As an affective construct, it refers to happiness (Lu, 1999). The affective or the hedonic (Diener, 1994) level is based more on the reaction to events and may not be as long lasting as the cognitive aspect of life satisfaction. Passing an examination, for example, may elicit a sense of happiness, which is more likely to be temporary and short lived. The cognitive aspect of life satisfaction, however, 'spills over' other aspects of life and is more consistent over time (Diener, 1984).

The relationship between the cognitive assessment of life satisfaction and the affective level depends on the time frame. It may be argued that a person who is satisfied with life would also feel happy on a long-term basis. However, being a happy person does not necessarily mean that the person is satisfied with his/her life, especially if happiness is not experienced for a long period of time. Indeed, according to Diener "Life satisfaction is dependent on global appraisals of life, appraisals which are guided to some extent by the immediate situation and current mood" (1984, p. 140).

The literature indicates that there is a controversy regarding whether life satisfaction is a trait or state (Michalos, 1991). As a trait, it is embedded in the personality of the individual who has a genetic predisposition to feel happy and satisfied with life. Hence, life satisfaction is characterized by stability and internal rather than external factors. Such internal factors include locus of control and introversion. This view, therefore, does not take environmental factors into account. Furthermore, it minimises any possibility to change as the person is dispositionally determined to be unhappy or dissatisfied, due to some internal factors such as lack of self-esteem (Diener, 1984; Dumont & Provost, 1999) and autonomy (Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1996). As a state descriptor, however, it suggests that life satisfaction is manageable and controllable, rather than fixed and uncontrollable (Michalos, 1991). It also suggests that it is broadly associated with psychological well-being. As such, it is related to happiness, a view that has been shared by a number of researchers (e.g., Diener, 1984; Lu & Shih 1997; Michalos, 1991) and feelings of intimacy (Cummins, 1996). In discussing whether happiness is a trait or a state, Diener (1984) argued that to some extent it could be both. In reviewing the literature, Diener concluded that the percentage of the variance of the happiness that is accounted for by the person's factors is between 30 and 49. The rest of the variance is accounted for by life circumstances.

Acknowledging life satisfaction as a psychological state provides a possibility to infer life satisfaction from other psychological outcomes that converge and diverge accordingly with life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). A person who is depressed, for example, is not likely to feel satisfied with life. On the other hand, a person who has a high level of self-esteem is more likely to feel satisfied with life. This approach is

considered to be essential because of the richness that it encompasses in the experience of the person's life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is one of the central elements of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984) or subjective quality of life (Cummins, 1993, 1996). As such, both subjective well-being and subjective quality of life are intertwined with life satisfaction. Indeed, Cummins uses the concept of subjective quality of life interchangeably with life satisfaction. Diener, in the light of the literature review that he conducted, concluded that subjective satisfaction is strongly related to subjective well-being. Therefore, both quality of life and subjective well- being depend on how much the person is satisfied in various aspects of life, both within the domestic and public spheres. Cummins (1993), for example, identified seven main domains that constitute quality of life. These domains are material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community, and emotional well-being. In another study, Cummins (1996) found that these domains are also specifically pertinent to the experience of life satisfaction.

Being so much intertwined with quality of life, life satisfaction plays a significant role in the subjective human experience. Social scientists have, therefore, been increasingly interested in what makes a person happy and satisfied with life, especially in the western world where there seems to be an element of unfulfilled needs, irrespective of material acquisition and accumulation of wealth. Indeed, it has been argued (Diener, 1984) that once basic needs are met, material acquisitions, such as wealth, start losing their salience with regards to life satisfaction.

## 2.2 Predictors of Life Satisfaction: A Literature Review

The literature reviewed indicates that over the last three decades, social scientists have been very much interested in the question "What makes a person happy or satisfied with life?" As already argued, although the constitution of this phenomenon has been examined among adults, it has scarcely been examined among adolescents.

The diversity of factors that have been identified as contributors to life satisfaction among adolescents is also limited. Such factors included relationship with parents and peers (Leung & Leung, 1992), family responsibility (Taylor & Field, 1997) income, class and education (Neto, 1993), avoidance coping strategies (Utsey, Ponterotto,

Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000), number of friends, satisfaction with finances, perceived discrimination and exposure to knowledge prior to migration (Sam, 2001), stress (Makinen & Pychyl, 2001) and self-esteem (Cummins & Nistico, 2002; Neto, 1993) that was found to be a predictor of life satisfaction in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Benet-Martinez & Karakitapoglu-Aygun, 2003). Cheung (2004) found that education predicts lower life satisfaction in Beijing.

Other studies identified predictors of life satisfaction through domain satisfaction. One study (Moller & Saris, 2001) examined subjective well-being in relation to satisfaction of three domains: finances, housing, and social contacts among different ethnic groups in South Africa. Different indicators were identified for life satisfaction and happiness for the different groups. For coloured people, the economic situation had a greater impact on life satisfaction than for the Asian population. For the latter, family and social contacts were more important.

In spite of the important role that the family continues to play in the life of the adolescent, it has rarely been the subject of investigation as a predictor of life satisfaction. Only some aspects of the family climate have been investigated. These aspects included relationship with parents (Dew & Huebner, 1995; Leung & Leung, 1992), authoritative parenting (Suldo & Huebner, 2004) and family satisfaction (Adams, 1999, Moller & Saris, 2001). Other studies examined family ties (Benjamin & Hollings, 1997), relationship with parents (Dew & Huebner, 1995), and family resources (Heubner et al., 2001) as domains of life satisfaction.

Various predictors of life satisfaction have been examined and identified across nations. A study that examined life satisfaction among European American, African American, Chinese American, Mexican American, and Domenican American adolescents (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004) identified variations in the contribution of specific predictors. Leung and Leung (1992) found that relationship with parents was the strongest predictor of life satisfaction among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong, aged between 11 to 16 years. Sex was not a significant predictor. The relationship with peers accounted for a very small portion of the variance. Neto (1993) found that income, class and education seem to have quite a small effect on life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents in Norway. Sam (2001) examined sources of life satisfaction among 304 international

students in the United States. Although on the whole, students reported good satisfaction with life, European and North American students were the most satisfied with life. Students' life satisfaction was affected by factors such as number of friends, satisfaction with finances, perceived discrimination and knowledge to which students were exposed to prior migration. In a study by Furnham and Cheng (2004), self-esteem was found to be the most dominant and powerful correlate of happiness. For Chinese early adolescents in Hong Kong, life satisfaction was predicted by perceived maternal concerns and academic competences (Leung, McBride-Chang, & Lai, 2004).

These studies indicate that there are various predictors of life satisfaction among adolescents and these predictors vary from one nation to another.

## 2.3 Theories of Happiness and Life Satisfaction

Although the phenomena of happiness and life satisfaction have captured the attention of many researchers over the years, little theoretical progress has been made. Three commonly used theories are the bottom-up and top-down theory, telic theory, and the Multi Discrepancy Theory (MDT) that was espoused by Michalos (1991).

### 2.3.1 Bottom-up and Top-Down Theory

Life satisfaction can be considered as a two way process (Michalos, 1991). It is both a cause and an effect; an end and a means of how much one is satisfied with life. This phenomenon has been explained by two theories: bottom-up theory and top-down theory. The bottom-up theory contends that it is the sum of life events that is important. A happy and satisfied life is the accumulation of happy events and satisfaction in various domains. In other words, in assessing his/her level of satisfaction with life, the person makes a mental calculation of happy or sad events, as well as the satisfaction or dissatisfaction in specific, subjective domains. Thus, the experience of overall life satisfaction depends on how much a person is satisfied in various domains.

The top-down theory, on the other hand, suggests that subjective, domain satisfaction is derived from an overall life satisfaction. Thus, a person needs to be generally satisfied with life in order to experience 'life domains' such as satisfaction with job and academic domains (Diener, 1984). In other words, a sense of global life

satisfaction spills over to other situations. An adolescent who is satisfied with life, for example, is likely to experience satisfaction in the academic and other spheres.

### 2.3.2 Telic Theory

Telic, or endpoint, theories of happiness contend that the fulfillment of needs and goals leads to a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Thus two approaches are evident in telic theories: a *need* approach and a *goal* approach.

#### 2.3.2.1 Need Approach

Need theory, espoused by Maslow (1970) is widely acknowledged as a useful tool in understanding subjective experiences. This is a theory that is grounded in human motivation. It suggests that human behaviour is generated by human needs, sometimes even at an unconscious level. According to Maslow, having a good quality of life is determined by the satisfaction of a number of needs. These needs are hierarchically structured. The basic need constitutes physiological needs, such as food. If these needs are satisfied, the person experiences a new set of 'safety needs' (Maslow, 1970, p. 39). These needs are characterised by security, stability, dependence, freedom from fear and anxiety, etc.

When both the physiological and the safety needs are met, the need to experience love, affection, and belongingness needs emerge. Maslow stated that the person "will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, in his group or family, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal…..Now he will feel sharply the pangs of loneliness, of ostracism, of rejection, of friendlessness, of rootlessness" (1970, p. 43).

The satisfaction of these needs leads to the emergence of esteem needs that constitute two further sets of needs. The first set includes achievement, adequacy, mastery, competence, and confidence. The second set includes respect from other people, fame, recognition, and appreciation. The inability to meet these needs results in 'deficiency needs', such as feelings of inferiority, weakness and helplessness.

Finally, at the top of the hierarchical needs is the need to experience self-actualisation. "What a man *can* be, he *must* be" (Maslow, 1970, p. 46). This level

includes acceptance (self, others, nature), autonomy, independence, and will. Spontaneity and creativity also come to the forefront. Through such actualisation, the person experiences a sense of self-fulfillment. Maslow argues that the gratification of the higher needs is more likely to generate feelings of profound happiness. “Higher need gratification produces more desirable subjective results, i.e., more profound happiness, serenity, richness of the inner life” (p. 99).

#### 2.3.2.2 Goals Approach

As already argued, telic theory encompasses a *goal* approach. The individual is intrinsically motivated to achieve certain goals. Unlike needs that are mostly expressed at an unconscious level, goals are more likely to be within the individual’s awareness. These goals vary from one individual to another, from one culture to another. An adolescent from a particular culture may aim at achieving a sense of self-esteem. Another adolescent from another culture may aspire to a sense of belonging. According to telic theory, the attainment of goals generates a sense of satisfaction with life. Sometimes certain goals are in conflict with other goals, in such cases, a harmonious integration of one’s goals and fulfillment of these goals are essential for life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) argued that “The types of goals one has, the structure of one’s goals, the success with which one is able to attain one’s goals, and the rate of progress toward one’s goals can all potentially affect one’s emotions and life satisfaction “ (p. 84).

The impact of goals on the attainment of happiness or life satisfaction depends on beliefs about the consequences of attaining goals. A study (McIntosh, Martin, & Jones, 2001), examined positive and negative affect amongst two types of people – those who believed that attaining certain goals would make them happy (linkers) and those who considered their happiness as more likely to occur as a result of the quality of their actions than upon the outcome of those actions (nonlinkers). According to the results, linkers placed more weight on negative affect than on positive affect after being exposed to both sad and happy videos. Nonlinkers, however, reported more positive affect when exposed to happy videos than when exposed to sad videos, but did not report different amounts of negative affect. It was argued that linkers placed more emphasis on negative affect because that was indicative of lack of progression towards the desired goal.

Another factor that comes into play in relation to goals and life satisfaction is culture. According to the literature (Diener et al., 1999; Oshi, 2000), culture plays a significant role in the goals that people select and, therefore, the sources of subjective well-being. Indeed, a study (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998) examined emotions versus normative beliefs for assessing life satisfaction among 61 individualist and collectivist nations. According to the findings, emotions were much stronger predictors of life satisfaction to norms (social approval of life satisfaction) in individualistic cultures. On the other hand, norms and emotions were equally strong predictors of life satisfaction in collectivist cultures. It can, therefore, be argued, that a person from an individualistic culture is more likely to set goals that are primarily grounded on intrapsychic experiences, such as autonomy and self-esteem; whereas a person from a collectivist culture is more likely to set goals that emphasise the evaluations and expectations of others.

The above discussion indicates that the *goal* approach is another important tool in understanding life satisfaction across cultures.

### 2.3.3 Multiple Discrepancies Theory

The multiple discrepancies theory (MDT) is also essential in understanding life satisfaction. This theory has been developed by Michalos (1991). It is grounded in a cognitive approach in relation to different comparisons of the self. Objective, measurable discrepancies are not taken into account. Instead, a "perceptual core of the theory" (Michalos, 1991, p. 65) is espoused. Perceived discrepancies in relation to various aspects of the self (see Figure 1) lead to a discrepancy between what the self has now and what the self wants. This discrepancy subsequently yields a measure of "net satisfaction." This framework encompasses a group of variables that Michalos calls mediators and conditioners. Besides demographic variables, these variables also include self-esteem and social support. According to a study by Schulz (1995), this theoretical framework accounted for more than 50% of the variance of life satisfaction among students in Vienna. Schulz concluded that "a comprehensive set of variables seems to be a very

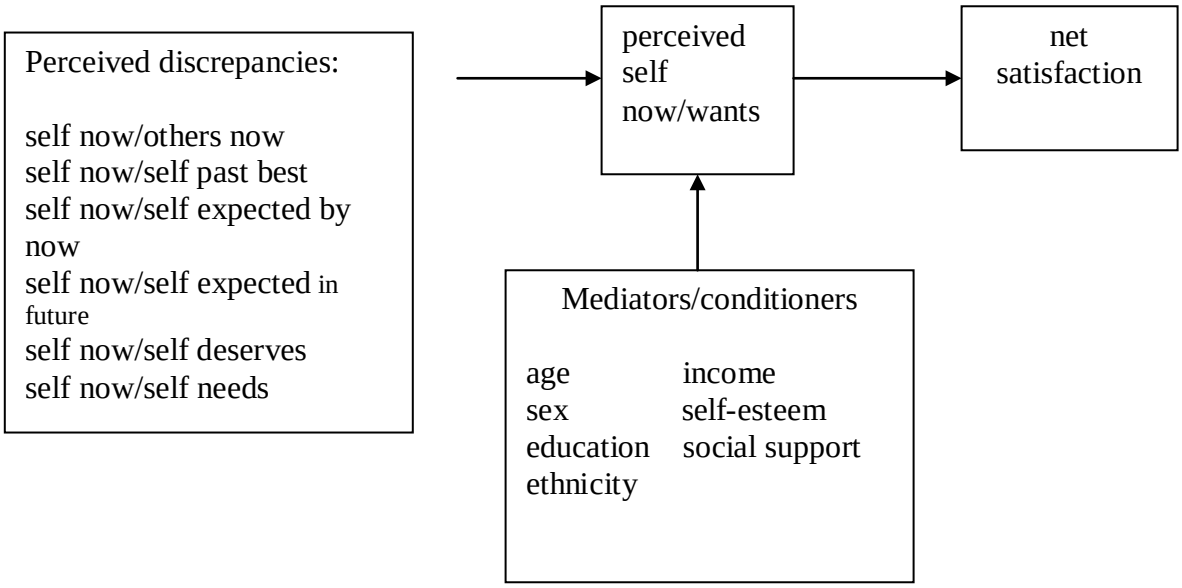


Figure1. Perceptual Core of MDT (Michalos, 1991, p. 65)

useful alternative to fill MDT explanations with more content" (p. 166). The MDT, therefore, is not sufficient to explain fully the experience of life satisfaction. It only addresses one aspect of understanding of life satisfaction. It does not specify, for example, what one wants or needs in order to feel satisfied with life.

The comprehensive model by Cummins (1993) further illustrates why the MDT is not sufficient to explain the experience of life satisfaction. Cummins developed the Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale (ComQol) that consists of seven domains – material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community, and emotional well-being. The domain of safety, for example, includes security, personal control, privacy, independence, autonomy, competence, knowledge of rights, and residential stability (Cummins, 1996). In reviewing 152 articles, Cummins provided data for life satisfaction. The analysis showed that this construct can be efficiently and comprehensively measured through the seven domains of ComQol. Assuming that this is the case, the above-mentioned domains could be considered as sources of life satisfaction. As will be argued later, these sources are a function of both ethnicity and gender.

## 2.4 Empirical Findings of Life Satisfaction

Empirical studies indicate that life satisfaction is manifested in various ways. It has been argued (Diener, 1984) that individuals who are satisfied with their lives are in general well adapted and free of pathology. In the same vein, life satisfaction has been used as an indication of adaptation among immigrants in Norway (Sam, 2000) and adolescents with Turkish background in Norway and Sweden (Virta, Sam, & Westin, 2004). Positive affect, such as happiness and intimacy, is likely to be an indication of this construct. This is in line with Diener's (1984) and Michalos' (1991) arguments that life satisfaction may be indirectly influenced by affect. In addition, a person who has a high level of self-esteem is more likely to be satisfied with life. Indeed, studies (e.g., Cummins & Histico, 2002; Diener & Diener, 1995; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Furnham & Chen, 2004; Neto, 1995) have shown that self-esteem is an important contributing factor in the life satisfaction of adolescents. A study by Yetim (2003) found a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction. Positive self-views were also found to predict higher levels of life satisfaction (Boyd-Wilson, McClure, & Walkey, 2004). On the other hand, a person who is depressed, for example, is very unlikely to be satisfied with life. It has been argued that these two constructs are near opposites and negatively correlated with each other (Headly, Kelly, & Wearing, 1993; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Viinamaki, & Heikkila, 2001). Maladjustment, antisocial behaviour (Sim, 2000), perceived racial discrimination and acculturative stress (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000) also jeopardize the potential of being satisfied with life.

Another construct that has been found to relate to life satisfaction is religion. In examining the data from the 1972-1996 General Social Survey Cumulative File, Ferris (2002) found that happiness (as indexed by life and family satisfaction) was strongly associated with the frequency of attendance at religious services and positively associated with the belief that the world is essentially evil or good. It was argued that "Certainly, mankind is happier thinking that the world is good " (Ferris, 2002, p. 211). It was further argued that religion offers a source of psychological satisfaction and involvement in the psychological community. This is in line with previous literature (Rokach, 2001). Rokach argued that "through affiliating with religious groups and practising their faith, individuals gain strength, inner peace and a sense of community and belonging" (p. 15).

Spirituality was also found to provide meaning in life and enhancement in the life satisfaction of college students in the United States (Dennis, Muller, Miller, & Banerjee, 2004).

Life satisfaction is a phenomenon that has been identified across nations. According to Lu and Shih (1997) "the nature of happiness and its state of experience is universal" (p. 184). International research is based on the assumption that life satisfaction is a need that individuals strive for, irrespective of their culture. However, research shows that its experience varies from one nation to another (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995; Kyeong-Ho, 2003; Oishi et al., 1999; Sam, 2001; Triandis, 2000; Veenhoven, 2000). For example, life satisfaction and happiness were not as important for Chinese people as they were for people in Japan and Korea (Diener, Suh et al., 1995). This finding could be attributed to the strong element of collectivism in China where subjective experiences, such as life satisfaction, may not be as salient.

The reported levels of life satisfaction also vary across cultures. The study by McConatha, Reiser-Danner, Harmer, Hayta, and Polat (2004) investigated life satisfaction in the United States, Turkey, and Germany. According to the results, U.S. participants reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than Turkish or German groups. Another study (Bjornskov, 2003) that used data from the Worlds Values Survey, found that people in the five Nordic countries, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are happier and more satisfied than people in other nations.

Findings at the national and cultural levels also indicate interesting, varied patterns that are in line with the fulfillment of basic needs and the achievement of goals at a societal level (Bjornskov, 2003; Diener, Diener, et al., 1995; Diener & Suh, 1997; McConatha et al., 2004; Schyns, 1998). This is reflected by objective measures, such as living conditions and wealth (Moller & Saris, 2001). Although wealth is related to life satisfaction (Diener, Diener, et al., 1995), its salience tends to decrease in wealthy countries (Diener & Suh, 1997).

Research that has examined life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents also found significant differences between ethnic minority groups. Sam (2000) investigated life satisfaction among adolescents with immigrant background (Chilean, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Pakistani) in Norway. According to the findings, participants of Chilean

background had the highest self-esteem and were most satisfied with life; whereas those of Vietnamese background were the least satisfied with life. In another study (Neto, 2001), ethnic minority groups in Portugal were compared to Portuguese adolescents who were used as a control group. According to the findings, Cape Verdean and Indian adolescents did not differ from Portuguese adolescents; whereas Angolan adolescents reported lower levels of life satisfaction compared to the ethnic majority group.

Such national and cross-cultural differences have been attributed to cultural factors. One dimension of culture commonly used by researchers in identifying systematic differences is the construct of individualism-collectivism (Diener, Diener, et al., 1995; Triandis, 2000). People in individualistic cultures tend to give priority to the goals of individuals, feel personally responsible for successes and failures, and are more oriented towards independence. In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures tend to give priority to goals of the collective society, share both successes and failures with others and encouraged to be interdependent (Triandis, 2000). When these two dimensions were investigated in relation to subjective well-being, individualism significantly correlated with it, whereas collectivism did not (Diener, Diener, et al., 1995).

Variations in levels of life satisfaction have also been attributed to salient cultural needs and values (Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998; Inglehart, 1990; Oishi et al., 1999) as well as goals (Diener & Suh, 1997). Self-esteem, for example, was found to be more important for life satisfaction in individualistic societies than in collectivistic societies (Diener & Diener, 1995). Cultural norms were found to be a contributing factor for the experience of life satisfaction in collectivistic societies, but not for individualistic societies (Suh et al., 1998). In a study of cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction, Diener and Diener (1995) found that four variables (satisfaction with self, family, friends, and finances) were related for all participants in 31 nations. However, satisfaction with the self was more important in individualistic countries (e.g., United States) than in collectivistic countries (e.g., China). Loneliness appeared to be more salient in the experience of life satisfaction of Australian adolescents than for their Japanese counterparts (Shumaker & Shea, 1993). Such cultural variations require further research among immigrant adolescents.

Pertinent to the current study are the differences in life satisfaction and happiness

that also occurred among traditional (e.g., Malta and Northern Ireland) and non-traditional (e.g., Britain and Denmark) countries (Abela, 1991). In Abela's study, 10 West European countries that took part in the European Value Systems Study Group were examined on the quality of life. The post-traditional and the European oriented reported higher levels of leisure, health, and prospects for the future than the traditionalists. While happiness in the family was common in all countries, people with high religious practice seemed to experience higher levels of family satisfaction. What is also interesting in this study is the fact that the Maltese reported the highest levels of life satisfaction in comparison to other countries, even though Malta was identified as the 'poorest' and the most traditional country in the group. It is important to point out that the participants in that study were over 18 years of age.

## 2.5 Life Satisfaction: The Case of Immigrant Adolescents

Cross-cultural research that investigated life satisfaction among ethnic minority groups is very limited. Targeted groups which were involved in such studies included Portuguese immigrants living in France (Neto, 1993, 1995, 2002); immigrants in Angolan, Cape Verdean, and Indian immigrants in Portugal (Neto, 2001); immigrants from Finland (Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000), Black and Hispanic young adults (Brown, Wallace, & Williams, 2001); immigrants in Norway (Sam, 1998); Turkish immigrants in Norway and Sweden (Virtu & Sam, 2004), international students in the United States (Sam, 2001); Chinese (Leung & Leung, 1992; Leung et al., 2004; Shek, 1999); ethnic groups in South Africa (Moller & Saris, 2001); Israeli adolescent immigrants (Ullman & Tatar, 2001); and African Americans (Adams, 1999). Overall, these studies indicated that the experience of life satisfaction among immigrants was more complex than that experienced by members of the majority ethnic group. Neto (2002), for example, found that Portuguese immigrants living in France, experienced social difficulties that were associated with satisfaction with life. The study by Ullman and Tartar (2001) examined central issues in the psychological adjustment of adolescents who emigrated from the Soviet Union to Israel: self-concept, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The results indicated that immigrant adolescents reported lower levels of life satisfaction than those reported by adolescents from Israel. They also reported less

congruence between self-concept and the ways in which in their opinion they were perceived by others. Other studies (e.g., Liebkind et al., 2000; Moller & Saris, 2001) identified differences among ethnic minority groups. Variations, for example, were found in perceived discrimination and its influence on life satisfaction among immigrants in Finland (Liebkind et al., 2000); whereas the study by Moller and Saris found different patterns for the factors that influenced subjective well-being among different race groups in South Africa. Similar findings were identified among five minority ethnic groups in the United States (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004).

Further research is essential among immigrant adolescents. Ethnic minority groups are not homogeneous. The culture of origin differs from one group to another, therefore, the findings of life satisfaction among the above groups cannot be applied to other minority groups, such as Maltese-Australian adolescents. Moreover, "Growing up in an ethnic minority situation is not the same as growing up in a traditional culture…." (DeVos, 1980, p. 122). It is sufficient to point out at this stage that in addition to their developmental issues, immigrant adolescents have to deal with a number of cultural and psychosocial issues (Berry, 1997) that may impinge on their life satisfaction. It has also been argued (Rodrigo, Geoffrey, & Minas, 2000; Cauchi, 2002) that immigrants are part of neither the ethnic majority group nor the country of origin. As such, this situation among immigrant adolescents is quite concerning and calls for further research.

On the other hand, immigrant adolescents may have inherited a legacy of assets that may be beneficial for their life satisfaction. The culture of origin can be a resource of wealthy assets that may be enhancing the core of their being from which self-fulfillment and satisfaction are likely to originate. Such assets, for example, may include traditional values and beliefs that have been found to relate to life satisfaction (Abela, 1991; Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000; Sam, 2000).

The above discussion highlights the need for further research among immigrant youth. Understanding how they experience life satisfaction in comparison with adolescents from the ethnic majority group and the country of origin is essential to a better understanding of the conditions that promote their satisfaction with life.

## 2.6 Gender and Life Satisfaction

The reviewed literature consistently shows that male and female adolescents make sense of their subjective health related experiences in different ways (Colarossi & Eccles, 2000). For example, it has been argued that as girls develop their sense of identity during adolescence, they become less confident, less assertive, and outspoken (Stiles & Gibbons, 1998). Girls tend to report more emotional problems (Helsen, Vollegergh, & Meeus, 2000), more family conflicts, personal problems, physical inactivity, more attempts to control body weight, use of psychoactive drugs, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Tomori, Zalar, & Plesnicar, 2000). The relationship between gender and self-esteem has been well established. Girls seem to experience lower self-esteem than boys (Colarossi et al., 2000; Dukes et al., 2000; Khanlou, 2004; Quatman & Watson, 2001). In examining why such differences occur in self-esteem, Quatman and Watson found that girls reported less satisfaction with their family and the home life, experienced more physiological symptoms and psychological symptoms of emotional disturbance. That study also ascertained that boys had a stronger sense of personal mastery and were more sure of themselves. They were also more satisfied with how attractive they were and enjoyed higher levels of personal security than girls.

Gender differences have also been identified in other measures of mental health. For example, female immigrant adolescents to Norway reported higher scores on depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms than boys (Sam, 1998). Girls experienced higher levels of depression than boys among New Zealand adolescents (Clarke & Jensen, 1997). They also scored higher on indicators that are usually associated with depression (Light, 2000). Van Wel and associates (2000) conducted a longitudinal study of well-being among adolescents and young adults (12 to 24 years) in the Netherlands. Girls in early and mid-adolescence were found to experience less general well-being than boys. From the ages 15 to 17 and above, the stress level for girls was consistently higher than that of boys. The study by Davis, Tang, and Ko (2002) also found that females had more somatic symptoms, anxiety, and depression compared to males in Hong Kong.

In spite of these gender differences in subjective well-being, the literature on the life satisfaction shows mixed findings. Neto (1995) found no sex differences in the life

satisfaction of native and immigrant Portuguese adolescents. Similar results were also obtained among adolescents in Finland (Hintikka, Koskela, Kontula, & Koskela, 2001), in the Netherlands (Van Wel et al., 2000) and in the United States (Henry, 1994). Using data from the World Values Survey II and the International College Student Data, Lucas and Gohm (2000) found that men and women appear to experience approximately equal levels of life satisfaction. Diener and Diener (1995) found striking similarities between the sexes with regards to life satisfaction and a number of domain satisfactions. Financial satisfaction, self-esteem, and family satisfaction covaried with life satisfaction for both males and females. It has been argued (Diener, 1984) that, although women report more negative affect, they also seem to experience greater joy so that little difference is usually found in global happiness or life satisfaction between the sexes. Along the same vein, Diener and his associates (1999) asserted that "women's more intense positive emotions seem to balance their higher negative affect, resulting in levels of global SWL similar to those of men" (p. 292).

Other studies, however, have identified gender differences in life satisfaction. Neto (1993, 2001) found that boys had a higher life satisfaction than girls among Portuguese adolescents. Boys also reported significantly greater family life satisfaction than their counterparts (Henry, 1994; Scott & Laughlin, 1999). Another study (Hutchinson, Simeon, Bain, Wyatt, Tucker, & Lefranc, 2004) also found that females in Jamaica had lower level of life satisfaction than males. In the light of these mixed findings, it would be interesting to find out if there are gender differences in life satisfaction among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents. Adolescents of Maltese origin come from a traditional culture in which gender stereotype roles, values, and beliefs are salient. Although a preliminary study (Borg, 1999) that examined adjustment among these adolescents did not find any gender differences in self-esteem and stress, further research is required to confirm such findings within the context of life satisfaction. It is also important to point out that participants in that study were between 18 and 22 years of age. The subjective experiences of younger adolescents may be different to this age group due to developmental issues.

Studies that examined predictors of life satisfaction among male and female adolescents have identified different patterns. One study (Benjamin & Hollings, 1997)

looked at students' satisfaction among university students. While having close relationships was the strongest predictor for females, certainty (about programs, students) and self-evaluation were the strongest predictors for males. Good events had more impact for females than males. The latter seemed to be more influenced by recent events. Another study (Blais, Vallerand, Briere, & Gagnon, 1990) found that social domains - family, friends and couple - were consistently salient for both male and female college students. However, a consistent pattern in gender differences emerged with regards to the levels of domains satisfaction. Such different patterns amongst male and female adolescents call for further research among adolescents of Maltese background to see if different patterns would emerge for this population.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewed literature indicates that the experience of life satisfaction plays an integral role in subjective well-being. It encompasses both cognitive and hedonic elements that need to be taken into account when examining this construct. In this chapter, it has been argued that life satisfaction varies across cultures and some of these differences are due to cultural factors. Hence, the importance to conduct further research among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents was emphasized. Native Maltese adolescents come from a culture that is collectivistically orientated. Since these adolescents, unlike their parents, have started embracing elements of a non-traditional culture (Abela, 1991) they may have made a shift (albeit small, yet significant) towards the end of the collectivistic-individualistic continuum. This transition could be impacting on their life satisfaction. There is some indication in the literature (Borg, 1999) that Maltese-Australian adolescents are at risk with regards to their psychological adaptation. As an ethnic minority group, these adolescents may be experiencing life satisfaction differently from other ethnic groups, such as native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents. On the basis of past findings among other ethnic minority groups, their level of satisfaction may be different from other ethnic groups. The factors that contribute to their life satisfaction may also be different given that their life experiences are unique.

# Chapter 3

## A Theoretical Exploration of Adolescence

In the previous chapter, it was argued that life satisfaction is a subjective experience, a function of both internal and external (or environmental) factors. It originates within the family environment and continues to thrive and grow as the individual journeys through life. The following chapter deals with a theoretical exposition of adolescence.

Over the years, many theorists have attempted to examine and explain aspects of subjective well-being within the context of human development. The two theories that will be guiding the current thesis are the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992) and psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1968). Both theories encompass the dynamics of this developmental stage – its assets as well as its liabilities. While Bronfenbrenner proposed systems that emphasise the interaction of the individual with the environment, Erikson espoused a number of crises that the individual needs to go through to attain maturity and growth. Of particular interest for adolescence is the development of identity that comes to the forefront during this stage.

In developing their personal identity, adolescents need to go through the 'separation-individuation' process that is also integrated within the current theoretical framework. According to Maslow (1970) this is a very important personal process that takes place during adolescence. Emotional ties with significant others need to be broken for individuation to take place. This process poses both challenges and threats. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping is, therefore, adopted to examine one of the pathways to life satisfaction. In addition, another related theory, namely social support theory is also incorporated in the theoretical framework.

### 3.1 The Experience of Adolescence

Adolescence is a transition from childhood to adulthood characterised by multiple biological, social, and psychological changes. Early adolescence entails major hormonal changes that lead to puberty and significant growth spurts to the extent that there is a "restructuring of physique" (Leffert & Petersen, 1995, p. 67). The onset of puberty

encompasses changes in height, muscle and fat tissue in both sexes; breast development and menarche in girls; and voice deepening and growth of facial and body hair in boys. Such physical changes tend to generate increased awareness about body image, especially in girls (Fombonne, 1995).

During adolescence, more advanced cognitive abilities are also developed (Leffert & Petersen, 1995). Thus, the individual is able to employ abstract reasoning and to think about situations hypothetically. According to Leffert and Petersen, this cognitive development increases the ability to make decisions, but this can also be limited. Most situations that adolescents encounter are new to them and their judgements are not always accurate, especially in emotionally charged situations. Experimentation, such as with opposite sex relationships, is therefore required for their psychosocial development.

Adolescence is also characterised by changes in interpersonal relationships, both within the domestic and public spheres. The literature suggests that parent-child conflicts are at their height during adolescence. Parents' expectations are often at loggerheads with those of their children and vice versa (Leffert & Petersen, 1995). In addition, the process of individuation that refers to the breaking of the emotional ties with significant others (Barth, 2003; Maslow, 1970) requires an increased sense of autonomy that can cause friction between parents and adolescents, especially if parents are too controlling and are not ready to psychologically let go of their children.

As adolescents start to break their emotional ties from parents, peer relationships become more salient. Past research (Fallon & Bowles, 1997) indicated that adolescents spend the most intimate time with peers, then siblings, mothers, and fathers. According to Fallon and Bowles, adolescents who come from cohesive families are more likely to spend intimate time with peers. Intimacy is synonymous with trust. The family provides the interpersonal communication skills that are required to develop intimate relationships with peers (Engels, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2002). It has been argued (Uruk & Demir, 2003) that family cohesion "….creates the conditions for identification with a basic primary group and enhances emotional, intellectual and physical closeness" (p. 181). According to Demo, Small, and Savin-Williams (1987) the family provides a model of adaptability; that is, it illustrates, through its basic functioning, how a power structure can change, how role relationships can develop, and how relationship rules can be formed.

The literature consistently indicates the significant role that peers play in the experience of adolescence both theoretically and empirically. The study by Cheng and Furham (2002), for example, demonstrated that peer friendship was directly related to adolescents' self-reported happiness. Another study (Kracke, 2002) examined the role that peers play in adolescents career exploration among German youth. According to the results, frequent talks with peers about career-related issues were significantly associated with the intensity of information-seeking behaviours. It also predicted a highly occupational exploration during the following 6-month period.

The above discussion illustrates the important roles that both parents and peers play amongst youth. Fallon and Bowles (1997) concluded that the functional roles of parents differ from those of peers. Parents are sources of affection, instrumental aid, and alliance, whereas peers provide companionship and opportunities to extend their intimate boundaries. This conclusion parallels another study (Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999) that found that lack of parental support is not compensated for by peer support. This is partly due to the different functional roles that both parents and peers play, and partly due to the fact that adolescents need to have good trusting relationships with parents to be able to extend their psychosocial boundaries with peers. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological model sheds more light in this area.

### 3.2 Overview of Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) social ecological model focuses on the developing person, the environment, and the subsequent interaction between the person and environment. The ecological environment or the contexts in which human development occurs, is conceptualised as a set of 'nested structures'. These structures are in fact systems that can be viewed as concentric circles with the individual at the centre. The family system, known as the microsystem, is considered as the central focus of influence in a child's life. Thus, the microsystem is the most intimate level. This system is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that a child might experience within the home setting. The next level, the mesosystem, includes those settings where children and family members spend most of their time, including the home, day care, school, workplace, and church. It also encompasses communication among individuals in each of

these settings. Experiences in one system, such as parent-child interactions in the home, may influence activities that may influence activities and interactions in another, such as the peer-group or vice versa. The third level, exosystem, includes institutions outside the family, such as school system, social welfare system, and health care system. Although not directly affected, children and families can be greatly influenced by policies and programs that are established by these institutions. Finally, the macrosystem involves influences of the broader and socio economic environments. It involves the culture that affects each of the other levels and ultimately, children, and families.

### 3.2.1 The Experience of Adolesence: An Ecological Perspective

Understanding human behaviour from an ecological perspective is becoming more popular among social scientists. The context, or social ecology of human behaviour provides a framework for viewing developmental issues involving individual adjustment to the many psychosocial changes that both the family and society undergo in dealing with the various stages of human development. Indeed, the context of development is grounded in ecological frameworks, an essential starting point in examining human development. The adolescent, like any other member of society, does not develop in a vacuum. The context/s need to be taken into account otherwise subjective experiences will be devoid of meaning. In addition, the developing person is considered as an active agent, manipulating and influencing the environment, in an attempt to meet his/her needs. The ecological model, therefore, takes into account multiple factors, both constitutional and environmental, and the systematic, reciprocal nature of child and environment influence.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory laid the foundation for the ecological approach to development. This model is useful for considering the environmental influences on developmental outcomes, including influences external to the immediate context, such as the school and other institutions. These institutions play a very important role in the lives of adolescents and their experiences of life satisfaction. Institutions, such as the family and the church are value laden. Given that life satisfaction is likely to be derived from domains that the individual values most (Oishi et al., 1999), it is important to acknowledge the significant impact that these institutions have on subjective experiences,

such as life satisfaction. Thus, if the individual values the family for example, it is this domain that is likely to be the source of life satisfaction. The impact that institutions, such as family and school, have on human development, especially during the stage of adolecence, is widely acknowledged (e.g., Call et al., 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Eckeresley, 2004; Price, Cioci, Penner, & Trautlein, 1993). Bronfenbrenner's theory, consisting of a number of inter-relating systems, has the potential to illuminate why some adolescents feel satisfied with life and others do not, both within and across cultures. Changes in what he terms exosystem and macrosystem elements, such as changes in multicultural orientation, cultural values and beliefs, all have reciprocal and bi-directional influences on all the other ecological systems. This is in line with Prilleltensky's and Nelson's argument (2002) that person, family, community, and society are all inter-related and influence the well-being of the individual. According to these authors "The well-being of the individual is predicated on the well-being of the immediate family, which in turn is contingent upon community and societal conditions" (Prilleltenski & Nelson, 2002, p. 10).

The Process-person-context model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) acknowledges "….ecological niches. These are particular regions in the environment that are especially favourable or unfavourable to the development of individual with particular personal characteristics" (p. 194). The process provides an explanation and an understanding of how the particular combination of environmental and personal characteristics provides a 'ecological niche' that influences human development. Such a view, therefore, takes into account both assets and liabilities of members of subgroups, such as members of ethnic minority groups.

The integration of this ecological model by scholars who are engaged in studying life satisfaction is essential. It is an important tool that provides understanding of the conditions that are likely to promote or hinder adolescents' sense of well-being, more specifically satisfaction with life.

### 3.2.2 Interrelationships among Family Members

An important aspect of the family that has attracted the attention of a number of theorists (e.g., Green & Werner, 1996; Minuchin, 1974; Olson & Gorall, 2003) is the

interrelatedness among its members. Two related concepts are *cohesion* and *enmeshment*. According to Olson and Gorall (2003) family cohesion refers to "the emotional bonding that couple of family members have toward one another" (p. 516). These authors do not define enmeshment as such. However, according to the five levels of cohesion that they present, these levels range from disengaged/disconnected (extremely low) and enmeshed/overly connected (extremely high). This suggests that on the continuum of cohesion, high cohesion translates into enmeshment. Olson and Gorall argue that the mid-range levels of cohesion (i.e. separated and connected) are central for family functioning, whereas the extreme ends are problematic.

Minuchin (1974) argued along the same lines. According to Minuchin, boundaries within the family system fall on a bipolar linear continuum ranging from diffuse boundaries (enmeshed) to clear boundaries (normal range) to inappropriately rigid boundaries (disengaged). Whereas families that have clear boundaries are considered to be functional, those that have inappropriate rigid or diffuse boundaries are considered as dysfunctional.

The literature indicates that the notions of cohesion and enmeshment are not clear-cut. Indeed, it has been argued (Barber & Buehler, 1996) that these two constructs need to be disentangled and considered as two different constructs. Green and Werner (1996) have persuasively argued that researchers in the past have blended "two conceptually distinct notions" in the term "enmeshment" (p. 122): *closeness-caregiving* and *intrusiveness*. According to these authors, the dimension of *Intrusiveness* refers to "enmeshment" which incorporates elements of family dysfunction. The dimension of *Caregiving* refers to aspects of closeness and connectedness such as warmth and nurturance that enhance family function. On the basis of these two concepts, Green and Werner postulated a model that depicts the extreme combinations of these dimensions (see Figure 2).

According to this model, family members' psychological well-being is likely to be enhanced if family relationships are high in closeness-caregiving and low in intrusiveness (quadrant I). Green and Werner continue to argue that "…such family relations (quadrant I) would be highly nurturing and supportive *but also highly respectful of individuation* [current author's emphasis]. On the other hand, we would expect that

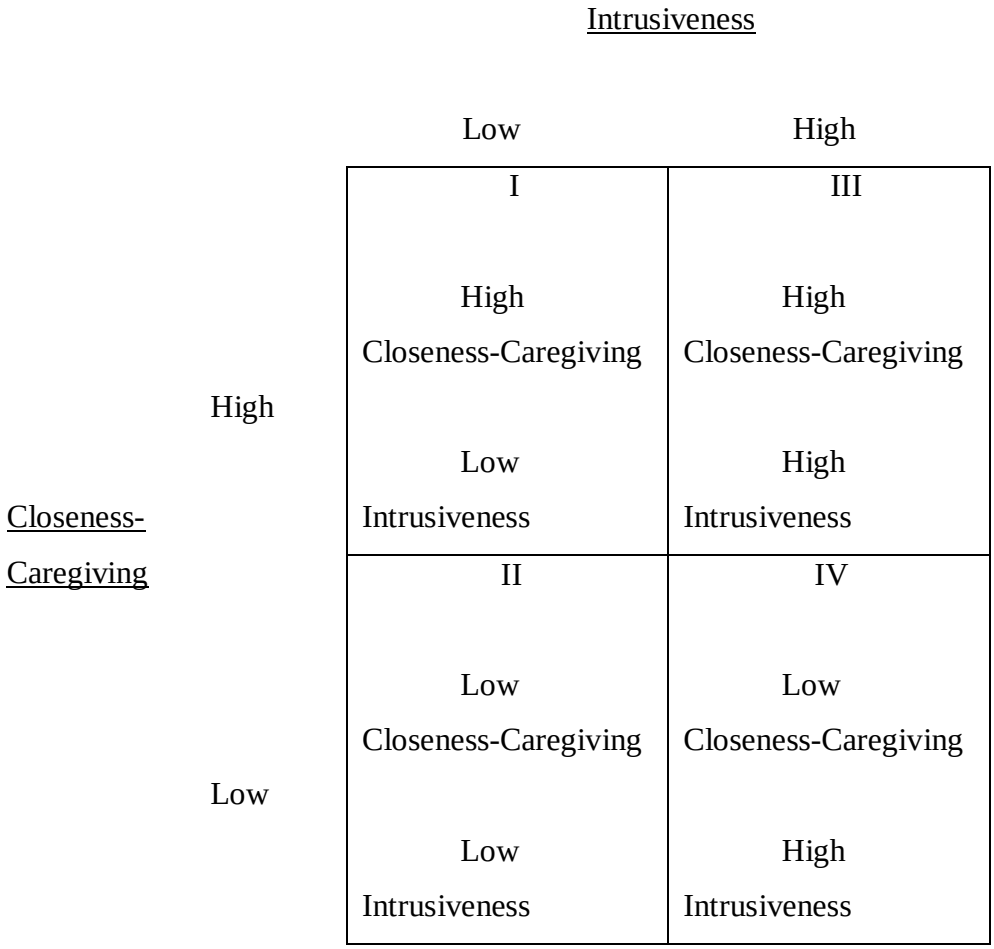


Figure 2. Four extreme combinations of closeness-caregiving and intrusiveness. (Green & Werner, 1996, p. 122)

combinations in the other quadrants to be associated with family members' global psychological distress and perhaps with specific clinical problems such as anxiety disorders (quadrant III)" (p. 122).

Another two conceptual issues that relate to the interrelatedness of family members and parenting practices require some clarification. These issues are *psychological control* and *behavioural control*. According to Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003) "Psychological control …..is intrusive, manipulative control that interferes with the adolescent's psychological and emotional development" (p.116). Barber and Lovelady Harmon (2002), in conducting a comprehensive literature review,

identified three types of parental practices that reflect psychological control – manipulative, constraining, and miscellaneous. The manipulative parent employs three main strategies: inducing guilt, instilling anxiety, and withdrawing love. The constraining type inhibits the child's verbal behaviour, thereby restricting the child's discovery and self-expression. The miscellaneous type included excessive parental expectations, love withdrawal, and personal attack on the child (see Barber & Lovelady Harmon, 2002 for an intensive discussion).

Behavioural control is different from psychological control (Barber, 2002; Silk et al., 2003; Steinberg, 1990). Behavioural control includes home responsibilities, daily activities, and manners. The literature indicates that whereas psychological control is generally detrimental to adolescents' psychological well-being (e.g., Finkenauer, Engels, Baumeister, 2005; Galambos & Almeida, 2003; Seibel & Johnson, 2001) there are indications that adolescents are positively affected by behavioural control (Barber, 2002). Indeed, Steinberg (1990) argued that:

> Adolescents appear to be adversely affected by psychological control - the absence of "psychological autonomy" – but positively influenced by behavioural control – the presence of "demandedness"…The challenge for parents – and it may be a difficult one – is to grant sufficient psychological autonomy to their children without being behaviorally permissive (p. 273-274).

Behavioural control involves setting up boundaries, guidance, and supervision that are likely to help the adolescent minimise the chances of risk taking behaviour especially when it is exerted within a warm, loving parent-adolescent relationship. It has been argued (Steinberg, 2001) that it is not just what parents do that matters, but how they do it. In other words, the emotional context in which the behavioural control is exerted is also critical.

### 3.3 Psychosocial Theory: An Eriksonian Approach

Psychosocial development of adolescents is viewed as a process towards psychosocial maturity. As a process, it encompasses contradictions (Wang & Viney, 1997) thereby highlighting weaknesses and strengths, limitations, and opportunities, in the experience of adolescence. Indeed, difficulties, doubts, insecurities, vulnerabilities,

gains, and losses are inherent in the experience of adolescence (Eckersley, 1995). On the other hand, as a process it also encompasses a number of conditions that are likely to promote subjective well-being. According to Erikson (1968), for example, successful resolutions to personal crises give rise to a number of virtues that are likely to enrich their life experiences and hence maximise the potential for life satisfaction. Striking a balance or having "a fair ratio" (Wang & Viney, 1997, p. 140) between the negative and positive elements of human experience is essential for a general sense of well-being and life satisfaction.

Within this framework, Erikson's (1968) epigenetic model has been considered to be appropriate for a number of reasons. It has been argued (Wang & Viney, 1997) that this model of psychosocial development is both universal and particular. While its universality cuts across cultural boundaries, its particularity allows for variability within specific contexts; in other words, the stages as such are not limited to one particular culture, whereas the process is culture specific. The issue of identity for adolescents, for example, is experienced by youth in all cultures. However, the process involved varies from one culture to another. Thus, an adolescent from an individualist society is more likely to conjure up a self-image based on personal experiences. On the other hand, social norms are more likely to be important for the self-image of an adolescent from a collectivist culture (Suh et al., 1998).

Erikson's theory is also considered to be important because it draws upon principles of psychoanalytic theory and the unconscious mind, thereby taking into account enormous breath and depth of the human experience. Such consideration is deemed to be essential in tapping into life satisfaction among adolescents.

The psychosocial theory acknowledges both the debits and assets of the individual as he/she progresses from one stage to another. Through the crises inherent in the psychosocial development, the individual is propelled to experience both sides of each crisis, thereby allowing both strength and vulnerability to come to the forefront. Such a combination of experiences is likely to bring out the individual's resilience and potential to overcome the crises. Indeed, according to Erikson, every psychosocial crisis is a turning point in which basic virtues emerge, provided that the required tasks are successfully achieved. He also writes of opportunity and empowerment, two important

elements in the experience of adolescence (Erikson, 1968).

### 3.3.1 Erikson's Theory

According to Erikson (1968), life span development is characterised by eight crises. Inherent in these crises are conflicts that arise from the demands imposed on the child both by parents and society in general. As each conflict is resolved, the individual becomes ready to move on to the next stage. This theory is based on the assumption that there is a need for continuous mastery of new tasks that each crisis entails. For the purpose of the current thesis, only the three crises relevant to childhood and adolescence will be examined: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame, and identity versus identity confusion. Although the focus is on identity that is central to adolescence, it is important to keep in mind that this stage could be affected by what happened in the earlier stages. The understanding of the dynamics of these stages, therefore, will shed more light in the experience of adolescence and life satisfaction.

Erikson's theory is based on dialectics that the individual needs to experience for successful maturity and growth. Erikson (cited in Hall, 1987) argued that opposites are characteristics of the life cycle; the task of the individual is to strike a balance between them. In discussing the importance of balancing these polarities, Hamachek (1990) used the issue of identity as an example, arguing that "the feeling most people have now and then of *not* feeling so sure about their identity that enables them to sharpen, refine, and if necessary redefine their self-concept…" (p. 679). Hence, the need to consolidate the identity generates a motivation to work through the issue concerned and reach a subsequent resolution, which in turn gives rise to a related virtue. The same principle is at work in relation to the other crises.

#### 3.3.1.1 Trust vs Mistrust

According to Erikson's theory (1950), establishing a basic trust during the first year of life is the first required task. Through his/her needs, the baby learns to trust or mistrust the caregiver. This trust is not absolutely generated by the provision of food and demonstrations of love, but rather on the quality of the interaction with the mother. When the mother is responding in a warm, loving way, the baby tends to respond in a similar

way. By the same token, hostile behaviour on the part of the mother elicits a hostile response from the baby (Barklay, 1987). This suggests that there is a reciprocal behaviour between the mother and the baby.

If the family environment is not conducive to psychological well-being, the child develops a sense of mistrust that is detrimental to its psychological well-being. According to Erikson (1995), this condition can manifest itself in psychopathology, such as infantile schizophrenia. In developing a sense of mistrust, the child is likely to develop defence mechanisms, such as introjection and alienation that alienate him/her both from the environment and the self for fear of being hurt again. "These mechanisms are, more or less normally, reinstated in acute crises of love, trust, and faith in adulthood and can characterize irrational attitudes towards adversaries and enemies in masses of 'mature' individuals" (Erikson, 1959, p. 223). As a result of mistrust, schizoid, and depressive states are not uncommon as the child moves on to adulthood.

#### 3.3.1.2 Autonomy vs Shame

Provided that the child has developed a sense of trust, he/she gradually moves on to establish a sense of autonomy during the second year. This gives rise to an autonomous will, through which control and freedom of choice are employed. Failure to resolve the issue of autonomy can have serious implications on the child's development. Firstly, lack of autonomy fosters dependence, which deters the individual from acquiring psychological independence during adolescence. Secondly, a loss of self-control and parental over-control has a propensity for doubt and shame – doubt in him/herself as well as others. Given that "shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at" (Erikson, 1968, p. 110) one can anticipate the adverse effect on self-esteem that is so central during the experience of adolescence and life satisfaction (Diener, 1984).

The issue of autonomy and control is pertinent to adolescence and life satisfaction. Baumrind's (1967) work on parenting typologies has generated research that consistently found that authoritative parenting (which tends to be low in psychological control and high in autonomy granting) is associated with positive outcomes and the minimisation of negative outcomes for adolescents. On the other hand, authoritarian

parenting (which tends to be high on psychological control and low in autonomy granting) places adolescents at increased risk for a variety of psychological and behavioural problems (Steinberg, 2001). It has been argued (Dumont & Provost, 1999) that a strong sense of self-control helps adolescents to deal with daily stressful situations by enhancing their self-esteem and subsequently their satisfaction with life. Indeed, according to Diener (1984), self-esteem is an essential prerequisite to life satisfaction. A study by Boykin McElhaney and Allen (2001) demonstrated that adolescents who exhibited their autonomy with their relationships with their mother were more socially competent outside the family.

#### 3.3.1.3 Identity vs Identity Confusion

For the adolescent, the most salient crisis is ego identity versus identity confusion. Erikson (1950, 1974) developed the notion of ego identity that encompasses the merging of past identifications, future aspirations and cultural values, norms and expectations. In defining themselves, adolescents need to take into account the bonds that have been established between themselves and others in the past. The integration of these past social relationships with contemporary social relationships is essential for a healthy identity development. In fact, the identity becomes a focal point of reference that provides a sense of continuity in social relationships. Erikson (1959) argued:

> ……..the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means the most to others – those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to him. The term identity expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others (p. 102).

Besides integration of social relationships, Erikson (1968) contends that the notion of identity encompasses a cultural component. In defining him/herself, the adolescent incorporates not only the cultural norms, values, and expectations that are presently at work, but also the roles and expectations that he/she envisages in becoming involved in.

According to Erikson (1959), cultural expectations and demands can be at variance from the cultural values of the community. An ethnic minority community is a

case in point. It is not uncommon, for example that the cultural expectations of the ethnic minority group are at loggerheads with those of the dominant culture. An immigrant adolescent who belongs to a culture that fosters interdependence may find it very difficult (if not impossible) to reconcile the cultural expectations of the dominant culture that encourages independence. The young person is, therefore, confronted with a conflicting self-image that can give rise to a negative identity. This in turn generates both an identity diffusion and confusion. The former relates to the lack of fusion of the individual's identity with that of others, such as role models - a task that is pertinent prior to the emergence of one's differentiated identity. Identity confusion relates to the inability to integrate all past identifications that the individual has acquired during his/her psychosocial development. Both identity diffusion and confusion are likely to foster a disintegration of the various roles that the adolescent plays. Such conditions are likely to arise when the person is confronted by opposing value systems. As a consequence of this confrontation, the ability to make meaningful decisions may also be jeopardised. Feelings of anxiety, apathy, and hostility are likely to set in. This likelihood is very pertinent to immigrant adolescents whose culture of origin is likely to embrace values that may be at variance with those espoused by the dominant culture.

### 3.4 The 'Separation-Individuation' Process

Inherent in the developmental experience is the process of 'separation-individuation'. This refers to the individual's development of a sense of self that is separate and apart from his/her parents. Through this relational process, the adolescent acquires the skills to break the emotional ties with the parents. Indeed, a successful individuation process entails the emergence of a secure, stable and autonomous sense of self and a consolidation of a personal identity (Lopez & Gover, 1993).

The examination of the 'separation-individuation' process within the context of the family environment is essential. Research based on family systems theories has argued that adolescent individuation is primarily influenced by family patterns of interaction, especially between parents and children. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of the developing self primarily within the microsystem.

Family boundaries are also important for a successful individuation process. It has been argued (Minuchin, 1974) that boundaries in families help the individual to establish a sense of autonomy, while ensuring mutual support and intimacy. They are also used as focal points of reference during the individuation process. When these boundaries are lacking, the potential to establish differentiation and individuation is jeopardised. Boundaries become enmeshed, resulting in a dysfunctional family that lacks boundaries. Such family is likely to have a *laissez faire* attitude towards the behaviour of the individual. The opportunity to develop a sense of autonomy and individuation is, therefore, minimised. So is the potential to maximise the psychological well-being of the adolescent.

### 3.5 Social Identity Theory

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) the individual's identity develops within a social context. The relationship between the individual and society is of utmost importance, as is one's position within society. One important assumption of this theory is that the individual strives for a positive sense of self-identity that usually results in ingroup favouritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People like to think positively about themselves and the groups to which they belong. This positive self-concept is partly derived from the knowledge that one belongs to a certain group and the emotional significance that is attached to that group membership. The more the group is positively evaluated, the stronger the identification (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). By the same token, the more the group is negatively evaluated the weaker the identification. This issue is very important in relation to ethnic minority groups that are likely to be inferior to the dominant group.

Another assumption of Social Identity Theory is that ingroup favouritism is generated by a motivation to achieve or maintain differences in favour of the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Members of ethnic minority groups, for example, are expected to exhibit ingroup favouritism. As their status is low in comparison to the dominant group, they are likely to feel threatened by such inferiority. One way of dealing with such a threat is to identify strongly with their group (Kinket et al., 1999).

Underpinning the Social Identity Theory is a number of psychological needs that

need to be met for optimal adaptation and performance (Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). That study examined 'socially based' needs and 'personal based' needs. The needs included group inclusion, group distinctiveness, interpersonal relatedness, personal distinctiveness, and personal autonomy. Results indicated that all need-satisfaction constructs were correlated with intrinsic motivation, commitment and positive affect. Such needs motivate the individual to enhance his/her identification with the ingroup. These findings, therefore, highlight the importance that Social Identity Theory is likely to play in the experience of life satisfaction, since it provides both socially and personally based needs.

For adolescents, the need to establish a social identity becomes salient. Relationship parameters are expected to extend beyond the family environment. This process can be both challenging and threatening. Inner resources, such as coping are essential to deal effectively with this required task.

## 3.6 The Experience of Stress and Coping during Adolescence

Inherent in the experience of adolescence is the crisis in relation to ego and social identity formation. As a crisis, the adolescent finds him/herself in a very vulnerable state as the diverse pieces of the puzzle are shifted and reordered into the total picture. Through the psychological and psychosocial changes, feelings of insecurities, doubts, uncertainties and alienation are likely to come to the forefront. The developing of a coping repertoire is, therefore, essential for a subsequent successful adaptation that the changes entail.

### 3.6.1 Definition of Coping

The term "coping" has acquired a variety of meanings with a growing consensus (e.g., Lazarus, Averill, & Opton, 1974; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Murphy, 1974) that *coping* refers to an individual's efforts to manage situations that are perceived as threatening. In the present thesis, the definition proposed by Lazarus (1991) is applied. Coping is defined as "the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person-" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 112). This definition implies an initial

evaluative phase of the coping process known as primary appraisal. Through this phase the individual is prompted to make an evaluation of a situation as (a) posing a threat, (b) potentially resulting in harm or loss, (c) judged to be irrelevant or benign positive, or (d) presenting a challenge. Having perceived the situation as stressful, a secondary appraisal takes place. This is concerned with whether or not one has the necessary resources for coping with the stressful situation whereby the potential for threat is reduced.

According to the above definition, coping is conceptualised as a mediator between negative life events and psychological well-being. A study conducted by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), for example, revealed that coping acts as a powerful mediator of emotional outcomes: positive outcomes are associated with some coping strategies, negative outcome with others. As such, it may be argued that coping may be a determinant of life-satisfaction. A person who finds him/herself in a difficult situation and uses a problem-focused strategy, for example, is more likely to experience satisfaction with life than someone who uses a non-constructive strategy, such as avoidance coping.

Frydenberg (1997) identified three aspects of Lazarus' definition of coping:

- The shift from personality traits to context with regards to coping
- The crux of coping strategies is the individual's effort to minimise and overcome the threat provoked by the environment. Therefore, coping is not limited to the successful completion of an act, but includes all purposeful *efforts* to manage stress irrespective of their effectiveness. The attempt may consist of behavioural acts or cognition.
- Coping is regarded as a process that changes during the course of the threatening experience.

An appraisal of the situation occurs before the individual initiates a coping action. As part of the coping strategy, a reappraisal that modifies the situation, takes place accordingly.

### 3.6.2 Coping: A Theoretical Approach

Coping has been approached from a number of theoretical perspectives (see Moos & Billings, 1982). Lazarus and his colleagues (e.g., Lazarus et al., 1974; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) developed one of these perspectives. These authors argued that the concept of coping is intertwined with stress. In fact, coping is viewed as a reaction to stress. However, it also has the potential to mould the stressful encounter, thereby determining whether the individual perceives it as a stressful or challenging experience. As such "Coping and stress are but two faces of the same coin and any model of stress must also be viewed as a model of coping" (Roskies & Lazarus, 1980, p. 45).

This cognitive theory of stress and coping is based on the transactionists model which assumes that the person, situation and coping mutually affect one another. Such a model is essential if it is to incorporate the person as an active agent in shaping the stressful experience as well as being a responder to the situation (Roskies & Lazarus, 1980). According to this theoretical framework, person and environmental factors influence appraisal that in turn determines the types of strategies used.

### 3.6.3 Types of Coping

During adolescence, a range of coping strategies is developed in an attempt to alleviate the stress inherent in the required developmental tasks. More specifically, the need to understand both the inner world and their environment, as well as the need to control these two dimensions, motivate adolescents to create opportunities to enhance and develop new coping skills. The coping strategies that are likely to develop vary from adaptive to maladaptive, from functional to dysfunctional (Hess & Richards, 1999; Piko, 2001). Such strategies include reaching out to others, making a plan to deal with a difficult situation, ventilating feelings, and turning to alcohol.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are two types of coping: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping aims to manage the feelings provoked by a stressful situation and to preserve an emotional equilibrium. This approach often includes attempts to alleviate distress by ventilating feelings, distraction, denial and avoiding the situation that triggered the stressful response. Empirical studies (e.g., Chapman & Mullis, 2000) often show that emotion-

focused coping strategies are less effective for psychological well-being. Problem-focused coping aims to reduce the threat, and the stress that it entails, by taking some direct action (e.g., reappraisal of the threatening situation) or increasing one's inner resources (e.g., perceived social support and self esteem). Strategies that directly address the underlying problem are usually positively related to psychological well-being (Dumont & Provost, 1999). Thus, an adolescent who experiences parent-child conflicts and seeks advice regarding how to handle the situation is more likely to experience life satisfaction than someone who sweeps the issue under the carpet.

In examining the psychosocial health among adolescents, Piko (2000) identified four coping strategies: passive coping, problem-analysing coping, risky coping and support-seeking coping. Passive coping is characterised by wishful thinking or praying to get through the problem. When the individual take measures to deal with the problem, he/she is considered to use problem-analysing coping. Risky coping consists of risk-taking behaviours as drinking and smoking. The support- seeking coping refers to when the individual reaches out to other people for support and/or advice. Piko's study also found that both passive coping and risky coping played a negative role, and problem-analysing and support-seeking factors played a positive role in the psychosocial health of adolescents.

## 3.7 The Experience of Social Support

As already argued, the individual does not develop in a vacuum. Developing human relations is essential for psychological and psychosocial well-being (see Sections 3.2 and 3.1). Having a sense of being supported, for example, is essential for adolescents as they chart their way through this transition between childhood and adulthood. This need becomes salient during adolescence when the individual is required to renegotiate the relational boundaries with parents and peers alike, amongst other tasks. Hence, the need for social support is critical as the adolescent attempts to achieve the required goals.

### 3.7.1 Definition of Social Support

The concept of social support has been defined in numerous ways by investigators. It has become increasingly evident that social support is not a single unitary

concept. It is a multifaceted phenomenon, subjected to various definitions and interpretations that seem to capture different aspects of social support. Cobb (1976) identified three kinds of social support - emotional support, esteem support and network support. These kinds of support focus on the interpersonal aspect of social support. Others (e.g., Tolsdorf, 1976) incorporated "any action or behavior that functions to assist the focal person in meeting with his personal goals or in dealing with the demands of any particular situation" (p. 410). In defining social support, Caplan (1974) suggested that this construct is a function of social activities which enhances the individual's sense of mastery through sharing tasks, giving material and cognitive assistance and providing emotional support. Vaux (1988) postulated that social support is best seen as a metaconstruct, consisting of three subordinate constructs: support network resources, specific supportive behaviour and subjective appraisals of support.

Many researchers defined social support mainly in cognitive terms. Cobb's (1976) definition of social support, for example, is a case in point. He described social support as information conveying : i) a sense of being cared for; ii) the belief that one is loved, esteemed and valued; and iii) the sense of belonging to a network system. This suggests that the sense of being supported is derived not from the behavioural act, but from the recipient's interpretation of the experience. Cassel (1976) examined the feedback function along the same vein. He argued that the beneficial outcome is more attributed to the conveyance of positive regard and caring than to any specific behaviour.

Through the various conceptualisation of social support two disparate processes of this construct have emerged (Cohen & Wills, 1985). One model postulates that support is related to well-being only when the person is threatened by stress. This is known as the *buffering effect* because it 'buffers' and, therefore, ameliorates adverse effects on health outcomes. This model supposes that adequate social support will moderate the impact of stress on health. The alternative model proposes a *main effect* on the well-being of the individual, independent of the level of adversity or stress. Thus, social support provides an individual a general positive context irrespective of the actual experiences of stressful events. Stated differently, at all levels of life events, people with better social supports, are likely to be psychologically healthier.

In general terms, social support implies behaviour, both perceived and received

by the recipient, that has beneficial effects, directly or indirectly, on the psychological and/or physical health outcomes. However, the conceptualisation adopted in the current thesis defines it as perceived support, through which the person feels a sense of being cared for, valued and accepted and a sense of security through the perception of availability of support when need arises. Social support, therefore, is characterised by a set of cognitive and affective behaviours. This definition is based on Procidano and Heller's (1983) notion of *perceived support*. This notion refers to a generalised appraisal that is elicited when a person is confronted by a stressful experience. This appraisal encompasses a sense of being cared for and valued, the availability of significant others when need is required and the satisfaction of the relationships the individual might have.

### 3.7.2 Perceived Social Support

According to Vaux (1988), subjective appraisals of support are "subjective, evaluative assessments of a person's supportive relationships and the supportive behavior that occurs within them" (p. 29). From a cognitive, psychological perspective, it is the person's interpretation of the experience that affects social support (Turner, Frankel, & Levin, 1983). As such, perceptions play a crucial role in the experience of social support and the life satisfaction of the individual.

Many investigators (e.g., Heller & Swindle, 1983; Procidano & Heller, 1979; Turner et al., 1983) have postulated the importance of the individual's experience of supportive relationships and interactions. In examining the social support processes Heller, Swindle, and Dusenbury (1986) found that it is not the social activity as such that is health protective, but how the activity is perceived and interpreted. Evidence suggests that people have a set of expectations and attributions about social relationships. It is possible that measures of perceived social support are tapping into these domains which also include ideas on how approachable and forthcoming people are likely to be within the social environment (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991).

### 3.7.3 Social Support: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model of social support draws heavily on a cognitive perspective based on the work of Lazarus (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) on stress and

coping. Academic scholars have used two approaches in examining social support, namely the actual social support that the individual receives and the perception of social support that is cognitively oriented.

The focus on perceived social support is embedded in the cognitive appraisal and the influence of cognitive schemata. Lazarus and his colleagues highlighted the importance of cognitive appraisal in their work on stressful life events and the coping process. When the individual is confronted by a stress-provoking situation, a cognitive appraisal is elicited. Through such an appraisal, the situation is viewed either as threatening or challenging. The view depends very much on the individual's perception of his/her coping repertoire (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thoits (1985) argued persuasively for a model of social support as coping assistance. The model draws heavily on Lazarus' theory of stress. Parallels between the cognitive appraisals in coping and the stressful situations are drawn. Thoits argued that adequate support mitigates/minimises/alleviates the adverse effects of stress. Conversely, the level of stress is likely to increase when social support is lacking.

#### 3.7.3.1 Buffering Effect and Main Effect Models

In examining social support, two lines of theoretical approaches have been adopted. The first approach postulates that social resources have a beneficial effect on the subjective well-being of the individual, irrespective of the stress factor, whether it is present or not. This is known as *main effect* model that is derived from the Stress x Support interaction (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The other approach is known as the *buffering* model because it "cushions" the psychological as well as physical outcomes from negative impacts derived from stressful life events. Both models differ, not only in terms of conceptualising social support and how it operates, but also in methodological techniques. As such, these models have theoretical and practical implications (see Cohen & Wills, for an extensive discussion).

Underpinning these models is the notion of stress. For the current theoretical framework, Lazarus' (1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) contention that stress results from an appraisal of a situation that it is threatening or otherwise demanding, thereby exceeding the coping resources of the individual, is employed. As already discussed in

this thesis, the appraisal aspect of stress is crucial for the stress provoking experience. The cognitive stress appraisal processes are triggered by environmental events. These cognitive processes determine the coping behaviour that in turn leads to a reappraisal of threat.

On the basis of these propositions, many investigators of social support have postulated that there might be different points at which a buffering effect takes place. Gore (1985), for example, stated that social support might have an impact on the stress process at two different points: the relationship between objective and subjective stress; and the relationship between subjective stress and mental health outcomes. In investigating social support, occupational stress and health, LaRocco, House, and French (1980) identified three such points at which a buffering effect occurs-between perceived job stress and job-related strain; between perceived job stress and mental and physical health outcome; and between job-related strain and mental and physical health.

The alternative model of social support proposes that this construct has direct, positive effects on psychological well-being by fulfilling needs of affiliation, belonging, respect, social integration, affection and nurturance. Conversely, lack of support generates a source of stress in and of itself (Turner, 1981). A generalised positive outcome of social support could occur because social networks, for example "provide persons with positive experiences and a set of stable socially regarded roles in the community" (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 311). Another possible explanation offered by the same authors is that this supportive behaviour generates positive affect, a sense of predictability and an affirmation of self-worth.

Both the buffering effect and the main effect models have been useful tools in examining perceived social support. On the basis of previous findings, perceived support tends to have direct and additive effects. A study (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981) revealed such effects on levels of depression and morale. The former model proposes that social support has a direct effect on the well-being of the individual. It is assumed that social support has a beneficial effect irrespective of the level of stress.

This is in contrast to the buffering effect model. Within this model, social support is viewed as a vulnerability factor because it is assumed to operate *only* under major stress conditions. In other words, it alleviates/moderates the level of stress, but is not

relevant when the experience is not threatening. Through the vulnerability factor, the person amplifies the perception of stress that provokes a mobilisation of his/her resources to reduce or manage stress. Another implicit assumption of the stress-buffering model is that support is mobilised when the provoked stress is very high. There is evidence that people tend to seek and report more social support under such conditions (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1987). In the light of such findings, it has been argued (Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990) that stress may alert the person to seek help and/or offer help.

#### 3.7.3.2 Social Support and Attachment Theory

The cornerstone of social support is the quality of one or more dyadic relationships. As such, the interactive element of the construct in question is crucial for the life satisfaction of the individual. The present theoretical framework that is used to explain the interactive component of perceived social support is based on attachment theory. Parallels have been drawn between this theory and social support, manifesting a strong link between them (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990), as well as identifying attachment as an integral part of social support (Boyce, 1985).

It has been argued (Boyce, 1985; Sarason et al., 1990) that attachment plays a crucial role in the social support domain. The relationship between the mother and the infant is a decisive social interaction in the human development. Establishing a strong bond between the infant and the 'significant other' is imperative for a healthy psychological development of the child (Bowlby, 1988). According to Bowlby, the availability and responsiveness to the child's needs, as well as unconditional acceptance are the basic ingredients for a 'secure base' through which the child is encouraged to explore the environment and return from time to time. It also enhances his/her coping skills that in turn generate a feeling of self-efficacy. If the child does not develop a secure base, feelings of anxiety and preoccupation with the fear of losing the attachment figure are provoked. Such a secure base is not limited to childhood. It is also extended all through life.

It has been argued (Boyce, 1985; Sarason et al., 1990) that the infant's early attachments form the basis for all subsequent social relationships. As such, it is the nucleus of social support. In fact, evidence (e.g., Rutter, 1981) suggests that infants'

attachments are extended to a variety of people in their broader social networks and the quality of such attachments does not differ from the original attachment of the significant other.

In establishing a link between attachment theory and perceived social support, parallels were drawn from both notions. Supportive hypotheses were generated from attachment theory and were redefined in terms of perceived social support. The outcomes of this experimental work revealed that perceived social support, at least as defined by the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983) may be the inception and extensions of the early relationship with the mother (see Sarason et al., 1990, for an in-depth discussion). If the notion of attachment is synonymous with social support, then people who are high in perceived support believe that support is available when needed and feel accepted under all or most conditions (Sarason et al., 1990). Conversely, those who are low in perceived support believe that support is unavailable when needed and likely to feel rejected.

Following the above theoretical discussion, it seems reasonable to expect that the stronger the perceived social support an individual can have, the more he/she is likely to experience life satisfaction.

### 3.8 Conclusion

Besides physical development, adolescence provides opportunities for youth to develop psychologically and psychosocially. As they chart their way through adolescence, youth require to undergo a number of developmental crisis. Although the central task that adolescents are required to accomplish is the development of their identity, the tasks that are required in previous stages of development still come into play (Erikson, 1968).

Another close related theory of development is Bronfennbrenner's (1979, 1992) theory of ecological development. Whereas Erikson's theory focuses on various stages of development, the thrust of Bronfenbrenner's theory is the interaction between the person and the environment within the context of a number of systems. A conducive environment to psychological development, especially within the microsystem, is essential for subjective well-being.

Both Erikson's and Bronfenbrenner's theories espouse positive relationships between children and parents as the fundamental basis of human development. As the individual moves from childhood to adolescence, relationships are extended beyond the family. In developing their identity, adolescents are influenced by other systems that go beyond the microsystem as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

The development of social identity is also essential for human development, especially during adolescence. Like the previous two theories, this theory must also be understood within the context of human relationships, both within and outside the family. Such approach is more likely to tap into the essence of one's being where life satisfaction is likely to emerge.

The above-mentioned theories indicate that human experience is relational in nature on three levels-interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environmental. The first two levels are manifested in perceived social support that is also another important element in the experience of life satisfaction. Indeed, Cobb's (1976) definition of social support indicates the significant role that this construct plays in life satisfaction among adolescents (see Section 3.7.1). Another relational issue is related to the notion of attachment that is embedded in perceived social support. Some initial attachment is required for the individual to be able to experience perceived social support.

A theoretical model of life satisfaction in adolescents is not complete unless it incorporates a theory of coping and stress. The journey of adolescence is both challenging and threatening. Youth require a repertoire of constructive strategies whether they are going through Erikson's (1968) crises, whether they are relating to the multiple ecological systems espoused by Bronfenbrenner (1979), or whether they are dealing with social identity (Tajfel, 1981). Constructive coping strategies are challenges in themselves. As such, they are likely to generate life satisfaction.

In conclusion, the overall theoretical model proposed in the current thesis overarches a number of theories that need to be taken into account in attempting to understand life satisfaction in adolescents.

# Chapter 4

## The Immigrants' Experiences and Life Satisfaction

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the experience of adolescence is both challenging and enriching. However, it can also be threatening, especially if the environment is not conducive to subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction. In this chapter, the experience of adolescence is examined among youth from immigrant backgrounds. It is argued that for the immigrant youth, journeying through adolescence is even more challenging and, perhaps, more threatening. In addition to the normal developmental tasks, these adolescents are faced with additional psychological and psychosocial issues that need to be dealt with. These issues include the acculturation process and ethnic identity.

### 4.1 Culture and Ethnicity

The concepts of culture and ethnicity are central to the present thesis. These factors are important to take into account when attempting to understand personal experiences, such as life satisfaction. The literature reveals various definitions of culture, not only between disciplines - sociology, anthropology and psychology - but also within disciplines. Generally speaking, culture is defined as a shared way of life of a given society. Elements of culture include norms, customs, language, values and beliefs (Triandis, 2001; Sonn & Fisher, 2003). Culture reflects the ways in which people process and make sense of their experiences (McBride Murry, Phillips Smith, & Hill, 2001). These authors define ethnicity as the perceived group membership based on nationality, ancestry, or both.

Typically, an individual is a member of an ethnic group at birth and his/her ethnicity affects how others respond to him/her. According to Isajiw (1974), ethnicity refers to:

> an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary group (p. 122). .

As a person is born into a group without having any choice as to the specific

cultural group, the membership to this group is considered as involuntary. To emphasise this point, Isawij cites Breton and Pinard (1960) who stated that "A person does not belong to an ethnic category by choice. He is born into it and becomes related to it through emotion and symbolic ties" (p. 120).

The ethnic group provides for the individual the basic process of socialisation. It is one of the vehicles that shape the values, attitudes and patterns of behaviour that are internalised by the individual from childhood through adulthood (Tajfel, 1978). Ethnicity, therefore, refers to the interrelation of cultural and social process in the identification of ethnic groups and the interaction between such groups. The main characteristics of ethnicity are "the identification and labeling of any grouping or any other category of people and the explicit implicit contrasts made between the defined group and another group or category. There must always be a we/them dichotomy to apply a concept of ethnicity" (Seymour & Macmillan, 1986, p. 95). Harrison (2002) argued along the same lines, stating that embedded in ethnicity is the “politics of difference” (p. 212) in which minority groups are categorized as ‘other’ in relation to the majority group.

Two concepts that are useful in understanding culture and cultural differences are *culture-general* and *culture-specific*. The former concept, also known as "etic", refers to aspects of culture that are common to other cultures. The latter, sometimes known as "emic" refers to those specific aspects attributed to a particular culture (e.g., child-rearing practices, language).

Another two important concepts are *explicit culture* and *implicit culture* (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Densen, 1992). The former, also known as the peripheral and the visible (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) refers to customs, traditions and any other observable acts and products (Berry et al., 1992) found in any group. In contrast, implicit culture sometimes referred to as being central and invisible (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) refers to attitudes, values and beliefs.

From this perspective, explicit and implicit cultures serve as a useful framework for studies focusing on the subjective well-being of immigrants. Therefore, these two constructs are of utmost importance in understanding the experience of Maltese adolescents in Australia within the context of family environment. As second-generation immigrants are less likely to embrace the overt behaviour of their ethnic culture (Borg,

1999; Cauchi, 2002), they are more likely to be at loggerheads with their parents. Indeed, Maltese-Australian adolescents, for example, reported more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australians (Borg, 1999).

### 4.2 Individualism-Collectivism

The constructs of individualism and collectivism have been important tools in cross-cultural research over the last 20 years since Hofstede (1980) identified the dimension of individualism-collectivism. This dimension that is also considered as a "cultural syndrome" (Triandis, 1996) refers to the degree to which cultures encourage individual needs, wishes, desires, and values in relation to group and collective ones. According to Hofstede (1991), "Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only ….. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (p. 260-261).

In individualist societies, people are encouraged to be autonomous and independent from the in-groups; their personal goals take precedence over those of the in-groups. In addition, people's behaviour is driven by personal attitudes rather than norms of their in-groups and think in terms of "I" (Hofstede, 1980). In contrast, people in collectivist societies are more oriented towards the interests of the group. They are also more interdependent and express themselves in terms of "we" (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, in collectivist cultures, there might be greater feelings of social support, which are likely to enhance subjective well-being, including life satisfaction. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, there is more personal freedom and a higher ability to pursue individual goals that are likely to generate a sense of well-being (Diener, Suh, et al., 1995). Indeed, Diener and his associates found a strong relationship between individualism and subjective well-being among students in S. Korea, Japan, the People's Republic of China, and U.S.A. Individualism was also found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

Rather than being considered as polar opposites, the constructs of individualism and collectivism have been conceptualized as multidimensional (Kagitcibasi & Berry,

1989). When measured empirically, these two dimensions appear to be uncorrelated; that is people can be high on both, low on both, or high on one and low on the other. Therefore, Triandis (1995) argued that individualistic and collectivistic tendencies co-exist within individuals and cultures. This argument was also echoed by Kemmelmeier and associates (2003) and supported by a study (Wang & Tamis-Lemonda, 2003) that found that mothers in Taiwan and the United States embraced both individualistic and collectivistic values.

Given such a cultural discrepancy between individualistic and collectivistic societies, it is not surprising that the sources of life satisfaction would be different for both societies. A study (Suh et al., 1998) examined life satisfaction among 61 nations. They found that in individualistic countries, life satisfaction was more grounded in intrapsychic experiences, such as emotions rather than norms (social approval of life satisfaction). In collectivist countries, however, both emotions and norms were equally important for the experience of life satisfaction. Diener and Diener (1995) found that self-esteem was more important for life satisfaction in individualistic societies than in collectivistic societies. In a study of cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction, Diener and Diener (1995) found that four variables (satisfaction with self, family, friends, and finances) were related for all participants in 31 nations. However, satisfaction with the self was more important in individualistic countries (e.g., United States) than in collectivistic countries (e.g., China). Loneliness appeared to be more salient in the experience of life satisfaction of Australian adolescents than for their Japanese counterparts (Shumaker & Shea, 1993).

### 4.3 The Immigration Experience

As immigration is becoming more common, so is the interest of the immigration experience by social psychologists (Leung & Leung, 2001). Leaving one's native country to settle in another country can be very challenging and perhaps even traumatic. Indeed, the notion of uprooting that is quite common in cross-cultural literature suggests a radical change at a number of levels – physical, biological, cultural, and psychological (Berry & Kim, 1988). In many cases, the host country is very alien to the immigrant especially if the discrepancy between the culture of origin and the host culture is very broad.

Consequently, feelings of alienation are not uncommon, as are feelings of loss and grief (Cauchi, 2002).

In attempting to deal with the traditional culture and the new environment, some degree of acculturative stress sets in. Indeed, inherent in the acculturation process, is the acculturative stress that is widely acknowledged in the literature. According to Berry (1997) acculturation refers to "the general processes and outcomes (both cultural and psychological) of intercultural contact" (p. 8). It also refers to the ability to deal effectively with more than one culture when a person comes in contact with a foreign culture. It has been argued (Ward, 1996) that acculturation can be viewed as a state or a process. As a state, it refers to the culture-specific cognitive, behavioral and affective domains that a person adheres to. As a process, it involves change over time – change that involves both societal and individual variables (see Ward, 1997 for an intensive discussion).

### 4.3.1 Berry's Acculturation Model

Various theoretical frameworks have been postulated to explain the immigrant's adaptation to a new country (e.g. Berry, 1997; Bochner, 1982; Ward, 1996). In an attempt to adapt, the immigrant goes through an acculturation process. According to Berry, this process involves two major issues, namely maintenance of the culture of origin and contact and participation in the host culture (see Figure 3). These issues lead to four possible acculturation strategies:

1. The assimilation strategy refers to when the individual adheres to the host culture while relinquishing the culture of origin.
2. The separation strategy is employed when the individual seeks to maintain the traditional culture without seeking contact and participation with the dominant group.
3. Through the integration strategy, the individual embraces both the culture of origin and the dominant culture.
4. Finally, the marginalisation strategy comes into play if the individual rejects the original culture while at the same time maintains minimal contact and participation in the dominant culture.

Empirical findings indicate that the integration strategy is the most beneficial for adaptation. For example, Chinese students who were integrated had significantly subjective well-being than their peers who were assimilated, separated, or marginalized (Zheng, 2004).

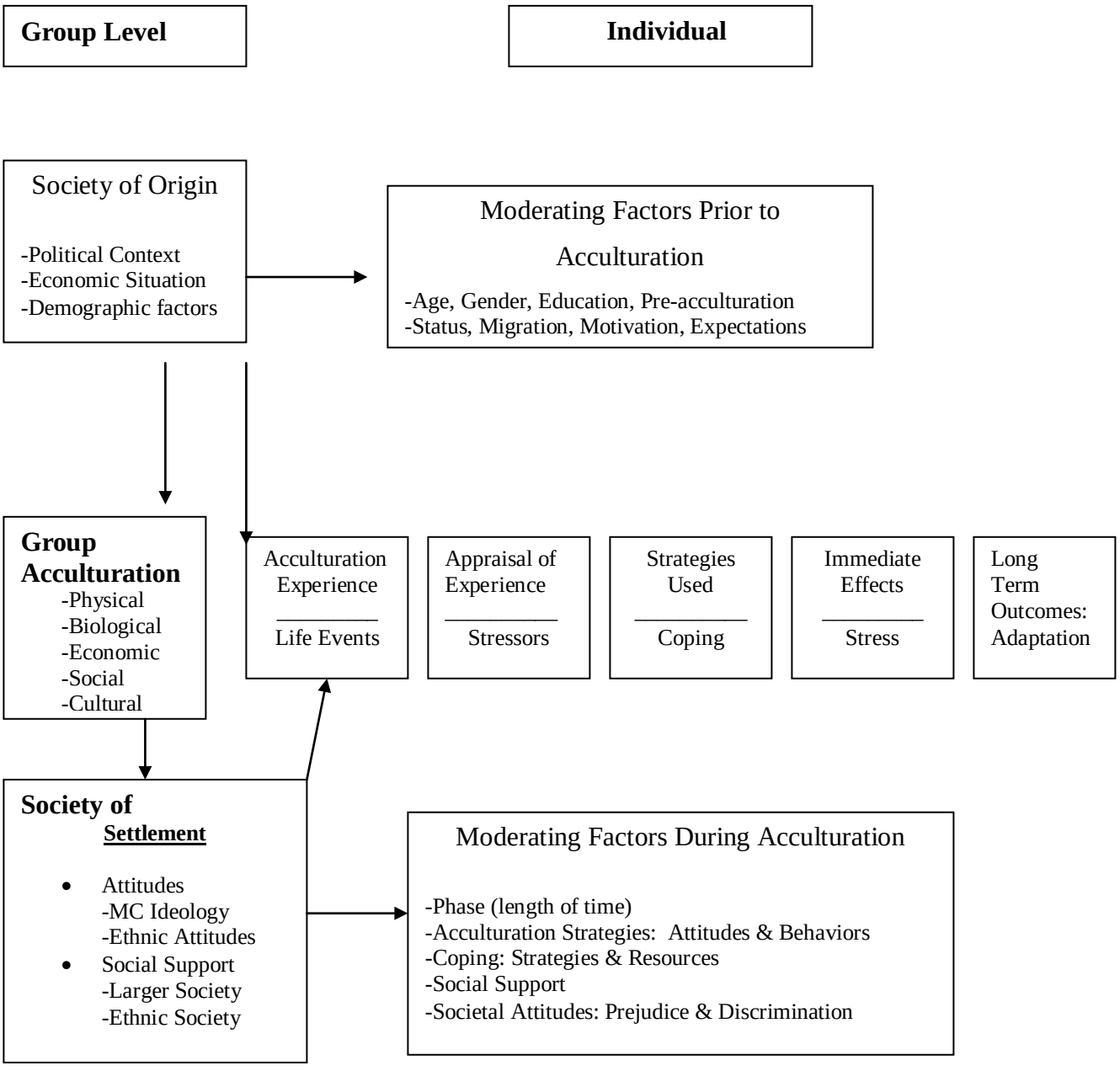


Figure 3. A framework for acculturation research (Berry, 1997, p. 15)

The theoretical framework in Figure 3 (Berry, 1997) includes *situational* variables at the group- or cultural-level. It also includes *person* variables at an individual- or psychological-level. The adaptation outcome is mediated by a number of variables at an individual level. These variables include social support and coping strategies. The central role that the family plays during the acculturation process among first-generation immigrants and beyond is highly acknowledged. The experience of immigration requires a great deal of adjustment and adaptation. During the acculturation process the immigrant needs to find a new place to be able to feel secure in the new environment. This can be an arduous task, both psychologically and psychosocially. The social position of the immigrant, for example, goes through a very radical transformation. Whereas in the born country, the 'immigrant' may have been a member of the majority group, in the host country, he/she usually finds him/herself as a member of a minority group. This inferior position can have serious implications on the subjective well-being of the individual (Simon, Aufderheide, & Kampmeier, 2001), including life satisfaction**.**

### 4.3.2 Ethnic Identity and Identification

Another psychological task of the immigrant is in relation to ethnic identity. This refers to an individual's sense of self in terms of membership in a particular ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). It has also been defined as the ethnic component of social identity (Tajfel, 1981). According to Tajfel it is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). As an identity it is salient for immigrant adolescents. As has been argued, one of the major tasks of adolescence is the consolidation of the individual's identity as well as in terms of the dominant culture within which they are now living. Immigrant adolescents are required to resolve identity issues within the context of their ethnic identity. Thus, visiting the roots of their origin becomes essential for a healthy psychological development (Berry, 1997; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980).

According to Phinney (1993) there are two aspects of ethnic identity: its content and its formation. The content refers to the elements that constitute it - values, attitudes and behaviours that are typical of an ethnic group and are transmitted across generations.

In their attempt to acculturate, immigrants retain these cultural aspects (Phinney, 1996) that help them feel connected with the roots of their identity. It is not uncommon, for example, for ethnic minority groups to get together and celebrate cultural events. This is the case of the Maltese-Australian community in Melbourne. A number of cultural clubs and associations have been set up to celebrate the village festa in memory of the patron saint (York, 1990).

The formation of ethnic identity refers to the process that the individual goes through in identifying his/her ethnic identity. Phinney (1996) identified three stages of ethnic identity formation. The first stage is the unexamined ethnic identity, also known as diffused or foreclosed ethnic identity (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). During this stage the individual experiences lack of interest in his/her ethnicity and sheds off the traditional culture of origin. Instead, values and attitudes of the dominant culture are internalized. The second stage is the ethnic identity search or moratorium. This stage parallels Erikson's (1968) identity crisis. During this stage the individual becomes actively involved in an exploration of identity issues that are rooted in his/her ethnicity. The third stage is the ethnic identity achievement. This stage is characterized by acceptance and internalization of one's ethnicity. According to Phinney, " Those adolescents who have explored ethnicity as a factor in their lives and are clear about the meaning of their ethnicity are likely to show better adjustment than those who have not considered their ethnicity" (p. 75).

Acculturation theory has also been used as a theoretical framework to explain ethnic identity. In reviewing the literature, Phinney (1990) argued that ethnic identity is sometimes used synonymously with acculturation. However, she asserted that the two concepts are different. The thrust of acculturation is geared towards changes in cultural values, attitudes and behaviour, and the level of concern is the group rather than the individual. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is more geared towards individuals and the focus is on how they relate to their own group. In this respect, ethnic identity can be considered as an aspect of acculturation.

In reviewing the literature, Phinney (1990) identified two distinct models of ethnic identity. The first model is a linear, bi-polar model. According to this model, ethnic identity is viewed on a continuum with strong ethnic ties on one end, and strong

mainstream ties on the other. This view maintains that by having strong ties with one culture, the individual minimizes the ties with the other culture. The other model is a two-dimensional model that posits the view that a person can have strong or weak ties with both the culture of origin and the dominant culture. From a theoretical perspective, psychological well-being is enhanced when the individual integrates the two cultures.

Two main theoretical frameworks have generally guided the issue of ethnic identity. These frameworks are social identity theory and acculturation theory. According to social identity theory, individuals use social categories to identify and to define themselves. By identifying with a specific social category, individuals identify themselves as group members. This identification is referred to as social identity. As an attempt to enhance their self-concept and self-esteem, individuals become members of the 'ingroup', comparing themselves or the group they belong to with other social groups ('outgroups'). It has been argued (Tajfel, 1978) that group identity is an important part of self-concept; people generally attribute value to the group to which they belong and derive self-esteem from their sense of belonging to that group. In other words, being a member of a group enhances a sense of belonging that contributes to a positive self-concept. The direct influences of parents and peers on social identity are considered primary social factors; whereas indirect reference group, such as the media, are considered as secondary sources.

According to Tajfel (1978) "Being a member of a minority presents the individuals concerned with the psychological requirements to adapt to the present situation or to do something in order to change it" (p. 3). However, this membership can be complicated. If the dominant group holds the ethnic group in low esteem, then members of that particular ethnic group are potentially faced with a negative social identity. They are also less likely to adhere to that group. Tajfel also asserted that members of such low-status groups seek to improve their status by identifying themselves with the dominant group. This solution, however, may have negative psychological outcomes. Another strategy that may be adapted is to participate in the two cultures. According to Tajfel, this may also have serious implications, especially if there is a great discrepancy between the two cultures in values, attitudes and behaviours.

These issues of acculturation and ethnic identity are not limited to first-generation

immigrants. According to Cauchi (2002) “The children of migrants, while often well adjusted and integrated in most ways, many at times show the effects resulting directly from the migration process” (p. 253). He continued to argue that the influence of parental culture often has a delayed effect. Assuming that this is the case, it can be argued that the experience of life satisfaction for immigrant adolescents would be different from adolescents who belong to the majority group.

### 4.4 The Role of the Family Environment in the Acculturation Process

According to Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation, the family environment plays a central role in the acculturation process. As already argued, although children and adolescents with immigrant backgrounds may not have directly experienced the traditional culture of origin, they experience it indirectly through their own parents and the socialisation and acculturation process. Traditional cultural norms for example, extend to family dynamics and child rearing practices (Jambunathan, Burtis, & Pierce, 2000; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992; Sam, 2000) that may differ from the host culture, as do family values and beliefs. These core elements of culture are more resistant to change (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Indeed, research shows that such values are passed on from one generation to another, even up to second and third generations (Sam, 2000).

This suggests that immigrant adolescents are faced with two sets of culture – the traditional culture of origin and the dominant host culture (Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996). On one hand parents tend to insist on traditional cultural transmission to ensure cultural continuity (Hofstede, 1991). This was the case of acculturating mothers in the U.S. (Cote & Bornstein, 2003). On the other hand, adolescents are likely to embrace the dominant culture through peer pressure and conformity. This was evident in a study (Borg, 1999) conducted amongst Maltese-Australian adolescents. This study showed that parents still adhere to the traditional culture while their children started to embrace the Australian culture. Only 4% of the participants were identified as bicultural, that is embracing both the Maltese culture and the Australian culture.

This situation poses a number of challenges for such adolescents. The discrepancy between the two cultures is more likely to generate parent-child conflicts that become more salient during adolescence. Such conflicts are highlighted by comparative studies

(e.g., Borg, 1999; Rosenthal, 1982; Shek, 1997) that have investigated parent-child conflicts in various cultures. Rosenthal (1982) examined the influence of ethnicity on parent-adolescent conflicts. Findings indicated significantly higher levels of conflicts in Greek and Italian families in Australia than in Anglo-Australian families. It was suggested that such a discrepancy could be attributed to differences in family systems between the immigrant and the majority cultures. In Greek and Italian families, adolescents were subjected to more authoritarian, parent-centred control, whereas the Australians came from families that were more oriented towards individuality, with a greater stress on personal freedom. Given that Greek and Italian adolescents in Australia are likely to be attempting to conform to the culture of Anglo-Australian peers (Rosenthal, 1982), there is more potential for parent-child conflict. A study (Borg, 1999) has also shown that Maltese-Australian adolescents are more likely to experience parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australian adolescents. This has been attributed to the great discrepancy between the two cultures.

Another line of cross-cultural research has focused on developmental expectations for children that vary from one culture to another. According to Jambunathan et al. (2000) "…what may be viewed as an appropriate expectation in one culture may be viewed as delayed or accelerated development in another culture" (p. 405). Parental expectations with regards to children's autonomy, for example, have also been identified. Parents of ethnic minority groups in Israel have been found to have 'timetable variations' in allowing autonomous behaviour in children (Roer-Strier & Rivlis, 1998). These variations were considered to be due to cultural factors.

Family cultural differences manifest themselves in differences in ideologies of upbringing and most particularly in patterns of control (Bottomley, 1979; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Studies in the United States among ethnic groups have identified such patterns. A study by Jambunathan et al. (2000), for example, found that Asian American and African American mothers supported the use of corporal punishment more than the Hispanic and European American mothers. Ethnic differences in social expectations with regards to expression and aggression have also been found (Yager & Borus, 2000). Parental attitudes towards childrearing practices have also been investigated among five ethnic groups of mothers (Jambunathan et al., 2000). This study found a greater tendency

of maternal role reversal with the children among Asian American, Asian Indian and African American than among European American and Hispanic mothers. The former also experienced lower empathetic awareness of their children's needs. Inappropriate expectations were also found between immigrant and nonimmigrant mothers. These differences could be attributed to cultural differences.

Family values of ethnic minority communities seem to be more resistant to change and are more likely to be passed on from one generation to another (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, Elver, & McCubbin, 1998). In examining the family environment among first- and second-generation adolescents of Chinese descent, both in the United States and Australia, Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) found that although there was evidence of a relatively rapid change in accommodating to individualistic norms in the first-generation families, there was little shift in family environment as a function of length of residence. In fact, family values were still prevalent among second-generation Chinese immigrants, both in America and Australia. Another interesting finding in this study was an aspect of the family functioning that differentiated between immigrant and non-immigrant Chinese adolescents. It seems that, according to adolescents' perceptions, the issues of control and achievement were more salient for parents of adolescents in the immigrant groups, whether they were in Australia or the United States. McCubbin et al. argued that these differences could be a generalised by-product of the immigration experience.

Assuming that this is the case, it is important to examine the issue of control among Maltese-Australian adolescents in comparison to native and Australian adolescents. For Maltese-Australian adolescents the issue of parental control would be even more salient than for Chinese immigrant adolescents. The Maltese come from very traditionally oriented families that are heavily influenced by Catholic religious values and beliefs (Abela, 1991). The perception of God as an authority figure and a controlling agent is prevalent. On the other hand, the notion of God as a role model is highly valued and emphasized. As such, it can be argued that authority and control are likely to be central to the Maltese family. Since no systematic studies have been done in this area among both native and immigrant Maltese adolescents, such speculations are tentative. Further research is required to explore this issue. In addition to traditional cultural factors,

the immigration experience of Maltese-Australians may have also exacerbated the issue of control and the subsequent acculturation process that is required. As will be argued later, this factor can be impacting on their life satisfaction.

## 4.5 Life Satisfaction among Immigrant Adolescents: Empirical Findings

Given that the experience of adolescence for ethnic minority groups is more complex relative to that of ethnic majority groups (Borg, 1999; Cauchi, 2002), it is possible that the experience of life satisfaction would not only be different, but also jeopardised. It is important to point out that the immigration experience is not a negative experience per se. It is the *process* of acculturation that is threatening and/or challenging. The literature reviewed indicate two main areas of interest in the well-being of immigrant adolescents, namely acculturation and ethnic identity.

### 4.5.1 Acculturation

The notion of acculturation has been studied in relation to various psychological constructs. Studies examined acculturation mostly in relation to stress (Borg, 1999; Hovey & King, 1996; Sam, 1995), self-esteem (Borg, 1999; Sam, 2000), satisfaction and social anxiety (Neto, 1995), depression and suicidal ideation (Hovey & King, 1996); and depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms (Sam, 2000). Acculturative stress was also examined in relation to perceived discrimination, self-esteem and life satisfaction (Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000).

Other studies examined how the various coping strategies inherent in the acculturating process relate to some aspects of mental health (Rumbaut, 1997; Sam, 2000). For example, Neto (1995) found that greater satisfaction was associated with integration than separation amongst second-generation immigrants in Norway. A study by Zeng (2004) who examined acculturation and subjective well-being of Chinese students in Australia found that both strong host and strong co-national identification (HNI and CNI) predicted enhance subjective well-being. Acculturation discrepancies were negatively related to life satisfaction among immigrants in Israel (Roccos et al., 2000). Social anxiety was also negatively related to life satisfaction.

Researchers have also used acculturation to explain various aspects of subjective well-being. Coping strategies involving assimilation, integration, separation and

marginilisation have been found to be significant predictors of mental health outcomes (Sam, 1998, 2000). Another study (Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000) examined the effects of acculturation on psychological well-being among a number of immigrant adolescents living in Finland. It was found that perceived discrimination increased acculturative stress and behavioural problems. It also decreased self-esteem and life satisfaction. Another interesting finding of this study revealed that adherence to traditional family related values had a significant positive effect on various aspects of well-being. This was also in line with other studies (Borg, 1999; Sam, 2000). For Maltese-Australian adolescents this could be an important asset in their experience of life satisfaction since traditional family values are still very much upheld (Borg, 1999; Drofenik, 2000).

As already argued immigrant adolescents develop acculturating strategies in their attempts to develop a social identity (Roccas et al., 2000). These strategies vary not only from one individual to another, but also from one ethnic group to another (Nauck, 2001). Coleman Casali, and Wampold (2001) found that African Americans are more likely to use the separation strategy than European Americans; Asian Americans are more likely to use the integration strategy than European Americans. Moreover, this study also revealed that these acculturative strategies are not mutually exclusive – one individual may be able to use all the strategies at different times depending on the situation. Other researchers (Sam, 1998; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002; Szapoznick et al., 1980) postulated similar arguments along the same lines.

### 4.5.2 Ethnic Identity and Life Satisfaction

Another related issue that has attracted the attention of many cross-cultural researchers is ethnic identity, which can also be considered in the light of acculturation (Phinney, 1990). Given that "ethnic identity locates the individual within a particular cultural framework" (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1987, p. 147) it plays an integral role in social identity (DeVos, 1980). Therefore, it is important to investigate the role of this construct in relation to life satisfaction. As already argued in Chapter 3, one of the developmental tasks of adolescents is to develop their own identity (Erikson, 1968). Hence, it can be argued that ethnic identity plays a significant role in the experience of

their life satisfaction.

There is ample evidence that suggests that ethnic identity is associated with various aspects of subjective well-being (Dukes & Martinez, 1997). In general, a strong ethnic identity is associated with higher self-esteem and less stress (Borg, 1999), mastery (Phinney, 1999), with measures of psychological well-being (see Phinney, 1999), and purpose in life (Dukes et al., 1997). Dukes et al.'s study also indicated a negative association between depression and ethnic identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that a positive correlation has been found between ethnic identity and happiness (Phinney, 1999). Similar results emerged among immigrant adolescents in Norway (Sam, 1998). In that study, both ethnic identity and identity with the dominant culture positively related to life satisfaction, suggesting that "it is possible to have strong identification with the majority groups without weakening in ethnic identity" (p. 6).

Another closely related issue that needs to be taken into account is ethnic identification, which refers to the degree that the individual identifies with his or her ethnic group. Both theoretical and empirical research indicates that this phenomenon is essential for psychological well-being. For Maltese-Australian adolescents, for example, ethnic identification positively correlated with self-esteem and negatively correlated with stress and parent-child conflicts (Borg, 1999). The study by Verkuyten (2003) also found a positive correlation between ethnic identification and positive self-esteem among Turkish and Moroccan adolescents in the Netherlands.

Whereas in general, research has consistently shown that ethnic identification is fundamental for subjective well-being, cross-cultural studies of life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents have identified the importance of ethnic identification for some ethnic minority groups, but not for others. Sam (1998), for example, found that for Vietnamese immigrants ethnic identity was the most contributing factor for life satisfaction. For immigrant adolescents from Pakistan, Chile, and Turkey, however, it was not so important and did not contribute to their life satisfaction. Such mixed findings require further research. The current study seeks to extend Sam's study of ethnic identity and identification among Maltese-Australian adolescents within the context of life satisfaction.

## 4.6 Immigrant Adolescents and Social Support

In general, social support is likely to be an important aspect of life satisfaction among adolescents. For adolescents from ethnic minority groups, however, it is even likely to be more salient. In addition to the developmental challenges, immigrant adolescents are faced with the acculturation process that poses more challenges and/or threats. It has been argued (Smith & Carlson, 1997) that environmental and contextual risk factors are more prevalent among this subpopulation than among adolescents from the dominant groups. As such, one would expect that the level of stress would be higher in the former adolescents. Indeed, a study (Borg, 1999) showed that Maltese-Australian adolescents experienced higher levels of stress and lower self-esteem than adolescents from the majority group. Such evidence highlights the importance to establish a supportive network system and to feel supported during their acculturation process that becomes more salient during this developmental stage. While loneliness, for example, is a problem in adolescence across cultures (Neto & Barros, 2000), adolescents from ethnic minority groups are more vulnerable to loneliness (Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1995; Neto & Barros, 2000). It can, therefore, be argued that the need for social support in relation to life satisfaction is very critical for immigrant adolescents.

## 4.7 Coping Strategies among Immigrant Adolescents

Like social support, coping strategies are considered to play a fundamental role in the experience of life satisfaction of immigrant adolescents. In fact, the arguments in Section 4.5 are applicable to coping. As members of an ethnic minority group, immigrant adolescents are more likely to experience life events that are inherent in the acculturation process. The prevalence of acculturative stress is widely acknowledged in the literature. Immigrant adolescents are subjected not only to normative adolescence which is stressful in itself (Aneshensel & Gore, 1991), but also to other stressors such as cultural conflicts, negative stereotypes and inferior status, which may compound the stress. Additional stress can also be experienced through developmental changes and the ethnic status of the individual (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). For example, issues relating to ethnic identity become more salient in adolescence and require successful resolution for the subjective well-being of the individual. The coping repertoire is crucial for these

adolescents to deal with such stressful situations and the acquisition of life satisfaction.

Given that factors, such as culturally unique beliefs and values have a powerful effect on a coping response for a cultural group (Cervantes & Castro, 1985; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, Elver, & McCubbin, 1998), a person's coping response will affect his or her perception of an event as well (Copeland & Hess, 1995). In fact, a significant difference in coping appraisal has been found among Hispanic and Anglo students in the United States (Mendoza, 1981). Although Hispanic students did not report more stressors than the American Mexican students they reported higher levels of stress than their counterparts. Such a difference in coping appraisal is more likely to affect the choice of coping strategies among adolescents from different ethnic background. This claim was supported by comparative studies among immigrant adolescents (Chapman & Mullis, 2000; Copeland & Hess, 1995; Goodwin, Nizharadze, Luu, Koza, & Emelyanova, 2001; Griffith, Dubow, & Ippolito, 2000). In the study conducted by Copeland and his associate, for example, Hispanics used more social activities and sought spiritual support more often than their counterparts. In another study (Griffith et al., 2000), African-Americans reported higher levels of approach coping than Caucasians. However, the Hispanic sample in the latter study did not significantly differ from African Americans and Caucasians.

Although much research has examined the relationship of the coping strategies to various indicators of well-being, research on how adolescents from ethnic minority groups manage the tensions and stressors which are inherent in their psychological and psychosocial development is very limited. As already argued, Maltese-Australian adolescents are likely to experience more life events that require adaptation than Anglo-Australian adolescents. On the other hand, their life experiences are enriched with a culture that is embedded in a history of survival that could be influencing the coping strategies employed by these adolescents. Hence, findings from other ethnic studies cannot be extended to this subpopulation. The above discussion indicates that adolescents from different ethnic groups not only differ in the experiences of stressors, such as life events, but also in the utilization of the strategies employed to deal with these experiences.

## 4.8 Conclusion

In multicultural societies, the experience of adolescence for immigrant youth is more complex than for adolescents from the majority groups. Although the former may be endowed with a rich traditional culture in addition to the dominant culture, such benefits can be very much outweighed by the process of acculturation. Both individual and cultural variables come into play. Social support and coping strategies, for example, are essential for adaptation and the experience of life satisfaction. As is a conducive family environment to psychological well-being – an environment that promotes the integration of both the culture of origin and the host culture.

# Chapter 5

## Malta and the Maltese: A Cultural Perspective

### 5.1 Introduction

In examining life satisfaction among both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents, it is essential to look at some aspects of the Maltese culture, the bedrock of their ethnic identity. It impinges on every aspect of their life, whether they are aware of it or not. For the purpose of this thesis, the elements of culture that are examined in this chapter include a historical account, the Maltese family, religion, characteristics of culture that reflect a high level of collectivism, the support system, and cultural coping strategies.

The Maltese family is entrenched in the religious values and beliefs based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. Since these two institutions encompass a number of values (Abela, 1991), they are central to the inner world of the individual. People attach meanings to their behaviour on the basis of their value system. Values inspire and motivate people to adopt or disregard patterns of behaviour, thereby providing a degree of internal stability (Tonna, 1995). An examination of Maltese values within a cultural context can provide a deep understanding of the psychological and psychosocial behaviour of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents. It can also provide further understanding of the internal elements of culture that most likely have been mostly responsible in moulding the ethnic identity and the sources of life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents. It is argued that Maltese values and beliefs may have a lot of bearing on how adolescents of Maltese origin feel about life in general. In fact, domain satisfaction such as family satisfaction, for example, is more likely to be achieved when value congruency prevails (Oishi et al., 1999).

### 5.2 Malta: A Historical Perspective

The Maltese archipelago comprises three main islands – Malta, Gozo, and Comino. It is situated in a very strategic position in the middle of the Mediterranean, between Tunisia and Sicily. Covering an area of 316 square kilometres, with a population

of 380,000, Malta is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. In 1990, for example, the national population density was 1,125 persons per square kilometre (Tonna, 1993). It has a Semitic language, with a Roman alphabet, making it unique. It is also injected with some other foreign words, such as Italian, French, and English, one of the legacies of foreign occupations and colonisation over the years.

The history of Malta dates back as far as prehistoric age, with the Neolithic period around 4500 BC. This period is characterised by the building of a number of megalithic temples, the oldest in the world. They are even older than the pyramids and Stonehenge. This was a time of fertility and sacredness, with a strong connection to Mother Earth (Bonanno, 1987). The Neolithic period in Malta came to an end round about 800 BC with the coming of the Phoenicians. The Maltese language seems to have originated from this period, including the word 'Malta' which is derived from the Phoenician word 'Maleth', meaning refuge (Borg, 1998).

The Cartagenians (500 BC) and the Romans (218 BC) successively occupied the islands. These were followed by the Arab rule (870-1090). The main legacy of this occupation is the Maltese language, which comprises many Arabic elements (Bonanno, 1987, 1994). The Normans under Count Roger defeated the Arabs and occupied Malta till 1194 AD. A succession of feudal lords of the Kingdom of Sicily continued to reign over Malta, thereby leaving a European cultural influence.

In 1530, Malta was ceded to the Knights of St. John. At that time, the Christian powers round the Mediterranean and the Balkans were under threat by the Ottoman Empire. Because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean Malta became subjected to constant attacks by the Turks, culminating in the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 (Ellul, 1992). During this siege, the Maltese under the leadership of the Grand Master Jean de la Vallette, defeated the Turks. Soon afterwards, the fortified city of Valletta, named in his honour, was built.

The Knights of St. John ruled over Malta until 1798 (De Giorgio, 1985) when they were defeated by the French during the Napoleonic Wars. Soon after the French occupation, the Maltese rebelled against French rule that came to an end in 1800 with the help of the British. A period of uncertainty with British occupation of Malta followed.

Eventually the Maltese requested to stay under British rule. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the British occupation of Malta was finally legalized (Borg, 1998).

As a British colony, Malta experienced both prosperity and poverty. By 1919 the plight of the Maltese was so deplorable, due to unemployment and inflation, that a number of protests and strikes took place. On the 7th June a riot took place in Valletta (Frendo, 1993) and troops opened fire killing five men. This event forced the British government to cede part of its power to the Maltese. In 1921, Malta achieved responsible government, through which all internal affairs were handed over to the Maltese. This continued until Malta became independent in 1964.

### 5.3 Cultural Strategies for Survival

Despite Malta's tiny size, the Maltese have survived countless colonisation, during which they manifested enormous bravery, endurance, tolerance, and adaptation. Inherent in the experiences of colonisations were the expositive and the subjection of the inhabitants to various foreign cultures. Through these experiences the Maltese learnt a number of strategies for survival.

One such strategy was adaptation. Throughout history, the Maltese managed to adapt quite successfully to the extent that adaptability to other cultures has been identified as a characteristic of the Maltese culture (Tonna, 1993). This adaptation seems to be grounded in religious values and beliefs. The Maltese have been staunch Catholics for hundreds of years. The notions of determinism and destiny are of utmost importance – *"tieħu kollox minn idejn Alla"* (accepting everything from God's hands) and *"Kull ma' jiġi merħba bih"* (whatever comes is welcomed) are two expressions which clearly reveal such values. In as much as the Maltese tried to defend themselves against foreign invasion, once the invasion took place they had no other choice but to adapt to the subsequent colonisation and to accept their fate gracefully and wholeheartedly as an act of God. At one level, therefore, adaptation became a strategy for survival. In questioning how the Maltese managed to survive 'where many an empire has disappeared', Adams (1996) argues "that part of the answer lies in the capacity of the people of these islands to accommodate to world events and change while retaining a distinctive sense of their own heritage" (p. 29).

At another level, however, it can be argued that this adaptation may have taken place at quite a costly price. Over the years, the 'Fortress Island' had to conceal integral aspects of its Malteseness, while incorporating some aspects of the foreign culture into its own as a way of adapting. The Maltese could be unconsciously dealing with an identity crisis, which is still unresolved (Frendo, 1986). This could have some bearing at a psychological level on the well-being of the Maltese and it could be unconsciously passed on from one generation to another, including second-generation Maltese-Australian adolescents.

Another strategy that the Maltese used in adapting to other cultures was to submit to the demands of the ruling power. This submissiveness was in fact a form of a 'disguised resistance' that enabled the Maltese to preserve their language and culture over the years of foreign rule (Adams, 1996). Such submissiveness could have been internalized and passed on from one generation to another. In exploring the identity of the Maltese, Frendo (1986) pointed out that "Crudely put, the Maltese were Phoenicians and Carthagenians, Romans and Byzantines, Berbers and Moors, Normans, Spaniards, Greeks, Sicilians and Italians, with a fair sprinkling of more northern neighbours" (p. 18). Such a blend is a testimony of coping and adapting to a diversity of cultures, as well as a fabrication of a unique and complex culture.

Throughout history, the Maltese manifested a tenacity of spirit that helped them to cope and adapt in various situations. This tenacity of spirit was expressed in many ways – for example, in the building of the neolithic temples, their heroic accomplishments during the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 and the Second World War for which George VI honoured the Maltese with the George Cross for their bravery. The strong spirituality of the people also helped them to cope in times of other foreign invasions and wars.

The myth of *Żgugina* is a case in point. According to the myth, a woman named *Żgugina* lost her only son *Mattew* who was stolen by the Turkish corsairs. She made a pact with a saint, *San Dimetri*, that if he would bring her son safely, she would light up '*qasba żejt'* (burning oil) every day. Her prayers were heard and her son returned safe and sound. It is alleged that the '*qasba żejt*' that *Żgugina* lit, is still burning to this very day. As we can see, the ability to cope and to adapt is entrenched in the Maltese culture,

both at macro and micro levels. As a community the Maltese have demonstrated a sense of solidarity that helped them to survive and maintain a distinctive heritage. This solidarity is still prevalent in contemporary society (Abela, 1999).

### 5.4 Collectivism in Malta: Its Implications on Life Satisfaction

So far, no studies have been conducted to explore the level of collectivism in Malta. However, a close examination of the Maltese culture indicates that it highly endorses a collectivistic culture. Although the degree of collectiveness in Malta is not as strong as it is in Eastern countries especially among young generations in contemporary society, elements of collectivism that go beyond a sense of community are apparent. This could be partly because of the small size of the Maltese archipalago and the physical proximity of the inhabitants. It could also be because the Maltese as a nation have a history of foreign threat and occupation. A sense of national solidarity was critical. According to Triandis (2000, 2001) collectivism arises out of a need of national survival.

The notion of 'sense of community' is critical in understanding the Maltese culture and its collectivism. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), this phenomenon encompasses four elements. The first element is *membership* that provides members with a sense of belonging. Inherent in this membership is a sense of relatedness and intimacy. It also provides boundaries, which at one level generate a sense of intimacy; at another level they generate painful feelings of rejection and isolation. The second element is *influence* that is bi-directional. On one hand, the community influences its members; on the other, its members influence the community. The pressure for conformity is therefore very strong. The third element is *integration and fullfilment of needs*. According to McMillan and Chavis, community membership provides reinforcers, such as status, competence, and shared values that enhance the individual's membership. The fourth element is a *shared emotional connection*, which include honour, humiliation, and a spiritual bond. Such an emotional connection is usually generated from shared events, often crisis.

This sense of community in Malta has prevailed over the year. It has been manifested in numerous daily life experiences, including the religious rituals that were held on a daily basis. Until the 1970's people, for example, would attend church at least

twice a day. Congregating outside their homes, chatting together, even praying together was a common practice. In the rural villages, during wheat and grape harvesting, the sense of community was very much apparent, with people helping each other in the fields. This was the experience of the author of this thesis.

Contemporary Maltese society is still characterized by the connectedness at a community level. This is manifested in times of religious celebrations - joy and sorrow. In examining this issue in relation to the Maltese culture, Tonna (1993) argued that "Our response to the challenge of our size, resources and weight has been to pull together as a closely knit community…. Mutual dependence led to solidarity. Through it our culture is becoming more of a home where we share what we have and we receive what we do not have" (p. 118).

The Maltese language also manifests an element of collectivism. Expressions, such as *tagħna f'tagħna* (What is yours is ours), *Alla magħna* (God is with us), *għandna mmorru* (let's go), are evidence of such a social phenomenon. First-generation Maltese-Australian immigrants who participated in Proctor's study (1998) to explore collectivism in Malta also identified the first two expressions as a reflection of collectivism in Malta. This sense of collectiveness at a community level is also depicted in the opening words of public speeches, such as sermons: "*Għeziez ħuti Maltin…."* (Dear Maltese brothers and sisters…).

The sense of belonging that is a characteristic of a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is highly prevalent among the Maltese both at an individual level in relation to the family (Abela, 1991) and a community level. "I think that the Maltese sit more with **'we belong therefore we exist,' than 'you think therefore you exist' …. Perhaps the thing that we value is belonging**" (Proctor, 1998, p. 45, original emphasis). The need to belong has also been identified amongst second-generation adolescents in Australia (Proctor, 1999).

Collectivism in Malta goes beyond a sense of community. Inherent to the Maltese culture is the notion of gossip. It has been argued (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994) that this social phenomenon in Malta is a means of social control. Social expectations, traditional values, and beliefs are continuously reinforced for fear of discrimination and shame within the community. By the same token, these mechanisms are at work in upholding honour

within both the domestic and public spheres. Hence, the code of honour and shame are entrenched in the Maltese culture (Abela, 1991; O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994) and reinforced through gossip. This experience of collectivism has a number of implications with regards to the psychological well-being of the Maltese people. Feelings of shame are not uncommon when diverging from the norms. So are feelings of apprehension in case '*li taqa' fl-ilsien in-nies'* (you become the subject of gossip). It can, therefore, be argued that gossip is also a means of control at an individual level, especially for women (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). This is in line with the sense of community model as proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986). According to this model, the *shared emotional connection* has an element of shame that is bound to deter its members from diverging from its norms. The community in Malta seems to have a strong psychological hold on the individual who is indirectly controlled by the community's expectations to conform. One would wonder whether the individual behaves in his or her own interests or those of the community. At this stage only speculations can be made since no investigations have been done in this area. However, the expression *'għall-għajn in-nies'* [1] which is very colloquial seems to support such speculations.

Besides social control, gossip has another function (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). By reinforcing social values it generates a sense of cohesion and integrity within the community. Common social and religious values bind the community together at a deep, cultural level. They generate and perpetuate a sense of community that is grounded in emotional ties. One could argue that gossip in Malta is both the ends and the means of collectivism throughout the islands. As ironic as it may sound, at one level there is a sense of connectedness and solidarity. At another level, however, there is an element of distrust inherent in gossip to the extent that confidentiality and anonymity are lacking (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994).

Such elements of culture may impinge on the life satisfaction in native Maltese (and to some extent Maltese-Australian adolescents). At one level, these adolescents may have a high level of perceived support in times of stress. Such a

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1. There is no equivalent translation of this expression in English. However, it implies that people behave in a particular way because of being scrutinized by other people

perception is likely to minimize the experience of loneliness that in turn promotes life satisfaction among adolescents (Neto, 1995). Through such a collective society, their life satisfaction may also depend on external factors. Norms may play an important role in how they feel about life in general. In fact, Suh and associates (1998) found that whereas in individualistic societies emotions rather than norms which significantly contributed to life satisfaction, in collectivistic societies norms and emotions were equal contributors. At another level, the lack of confidentiality and anonymity that arise as a result of gossip amongst the Maltese community may act as a deterrent to establishing meaningful relationships that are essential for their psychosocial development and the subsequent promotion of life satisfaction.

Some of these implications could also be applicable to Maltese-Australian adolescents. Both the psychological assets and liabilities inherent in the collective orientation in Malta could be a legacy from the past that has been passed by their parents and the Maltese-Australian community. Their social support network system, for example, may be enhanced or impeded by the relational skills (or lack of such skills) that they may have been inherited from their parents. The lack of trust at a community level may generate a sense of being unsupported outside the family circle.

### 5.5 Religion

Religion, based on the teachings of the Catholic Church, is deeply entrenched in the Maltese culture. Christianity in Malta dates back as far as 60 AD with the shipwreck of St. Paul on the islands on his way to Rome. The Maltese celebrate once a year this event that is also documented in the Bible. Other religious celebrations include the village '*festa'* which is in commemoration of the village patron saint and which takes place annually in a highly fashioned way, both religiously and socially. The significance of religion is also very much reflected in the high number of churches and niches that are found on the islands.

Religious values and beliefs in contemporary society still permeate in all aspects of life, especially the family. According to Abela (1994) most Maltese people (95%) think that it is important to celebrate marriage in conjunction with a religious service.

Most married partners still share religious attitudes (86%) and moral standards (87%), while 85% think that the church in Malta is giving adequate answers to the problems of family life. It has even been argued (Tabone, 1987) that in Malta "family solidarity finds its foundations in the involvement of the Church in family life" (p. 152). As the primary agent of socialisation, therefore, the Maltese family generates, perpetuates, and transmits family values, morals, and beliefs that are traditional, in accordance to the Catholic Church. In fact, religion has been identified as the strongest predictor of the traditional value orientation amongst the Maltese (Abela, 1991).

Religion may have significant impacts on life satisfaction on the Maltese community. It has been argued (Pargament & Crystal, 1995) that religion has both beneficial and adverse effects on personal and societal well-being. Religious activities, for example, may reinforce a sense of belonging within the community, thereby providing an opportunity to experience emotional connectedness. Indeed, a study (Hintikka et al., 2001) found a positive correlation between religious attendance and life satisfaction among the general population in Finland. Religious beliefs of a loving God may also provide solace, comfort, and hope in times of adversity (Pargament & Crystal, 1995). Indeed, turning to God and other religious figures as a 'surrogate parent' is very likely when people feel insecure (Kirkpatrick, 1992). At a community level, religion and spirituality have the potential to influence the domain of community building (Maton, 2001) through shared values and beliefs. As such, it may provide a consolidated communal sense of identity.

Religion, however, may also have adverse effects at an individual level. From a sociological perspective, it is well established in the literature (e.g., Giddens, 1985) that as an institution, the Church is a means of social control, maintaining, and perpetuating the status quo. Being so patriarchal, it also tends to favour the oppression of women, relegating them to their stereotype sex roles. The personal narratives of three women (Mulvey, Gridley, & Gawaith, 2001) who grew up Irish-Catholic are a case in point. These women's stories address experiences of dominance and oppression that have shaped their personal and professional lives. It has been argued (Pargament & Crystal, 1995) that from a psychological perspective, religion can serve defensive roles. It is a

form of escapism, denial, avoidance, passivity, and dependence. As such, it can have adverse effects on the psychological development of the individual.

To date, no systematic study has been conducted among the Maltese, both in Malta and abroad, to explore how religion and spirituality affect people's psychological well-being given that religion permeates all aspects of their lives.

## 5.6 The Maltese Family

The typical family comprising husband, wife, and children is still prevalent in Malta. This type of family, which is endorsed by a Catholic matrimony, is not only characteristic of the Maltese culture, but is also a value in itself. On one hand, children are considered to be important for a successful marriage; on the other, most Maltese people think that children require both parents in order to grow up happily (Abela, 1995). Consequently, the family holds a very prominent position, not only at a societal level, but also at an individual level. In fact, most Maltese people (94%) regard the family as highly important (Abela, 1994). According to Abela, this is also manifested in the high level of trust within members of the family as well as satisfaction with home-life that was found among the respondents of his study. The notion of the Maltese family is not limited to the nucleus family – it includes the extended family that is highly regarded by the Maltese.

### 5.6.1 Maltese Traditional Family

That the traditional family is highly valued in Malta is widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Abela, 1991, 1995; Tabone, 1995; Vassallo et al., 2002). Sex role stereotype behaviour is still prevalent. The majority of men, for example, were reported to be the head of the family in the 1995 census (Vassallo et al., 2002). These authors also found that between the ages of 25-44 years of age, only 13.01% of women were in the workforce in 1999. Although this rate is small relative to the rate of women in the paid workforce in other countries in Europe (Vassallo et al., 2002), it may be very significant. Crossing stereotype boundaries can be challenging or perhaps threatening for Maltese women joining the workforce. In addition to the paid work, they still have the responsibility of the bulk of the domestic chores. Indeed, studies (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1995) found that the division of labour within the domestic sphere is pervasive.

As a traditional society, Malta is also imbued with a patriarchal system, characterised by the submissiveness of women. This complicates women's roles and expectations both within and outside the home environment. "Thus, Maltese women are bound by the convergence of three ideas: the role model for women set by the Catholic church, the code of honor and shame, and the myth of the sacred woman. These ideas interact to reinforce one another and to place women at the same time in a position of importance and influence, as well as a position of subservience and subordination" (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994, p. 374). Such a situation can create inner conflicts that can jeopardise the life satisfaction of women.

In spite of the traditional characteristics of the Maltese family, the distinctions between husband-father and wife-mother roles in relation to power are not clear-cut. Although Malta has been considered as a patriarchal society, it has also been argued (Tabone, 1991) that "Matriarchal customs characterise the Maltese society" (p. 105). Vassallo (1994) and Tonna (1996) also echoed this view. Matriarchy in Malta dates back as far as the neolithic age. Four great temples at *Hal Tarxien, Hal Saflieni, The Hypogeum* and Ġ*gantija* had been excavated over the years. In these temples, statues of obese women, thought to be of the fertility goddesses were also found (Bonanno, 1987). Such remnants are evidence of the sacredness of women during that era (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). Vassallo (1985) also identified traces of matriarchal elements in contemporary Maltese society through the informal power exerted by women within the family.

For the purpose of this thesis, the identification of the typology of the family system (Minuchin, 1974) within the Maltese family is crucial. So far, no studies have been conducted to explore the Maltese child-rearing styles and practices in relation to the possible typologies proposed by Munichin. However, the Maltese culture indicates that parents are likely to be authoritarian in their approach. As already argued, the Maltese culture reflects a high level of collectivism. Research (Kemmelmeier et al., 2003) indicates that there is a positive relationship between authoritarianism and collectivism. In addition, the Maltese family is imbued with religious values and beliefs. Given that traditional religions portray God as authoritarian (Altemeyer, 1996) and given that the Maltese (especially older generations) are strictly traditional, the possibility of a correspondence between the authoritarian parents and an authoritarian image of God is

high. Indeed, Birgegard and Granqvist (2004) found a correspodence between attachment to parents and God. The notions of sin and hell and the perception of God as a judgemental figure are highly prevalent among the Maltese. The 'law and order' mentality that reflects authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1996) is also pervasive in Malta. Corporal punishment, for example, is still acceptable (Cole, 1994). The authoritarian approach which Maltese parents are likely to endorse, would have a significant impact on the life satisfaction of their children.

Another important issue that needs to be taken into account is in relation to parental psychological control within the Maltese family. So far, no studies have been conducted in this area among the Maltese. However, a close examination of the Maltese family indicates that parental psychological control is likely to be high. Assuming that the Maltese family is traditional, it is likely to endorce an authoritarian approach that is characterized by psychological control. According to Silk, Morris, Kanaya, and Steinberg (2003) psychological control is intrusive, manipulative control that interferes with the adolescent's psychological and emotional development. The need to conform to social norms is critical within the Maltese society both at macro and micro levels. This is partly because this need is entrenched in this culture through a history of national survival, partly because of religious values and beliefs and partly because of the small size of the Maltese archipalago. The issue of gossip, for example, is quite salient. It is both the ends and the means of psychological control. This psychological control is likely to operate not only at a macro level, but also at a micro level. Through the code of honour and shame Maltese parents are more likely to enforce traditional values and beliefs by using psychological control. Indeed, the Maltese culture, including religious values and beliefs, indicate a high pervasiveness of guilt induction – a strategy that characterizes psychological control (Barber & Lovely Harmon, 2002). Abela (1991), for example, found that the Maltese, compared to other European countries, reported higher levels of guilt.

Although the traditional family is still predominant within the Maltese society, the ways that its values are experienced have changed. "Families today are smaller; enjoying a better standard of living; independent, although not isolated; more secular and more symmetrical, at least in theory" (Tabone, 1995, p. 120). This transition has been gradually

taking place (Tabone, 1987). Although a small percentage of families have shifted towards the post-traditional end of the traditional-post-traditional continuum, these changes cannot be ignored, especially as native Maltese adolescents, unlike their parents, started to embrace non-traditional values. Since the current investigation includes the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents living in Australia, it is also important to point out that their parents and/or grandparents who most likely immigrated before the early 70's come from a Maltese traditional family. Therefore, the values, morals, and beliefs that they have transmitted to their children most likely have been traditionally oriented.

### 5.6.2 Relationships within the Family

The Maltese family is regarded as close knit, comprising a nuclear and an extended family. Solidarity and stability are central to this institution, with disunity in the family being regarded as a dishonour and shame. Members are expected to maintain and enhance its unity in any possible way, an expectation that encompasses a high degree of respect and support between the members. The notion of respect is, therefore, intertwined with the unity of the family (Tabone, 1994). Children are at the heart of the Maltese family; parents are expected to do anything for their children even if it involves self-sacrifice. Children are expected to love and respect their parents, irrespective of their faults (Abela, 1991). Members of the extended family are also expected to respect and support one another.

Although during these last few years the family has been going (and still is) through a transition at a sociological level (Tabone, 1987, 1995; Vassallo et al., 2002), family ties are still prominent (Abela, 1999). The Maltese still adhere to the value of unity within the family both theoretically and practically (Tabone, 1995). Although separation is permitted, divorce is not legalized expecially if the Church consummates the marriage. The strong family ties are also reflected in family gatherings such as weddings, christenings, and other celebrations. In addition, Tabone's study revealed the strong ties that still exist between young families and their families of origin, even when the former go and live in another village.

So far, research among the Maltese family has mainly been conducted from a

sociological perspective (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1987, 1995; Vassallo, 1985; Vassallo et al., 2002). Therefore, the implications of the interpersonal relationships between parents and children on the psychological well-being of its members are lacking. Further research is required.

### 5.6.3 Conflicts within the Family

Like any other family, the Maltese family is afflicted by conflicts between its members. Vassallo (1985) argues that when conflicts arise, couples tend to speak their minds and sometimes rows over trivial things tend to erupt. However, these do not tend to last for long. This could be partly due to religious values with regards to mutual respect between husband and wife, and partly due to a harmonious life that is highly regarded for the solidarity and stability of the family. Under such circumstances, the resolution of conflicts can be questionable with regards to the psychological well-being of the individual concerned. Instead of discussing disagreements, the Maltese, especially women, tend to sweep things under the carpet, fearing further eruptions. Sultana and Baldacchino (1994) argued that the Maltese tend to mute "hostility, containing disagreements and avoiding disputes…" (p. 17). Contrary to Abela's (1998) argument that such a tendency of 'making up' enhances the bond between the couples, it can be argued that such an approach can lead to passive anger and emotional distancing (Johnson, 2003).

This type of parental practice with regards to unresolved conflicts can impede the satisfaction with life of the children, especially during adolescence when parent-child conflicts are more likely to arise. To date, no studies have been conducted with regards to parent-child conflicts in Malta. However, like in any other culture, parent-child conflicts within the Maltese family are likely to occur especially during adolescence. What is questionable is the resolution (or lack of resolution) of these conflicts. The above discussion about interparental conflicts can be extended to parent-child conflicts. It is possible that parent-child conflicts remain unresolved since harmony within the family is highly valued (Abela, 1991). The implications of these unresolved conflicts require an investigation especially in contemporary society in which adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs may be different from previous generations.

## 5.7 The Immigration Experience in Australia

The investigation of the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents requires an historical account of the immigration experiences of their grandparents and/or parents. According to Berry (1997) these experiences play a significant role in the acculturation process of the parents and their children.

Although Maltese immigration in Australia dates back as far as the 19th century, it was not until 1947 that immigration started accelerating at quite a steady pace. During the period 1947 and 1986, the number of Maltese-born people in Australia increased from 3,238 to more than 60,000; and most of this increase took place between 1949 and 1961 (York, 1986). After the Second World War, the Maltese government was confronted with two problems: unemployment and a dramatic increase in birth rates. This situation created a lot of tension not only among the islanders, but also among government officials. One solution to these problems was emigration to another country. At the time, the Australian government wanted to attract a substantial number of immigrants. Assisted-passage schemes were offered to a number of countries, including Malta and this was an incentive for the Maltese to immigrate to Australia.

During the first five years since the assisted-passage scheme was introduced, 5000 Maltese immigrated to Australia, settling mostly in Sydney and Melbourne (York, 1986). At first Maltese immigrants were mostly men, including married men, who left behind the family back home. It was not until the early 1950's when migration of the Maltese family was actually preferred by the Australian government (Chetchuti, 1986). When the latter realized that the immigration of the whole family would be beneficial for permanent settlement, members of the family who were still in Malta, were encouraged to join their husbands, so were new families. Many husbands emigrated months before to find accommodation for the families, who joined them later. This became known as 'chain migration' (York, 1986), involving extended families and people from the same village.

During the immigration experience, the Church played a very important role. When travelling by sea, Maltese immigrants were accompanied by a priest to look after their spiritual needs. Within a few years, priests settled in Australia primarily to do

pastoral work amongst Maltese migrants. However, their mission went beyond the spiritual welfare of these people. Referring to members of the Maltese Society of St. Paul (MSSP), Micallef (1998) argued that "MSSP members have acted as job-hunters, accomodation- seekers and even match-makers" (p. 67). Parishes were established in those suburbs that were highly populated by the Maltese. The missionaries of St. Paul, for example, established the St. Bernadette's parish in the Western suburbs. The Augustinian nuns also built a convent and later on started running a primary (elementary) school. Such an environment not only catered for spiritual needs, but it also created a culturally conducive niche where Maltese immigrants would feel comfortable, at least in part, expressing their traditional culture.

As an ethnic minority group, the Maltese in Australia were confronted by a number of problems during their acculturation process. During the period from around the 19th century till the end of the Second World War, the Maltese had an extremely low profile. They were outcast by Australians who considered them as 'the Maltese invaders'. At one stage they were even nicknamed 'The Black menace' (Azzopardi, 1983). Frendo (1986), in questioning the self-image of the Maltese immigrants in Australia, identified quite a low profile that was manifested in the low retention of the Maltese culture, including the Maltese language. As no systematic studies have been conducted in this area, it is not known how such a low profile may have affected the acculturation process. It is possible that such a negative stereotype image could hinder the identification of the Maltese culture.

In examining the experience of Maltese immigrants in Australia, Cahill (1998) argued that they were in fact 'environmental refugees'. After World WarΠ, Malta was becoming overpopulated and job opportunities were highly lacking. The Maltese were, therefore, 'forced' to immigrate and seek a better future in other countries, such as Australia. Being forced to leave their country, they were also "work refugees driven from their homeland by their unemployment or potential unemployment situation" (p. 28). Such circumstances, according to Cahill, would create a 'refugee mentality', which among other things would foster feelings of guilt for leaving their family and friends behind. "…the "eternal sadness" for their homeland, that most immigrants carry in their hearts" (p. 25) has frequently been identified by myself through my interactions with

first-generation Maltese-Australian immigrants over these last 30 years. Although many of them have been in Australia for about 50 years, they still express feelings of loneliness and alienation, using Malta as a focal point of reference. *"Għax hawnhekk mhux bħal Malta* [Because here it's not like Malta]" they would often lament. This is usually followed by an expression of a wish to go back home for good. However, the emotional ties with their children, who in many cases are married and have their own families, are so strong, that they cannot separate from their children to fulfill their wish.

York (1986), however, portrays a different picture. He argues that the "Maltese are capable of responding seriously to serious situations, but generally they are of a happy disposition. They live life to the full in Australia…" (p. 138). It is important to point out that York, who is a second-generation Maltese immigrant, is looking at the Maltese community in Australia through the eyes of an historian, within the context of their contributions in every facet of social life. His claim about the Maltese living life to the full is questionable. As no systematic study from a psychosocial perspective has been done in this area, such statements need to be interpreted with caution.

The Maltese immigration experience was exacerbated by the 'myth' that Maltese immigrants were "quite adaptable" (Briffa, 1998). It is true, as already argued, that the Maltese had demonstrated a tendency to adapt over the years. However, the past adaptations did not involve 'uprooting' as the immigration experience entailed. The Australian government had the erroneous assumption that the Maltese, being British subjects, were fluent in the English language, and that the Maltese culture was Anglo-Saxon in nature. Because of such assumptions, language and other cultural problems amongst the Maltese immigrants were not acknowledged, let alone met, and no special services or provisions were made to meet them. To this day, for example, no health related brochures are translated in Maltese, even in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, where there is a high concentration of Maltese born immigrants. According to Frendo (1986) "There have been, and still are tremendous unexpressed needs within the Maltese community" (p. 12).

It is possible that the Maltese, through this myth, were expected to adapt easily to the Australian way of life. Such an expectation could have eventually become a self-fulfilling prophecy, thereby adapting to such life, at least at a one level. The effectiveness

of this adaptation at a psychological level remains to be seen, since this area is still subject to investigation. However, concern about this possible 'superficial adaptation' has already started to emerge (Briffa, 1998). As a result of the cultural insensitivity of the Australian government, the Maltese may have had to contain their Malteseness. Consequently, "…we might expect to have a group of second-generation Maltese in Australia who contain their Malteseness locked deep within, who lack access to this part of their being, and who on the surface may seem quite 'Australian'" (Briffa, 1998, p. 80). Such a situation would entail a denial of the core elements of their identity. This could be threatening their sense of well-being, including their life satisfaction. In fact, Proctor (1998) found that "that when one's collective voice is silenced, or relegated to background noise, it possibly leads to sadness, grief, depression or other symptomatic expressions of alienation and emotional deprivation" (p. 46). There is already some evidence (Borg, 1999) that Maltese-Australian adolescents experience more stress and lower self-esteem than Anglo-Australian adolescents.

It seems that the family has played a role in encouraging the children to assimilate and adjust to the host country (Chetcuti, 1986; Frendo, 1986; Proctor, 1998). The low rate of retention of the Maltese language is a case in point. A study (Terry, Borland, & Adams, 1993) revealed that very few Maltese students attended language school classes to study Maltese. Although both parents and students that participated in the study were eager to learn Maltese the learning of the Maltese language at a secondary school level was undermined by both parents and students. Such a mentality could have been a legacy of the British colonised Malta when the Maltese language had a low status, compared to English.

Another way in which the family has encouraged the children to assimilate is by not sharing the family history with the children (Proctor, 1998). Proctor, for example, found that some of the participants in her study did not know much about their family personal history. For Maltese-Australian adolescents, such lack of knowledge can create emotional distance from their ethnic identity, an issue that becomes very crucial during adolescence.

## 5.8 The Maltese Family in Australia

Research on the Maltese family in Australia has been limited. However, from the available literature, a profile can be drawn up. The family is still highly valued by Maltese-Australian immigrants and is characterised by its solidarity which could have originated and been perpetuated by the heavy involvement of the Church in family life (Johnstone, 1994). The Maltese family "with its intertwining, ever widening and active system of relationships" (Azzopardi, 1983, p. 40) relegates each member to a network of kinships (Johnstone, 1994). This solidarity is very much reflected in times of joy (e.g., Christening, First Holy Communion, weddings) and sorrow (e.g., death of close relatives) when the extended family gets together.

Maltese-Australian family values are highly interrelated with religious values (Johnstone, 1994). In examining these two types of values, Johnstone drew parallels between the Catholic Church and the Maltese family in their patriarchal structure. Within the latter institution, the father being considered as the head of the family is the main person involved in decision-making (Johnstone, 1994, p. 33). The mother, who is entrusted with the general responsibilities of running the household, uses the 'Madonna image' as a role model. The patriarchal structure of the family in Australia is not surprising as Maltese-Australian immigrants are subjected to traditional values. There is no reference in the literature with regards to any matriarchal elements in the Maltese family in Australia. However this does not mean that such elements do not exist.

The internal structure of the Maltese family in Australia is also interesting. A very close relationship exists between mother and daughter to the extent that in many cases the mother becomes dependent on her. For example, in the early years of settlement in Australia, the mother relied on her daughter's advice in dealing with someone from another ethnic background (York, 1986). York points out that often daughters "were denied any independence whatsoever, even on taking up employment. It was only with marriage that the 'apron strings' would be relaxed" (p. 116). Although he is referring to the post war period, it is not known if the current situation is still the same. From personal observations, it seems that although the attitude of the mother towards her daughter joining the workforce might have changed, female offspring are still encouraged to be

dependent. Sometimes this dependency still continues, to a certain degree, even after the daughter gets married. Sons, on the other hand, are encouraged to be more independent, at least at the manifest level.

The issue of independence, however, is not clear-cut. According to Proctor (1998), who worked as a family therapist with Maltese families, adolescents do not want to be independent of the family. However, Proctor does not differentiate between emotional connection and independence. It is possible that these adolescents want to be independent, but at the same time feel the need to be emotionally connected. As we have seen, family ties in Malta are very strong. One would expect such ties to continue in Australia, especially when feelings of insecurity may have been exacerbated through the traumatic up-rooting via the immigration experience. As an ethnic minority community, the Maltese in Australia lacked solidarity (Frendo, 1986). Therefore, the solidarity of the family that can be both the ends and the means of a secure niche would have been crucial for their acculturation. As the issue of independence among adolescents has never been explored, it is not known whether dependence on the family is due to cultural and/or psychological factors.

Another issue related to parental practices within the Maltese-Australian family is the issue of psychological control. It has been argued (Borg, 1999) that this family is authoritarian in its approach. Therefore, the chances of endorcing psychologial control are high. Maltese-Australian parents in their attempt to pass on the traditional culture to their children are likely to use this parental style. Morover, through their own insecurities that arise from their up-rooting and their acculturation process and the fear of losing contol over their children, these parents are more likely to exert psychologival control over their children. This was a possible explanation put forward by Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) in relation to high levels of control reported by Chinese-Australian adolescents.

## 5.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Maltese culture is a unique and complex one. Being predominantly oriented towards a collectivistically culture, it differs significantly from European and other Western countries that are more characterised by an individualistic

culture. At the same time, Malta is in the process of modernization. The Maltese society, especially the younger generation, has started making a shift (albeit small, yet significant) towards the non-traditional end of the traditional-post-traditional continuum (Abela, 1991, 1999). These adolescents are, therefore, faced with a number of cultural issues in addition to the psychological and psychosocial issues that originate from the adolescence experience. Consequently, their experience of life satisfaction is likely to be different from that experienced by adolescents of other ethnic groups, including Anglo-Australian adolescents who come from a culture that is more individualistically orientated. Since no studies have been conducted among the native Maltese adolescents to examine how these adolescents are experiencing cultural and personal factors that are likely to impact on their satisfaction with life, further research is required.

Considering the culture of origin and the immigration experience, Maltese-Australian adolescents are confronted with the task of integrating both the traditional culture of origin and the host culture in order to optimize their level of adjustment. This task can be quite challenging and/or perhaps even threatening. Indeed, there is some indication that these adolescents are less psychologically adaptive than Anglo-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999). This has been partially attributed to the wide discrepancy that exists between these two cultures. The acculturation process of Maltese-Australian adolescents is likely to impinge on their experience of life satisfaction since the integration of both cultures is considered as the most adaptive acculturation strategy (Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996).

# Chapter 6

## Life Satisfaction: A Literature Review

### 6.1 Overview

Both theoretical and empirical findings indicate that a number of factors impinge on the life satisfaction of adolescents. These factors include family environment, ethnicity, gender, perceived social support, coping strategies, and ethnic identification. Some of these factors have already been identified in previous chapters. This chapter examines how some of these factors interact with each other and how they influence life satisfaction. The combination of environmental and personal factors is fundamental for the experience of life satisfaction among adolescents, both from developmental and cultural perspectives.

There are indications from various empirical investigations that demographic variables, such as ethnicity and gender play a significant role in the life satisfaction, even though that role is relatively minor (Diener, 1984; Heubner & McCullough, 2000). An examination of these two constructs will shed more light on how native Maltese (i.e. Maltese born and living in Malta) and Maltese-Australian adolescents are likely to feel about life in general. According to the reviewed literature, no research has been conducted among both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents with regards to life satisfaction, even though there is a general consensus among social scientists that this is a central component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984) and quality of life (Cummins, 1996).

Adolescents of Maltese origin may be experiencing life satisfaction differently from other populations. As already argued, these adolescents come from a traditional culture that is very different from the Australian culture. Contemporary Maltese society is still mainly traditional (Abela, 1991; Vassallo et al., 2002). As for Maltese-Australian adolescents, although they are influenced by the Maltese culture (Borg, 1999), they could be ‘culturally marginalised’, that is, as immigrants, they are in between cultures, the culture of origin and the host culture (Choi, 2001). This marginalisation is likely to create emotional conflict and struggle especially if the discrepancy between the two cultures is

large. It is also likely to generate feelings of alienation, as immigrants are part of neither the ethnic majority group nor the country of origin (Cauchi, 2002; Triandis, 2000). This situation may have serious implications on the psychological and the psychosocial development of immigrant adolescents.

## 6.2 Family Environment and Life Satisfaction

In this section, it is argued that the family environment plays a significant role in the life satisfaction of adolescents. Empirical findings consistently show that the family is a resourceful medium for the psychological and psychosocial development of adolescents. However, if these resources are jeopardized, life dissatisfaction is likely to occur. An examination of the family environment also requires a cultural approach as childrearing practices and their impact on life satisfaction vary from one culture to another.

### 6.2.1 Life Satisfaction within the Context of the Family Environment

Many studies and reviews have demonstrated the centrality of the family in the socialisation of children's behaviour and in their psychological well-being (e.g., DeVos, 1980; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Indeed, it has been argued (Ianni, 1989) that the family is the cornerstone on which the adolescent's formation of self is based, so that the guidance from parents "is the first step in providing congruence and continuity for the adolescent transition and in developing the attachments which produce positive social bonds" (p. 75). As children move to adolescence, the family is still the major agent of socialisation and development (Foxcroft & Lowe, 1995; Gecas & Seff, 1990).

It is well established in the literature that the family environment is crucial for the psychological functioning of adolescents (Formoso, Gonzales, & Aiken, 2000; Freeman & Bradford Brown, 2001; Moos & Moos, 1986; Shek, 1997, 1999, 2002; Quatman & Watson, 2000). Critical issues include bonding and emotional ties (Freeman & Bradford Brown, 2001; Henry, 1994; Van Wel, Linssen, & Abma, 2000); connectedness with parents and siblings (Heaven, Searight, Chastain, & Skitka, 1996); self-disclosure with parents (Papini, Farmer, Clark, Micka, & Barnett, 1990; Sim, 2000); independence (Heaven et al., 1996); autonomy and control (Roer-Strier & Rivlis 1998; Seibel &

Johnson, 2001); interparental conflicts (Nilzon & Palmerus, 1997; Roer-Strier & Rivlis, 1998); parent-adolescent conflicts (Borg, 1999; Shek, 1997, 1999; Sim, 2000); hassles with parents (Ash & Heubner, 2001; Sim, 2000); stressful family situations (Kobus & Reyes, 2000) and parenting styles (Jones, Forehand, & Beach, 2000; Shek, 1997; Sim, 2000; Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001). These issues need to be dealt with effectively by adolescents otherwise they can have adverse effects on their life satisfaction.

By the same token, the family environment can be a rich resource for the well-being of adolescents. Family resources encompass a variety of social and psychological assets that hold the potential to contribute to adolescents' satisfaction with life. Self-concept including self-esteem, for example, is harnessed within the family environment (Leung & Leung, 1992; Quatman & Watson, 2001). So is social identity (Roccas, Horenczyk, & Schwartz, 2000). Parental support also plays an important role in their experience of life satisfaction during this stage of development. It has been argued (Scabini & Cigoli, 1997) that it is important for the family to leave the "youngsters free but not alone" (p. 612) as they try to negotiate new relationships and to balance autonomy and independence (Heaven & Goldstein, 1996). Social activities with members of the family also seem beneficial for the social adjustment of adolescents in helping them to avoid stressful experiences, or in making such experiences less stressful (Dumont & Provost, 1999). The family is also considered as a vehicle of religious and spiritual assets (Abela, 1991) that have been found to enhance the subjective well-being of adolescents (Hintikka, Koskela, Kontula, & Koskela, 2001; Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999).

Parents and family continue to play an important role in the lives of adolescents with regards to their psychological development and adjustment (Weigel & Deveraux, 1998; Van Wel et al., 2000). Research indicates that a functional family environment has positive impacts on the emotional health of children. For example, adolescents with close family relationships have reduced chances of engaging in risky behaviours (Shek, 1997). Warm intimate relationship with parents also tends to function as a protective factor against both internalising and externalising problem behaviour (Dekovic et al., 2004). The study by Suldo and Heubner (2004) also found similar findings. According to that study, authoritative parenting correlates negatively with adolescent problem behavior . O'Connor (1998) found that a sense of being connected to family had a significant

protective effect against suicidal thoughts or attempts and emotional distress in young adolescents. A warm intimate relationship with parents also tends to function as a protective factor against both internalising and externalising problem behaviour (Dekovic et al., 2004). Adolescents who experience high parental support experience less depression and less antisocial behaviour (Sim, 2000); while acceptance by both parents is significantly positively related to satisfaction with life (Seibel & Johnson, 2001). Aydin and Oztutuncu (2001) found that Turkish adolescents who perceived higher family cohesion experienced less depression. Using a hierarchical regression model, Henry (1994) found that adolescents who reported greater life satisfaction were older, perceived their families as being quite bonded, flexible, and supportive. Parent-child relationship had a greater impact on life satisfaction than school related relationship (Leung & Zhang, 2000). Furnham and Cheng (2004) found that maternal care was a significant positive correlate of self-esteem of Chinese students.

A non-conducive family environment to psychological well-being can impede subjective well-being of adolescents. Studies have shown that exposure to interparental conflict is a source of stress for children (Kjell & Kerstein, 2000) and related to child depression (Nilzon & Palmerus, 1997). Hassles with parents and peers were the best predictors of depression, whereas hassles with parents were the best predictors of antisocial behavior in Korean early adolescents (Sim, 2000). These hassles also have stronger direct effects on life satisfaction than acute negative life events (Ash & Heubner, 2001). Studies have shown that parental punitiveness (Henry, 1994), parental control (Seibel & Johnson, 2001), self-criticsm (Furnham & Cheng (2004) and traditional values that limit the autonomy of adolescents (Liebkind & Jasinkaja-Lahti, 2000) are negatively related to life satisfaction.

Some studies (e.g., Baumerind, 1990; Foxcroft & Lowe, 1995; Shek, 1997) have examined family environment and health-related behaviours. In Baumerind's study, six parental styles - authoritative, democratic, directive, "good-enough", nondirective and unengaged - were used to compare adolescents on various attributes of competence. Adolescents from directive homes - both authoritarian and non-authoritarian - lacked individuation, social consciousness and autonomy, had an external locus of control but

were not vulnerable to drug taking. Adolescents from non-authoritarian directive homes were the most preoccupied with seeking adult approval. They also used significantly fewer drugs and alcohol problems than other adolescents, except those whose parents were authoritative. Adolescents from authoritarian homes, in comparison with those from authoritative and democratic homes, performed poorly on verbal and mathematics achievement tests and manifested more internalising problem behaviour. Over the last decade, other studies have found similar findings. Authoritativeness, for example, enhanced adolescent adjustment (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Sellers, 1999; Jones et al., 2000; Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and was positively associated with active coping and negatively correlated with trait anxiety (Wolfradt, 2003). On the other hand, control was positively associated with stress (Weigel & Deveraux, 1998) and anxiety (Pettit & Laird, 2002).

Two concepts that have attracted the attention of a number of researchers are family cohesion and enmeshment. A study (Barber & Buehler, 1996) investigated these two constructs among a sample of 471 students in preadolescence and early and middle adolescence. According to the results, family cohesion was associated negatively with both internalizing and externalizing adolescent problem behaviour. Enmeshment was related with youth problems, especially with internalizing problems. Another study (Jarret, 2002) found that those who suffered from panic disorders reported significantly more enmeshment than the control group. It has been argued (Polivy & Herman, 2002) that those who suffer from eating disorders are greatly influenced by family dynamics, including enmeshment.

Family environment has also been related to self-esteem. Cheung and Lau (1983) investigated the family and school environment in relation to self-esteem among 713 Chinese students in Hong Kong. Participants were grouped according to high and low scores on each of the subscales of Family Environmental Scale (FES). Those who scored in the middle were not included in either group for better discrimination. Comparisons between the high and low group were conducted on self-esteem with significant differences being identified. Those groups that were high in Cohesion, Expressiveness, Independence, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational, Moral-Religious Emphasis and Organization were high in self-esteem, whereas groups high in Conflict

and Control were low in self-esteem. Further analysis revealed significant differences between the high and low groups on the three domains of the FES- Relationship, Personal Growth, and System Maintenance. Such findings indicate that family environment plays a crucial role in life satisfaction, and that these two variables are highly related.

Past research that has investigated the psychological well-being of adolescents in relation to the family environment has mainly focused on adjustment and other psychological outcomes. Very few studies have examined global life satisfaction in relation to the family environment for adolescents. One such study (Heaven et al., 1996) examined life satisfaction in relation to perceived family functioning, personality dimensions, and self-concept among 183 Australian adolescents. Perceived family functioning had the strongest positive correlation with life satisfaction. An inverse relationship was also identified between psychoticism and healthy family functioning. In addition, families perceived as non-supportive were associated with adolescents who experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression. Another study (Leung & Zhang, 2001) found that parent-adolescent relationships influenced life satisfaction more than school-based relationships.

The roles that both mothers and fathers play individually in the psychological well-being of adolescents are not clear cut. According to Seibel and Johnson (2001) both maternal and paternal relationships with adolescents are vital for satisfaction with life. More specifically, adolescents need to experience closeness to both parents in order to feel satisfied with life. In a longitudinal study, Shek (1999) found that both maternal parenting style and paternal treatment contributed to adolescent self-esteem, purpose in life, and general psychological health of Hong Kong Chinese adolescents. However, paternal treatment was the only predictor of satisfaction with life across time, for both boys and girls. Another study (Ben-Zur, 2003) examined the associations between personal and parental factors with subjective well-being in Hebrew-speaking Jewish adolescents. According to the results, positive relationships were identified between adolescents' levels of the internal resources of optimism and mastery and those levels reported by their fathers. In addition, the significant correlations between both the fathers' subjective well-being and internal resources, and the adolescent-father relationship, were stronger than the comparable mothers' variables. It was argued that,

although adolescents tend to spend more time with their mothers, they are more likely to consider their fathers as social models since they are the ones who exert more power in the family. In spite of the significant roles that fathers play in the life satisfaction of adolescents, research consistently shows that maternal support is more prevalent than paternal support (Fallon, 2001; Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999).

As the family environment from a psychological perspective has never been examined amongst native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents and because it is so central for their psychological well-being, it is important to investigate how the Maltese family relates to life satisfaction. As already argued, the Maltese family is highly valued both in Malta and in Australia. It has also been argued (Abela, 1991) that native Maltese (over 18 years of age) lead a relatively happy life at home. This was attributed to the family environment as an agent of peace and harmony and the fact that "the Maltese family is able to tolerate tensions and divisions within it, if not to reconcile them" (Abela, p. 236). It was also attributed to the highly religious practices that are embedded in family values. This is in line with other studies (e.g., Diener, 1984; Hintikka et al., 2001) that found that religious activities enhance life satisfaction. Such a legacy of the home environment could be inherited by native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents from their parents and could be enhancing their life satisfaction.

### 6.2.2 Ethnicity and Family Environment

Ethnicity plays a central role in family environment, with cultural norms extending to family dynamics and child-rearing practices (Jambunathan, Burtis & Pierce, 2000; Rosenthal, 1984; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992; Sam, 2000). A longitudinal study (Kupermine, Blatt, Shahar, Henrich, & Leadbeater, 2004) examined interpersonal relatedness with parents among White, Black and Latino adolescents. Black youths reported less positive relationships with parents. Inter cultural family differences have also been highlighted by comparative studies (e.g., Borg, 1999; Kwak, 2003; Rosenthal, 1984; Shek, 1997) that have investigated parent-child conflicts in various cultures. Rosenthal (1984) examined the influence of ethnicity on parent-adolescent conflicts among Greek-, Italian- and Anglo-Australian adolescents. Findings indicated significantly higher levels of conflicts in Greek and Italian families in Australia than in

Anglo-Australian families. Such a discrepancy was attributed to differences in family systems between the immigrant and the dominant cultures. In the Greek and Italian families, adolescents were subjected to more authoritharian, parent-centred control, whereas their counterpart peers came from families that were more oriented towards individuality, with a greater stress on personal freedom. Given that Greek and Italian adolescents in Australia are likely to be attempting to conform to the culture of Anglo-Australian peers, there is more potential for parent-child conflict. Attempting to conform to the dominant culture, some conflict with the parents' culture may also occur for Maltese-Australian adolescents. In fact, there is some evidence that they tend to experience more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999).

Maltese-Australian adolescents are faced with two sets of cultures: the old traditional one represented by family and friends and the new one which is transmitted through social forces, such as school, media and peers. According to a study by Conway (1984), Maltese parents tend to insist on Maltese cultural transmission, as most are first generation immigrants. On the other hand, the Maltese adolescents, who are mostly second generation, seem to embrace the dominant culture through peer pressure and conformity (Borg, 1999). The discrepancy between the two cultures is more likely to maximize parent-child conflicts. Thus, the adolescent's need for autonomy and independence may be exacerbated when these needs are incompatible with the parental demands, values and cultural expectations (Rosenthal, 1984). These studies suggest that the adolescent's experience may be strongly affected by the ethnic group of his or her family, which in turn would influence life satisfaction.

Another aspect of the family environment that has attracted the attention of cross-cultural researchers is cultural differences in family systems. It has been argued (Bottomley, 1979) that adolescents from Greek and Italian backgrounds have been brought up in families that have a positional control system, based on the authority of age and status seniority. The family as a whole is judged to be more important than the individual and boundaries between the family and other groups are very rigid. In contrast, Anglo-Australian adolescents come from a family system that is more likely to be oriented towards the individual rather than the family. Indeed, it has been argued (Triandis, 2000) that western countries, such as Australia, are more oriented towards

individualism. Family members are expected to take responsibility for their own actions, and to seek their own personal success and happiness.

To date, there are no studies done on the Maltese family system as such, however, it seems that the Maltese family, like the Italian family, is likely to have a positional system. Over the years, some aspects of the Italian culture permeated the Maltese culture (Azzopardi, 1983). The literature consistently indicates that the Maltese family is still traditionally oriented, both in Malta (Abela, 1990, 1994; Tabone, 1995) and in Australia (Drofenik, 2000; Johnstone, 1994), thereby being hierarchical, with the father (or the mother) as head of the family. With the Maltese family having a positional system, one would expect that the family environment of native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents would be different from that experienced by Australian adolescents.

Another line of cross-cultural research has focused on developmental expectations for children that seem to vary from one culture to another. According to Jambunathan et al. (2000) "…what may be viewed as an appropriate expectation in one culture may be viewed as delayed or accelerated development in another culture" (p. 405). Parental expectations with regards to children's autonomy are a case in point. Immigrant parents from the Soviet Union in Israel, for example, have been found to have a 'time lag' in allowing autonomous behaviour in their children compared to Israeli born parents (Jambunathan et al., 2000).

Family cultural differences manifest themselves in differences in ideologies of upbringing and most particularly in patterns of control (Bottomley, 1979; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Rosenthal and Feldman, for example, found that, according to adolescents' perceptions, issues of control were more salient for immigrant Chinese parents than for nonimmigrant Chinese, both in America and Australia. The former exerted more levels of control than their counterparts. Another study (Jambunathan et al., 2000) found that European American mothers, compared to Asian American, Asian Indian, and African American mothers, used an authoritative parenting style in which parents used inductive reasoning with their children, allowed choices for their children and encouraged them to be independent. Also, Asian American and African American mothers supported the use of corporal punishment more than the Hispanic and European

American mothers. Ethnic differences in social expectations of African American, Hispanic, and European American adolescents have also been identified in the United States (Yager & Rotheram-Borus, 2000). After video viewing scenes from everyday social encounters, students' responses were categorized in four domains – group orientation, expressiveness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness. Significant ethnic differences were identified among the groups in each domain. Hispanic and European American students reported significantly more group-oriented responses; expressive and aggressive responses were significantly more frequent among African American and Hispanic students; and assertive responses were more frequent among European Americans compared to African Americans.

Ethnic differences in child-rearing practices have also been identified in other areas. The study by Jambunathan et al. (2000) investigated parental attitudes towards childrearing practices among five ethnic groups of mothers in America. This study found a greater tendency of maternal role reversal with the children among Asian American, Asian Indian and African American than among European American and Hispanic mothers. The former also experienced lower empathetic awareness of their children's needs. Inappropriate expectations were also found between immigrant and nonimmigrant mothers. These differences were attributed to cultural differences. Another interesting finding (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) was an aspect of the family functioning that discriminated between immigrant and non-immigrant Chinese adolescents both in Australia and America. It seems that, according to adolescents' perceptions, the issues of control and achievement were more salient for parents of adolescents in the former group, whether they were in Australia or the United States. The authors argued that these differences could be a generalised by-product of the immigration experience.

Assuming that this is the case, it is important to examine the issue of control among native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents in comparison to Australian adolescents. For adolescents of Maltese origin the issue of parental control is of utmost importance. As already argued, these adolescents come from very traditionally oriented families that are strongly influenced by Catholic religious values and beliefs (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1995). The perception of God as an authority figure and a controlling agent is prevalent. On the other hand, the notion of God as a role model is highly valued

and emphasized. As such, it can be argued that authority and control are likely to be central to the Maltese family. Since no systematic studies have been done in this area among both native and immigrant adolescents, such speculations are tentative. Further research is required to explore this issue. The immigration experience and the subsequent acculturation process may exacerbate the issue of control for Maltese-Australian immigrants. This factor is likely to be influencing their life satisfaction.

### 6.2.3 Gender and Family Environment

Apart from ethnicity, gender is another factor that needs to be considered in relation to family environment. Given the developmental differences between boys and girls, the experience of adolescence within the family environment differs for male and female adolescents. For example, social expectations within the domestic sphere differ by gender (Yager & Rotheram-Borus, 2000); so does the time spent with parents (Fallon & Bowles, 1997), the type of relationships with parents (Formoso, Gonzales, & Aiken, 2000) and family stressor events (Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999).

Gender differences in the family environment are highlighted in the utilization of parent support. Whereas adolescent females are more likely to nominate peers as their primary support person, male adolescents are more likely to nominate parents (Weigel & Deveraux, 1998). Studies (e.g., Papini et al., 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) have shown that when parents are approached for emotional support, females tend to report less support from their father than males do. Research findings have also shown that female adolescents differentiate more between their parents (Helsen et al., 2000) and talk more to their mothers and less to their fathers than male adolescents (Papini et al., 1990). While no difference emerged between early and middle adolescent females, middle adolescent males were more likely to report seeking help from their fathers than were younger adolescent males. Another study (Helsen et al., 2000) found no gender differences in perceptions of parental support among adolescents.

Another aspect of the adolescent experience that seems to be influenced by gender within the family environment is parent-child conflict. Differences have been identified not only in the nature of the conflict but also in frequencies (Tomori, Zalar, & Kores Plesnicar, 2000). Tseng and Dimit (1974) found that males reported greater

attitudinal differences on issues relating to appearance and activities, while for females the differences related to equality in social and political function. During adolescence, there tends to be a significant pressure for girls to adopt traditional roles (Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984). Hence, they are likely to experience more parent-child conflicts than males. Boys' experiences in these conflicts tend to be consistent throughout adolescence, but girls tend to have a change in conflict frequency. For girls, conflicts appear to heighten in early adolescence, decrease in mid-adolescence and peak again in late adolescence (Smetana, 1988). As adolescents grow older, females report more frequent family troubles, whereas the scores for males decrease slightly (Seiffge-Krenke, 1995).

### 6.3 The Experience of Life Satisfaction among Immigrant Adolescents

Given that the experience of adolescence for ethnic minority groups is more complex compared to ethnic majority groups (Borg, 1999; Sam &Virta, 2003), it can be argued that life satisfaction would be different among these groups.

Due to limited studies on life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents, the following literature review will draw on studies that measured adaptation and adjustment – two constructs that are likely to reflect a satisfaction/dissatisfaction with life. Two commonly used measures, for example, are depression and low self-esteem. Both these constructs indicate dissatisfaction with life. Diener (1984) argued that people need to have self-esteem to be satisfied with life. Studies have also shown that self-esteem is a very important contributing factor in the life satisfaction of adolescents (Diener & Diener, 1995; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Neto, 1995), both in individualistic and collectivistic societies (Benet-Martinez & Karakitapoglu-Aygun, 2003). On the other hand, a person who is depressed, for example, is very unlikely to be satisfied with life. It has been argued that these two constructs are near opposites and negatively correlated with each other (Headly, Kelly, & Wearing, 1993; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Viinamaki, & Heikkila, 2001). Hence, depression is synonymous with unhappiness (Cheng & Furnham, 2002).

Most of the cross-cultual studies (e.g., Borg, 1999; Murad, Joung, van Lenthe, Bengi-Arslan, & Crijnen, 2003; Ponizovsky, Ritsner, & Modai, 1999; Ulmann & Tartar, 2001) that have been reviewed indicated that immigrant adolescents are more at risk than

adolescents from the ethnic majority group. Murad et al., for example, found that Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands experienced significantly more problem behaviour than their Dutch peers. These immigrants also scored much higher on the internalized problems scales, such as Withdrawn and Anxious/Depressed. Another study (Ponizovsky et al., 1999) showed that immigrant adolescents are at a higher suicide risk than adolescents from the majority ethnic group. Immigrant adolescents are also better academically adjusted than host national peers (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004).

Pertinent to the current investigation is the study by Borg (1999). That study examined psychological adjustment between Maltese- and Anglo-Australian adolescents between 18 and 22 years of age. According to that study, Maltese-Australian adolescents reported more parent-child conflicts and higher levels of stress than their counterparts. They also reported lower levels of self-esteem. Ethnicity was directly related to self-esteem and indirectly related to stress. That study also showed that Maltese ethnic identification was positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to stress. In the light of these findings, Borg highlighted the need to further examine mental health issues among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 6.3.1 Interaction of Ethnicity and Gender in Life Satisfaction

The reviewed literature indicates that both ethnicity and gender play an important role in life satisfaction. It is widely acknowledged in the literature that the cultural and psychosocial experiences of males and females vary from one country to another. It is not uncommon, for example, that women are not satisfied with their traditional sex-roles (Rosenthal & Grieve, 1990). However, the role that gender plays in subjective well-being across cultures is not very clear, due to mixed findings. A study (Simpson & Schumaker, 1996) found no gender differences in depression among Australian respondents (mean age 22.5 years). However, gender differences occurred in the Nepalese sample - men experienced more depression than women. Another study (Ullman & Tartar, 2001) showed that although no gender differences were found in global self-esteem, Israeli-born girls reported higher self-esteem than immigrant boys. Dukes and Martinez (1997) found

no interaction between ethnicity and gender on well-being, including purpose in life among Whites, Native American, Blacks, and Hispanics in Colorado.

The reviewed literature among studies that examined life satisfaction in relation to gender and ethnicity also indicates inconsistencies. Some studies (e.g., Dew & Huebner, 1994; Huebner & Laughlin, 1999) found a main effect between race, gender and life satisfaction. Another study (Sam, 2000) found no interaction between gender and place of birth among native and foreign-born Norwegian adolescents. Such inconsistencies need to be clarified through further research. In addition, although studies consistently show that the contribution of gender to life satisfaction is minimal (Heubner & Laughlin, 1999), further research is required among immigrant adolescents, especially among Maltese-Australian adolescents whose parents still seem to be very traditionally oriented (Drofenik, 2000). These adolescents may be subjected to stereotype sex-roles that may be salient for their experiences of life satisfaction.

### 6.4 Adolescents and Social Support

In examining the well-being of adolescents, a number of researchers have included social support which seems to be a valuable resource in adolescence (e.g. Goodwin et al., 2001; Lu, 1997, 1999; Natvig, Albrektsen & Qvarnstrom, 2003). The literature shows that there are two main approaches in studying this construct - the support system in the external environment and perceived social support. The present study will focus on the latter approach. While levels of received support are obviously important, considering the perceptions of adolescents with how supported they would feel in meeting their challenges, is also very important (Cassidy & Burnside, 1996).

While there is ample research on the role of social support in the subjective well-being of adults, there is comparatively less research among adolescents, even less among immigrant adolescents. Journeying successfully through adolescence requires the accomplishment of a number of developmental tasks that can be challenging or, perhaps, even threatening (Erikson, 1968). Research has consistently shown that social support is essential for the subjective well-being of adolescents as they navigate through these challenges (Lu, 1997, 1999; Natvig et al., 2003).

For adolescents from ethnic minority groups it is even more important to feel

supported during their acculturation process that becomes more salient during this developmental stage. While loneliness, for example, is a problem in adolescence across cultures (Neto & Barros, 2000), adolescents from ethnic minority groups are more vulnerable to loneliness (Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1995; Neto & Barros, 2000). It has also been argued (Smith & Carlson, 1997) that environmental and contextual risk factors are more prevalent among this subpopulation than among adolescents from the ethnic majority groups. As such, one would expect that the level of stress would be higher among adolescents from ethnic minority groups (Borg, 1999). The need for social support in relation to life satisfaction is very critical for immigrant adolescents.

### 6.5 Ethnicity and Social Support

In examining social support, it is also important to examine the role that ethnicity plays in relation to this variable. "The extent, composition and content of our social relationships are determined to some degree by cultural blueprint" (Vaux, 1985, p. 120). In fact, culture and values have been shown to be important in perceiving support among participants in the United States (Goodwin et al., 2001). In their study, Goodwin et al. found that adolescents from Georgia, a state that was perceived as a supportive and closely knit community, perceived higher levels of support than adolescents from Russia and Hungary. Cultural differences in connectedness and social support also emerged as a result of collectivism and individualism in adolescents from Indonisia and the United States (French, Rianasari, Pidada, Nelwan, & Buhrmester, 2001). It was concluded that people in collectivistic societies are likely to perceive higher levels of social support than people in individualistic societies. It can also be argued that the notion of relatedness is more salient for people who embrace a collectivistic culture. Differences in perceived availability and utilization of support were also found among Israeli Jews and Arabs (Pines & Zaidman, 2003). Israeli Arabs were less likely to discuss emotional problems or use professional help and more likely to use familial help. Israeli Jews were more likely to turn to a spouse, a friend, a professional, and a superior.

The experience of social support differs across cultures. Ethnic differences in group orientation (Yager & Rotheram-Borus, 2000) and the importance of culture and values in perceiving and receiving support (Goodwin et al., 2001) contribute to such

differences. A study (Lorenzo et al., 1995) examined social support of 99 ninth-grade Asian-American students. In comparison with 404 ninth grade Caucasian adolescents who attended the same school, the Asian Americans were significantly more isolated and more depressed and anxious. Significant differences were also identified in perceived social support. The Asian-American adolescents were significantly less satisfied with concrete assistance, provided advice, positive feedback, and availability of people to confide in.

For ethnic minority groups, the status within the dominant society is another important factor that comes into play in relation to perceived social support. It has been argued (Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2000) that relatedness, a critical element of perceived social support, is essential for individuals to meet their psychological needs when they are in lower-power position. Therefore, for members of ethnic minority groups who find themselves in such position, this issue is very salient. Also, whether a behavioural pattern is adaptive or maladaptive depends not only on the behaviour itself, but also on the context that it occurs (Cervantes & Castro, 1985). As already argued, higher levels of perceived support are likely to be found in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. This is not surprising given that interdependence is highly valued in the former cultures (Triandis, 2000).

### 6.6 Peer Support

The perception of social support from peers has been considered to be very important for the psychosocial and psychological well-being of adolescents. Indeed, research shows that adolescents spend the most intimate time with peers (Fallon & Bowles, 1997). It has been argued (Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001) that during early adolescence friends begin to value loyalty and intimacy more, becoming more trusting and self-disclosing. Such psychosocial development facilitates a social support network among youths. Parents and peers, however, differ in functional roles in relation to social support. Parents are sources of affection, instrumental aid, and alliance, whereas peers provide intimacy and companionship (Fallon & Bowles, 1997). It has been argued (Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999) that since peer support does not substitute for a lack of parental support, peer support can still be established irrespective of level of parental support.

Freeman and Brown (2001) found that insecure adolescents show a strong preference for boy/girl friend for primary attachment when parents fail to meet their psychological needs. Another study (Helsen et al., 2000) identified age and gender related patterns with regards to peer support among adolescents. For boys, peer support increased with age; whereas for girls a curvilinear effect was found indicating a rise in peer support in early adolescence, a decline in peer support in middle adolescence, followed by a rather stable level of peer support at older ages.

Although these studies focus on received support from peers, they indirectly emphasise the importance of perceived support in times of need. Adolescents need to feel supported even when they are not confronted by stressful situations (Schaefer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). It has been argued (Roberts et al., 2000) that in perceiving social support among peers (and family members) adolescents view themselves as *worthy* of such relationships – a view that is likely to enhance their self-esteem and their level of acceptance by their peers. Heights (2002) argued along the same lines. "….friends who offer companionship, a sense of worth, and a feeling of belonging may help to support adolescents during periods of high stress" (Heights, 2002, p. 831). Indeed, Heights' study found that dysfunctional attitudes were associated with depression and the relationship was moderated by perceived social support.

Pertinent to the current investigation of perceived social support among native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents is a study (Palmori, Pombeni, & Kirchler, 1990) that was conducted in Northern Italy. This study revealed that almost all adolescents, independent of sex, social class, educational, and occupational status belong to a peer group that meets fairly regularly for various activities. The majority of these peer groups congregate at street corners or at peers' houses seeking to entertain themselves. Besides joining these peer groups, adolescents may join other formalised groups, such as religious groups and sports clubs. These findings can be extended to the Maltese adolescents in Malta where, according to anecdotal evidence, such informal and formal groups are quite common. However, for the Maltese-Australian adolescents, this support is less evident. For example, in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, there are no Maltese youth clubs to meet their cultural and psychosocial needs. Therefore, their level of perceived support from peers of Maltese background is questionable.

## 6.7 Importance of Perceived Parental Support

Because of the perceived importance of the parent-child relationship for the well-being of the individual, considerable research has examined the influence of parenting behaviours on adolescent outcomes (Catanzaro, Normal, & Laurent, 2004; Freeman et al., 2001; Heaven et al., 1996; Henry, 1994; Van Beest & Baerveldt, 1999; Van Wel et al., 2000). Parental support encompasses an underlying confirmation of acceptance and approval of the adolescent as a person, thereby generating positive feelings of affection and intimacy, which are so crucial during the adolescence stage.

Perceived parental support plays a significant role in the psychosocial and psychological development of adolescents. As part of their development, adolescents are required to renegotiate their relationship with their parents and establish new relationships with peers (Helsen et al., 2000). This can create emotional upheaval if perceived parental support is lacking. In their attempt to gain independence and autonomy from their parents, adolescents also require perceived parental support. These tasks can be daunting for the individual as he/she navigates through unchartered territory, acquiring new roles that encompass increased distance from parents and more independent functioning. Independence and autonomy are most likely to occur within the context of close relationships between parents and adolescents. By perceiving their parents as supportive, adolescents indirectly feel that their parents approve of their attempts to acquire these tasks. In order to gain psychological autonomy (Roer-Strier & Rivlis, 1998), for example, adolescents need to perceive their parents as accepting and approving, in order to be able to voice their own values, attitudes, and beliefs without fearing any criticism or rebuke.

In establishing their own identity, adolescents also require perceived parental support. This task involves a “deidealization” process (Frank, Pirsch, & Wright, 1990, p. 573). The childhood representation of the omniscent parent needs to be challenged. The values, attitudes, and beliefs that have been imposed by the parents during childhood require questioning. Adolescents need to feel secure enough to shed off any differing internalized schema of these core elements of culture and incorporate a new one. This process involves inner conflicts, and related feelings of inferiority, shame, guilt, and rage

(Frank et al., 1990), especially if the discrepancy between the two sets of values, attitudes, and beliefs is broad. Perceived parental support, however, can facilitate this individuation process. By the same token, parents who are perceived as unsupportive are likely to interfere with this process, thereby jeopardizing the experience of separateness and self-directedness that generate a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction with life. Indeed, according to Scabini and Cigoli (1997) the "code of self" (autonomy and liberty of action) is becoming more valued than role and status among adolescents.

Perceived parental support is also likely to enhance the adolescents' self-esteem. As already argued, adolescents who perceive their parents as supportive tend to achieve their developmental tasks more successfully than those who do not. Success feeds off success. By mastering their challenges, adolescents are more prone to identify their strengths, thereby contributing to a positive self-concept and self-esteem. The above discussion with regards to perceived social support within the context of peer relationships and self-esteem (Roberts et al., 2000) is also applicable to perceived parental support. Hence, close and emotionally supportive interactions with parents are most likely to generate a sense of worthiness among adolescents. Indeed, Frank et al. (1990) found that adolescents who experienced greater closeness and less insecurity in relation to parents also reported greater self-esteem, more feelings of mastery, and less psychopathology. This positive self-image has the potential to maximize the adolescent's satisfaction with life (Diener & Diener, 1995). So does the increased likelihood of experiencing less psychopathology (Diener, 1984).

Young and Miller (1995) examined parental support in relation to life satisfaction. Three aspects of parental support were identified – intrinsic, extrinsic and closeness. Intrinsic support was the strongest predictor of life satisfaction. Both maternal and paternal intrinsic support was equally important in predicting life satisfaction. Moreover, adolescents' perception of how parents feel about them (i.e. loving them, being interested in them, appreciating them etc.) was the most important factor associated with their satisfaction with themselves and their lives. It was concluded that "Material rewards do not appear to have an appreciable effect on adolescents' overall satisfaction with life" (Young & Miller, 1995, p. 819).

## 6.8 Social Support and Life Satisfaction

The research on adolescent social support has indicated that support from others has been found to be beneficial not only to physical health but also psychological well-being (Lincoln, 2000; Weigel & Deveraux, 1998; Young & Miller, 1995). Social support has also been widely studied as a construct specifically designed to foster the development and adaptation of children and adolescents, both at home and within society at large. Parental support, for example, has been identified as a salient family resource in promoting adolescent adaptation to their new roles (Ash & Heubner, 2001; Henry, 1994) and in improving academic performance (Ash & Heubner, 2001; Leung, 2001; Richman & Rosenfeld, 1998). A negative relationship was also found between parental support and emotional problems (Helsen et al., 2000). Moreover, the literature on risk and protective factors clearly highlight the crucial role of support provided by the family and peers. Early adolescents who perceived high parental support reported less maladjustment (Sim, 2000). It has also been argued (Richman & Rosenfeld, 1998) that social support enhances self-esteem especially when under stress. By the same token, self-esteem tends to decrease due to lack of social support (Brage & Meredith, 1994). This can lead to life dissatisfaction.

One line of research has investigated how intimacy in friendship may contribute to psychosocial adjustment. The literature indicates that friend intimacy is related to high levels of self-esteem in adolescents. For instance, Chou (2000) found that this factor is positively related to self-esteem and purpose in life among Hong Kong Chinese adolescents. It is possible that such intimacy is likely to make them feel worthy of such relationships. The results in Chou's study also identified different aspects of intimacy that are positively related to self-esteem: giving/sharing, imposition, and common activities. From a developmental perspective, adolescents with intimate friends are better psychosocially adjusted than those who fail to develop such intimacy (Chou, 2000). For instance, adolescents with intimate friends experience less deviant behavior (Shek, 1997), perform better academically (Leung, 2001), and have less anxious and depressed feelings than those who have no intimate friends.

There is considerable research showing that satisfaction with social support is positively associated with mental health. According to the study by Demaray, Kilpatrick,

and Kerres (2002), a negative relationship was found between perceived parental social support and maladjustment in a sample of predominantly at risk Hispanic students.

Families that are perceived as non-supportive have been associated with adolescents who experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression (Heaven et al., 1996). Stress was was negatively related to parental support (Weigel et al, 1999). Helsen et al. (2000) examined social support from parents and friends among young people in the Netherlands, aged between 12 and 24 years. Parental support was related to emotional problems – the greater the support, the fewer the problems. However, support from friends did not have an impact. They also found that the connection between parental support and emotional problems interacted with age; the effect of parental support on emotional problems also decreased with age. A negative correlation was found between parental support and emotional problems in all ages; high level of parental support was negatively correlated, especially for young adolescents.

In examining social support among a Chinese sample, Lu (1997, 1999) found that social support is the strongest predictor of happiness. According to these studies, social support not only enhances happiness indirectly as a vital mediator of personal factors, such as extraversion, but it also influences the level of happiness by increasing it in times of adversity. The salience of social support was also highlighted in a longitudinal study (Lu, 1999) that showed that social support predicted overall happiness even when the baseline levels of subjective well-being and personality traits were controlled. Coffman and Gilligan (2002) also found that social support provided the largest contribution to the life satisfaction of adolescents.

Given that the experience of perceived social support is such a valuable asset to the life satisfaction of adolescents, it is important to examine this factor in relation to Maltese-Australian adolescents. As already argued, the challenges that these adolescents are faced with at this point in life are numerous. Challenges encompass both gains and losses that require adjustment and adaptation. Perceptions of social support are, therefore, paramount to meet such challenges successfully as they journey through adolescence. In addition, being rooted in a community orientated culture Maltese-Australian adolescents may also have a stronger need to perceive a high level of social support. The sense of belonging at a community level is not only highly valued, but is also important for

contemporary Maltese society and its quality of life (Abela, 1991). Adolescents of Maltese origin may also be enriched with a legacy of interpersonal skills that are critical in establishing a supportive network system.

### 6.9 Gender and Perceived Social Support

Evidence suggests that gender permeates the experience of social support. We live in a society in which traditional roles play an important part in establishing and maintaining close relationships (Vaux, 1985) and social interactions are influenced by such roles. For adolescent girls, for example, the 'social self' appears to be more salient (Ullman & Tartar, 2001). Masculine roles are considered to be 'instrumental', emphasising independence, competence and rationality. On the other hand, feminine roles are considered as 'expressive', emphasising on dependence, warmth, compassion and support (Bem, 1974). Such stereotypical characteristics, fundamental ingredients for social support, would suggest that the experience of perceived social support is a function of gender.

Although the direct study of gender differences in the perception and utilisation of social support among adolescents is relatively new, related research suggests that such differences exist. Studies in the areas of self-disclosure and relationship development (Stokes & Wilson, 1984), interpersonal skills (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003) and seeking help in times of stress (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990) have provided evidence that men and women utilise interpersonal relationships in different ways. Women tend to invest in intimate, emotional, and self-disclosing relationships. Men, on the other hand, engage mostly in social activities that do not involve intimate interactions. Recent studies suggest that important aspects of relationship development may differ between male and female adolescents. A study (Van Wel et al., 2000) found that bonding was more important for girls than boys. Gnaulati and Heine (2001) found that men tend to be more likely than women to deny needs for close attachments. According to one study (Stokes & Wilson, 1984) men must have a close relationship with another person before they can talk about their feelings or receive support; whereas women are more subject to disclosure, even if the relationship is not close.

Perceptions of sources of support also seem to differ by gender. Adolescent females are more likely to nominate peers as their primary support person; whereas male adolescents are more likely to nominate parents (Colarossi & Eccles, 2000; Weigel & Deveraux, 1998). As women are more inclined to maintain close interpersonal relationships with friends than men (Gnaulati & Heine, 2001), it is not surprising that girls perceive more support from friends than boys (Hensen et al., 2000). Gender differences in experiences of social support are also evident in the home environment. Parenting characteristics were found to be more important for girls than for boys (Shek, 2000). Van Wel et al. (2000) found that parental bonding was important for both girls and boys for their general well-being, however, it was more important for girls than for boys. Shek (2000) found that Chinese adolescent males perceived greater parental harshness than did Chinese adolescent females and adolescents in general perceived their fathers to be harsher as compared with mothers. Adolescents' perceptions of maternal responsiveness were higher than paternal responsiveness with fathers perceived as less demanding than their mothers.

Although literature on support among adults has indicated that women tend to seek more social support than men (Sarason et al., 1990; Stokes et al., 1984) the small amount of research on social support among adolescents indicates conflicting findings. Some studies (e.g., Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991, 1993) found that adolescent girls use more social support than adolescent boys. Girls report higher levels of perceived support (Schwarzer, Hahn, & Schroder, 1994) especially emotional support, (Rosenthal, Gesten, & Shiffman, 1986).

However, other studies are either partially congruent or incongruent with these findings. Frey and Rothlisberger (1996) found that although girls do not report a larger number of supportive relationships than boys, they tend to get more intensive emotional support from peers than boys. Helsen and associates (2000) found no gender differences in perceived social support. Fallon (2001) found no association between help-seeking behaviour and gender.

These inconsistences may be due to different approaches that were undertaken by researchers with regards to the issue of social support. Some researchers (e.g., Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991) for example, examined levels of concern, while others (e.g.,

Fallon, 2001) looked at help-seeking behaviour. Another viable explanation for these contradictory results is the lack of uniformity in conceptualising social support (see Cobb, 1987). Whereas some studies (e.g., Rosenthal et al., 1986) assessed social support in *specific* situations, other studies (Procidano & Heller, 1983; Sarason et al., 1990) assessed social support in *general* situations.

### 6.10 Coping and Life Satisfaction

The reviewed literature indicates that many academic scholars have focused on the identification of the basic dimensions of coping. Coping strategies are characterised by a variety of ways of coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984), for example, suggested coping has two major functions and there are two basic dimensions: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. The former is considered to include coping strategies that are constructive (e.g., problem focused and seeking social support); whereas the latter is considered as a non-effective way of coping (e.g., escape-avoidance and passive coping). Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) identified three dimensions - solving the problem, reference to others and non-productive coping.

Both theoretical and empirical evidence suggest that coping strategies play a significant role in subjective well-being of adolescents. There is growing evidence that the ways of coping with stress, for example, affect not only the mental health but also the physical and social well-being of adolescents. A study by Seiffge-Krenke and Klessinger, 2000) suggested a link between avoidant coping and depression. Passive and risky coping factors played a negative role in psychosocial health (Freeman et al., 2001). Constructive coping skills, on the other hand, play a positive role in subjective well-being. Problem-analysing and support-seeking strategies were related to psychosocial health (Freeman et al., 2001). Whereas approach oriented coping styles were linked with less depressive symptoms (Seiffege-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000). Problem-focused coping has also been found to be associated with alleviated depression (Gencoz, 2003). Passive coping and risky coping played a negative role in the adjustment of adolescents, specifically with psychosomatic symptoms (Piko, 2001). Piko also found that problem analysis as an adaptive way of coping was positively related to psychological well-being and negatively related to the frequency of psychosomatic symptoms. Seeking spiritual support has also

been identified as a coping strategy (Frydenberg, 1997) that has been negatively related to family stress (Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999). A more recent study (Clarke, 2002) found that the use of approach coping in response to controllable stressors was associated with higher academic performance, fewer internalising and externalizing behaviours and greater social competence. Gonzales, Tein, Sandler, and Friedman (2001) found that avoidant coping was positively associated with depression and poor grades. Avoidance coping has also been found to be a predictor of the involvement among a subgroup of adolescents with little or no prior involvement in risky or problem behaviours (Cooper, Wood, Orcutt, & Albino, 2003). Similar findings were found in another study (Ben-Zur & Reshef-Kfir, 2003) that examined risk taking and coping strategies among Israeli adolescents. According to the results, the use of avoidance coping strategies was related to high involvement in risk behaviours. Another type of avoidant coping, namely "intropunitive avoidance" (Garcia-Grau, Fuste, Miro, Saldana, & Bados, 2004, p. 61) that is characterized by self-blame, was closely linked to eating disorders among adolescent boys in Spain.

The reviewed literature indicates that coping strategies among adolescents have not been examined in relation to life satisfaction. On the basis of the above discussion, however, it can be anticipated that coping strategies play a significant role in the experience of life satisfaction.

### 6.11 Coping Strategies and the Experience of Adolescence

Apart from social support, the reviewed literature indicates that adolescents require a repertoire of coping strategies to be able to adapt to the many rapid physical and psychosocial changes that occur during this stage of development (Frydenberg, 1997; Frydenberg, Ramon, Kennedy, Ardila, Frindte, & Hannoun 2003; Frydenberg et al., 2004). Besides changes, adolescents need to deal with life events which seem to be inherent in the experience of adolescence, even more so for ethnic minority groups. A life event has been defined as "…any event occurring to an individual or family that has the potential of producing stress" (Plunkett, Radmacher, & Moll-Phanara, 2000, p. 356). Adolescents are faced with a number of tasks in addition to their developmental tasks. These tasks require effective coping strategies for their adaptation and psychological

well-being, more specifically with life satisfaction.

Researchers have used two ways in identifying coping strategies. One strategy deals with specific-situations and the ways the individual copes in such situations (e.g., Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Goodwin et al., 2001). The other one is more generalized and extended to different situations that elicit stress and require adaptation (Frydenberg, 1997). The present study focuses on the latter approach. Understanding what kind of coping strategies adolescents employ in dealing with tensions and stressors in general would be more appropriate to consider within the context of life satisfaction.

Coping strategies are influenced by ethnicity. The study by Frydenberg et al. (2003) has identified different coping strategies employed by adolescents in Australia, Colombia, Germany, and Palestine. Both Palestinian and Colombian adolescents reported more seek to belong, focus on the positive, social action solving the problem, seeking spiritual support, and worry strategies than Australian or German adolescents. Such differences in the employment of coping strategies could be attributed to different cultural experiences. In examining ethnic differences in coping with interpersonal stressors, Lam and Zane (2004) also identified ethnic differences between Asian and White American students. Asian Americans were found to be more oriented toward secondary control and less oriented toward primary control than White Americans.

As members of an ethnic minority group, immigrant adolescents are more likely to experience life events that are inherent in the acculturation process. In examining coping in relation to ethnicity, it is important to briefly examine the cultural stress experienced by these adolescents. Immigrant adolescents are subjected not only to normative adolescence which can be stressful in itself (Aneshensel & Gore, 1991), but also to other stressors such as cultural conflicts, negative stereotypes, and inferior status – factors that may compound the stress factor. Additional stress can also be experienced through developmental changes and the ethnic status of the individual (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). For example, issues relating to ethnic identity become more salient during adolescence and require successful resolution for the well-being of the individual. The coping repertoire is, therefore, crucial for these adolescents to deal with such stressful situations and the acquisition of life satisfaction.

Although much research has examined the relationship of the coping strategies to

various indicators of well-being, research on how adolescents from ethnic minority groups manage the tensions and stressors which are inherent in their psychological and psychosocial development is very limited. As already argued, Maltese-Australian adolescents are likely to experience more life events that require adaptation than Anglo-Australian adolescents and native Maltese. On the other hand, their life experiences are enriched with a culture that is embedded in a history of survival that could be influencing the coping strategies employed by these adolescents. Hence, findings from other ethnic studies cannot be extended to this subpopulation. The above discussion indicates that adolescents from different ethnic groups not only differ in the experiences of stressors, such as life events, but also in the utilization of the strategies employed to deal with these experiences.

### 6.12 Gender and Coping Strategies

Apart from ethnicity, gender also seems to be a determining factor in the employment of coping strategies and the subsequent effect that certain coping strategies have on the psychological well-being of male and female adolescents. In a study (Piko, 2001) support-seeking coping was a significant correlate of psychological well-being for boys, but not for girls. Whereas passive coping and risky coping played a negative role in the psychological well-being of both boys and girls. Passive and help-seeking coping strategies were used more by girls than boys. In addition, coping factors significantly correlated with illness episodes for boys, but not for girls. Fallon (2001) reported no association between help-seeking behaviour and gender. A study (Utsey, Poterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000) found that female African-American adolescents utilised the seeking social support strategy more often than African-American males. Female adolescents also reported greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies than males (Renk & Creasey, 2003).

As already argued, the experience of adolescence differs by gender. Indeed, research consistently shows that females are more vulnerable to life events (Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, Pappillon, 2002), developmental issues (Quatman & Watson, 2001) and stress (van Wel et al., 2000). Through such experiences they appear to have a wider range of coping strategies that correspond to the stereotyped sex-role behaviour. For example,

females tend to use crying and talking to a friend as coping strategies, a finding consistent across several studies (e.g., Blanchered & Bologni, 1995; Chan, 1994; Copeland & Hess, 1995). This could be a reflection of stereotypical expectations for females to be emotional and reach out to others. In fact, turning to friends has been considered as dependent (Feldman, Fisher, Ransom, & Dimiceli, 1995). Copeland and Hess also pointed out that females use more coping strategies that reflected self-reliance and a proactive orientation than males. Male adolescents on the other hand, prefer to deal with stress by using alternative activities, such as physical diversions and alcohol intake. Unlike girls, boys tend to rely on stress reduction activities or diversions that are consistent with sex stereotyped behaviour. In fact, Foxcroft and Lowe (1995) revealed that males (aged between 12-16 years of age) reported more behaviours associated with alcohol, hallucinogens, cannabis, and ecstacy use. These studies manifest gender differences in coping strategies that are congruent with sex-role behaviour.

Gender differences in coping strategies were also found in more recent studies. Girls used more self-defeating and self-destructive patterns of coping (Light, 2000). Similar findings were found in a longitudinal study among a German sample (Kobus & Rayes, 2000). In that study, girls scored higher in avoidant coping than boys. Other studies (Freeman et al., 2001) found that passive and help-seeking ways of coping were more common among girls. In cross-cultural studies (e.g., Chan, 1994; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990) the influence of gender on the use of coping strategies was similar. In the former study, support seeking in particular, was employed more by female adolescents than by their male counterparts in both Israeli and German cultures. Of particular interest is the finding that out of all the strategies classified as "active" women tended to use *only* support seeking more often than men. Overall, their coping style was more passive. This finding suggests that the relegation of coping strategies to stereotyped sex roles crosses cultural boundaries.

### 6.13 Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewed literature indicates that various factors tap into the essence of life satisfaction of adolescents. It has been argued that a family environment that is conducive to psychological well-being is likely to maximize the potential for life

satisfaction. So does a high level of perceived social support. Adolescents need to feel supported as they navigate through adolescence. In addition, they also require a repertoire of constructive coping strategies as they take on the challenges that are likely to generate a sense of satisfaction with life. The integral role that life satisfaction plays in their subjective well-being, in conjunction with the lack of research and the inconsistencies that are found in some areas of the literature require further research among adolescents in general, more specifically among native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents.

## 6.14 Aims of the current study

The general aim of the current study is to examine some of the issues relating to life satisfaction among adolescents across cultures – more specifically native Maltese (born and living in Malta), Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents from the same socio-economic backgrounds. This study also aims at assessing culture and gender differences in family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies. In addition, ethnic identitiy and identification is also examined amongst Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 6.14.1 Aims of Qualitative Study

To achieve these aims, this study will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. The first study is guided by the following questions: How do native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents feel about the Maltese culture? How are their traditional views impacting on their lives? How do they experience life in the home environment? In what ways do these adolescents experience social support? What coping strategies are they likely to use in dealing with difficult situations? What are the conditions that promote a sense of good feeling?

To address these questions, in-depth individual interviews will be conducted among both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents. The following chapter describes the data collection process.

### 6.14.2 Aims of Qualitative Study

The second study is guided by the following questions: Are there any differing

reported levels of life satisfaction among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents? In what ways do these 3 ethnic groups differ with regards to various aspects of life satisfaction? What are the conditions that facilitate life satisfaction among the three ethnic groups?

Predictions

It is hypothesized:

i) That there will be significant differences in the reported levels of life satisfaction between the 3 ethnic groups

ii) That Maltese-Australian adolescents will report lower levels of life satisfaction than the other 2 ethnic groups

iii) That native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents will experience significantly higher levels of family cohesion than Anglo-Australian adolescents.

iii) That Maltese-Australian adolescents will report significantly more parent-child conflicts than native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents

iv) That native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents will report significantly higher levels of perceived social support

v) That there will be significant differences in the coping strategies between the 3 ethnic groups. Native and Maltese-Australian adolescents will report more effective coping strategies than Anglo-Australian adolescents

vi) That male adolescents will report higher levels of life satisfaction than female adolescents

vii) That there will be an interaction between gender and ethnicity in relation to life satisfaction. More specifically, native female Maltese adolescents and Maltese-Australian female adolescents will report lower levels of life satisfaction than Anglo-Australian adolescents

viii) That the predictive variables of life satisfaction will be different for the 3 ethnic groups

(ix) That the predictive variables of life satisfaction will be different for male and female adolescents

# Chapter 7

# Method for the Qualitative Study

## 7.1 Introduction

Life satisfaction is a phenomenon that is prevalent across cultures. However, its experience varies from one culture to another (Diener et al., 1995; Diener, Suh, et al., 1995; Oishi et al., 1999; Sam, 2001). Adolescents of Maltese origin are, therefore, likely to experience life satisfaction differently from adolescents of other nationality, such as Anglo-Australians.

Coming from a traditional culture, child-rearing practices, for example, are different from those practised in other cultures. Also, Maltese family values and beliefs are grounded in religious practices that are still prevalent in contemporary society (Abela, 1991, 1999). It is reasonable to argue that the in-depth exploration of these and other issues is essential as the probability of their impact on the life satisfaction of adolescents of Maltese origin is high.

As immigrants, the experience of life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents is more complex. Maltese-Australian families are still traditionally orientated (Borg, 1999; Drofenik, 2000). In addition to the traditional culture, the process of acculturation is likely to have a bearing on the life satisfaction of their children. The discrepancy between the Maltese traditional culture and the Australian culture is high (Borg, 1999). Therefore, the acculturation process can be difficult. Research, for example, indicates that parent-child conflicts are more prevalent among this ethnic minority group than among Anglo-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999). Ethnic identification is also likely to be salient and complex for Maltese-Australian adolescents since they belong neither to the country of origin or the host country (Cauchi, 2002). Hence, it is essential to explore these issues among this ethnic minority group and find out to what extent they are influencing various elements of their life satisfaction.

The current study employed qualitative methods, namely in-depth individual interviews among both native Maltese (born and living in Malta) and Maltese-Australian adolescents. In conjunction with quantitative method of inquiry for Study 2 the view that

these two methods can be combined and used as a 'strategy of mutual corroboration' (Bryman, 1988) will be adopted.

## 7.2 Participants

### 7.2.1 Native Maltese Group

This group included native Maltese adolescents aged between 14-18 years of age, born and living in Malta. Both parents and grandparents were of Maltese origin. There were 10 females and 10 males. These participants were from the same socio-economic background, namely from a working class background. This was considered to be more convenient for the researcher since the students who attended the schools from which the participants were sampled were predominantly from this socio-economic class. The participants also came from intact families, that is, families in which children were living with both parents. They were recruited from 6 government-funded schools on the islands of Malta and Gozo. These schools were selected because of the high rate of students who fitted the required criteria.

### 7.2.2 Maltese-Australian Group

Participants in this group were Maltese-Australian adolescents living in Australia, aged between 14-18 years of age. Both parents and grandparents were of Maltese origin. There were 10 females and eight males, from the same socio-economic background as the native Maltese group. They were also recruited from intact families. Most of the participants were recruited from 2 government-funded schools and two Catholic schools in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. These schools were selected because of the high rate of students who fitted the above criteria. The other participants were recruited through Maltese social functions and through friends acquainted with the researcher.

## 7.3 Materials

A list of questions related to the areas of interest was used to facilitate the interviews (see Appendix A). These areas included the family environment, social support, coping strategies, and life satisfaction. The guiding questions were formulated from the reviewed literature and relevant theories. These included Erikson's theory of

development (Erikson, 1968), Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), a theory of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and Folkman's and Lazarus' theory of stress and coping (1984). For Maltese-Australian adolescents, additional questions regarding acculturation and ethnic identification were included in the list of questions. These questions were generated from Berry's model of acculturation (1984) and Phinney's (1992, 1993) theory of ethnic identity and identification.

## 7.4 Procedure

### 7.4.1 Rationale for the Qualitative Method of Inquiry

As the life satisfaction of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents has not been explored from a psychological perspective, it can be argued that this study was at an exploratory stage. As already argued, the Maltese culture is different from the Australian culture. Individual interpretations and meanings needed to be explored, taking into account the possibility of differences in concepts due to cultural differences. In-depth interviews were, therefore, required to investigate the life satisfaction of these adolescents.

The use of qualitative methods was also employed in order to identify the underlying issues with regards to how the Maltese and Maltese-Australian cultures may impinge on the life satisfaction of native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents respectively. Besides developmental issues, native Maltese adolescents in contemporary society are also likely to experience cultural issues that could impact on their life satisfaction. Through globilistion and tourism, these adolescents are pressured to adapt to individualistic values and beliefs that are at loggerheads with the traditional norms. Therefore, these issues needed to be identified through personal narratives.

According to Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, both the culture of origin and the host culture play a significant role in acculturation. Through the immigration experience and the contact with the host culture, the socio-cultural context of everyday life experiences of Maltese-Australian immigrants would be different from native Maltese and Anglo-Australians. For Maltese-Australian adolescents the infiltration, to a greater or lesser degree, of both the traditional and the Australian culture in their everyday life most likely is inevitable. As such, the acculturation process both within and

outside the context of the family environment needed to be explored. The exploration of the similarities as well as differences of experiences of native Maltese and Maltese-Australian in relation to family environment, social support, and coping strategies was also essential in order to elicit a better understanding of the life satisfaction among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 7.4.2 Personal Statement

In the present study, the credibility of the researcher (Patton, 1990) was taken into account. My personal background was considered to be quite beneficial for the current study. Being a first generation Maltese immigrant and having lived in Malta for 20 years prior to emigration, I was very familiar with the Maltese culture, including the language that I can speak and write fluently. Moreover, through my continuous close involvement with the Maltese-Australian community over these last 30 years since I immigrated to Australia, I was able to immerse in the everyday life experiences of this population and gain both hunches and insights at a societal level long before I embarked on this project. This generated a great interest in the current area of investigation. Also, being a mother of two young adults was of an advantage to me. The experience of adolescence within an ethnic minority group was not alien to me. Therefore, I had quite a good understanding of the issues concerned.

While qualitative researchers (e.g., Patton, 1990; Bryman, 1988) encourage the issue of subjectivity, this method of inquiry also raises the question of bias. The potential for bias in this study is acknowledged. However, the combination of both self-awareness about such possibility and the continuous monitoring of my own internal processes during the interviews as well as during the analysis could have minimised this potential bias. At the end of each interview reflective notes were either recorded in a journal or tape recorded. These included feelings, hunches, observations, impressions, problems, and any other additional information that was considered to be important in establishing a context for interpreting and making sense out of data.

### 7.4.3 Procedure

Prior to data collection, permissions was obtained from the Education Department

of Malta, Education Department of Victoria, the Victorian School of Languages, and the Catholic Education Office. Participants, both in Australia and in Malta were mostly recruited from the schools from which the sample for the quantitative study was drawn. Principals of prospective schools were sent a letter that included information about the research project. Once approval was sought, arrangements were made for data collection to take place. A letter that included two consent forms--for parents and students--was handed out, inviting students to participate in individual in-depth interviews. Arrangements were made to hold these interviews during school hours, including lunch-time on the schools' premises. The interviews of those participants that were recruited from other sources besides schools were conducted in private rooms in Maltese community centres.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with Maltese-Australian (n=18) and native Maltese (n=20) adolescents. Adequate measures were taken by the researcher to establish a good rapport with the participants, including spending a short time getting to know each other better. During this time a background briefing about the researcher was given, including fluency in the Maltese language. All interviews in Malta were conducted in Maltese. However, participants were invited to speak in Maltese, English or both. While interviewing participants in Gozo, the researcher spoke the local dialect to enhance the required rapport.

The purpose of the interview was explained to the participants. Issues regarding confidentiality were addressed. Participants were also reminded that participation was voluntarily and they could withdraw from the interview at any time. Permission to tape record the interviews was also sought. A set of questions was used as guidelines. Each question was introduced with a brief introduction and some concepts were clarified when required.

These interviews explored the experience of adolescence and issues that were relevant to the area of interest in this study. Six main areas namely, developmental issues, ethnic identity, the family environment, coping strategies, and social support were investigated. The interviews that were conducted amongst Maltese-Australian adolescents explored these issues within the context of the Maltese culture in Australia. Each interview lasted for about 1 – 11/4 hours. Participants were given the opportunity to

speak either in Maltese or English or both. However, most of the time Maltese-Australian participants spoke in English, while participants in Malta spoke in Maltese. Notes were taken during the interview. Reflective notes were also taken soon after the interview. The researcher transcribed the interviews and a subsequent analysis was conducted.

As the interviews were semi-structured, the first level of analysis involved predetermined themes that were generated through a number of theories. These theories included Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, family system theory (Minuchin, 1979), Folkman and Lazarus' (1984) theory of stress and coping, and Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation. The second level of data analysis was conducted by employing the question ordered matrix data process (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The columns represented each question, whereas the rows represented each participant. Through this method the columns were organised in sequence, allowing the researcher to view the responses both horizontally and vertically across the matrix. The researcher was, therefore, able to identify themes that emerged between the cells and to obtain an overall picture of each participant. This parallels "the case within display" which involves the conceptual clustering of the rows (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 151), thereby allowing the researcher to obtain more information about the participant/s that would not otherwise have been possible. According to Miles and Huberman, it also allows the researcher to find answers to "why" questions. This strategy was important for the current researcher who was trying to understand the dynamics of the life experiences of the participants both within and outside the home environment.

Initially, these two levels of analysis were conducted separately. However, in the thesis they are integrated because it is considered to be a more appropriate strategy for the identification of the contexts in which the themes in the second level of analysis emerge from. This approach also helped the author to focus and organize the information coherently.

# Chapter 8

## Results of the Qualitative Study

In order to explore aspects of life satisfaction of native and Maltese-Australian adolescents in-depth individual interviews were conducted with 20 native Maltese adolescents (born and living in Malta) and 18 Maltese-Australian adolescents living in Australia. These interviews addressed a number of issues in relation to the home environment, including independence and parent-adolescent conflicts. As the Maltese family is strongly influenced by religious values and beliefs (Abela, 1991), these issues were also explored to examine the extent to which they influence everyday life experiences.

Coping strategies and social support were also examined, partly because they play an integral role in the life satisfaction of adolescents, and partly because aspects of life satisfaction may be influenced by the Maltese culture. The factors that contributed both to positive and negative aspects of their life were also investigated. For Maltese-Australian adolescents, their ethnic identity and identification were also explored.

The findings for native Maltese adolescents are presented first. These findings will provide the reader with a point of reference for the subsequent findings of Maltese-Australian adolescents. Although contemporary Maltese society is undergoing many social and cultural changes, most native Maltese adolescents (95%) reported that their parents were still traditionally oriented. In this respect, there were a lot of similarities between their parents and the parents of Maltese-Australian adolescents in their child-rearing practices.

### 8.1 Findings for Native Maltese Adolescents living in Malta

#### 8.1.1 Overview

The interviews indicated that through globalisation, Malta is undergoing social and cultural changes that are impacting on the Maltese family. Whereas parents were reported to be traditional, adolescents have started moving towards the non-traditional. The findings indicate that Malta is both traditional and non-traditional, thereby

confirming previous research (Abela, 1991). Data has highlighted the generation gap and its implications on the psychological well-being of native adolescents.

Social problems, such as drugs and related crimes were also reported to be on the increase. It is important to point out that two weeks before data collection there was a drug related death of an adolescent. This incident shocked the whole community, both young and old. It also came up during the interviews. According to participants, these radical changes were taking place at a very rapid pace to the extent that it was quite an issue for many participants, even causing some anxiety and distress. In spite of this however, Malta was still perceived as a "secure place" in comparison to other countries that are afflicted with more crimes and divorce.

The analysis of native Maltese respondents gave a series of themes. These themes included:

- The Maltese family and its transition from traditional to non-traditional
- The generation gap and its implications
- Parent-child conflicts and their implications
- Religion and secularisation
- The experience of social support
- Coping strategies
- Factors that upset adolescents
- Factors that make adolescents feel good

### 8.1.2 The Maltese Family and its Transition from Traditional to Non-traditional

Most participants perceived the Maltese family as being closely knit with a strong sense of loyalty towards husbands and wives "and they are always together". This is consistence with past literature (Abela, 1991, 1995; Tabone, 1995) that has investigated the Maltese family. It is also in line with the characteristics of a collectivistic society (Triandis, 1995). According to participants in the current study, being a close family also meant containing the conflicts between its members, especially between husband and wife. This is in line with Abela's (1991) argument that the Maltese value harmony within the family.

According to the adolescents in the current study, most parents are authoritarian, a finding that supports Abela's (1991) argument that Maltese parents are strict compared to parents in other European countries. In the case of the participants in the current study, this authoritarianism approach became evident when conflicts arose between parents and adolescents. The parental response *"għax hekk għidt"* (because I said so) which is usually uttered in an angry voice reflects authoritarianism. Such an approach suggests that parents are *enforcing* (even in subtle ways) the perpetuation of the traditional values and beliefs that are grounded in a "traditional religion" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 148). This religion is characterized by authoritarianism and the fear of God - the judgmental God who punishes the sinners and rewards the good. Indeed, the European survey (Abela, 1991) found that the Maltese reported higher levels of guilt for "wrong doing…..which is explained by the relatively higher strictness of parents towards their children and the extent of the Church's influence on the conscience of the individual (p. 85).

It can be argued that the present data revealed that parents were identifying with God. According to participants, for example, parental verbal communication revealed an element of authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1996).

Criticism and rebuke from parents were quite common. In one case, there was also physical abuse. The "law and order" mentality inherent in authoritarian aggression is still prevalent within the Maltese family as indicated by the current findings. This mentality is exacerbated by the code of honour and the strong hold that gossip has among the members of the community (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994) – an argument that has been confirmed by the current findings. Comments, like "That's the problem here. Because Malta is so small every body is subjected to gossip. You have to be very careful what to do or say *'għax taqa' fil-ilsien in-nies'* (this is a saying that suggests subjection to gossip). And that is bad" were quite common.

The current study indicated that all those participants whose mother had joined the workforce felt that there was no cohesion in the family. According to one participant:

> As a family I don't think they get together as a community…it's not that easy to get together because of work and the children are at school. I don't think they find enough time to discuss the problems together, to have conversations together because the father is out at work. Here [in Malta] whoever works goes out at 6.30

a.m. – and the children are still asleep and the mother goes out for work at 7.00 a.m. because here both father and mother work. My mother works till 7.30 p.m. and sometimes I go to private lessons – my father comes to pick me up and I go home at 4.30 p.m. By that time my mother had already left for work at 4.15p.m. She works till 7.30 p.m. Then I do my homework and go out again. Then I go to sleep. Sometimes mum has not returned by that time…..

It seems that this cultural change is quite significant, even though the number of women joining the work force is small compared to other European countries (Vassallo et al., 2002). The current findings indicate that the traditional sex role stereotype behaviour that is being challenged is having a great impact on the family, especially adolescents. Family cohesion is threatened. The above comments suggest that adolescents still need intimate time with parents, supporting Scabini's and Cigoli's (1997) argument that although adolescents start extending their psychosocial boundaries, they still need to experience parental intimacy not to feel alienated. According to the above participant, there is not only no time for the family to be together, but also there is no time availability to experience intimacy. Parents are not making themselves available for their children to share some intimate time, not even during the weekend. This is in line with Wynne's (1984) argument that couples in highly traditional marriages are not particularly self-revealing or intimate in self-expression.

The exploration of the experience of the Maltese family among adolescents in the current study identified 4 themes – the generation gap, parent-child conflicts, independence, and negative emotions among adolescents in relation to the home environment. These themes will be addressed below.

### 8.1.2.a The Generation Gap and its Implications

Data analysis identified the salience of a generation gap. Parents, especially fathers, were reported to be traditional, whereas adolescents showed that they were starting to shift (at least at a cognitive level) towards the post-traditional end of the traditional/post-traditional continuum. Previous studies (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1995) found similar trends among native Maltese parents and adolescents. The current study found that, unlike their parents, adolescents started questioning social issues, such as

religion and homosexuality and developmental issues, such as psychological control and autonomy. According to participants, these issues were threathening for their parents especially if they challenged religious values and beliefs. Expressions such as "parents still have old ideas" or "they are narrow minded" were quite common. This narrow mindedness is in line with the characteristics of a "tight culture" (Triandis, 2000, p. 146) in collectivistic societies. According to Triandis, conformity is high in such cultures. Questioning and deviating from the norms are, therefore, not acceptable.

The findings of the current study revealed that native Maltese parents and adolescents differ in the place where they belong on the traditional-nontraditional continuum. Such findings are in line with a study (Portes, 1997) that found that adolescents are ahead of their parents with regards to embracing cultural changes. According to native Maltese adolescents, parents are also not identifying the individuality of their children and their specific needs. These needs arise from the contemporary adolescent culture that is more oriented towards individualism rather than collectivism. There were many cases in which parents not only contrasted their children with their own upbringing, but also with that of the adolescents' older brothers and sisters.

In attempting to bridge the generation gap, native Maltese parents were reported to use psychological coercion, which reflects authoritarianism and high traditionalism (Altemeyer, 1996). This situation made participants feel angry, depressed, and even alienated "because nobody understands you". Data further indicated that in some cases, mothers were slightly more flexible and understanding than fathers were, especially with regards to going out with friends. One participant commented:

> See, in my case my father still has old fashioned ideas; he still upholds those old traditions. For example, that you don't go out in the evening. My father cannot come to terms with the idea, let's say for me to go out after private lessons to attend a youth group because before when one goes to a meeting it's more to go out and rebel. But my mother understands me. My mother is not like that; not like they used to think in olden times….and sometimes she tries and explain to dad the contemporary adolescents' culture and the way they think.

This suggests that there are inconsistencies among parents with regards to certain areas of discipline. It was not uncommon, for example, that the mother would approve of

the son's or daughter's behaviour even though the father did not approve. These situations could be jeopardizing parental intimacy. It is important to point out that in many cases among native Maltese [40%] the mother was portrayed as being much more dominant than the father within the home environment. This is in line with arguments (Tabone, 1991; Tonna, 1996; Vassallo, 1994) that although Malta is mainly a patriarchal society, it also has elements of a matriarchal society. It is possible that Maltese parents, being subjected to both matriarchal and patriarchal systems are confronted with some confusion in relation to some aspects of their gender roles and parental expectations. Indeed, Miceli (1994) argued that Maltese women, for example, are getting mixed messages in relation to their social position within the Maltese society.

#### 8.1.2.b The Experience of Parent-Child Conflicts

Data analysis in the current investigation indicated that many participants experienced a lot of parent-child conflicts. A previous study (Yau & Smetana, 1996) also identified parent-child conflicts among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong, suggesting that "even in cultures that are considered to be collectivistic and oriented toward interpersonal obligations and harmony, conflict may serve an individuating function in development" (p. 1270). The parent-child conflicts of native Maltese adolescents revolved mostly around schoolwork and going out with friends. Girls were often at loggerheads with parents in relation to boyfriends.

The examination of parent-child conflicts identified a number of themes (see Table1). Many participants reported that parents had high academic expectations with most participants attending private lessons after school hours, sometimes three times a week, to improve their academic performance. This is in line with past research (Vassallo et al., 2002) that found that 49% of native Maltese adolescents attended private tuition to complement their schooling.

The current study found that these academic expectations were stressful, partly because there seemed to be a great deal of competition among students. As one participant put it *"għal kull għadma hemm mitt kelb"* [literally, this proverb means that for every bone there are a hundred dogs, suggesting a high degree of competition]. The academic expectations were also stressful because the workload was quite heavy, leaving

Table 1

Emerging Themes Regarding Parent-Child Conflicts

| |
|---|
| High parental academic expectations |
| Passive anger, feelings of depression, and stress among adolescents |
| Unresolved conflicts |
| Parental psychological control |
| Poor listening skills |

little time for entertainment, physical activity and relaxation.

The examination of parent-child conflict among native Maltese adolescents also indicated that both parents and participants experienced a great deal of passive anger or "anger-in response" (Nunn & Thomas, 1999, p. 146). Drawing on the work of Spielberger and associates (Spielberger et al., 1985) Nunn and Thomas argued that the anger-in response refers to the suppression of angry feelings, as opposed to anger-out which refers to the outward expression of angry feelings. "If I don't talk to her [mum] she won't talk" commented one participant in the current study. This passive anger created emotional distance between members of the family and was perhaps responsible for feelings of depression that were reported to be quite common among participants. Comments like "I feel depressed and I experience some tension and anxiety too" were not uncommon. Given that depression is negatively related to life satisfaction (Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2001) the potential to maximise life satisfaction among these adolescents is likely to have been jeopardized.

Data in the current investigation also indicated that many of the conflicts were unresolved. Further attempts to resolve them on the part of the adolescents were futile, partly because that would have raised further conflicts with parents and partly because of the authoritarian approach that parents used. This finding is in line with Abela's (1991) argument that the Maltese value harmony within the family. According to most participants, parents had poor listening skills. Parents, for example, did not use inductive reasoning when conflicts arose. Comments, like *"għax hekk ghidt"* (because I said so)

were quite common. The idea that "parents know what's best" could be so ingrained that any deviations from their views are not considered as beneficial to their children's welfare. Maltese parents seem to identify with the omniscient and trusting God. Questioning their views would be considered as lack of trust and disrespectful.

Expressions such as *"għax hekk għidt"* (because I said so) or *"għax hekk"* ("because that's the way it is") is also suggesting a parental expectation of 'blind faith', that is "putting faith ahead of reason" (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 148). Therefore, rationality or inductive reasoning is not required. The current study further indicated that the parental response *"għax hekk għidt"* had an element of control. Any attempt to reason or assert themselves on the part of the adolescents was futile. Indeed, in most cases parents were psychologically controlling.

### 8.1.2 c The Issue of Independence

Most native Maltese participants reported that they felt quite independent, making decisions for themselves in some areas especially in school matters. They were continuously encouraged by parents to 'fend for themselves' (*'fendi għall-rasek')* which made them feel good. This is in line with past research (Ho & Chiu, 1994) that found that within the Chinese culture both individualist (e.g. self-reliant) and collectivist (e.g., cooperative) values are endorsed. The current study indicated that many of the native Maltese adolescents have already been overseas by themselves through the student exchange programs or with some other youth or sports groups. Such experiences were helpful in facilitating independence. One participant commented:

> Since I went overseas I began to follow my ideas rather than those of my father or my mother….and I am able to criticize. And criticism makes you independent too. If you criticise something that you depend on makes you feel independent from it

Some of the participants also had a part-time job. This also helped them to become more independent especially in managing financial matters. In one extreme case, the participant reported that her parents were not encouraging her to be independent. The mother was critical of her attempts to experience even such minor choices as buying her own clothes. Being unable to experience independence, the participant felt angry and commented that her mother was running her life.

### 8.1.2.d Adolescents' Negative Emotions in Relation to the Home Environment

The individual interviews in the current study indicated that native Maltese adolescents were experiencing a number of negative emotions in relation to the home environment, especially with regards to the authoritarian approach that parents were using. Adolescents felt quite angry when parents did not allow participants to express their views. However, in many cases, that anger was suppressed and they expressed passive anger instead. The results also indicated that a sense of helplessness emerged "because there is nothing you can do". Fear of parental criticism and rebuke was quite common among participants, especially when the latter found themselves in difficult situations. This is in line with an argument (Ruggiero, 2001) that parental criticism is common in Mediterranean countries, especially in those countries that are high on traditionalism. Another study (Jacobsen, 1998) found that high levels of parental criticism were stressful in children. Indeed, the present study identified a high level of stress among adolescents.

Another interesting finding in the current investigation was in relation to emotional distance between parents and adolescents. This was partly due to the fear of criticism and rebuke which inhibited participants and prevented them from establishing intimacy with their parents, and partly because traditional societies do not encourage emotional expression (Oyserman et al., 2002). As already indicated, the results in the current study have identified passive anger amongst both parents and children, especially when parent-child conflicts arose.

Feelings of anxiety and depression were not uncommon among native Maltese adolescents–Therefore, the chances of experiencing feelings of depression were maximized.

### 8.1.3 Adolescents' Attitudes towards Religion

Data analysis indicated that religion still plays a significant role in Malta, especially among parents of adolescents and older generations, thereby confirming Abela's (1991) findings. Adolescents reported that they go to church every Sunday. Some of them also reported to belong to religious organizations such as *L-Azzjoni Kattolika* and

the Legion of Mary. When asked about their perceptions about religion in Malta, some participants argued that "it is still a big thing and it is part of the Maltese way of life". Others argued that religion seemed to be losing its salience through secularization. This is in line with past literature (Tabone, 1995) that examined the transition of the Maltese family to secularisation. One participant in the present study argued:

> Religion I see that in many cases it has changed. It's losing its importance because before people were very religious. Then gradually it's like everybody – some say one thing, others say another. And with regards to religion everyone has his own ideas. Before there never were these ideas, maybe they were more frightened to reveal them, I think, because if you say them you commit a sin. Today, people seem to be more open. I think before the church had more power, because to-day there is the media and people are more open minded. But before people used to be ignorant – *kienu jibelgħu kollox* [they used to believe everything – line, hook and sinker]

This suggests that these participants were more liberal in their ideas and not as conservative as the previous generation. They experienced more freedom to question religious values and beliefs. However, it is important to point out that in spite of this questioning, values and beliefs, the core elements of culture, are more resistant to change (Rosenthal, 1984). Therefore, there may be a 'time lag' in the behaviour, both among parents and adolescents. Those native Maltese adolescents who started questioning their religion could be confronted with conflicts, both internally and externally, with parents. The traditional values and beliefs that the parents have instilled in them, for example, may still be internalized. In fact the above participant further pointed out that:

> The values you need to appreciate them too. Without it [i.e. religion] it's like you have something missing in you. Because everyone needs values and that…..and through religion you know who is God, why he created us and that. It's good to know that that is around you.

This is consistent with past research (Abela, 1991) that found that the notion of God is central to religious beliefs among the Maltese. Although religiosity seems to be declining among Maltese adolescents, the current study also found that religious morals and principles were still reported to be prevalent, once again supporting Abela's findings.

Going to confessions, for example, was reported to be a common practice among participants in the current study. So was the administration of the sacraments, such as baptism, first Holy Communion and confirmation. These findings are in line with the European survey (Abela, 1991) that found that the moral code of the Ten Commandments was common to both traditional and post-traditional religion. That study also found that the Maltese expressed high personal acceptance of the Ten Commandments.

### 8.1.4 The Experience of Social Support

To explore the issue of social support, participants were asked the question "If you were unhappy or upset about life whom do you go to?" A number of themes emerged (see Table 2). Some participants reported going to their mother (mostly for instrumental support) partly because the mother was more approachable than the father and partly because there was no availability of time in relation to the father. One participant pointed out "My father spends a lot of time at work. I don't see him much. And it's like I have more confidence with my mum". This suggests that adolescents tend to approach the mother rather than the father. This is in accordance with past findings (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003; Van Beest et al., 1999). In the case of Maltese adolescents, the lack of paternal parenting and disconnectedness that were identified through data analysis is of some concern. For example, Shek (1999) found that paternal parenting characteristics were more important than maternal parenting characteristics in predicting life satisfaction in both boys and girls. Colarossi and Eccles also found that father support predicted

Table 2
Emerging Themes Regarding Social Support

| |
|---|
| Mothers more approachable than fathers |
| Lack of paternal availability |
| The need for parents to be understanding |
| Peer support as alternative source of support |
| High level of distrust among friends |

depression, especially for boys.

Data analysis in the current study also identified a need among Maltese participants for parents to be understanding. Comments like *"Il-ġenituri ma jifmukx. Dik iddejjaqni"* [parents do not understand you. That bothers/depresses me] were quite common, in many cases uttered by the participants more than once throughout the interviews. This is in line with the study by Scabini and Cigoli (1997) that also identified the need for emotional support from parents of adolescents in Italy. It is important to point out that the expression *"ma jifmukx"* [they (i.e. parents) do not understand] suggests that parents do not only have lack of awareness of their psychological needs, but they are also lacking understanding and empathy.

Although extrinsic support was not explored among the participants in the current study, anecdotal evidence suggests that Maltese parents are very supportive in providing material needs. However, according to Young and Miller (1995), these needs may not be as relevant to their life satisfaction. The current data indicates that native Maltese adolescents seem to be lacking emotional support from parents. Criticism and even rebuke were reported to be common among parents, especially when their children challenged their traditional values and beliefs.

Those native Maltese participants who felt that their parents were not supportive resorted to reaching out to friends. These adolescents were identified as insecure and they preferred peers rather than parents 'by default' (Freeman et al., 2001) because of some negative consequences on the part of the parents. In fact, Maltese participants reported being concerned that their parents may not understand them. They also reported fear of criticism and even rebuke. Studies have shown that when adolescents get little support from their parents those who enjoy greater support from friends are found to report most problems (e.g., Helsen et al., 2000). This suggests that when parents do not meet their needs in terms of support, they tend to experience some problems that cannot be resolved by the support they get from friends. Indeed, the overall analysis of these Maltese participants indicated that these adolescents seemed insecure and in many cases the support from friends was not satisfying. It only made them feel good because friends helped them "to forget" and "have fun". These adolescents may also be lacking the required psychosocial skills to develop the capacity to develop supportive relationships

with friends. Franco and Levitt (1998), for example, found a relationship between social support provided to the child in the context of the family and the quality of children's friendships outside the family.

Data analysis in the current study indicated that, at a collective level, the Maltese community is perceived as caring and supportive. It was reported to have a high level of social participation, as evidenced in religious functions and ceremonies. However, at an individual level, a high level of distrust among friends, especially among girls, was identified. This is in line with past findings in Southern Europe (Inglehart, 1990). In the case of the Maltese, this is due to the high level of gossip in Malta and the strong hold it has upon the members of the community (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). Comments like "Malta, that's the problem – you cannot trust anyone" and "they are double faced" were quite common in the current investigation.

In the current study, there were even cases in which friends lied about each other, thereby creating a bad reputation for the person concerned. This could be considered as peer victimization (Coleman & Byrd, 2003; Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001). In the case of native Maltese adolescents in the current study, fearing gossip and the subsequent bad reputation caused a great deal of distress "because they say something about you which is not true and you become subjected to gossip". One female participant preferred to have male friends rather than females because she feared lack of loyalty by girls. Gossip among females in Malta is widely acknowledged by the Maltese community. Indeed, the adage *"San Pawl neħħa il-valenu minn ħalq il-lifa u poggieh f'ħalq in-nisa"* ("St. Paul removed the poison out of the viper and put it in the mouth of the women") is well entrenched in the Maltese language.

### 8.1.5 Coping Strategies among Adolescents

In order to investigate coping strategies amongst native Maltese, participants were asked "If you find yourself in a difficult situation what do you do?" The analysis of the responses to this question identified three themes (see Table 3). Many participants reported the initial attempt to deal with the problem themselves. Therefore, they spent a lot of time thinking about it. For some, this kind of approach was a challenge that they wanted to undertake. For others, experiencing a problem was alienating. The underlying

Table 3

Themes Emerging from Coping Strategies

| |
|---|
| Participants tend to try and deal with the problems themselves |
| Participants approach other people, such as mother, older siblings, and friends |
| Parents, especially fathers, are not understanding |

issue was lack of trust, both among family and friends. Some participants reported approaching the mother. This was consistent with a report that Caritas conducted in 1998. This report stated that Maltese adolescents approached the mother in discussing drug related issues, for example. In the current study, the mother was reported to be more sympathetic than the father who was hardly ever approached. There was a case in which the mother was approached not because she was sympathetic, but because participant was afraid that she would still find out from someone else about the problem. This is indicative of the fear of gossip as a controlling agent (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994).

Many participants in the current study also reported approaching friends. As with social support, friends helped them enter the world of escapism. They also provided "reality confirmation support" (Richman et al., 1998, p. 310). This refers to the perception that another person is similar to you and sees things the same way. Indeed, one participant in the current study pointed out "There is interaction between us. Because they too have the same problems up to a certain point". In spite of reaching out to others, some still felt very lonely and confused. One participant commented "I take advice if there is someone…Sometimes I talk to my elder brother who is 27 years old. At least he understands… I talk [i.e. about the problems] *imma xorta nispiċċa' waħdi newden fuqha* [but I still end up on my own, brewing over it]".

### 8.1.6 Contributing Factors in Relation to Feeling Upset or Unhappy

In order to facilitate the exploration of life satisfaction, native Maltese adolescents were asked the question "What are the things that make you upset or unhappy?" A

number of themes emerged (see Table 4). As already argued, parents' high expectations to academic performance are not only a source of parent-child conflicts, but they are also generating a great deal of distress, especially among females. There is a strong push rather than encouragement for academic achievement. Academic pressure is not uncommon, even in Australia (Frydenberg et al., 2004). However, this pressure among native Maltese adolescents is high, as indicated by the current findings. In most cases, participants reported taking private tuition, usually after school hours. This is consistent with past research among native Maltese (Vassallo et al., 2002). Adolescents in the current study reported that they did not have time for entertainment. There were cases where parents did not approve of participants attending any youth groups. Instead, they were expected to study. Many participants, especially older adolescents, were experiencing difficulty adjusting to school and acquiring the academic skills necessary for pursuing advanced education. Consequently, their opportunity for functioning successfully in their academic tasks seems to be jeopardized.

Table 4
Contributing Factors to Feeling Unhappy or Upset

| |
|---|
| Parents have high academic expectations |
| The wide prevalence of drugs among adolescents |
| Lack of loyalty among friends |

These adolescents may be using constructive coping skills (such as taking up private tuition) in dealing with their academic problems. However, their attempts in most cases are futile and feel that these academic stressors are uncontrollable. Therefore, their academic adjustment and the subsequent school satisfaction are jeopardized. Indeed, Clarke (2002) found that using approach coping in response to uncontrollable stressors was associated with poor adaptive functioning. The current study also found that these adolescents seem to be unable to function in a meaningful manner and to find personal satisfaction and purpose. Whereas some adolescents already reported to have a vision

regarding a prospective future, most adolescents seem to be experiencing a relatively dismal future.

The issue of drugs also contributed to participants' distress and unhappiness among native Maltese adolescents. According to the participants in the current study, the use of illicit drugs is on the rise. This is not surprising considering that Maltese rates for smoking adolescents, for example, is quite high when compared to other countries (Caritas Malta, 1998). That study also found a positive correlation between smoking and use of illicit drugs. In the current study, one participant argued "the fact that the adolescents devalue themselves because they take drugs….when parents hear about these things they sort of label everybody and think that they are going to behave badly".

The social, medical, and psychosocial implications of the use of illicit drugs seem to be having a great impact on the Maltese community, both young and old. Participants reported that they were subjected to hassles from parents not to take any drugs. These hassles may be detrimental to their life satisfaction.

Printz et al. (1999) found that adolescent psychological adjustment was influenced more by chronic stressors than by discrete events. For native Maltese in the current study, these hassles implied to participants that they are not to be trusted. As one participant commented "they [the parents] sort of brainwash you that when someone is going to offer you drugs you are going to say 'yes' and start taking drugs". Such comments indicate that on one hand parents are not trusting their children and they are not giving them the opportunity to behave in a trusting manner. On the other hand, it also suggests a high probability of a self-fulfilling prophecy on the part of the adolescents, thereby generating a great deal of fear in them because they may not have the will power to say 'no' to drugs.

Lack of trust and betrayal by friends was also a contributing factor to participants' feelings of distress or unhappiness. Indeed, a study (Plunkett et al., 2000) found that "change in relationship with people you know" was identified as the top stressful life event, followed by "close relationship problem with opposite sex friend" - for both girls and boys. Also, according to another study (Sim, 2000) 70% of the variance in the incidence of depression was attributed to friends' hassles in young adolescents. Many participants in the current study reported being betrayed by friends. The betrayal ranged

from defamation to 'stealing' boy/girlfriends. Those who did not feel that they were not betrayed were still concerned that it might happen to them. "Even the thought of it scares me," commented one participant. Having their reputation at stake and being very self-conscious about gossip was quite distressing for these participants.

### 8.1.7 Who or What make Adolescents feel good?

In exploring the factors that make native Maltese adolescents feel good, two themes emerged. For most participants, friends made them feel good. This is in line with a study (Kang et al., 2003) that found that interpersonal relationships made individuals in collectivistic cultures feel good about their lives. In the case of some native Maltese in the current study, friends made them feel good. "For me, friends are very important….they can understand you more. Even the way they talk to you," commented one participant. "Friends don't yell back at you" pointed out another participant.

For most native Maltese participants in the current study friends also made them feel good because they had a good time together and made them forget their problems. One participant commented "I have fun. I feel like I am detached from the world, not from the world, but from the environment that I'm in". This suggests that there is an element of escapism. It may also suggest that being with friends may help them to alleviate stress (Plunkett et al., 2000) and perhaps give them some space to work through any worrying issues.

Another theme that emerged regarding the factors that contributed to a sense of happiness was entertainment via television and music. Once again, at face value these media contributed to the world of escapism. However, at a deeper level there could be some other more meaningful mechanisms at work, which perhaps were even beyond the participants' awareness. One participant, for example, enjoyed the lyrics of the songs that were consistent with his own feelings. This could be unconsciously providing 'reality confirmation support' (Richman et al., 1998). Another participant, who appreciated works of art and was a painter himself, enjoyed looking at Van Gogh's paintings. A deeper exploration of the enjoyment derived from this experience revealed a functional role that goes beyond escapism. He commented:

I like Van Gogh's paintings. When I look at his paintings, it's like I am

> discovering something new - the paintings express his life. It's like I have a romantic idea about him too…when I look at his paintings I'm in another world….a world in which life is not so confused as it is mine. Van Gogh was very confused, he had mental problems and he was a genius. And his paintings express a lot of his life. A very beautiful world – beautiful colours and you feel that you are communicating with him. You feel that although his life was so difficult, there is an alternative life. For me it's like a mental life, that is, an alternative world in art. That is whatever you have there is something in your life that is going to come out of your depression - it's like you have that hope that you can cope…you find yourself in it.

Such mental processes reveal that the paintings were actually helping him to break down the barriers, tap into his inner self and identify with Van Gogh – a meaningful experience that elicited happiness in him. They also provided an element of hope that helped him to go through difficult times of despair.

### 8.1.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, native Maltese adolescents are dealing with many cultural and developmental issues that are impacting on their life satisfaction. The Maltese society is faced with a cultural transition from a traditional society to a post-traditional one. According to adolescents, these cultural changes are taking place at a rapid pace to the extent that it is causing some concern. Not only it is broadening the generation gap between parents and adolescents, but it is also creating some anxiety among both parents and adolescents. Through globilisation, these adolescents are pressured to adopt values and beliefs that are at loggerheads with the Maltese traditional culture. This pressure is exacerbated by the fear of gossip within the community. As a collective society, honour and shame are highly valued (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). Deviating from the norm is therefore, threatening, both at family and community levels, as confirmed by the current study.

Another cultural issue that is creating concern among native Maltese adolescents is the issue of drugs. The use of illicit drugs is on the increase. So are the detrimental consequences of their use. Their impact is quite pronounced, partly because Malta has a small, closely-knit community and partly because it is shattering the image that Malta is a

'safe place' where crimes are less likely to occur. In addition, for adolescents in the current study, the issue of drugs is creating more hassles and conflicts with parents. It is also highlighting the issue of trust. In many cases, parents are not trusting of their children – a behaviour that is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy for adolescents; in other words by not trusting their children adolescents are more likely to behave in a more non trusting manner and take drugs. Consequently, feelings of fear and anxiety in relation to drugs were not uncommon.

Although at a collective level the family has been perceived as a close, caring institution, at an individual level, there seems to be a lot of emotional distance among its members. Rather than being characterized by emotional support as would be expected in a cohesive family as Moos & Moos (1986) found, the current study found that the Maltese family was characterized by emotional distance between parents and adolescents. Parental psychological control was also evident. Instead of facilitating the individuation process/development of the children such psychological control is likely to be fostering the emotional fusion of family members.

The current investigation has also shown that having high academic expectations of their children, parents of native Maltese adolescents are imposing a great deal of pressure upon their children to the extent that not only it is an issue for these adolescents, but it is also creating a great deal of distress. Such situation is also responsible for a lack of life's vitality. In attempting to meet these expectations, their academic goals are not self-driven. Therefore, the satisfaction derived from academic achievements is jeopardized (Nix et al., 1999). Many of the adolescents in the current study are also finding it hard coping at an academic level. Consequently, long hours of studying after school hours are depriving adolescents of recreation time.

In their attempt to cope, many participants are reaching out to friends. Although for some, this is an escapism, for others it helps them experience 'reality confirmation support' (Richman et al., 1998). There are many others whose relationships with friends, however, are threatened by lack of trust and gossip. This social issue is concerning because it is a source of malevolence among youth.

It is interesting to note, that although, the family is highly valued, a finding that is consistent with past findings (Abela, 1991), it is not reported to be a contributing factor to

making adolescents feel good. Instead, it is friends and entertainment media, such as television and music that are meeting this need. Parents are not meeting their emotional and psychosocial needs which are so salient for life satisfaction in contemporary society. Instead, for some participants it is friends who are providing some degree of intimacy and understanding. In spite of this, the need to be understood by the parents was continuously echoed throughout most of the interviews.

## 8.2 Data for Maltese-Australian Adolescents living in Australia

### 8.2.1 Overview

The interviews among Maltese-Australian adolescents explored similar issues to those with native Maltese adolescents. In addition, issues relating to ethnic identity and identification were also examined among Maltese-Australian adolescents. The Maltese culture and ethnic identification were examined towards the beginning of the interviews. It was considered that these issues were less personal and further enhanced the rapport between the researcher and the participants. In spite of this sequence, the following analysis will follow the same sequence as that amongst the native Maltese to be in line with the literature review and to enhance better cohesion and clarity in the overall analysis.

### 8.2.2 The Maltese Family in Australia

In examining the Maltese-Australian family, a number of themes emerged (see Table 5). The Maltese-Australian family in the current study was also perceived as traditional consistent with past findings (Borg, 1999; Drofenik, 2000; Johnstone, 1994). Parents still upheld traditional customs. They were reported to use lots of Maltese artifats in decorating their houses. Traditional food was common within the Maltese-Australian household. One participant commented:

> I think my family is almost like a Maltese family living in Malta except we live in Australia…….We have many Maltese souvenirs around the house, including a Maltese knight in armour and the *karozzin*. We also have Maltese lace around the house. Last time we went to Malta we got some paintings about the Grand

Table 5

Themes about Adolescents' Perceptions of the Maltese Family in Australia

| |
|---|
| Family is very close, sticking together and very helpful |
| Parents are very strict |
| Parents are over protective |
| Parents are fussy about cleaning the house |
| Traditional values and beliefs are strongly upheld |
| People are very religious |

> Harbour and the bastions in Valletta. We also got many tapes of music. On Sunday morning my father likes listening to the *banda* and the Maltese *għana*. That is **really** Maltese…..We cook *minestra, ross il-forn, għaġin il-forn* and *pastizzi*…everyone in the family always has something Maltese on them, even if it's earrings something like that.

Going to church every Sunday and attending other religious festivities were also common. This practice was also considered as "typical Maltese". One participant commented:

> Every Sunday we go to St. Bernadette's church which is run by Maltese priests. Sometimes we go to the Maltese mass. Most of the people who go to that church are Maltese. There are some old women who even wear a veil on their heads. Many of them gather outside the church chatting in Maltese after the mass. It's like in Malta…once a year they celebrate the village festa. They have a special mass and a procession with the statue. They go around the streets, followed by the Maltese band.

The family-centred orientation of participants was consistent with Maltese cultural norms, which emphasize familial bonds and relationships (Abela, 1991; Johnstone, 1994). As expected, the Maltese-Australian family was perceived as close, sticking together and very helpful. This is characteristic of a collective society (Triandis, 1995), such as Malta. However, at a personal level, the interviews in the current study

revealed that in most cases the relationships between adolescents and parents were not intimate, thereby supporting the findings of another study (Wynne, 1984) that found that although family members are caring in traditional families, intimacy is lacking. This is in line with another study (Oyserman et al., 2002) that found that emotional expression is not encouraged in societies high in traditionalism. The current study found that the intimacy among Maltese-Australian parents and their children was jeopardized by lack of listening skills on the part of the parents. Comments like "they don't understand me….no matter what I said their side of the story kind of thing" and "whatever they say goes…Oh I hate them" were quite common. There were cases in which the mother showed some understanding more than the father and ended up either mediating between the adolescent and the father or 'covering up' to avoid further conflicts. In most of these cases the father argued that "he's always right".

Maltese-Australian parents were perceived as strict and authoritarian. The above mentioned quotes are indicative of such an approach. This is in line with the Maltese traditional culture and the strict religious upbringing (Abela, 1991). According to Altemeyer (1996), there is not only a relationship between religious beliefs and authoritarianism, but religion creates authoritarian people. Being embedded in religious values and beliefs the Maltese-Australian family embraces a strong sense of authority. One participant argued:

> I like going to church because I've been brought up to go to church sort of thing. But sometimes I don't go because I have too much homework. But I feel bad because mum gets upset….Mum always said 'Go to church so that God will help you'…yeh, I thought that was true and all that. But I *had to* go…..

Besides authoritarianism, this also indicates a type of psychological control, namely manipulative (Barber & Lovelady Harmon, 2002). By getting upset, the mother made the adolescent "feel bad" which implies that she induced guilt.

Maltese-Australian adolescents perceived the Maltese-Australian parents as over protective, especially when compared with Anglo-Australian parents. This is in line with another study (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) that found that immigrant Chinese parents were significantly more protective than non-immigrant Chinese parents. Comment like

"Maltese parents worry about a lot of things. They are over protective" were quite common among Maltese-Australian participants. One female participant commented:

> ….so if they're [i.e., Anglo-Australian girls] going out they're going out –that's it. But if I'm going out, my mum…. oooh! She wants to know whom I'm going out with…….'Whom are you going with? Where are you going? What time you're coming back?'….

It was interesting to note that this participant's intonation of the voice reflected agitation as she imitated her mother and uttered these questions.

8.2.2.a The Generation Gap and its Implications

Data analysis highlighted the generation gap between parents and Maltese-Australian adolescents. One participant has eloquently portrayed this gap:

> Physically they're here, but mentally and emotionally they're in Malta. And they haven't moved from Malta. So that works bad, so they don't understand the way you live here. They apply their lives as if they were living in Malta. But they're not. They're here. They don't want to believe they're here because they want to go back. So when it comes to politics or education or communication in a way they're stupid. That's my family. They're antisocial because they try to live their lives as a Maltese person in Malta would live their life. But you can't because it's totally different here.

This participant is referring to the notion of the 'broken clock', a term coined by Krupinski (1984). For immigrant parents, the cultural clock stops ticking and a cultural stagnation takes place. They still tend to embrace the behaviours, morals, and values that were in existence when they were back home, without taking into account the cultural changes that have most likely taken place since then. According to participants in the current study, parents still had a closed mentality of a traditional culture (Triandis, 2001), accepting authority without questioning it. Once again, this became evident in the exploration of the experience of parents-child conflicts. Unlike European-American parents (Jambunathan et al., 2000), Maltese-Australian parents did not use inductive reasoning, and did not allow choices for their children. Indeed, expressions such as "because I said so" were quite common when conflicts arose. Parents did not offer further

explanations even when requested by their children. Like native Maltese parents, this is indicative of an authoritarian approach.

Data indicates that Maltese-Australian parents are attempting to bridge the generation gap by encouraging (and in most cases enforcing) their children to embrace the Maltese traditional culture and maintain a cultural continuity. One participant, who was 17 years old argued:

> Because my parents grew up in Malta they expect me to do the things they used to do. Because they like to go to Maltese places, activities and stuff they expect me to go. So I end up going to all of them…they have other expectations to follow their religion and do typical Maltese things. ……sometimes I feel like going to McDonald's, but I'm expected to eat the *minestra* that mum has prepared. I hate it, but there's nothing much I can do.

The individual interviews revealed that these adolescents seemed to be aware of the cultural background of their parents in terms of time and place. In some cases the understanding of where the parents are coming from helped them to tolerate the generation gap and to contextualise the parent-child conflicts. Comments like "they are caring" or "they mean well" were quite common. Such expressions were also uttered within the context of the many questions that parents asked in relation to going out with friends.

#### 8.2.2.b The Experience of Parent-Child Conflicts

As expected, parent-child conflicts were common, a finding that is consistent with past research (Borg, 1999) that found that Maltese-Australian adolescents reported significantly more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australian adolescents. Data analysis in the current study indicated that they evolved around schoolwork, going out, and friends. Some adolescents reported ongoing family discord that was quite taxing at an emotional level. This is in accordance with past research (e.g., Ash & Heubner, 2001) that found that chronic stressors have stronger direct effects than acute negative life events on life satisfaction. Pritz et al. (1999) found similar findings in relation to psychological adjustment. Feelings of anger and isolation were quite common among

participants in the current study. So were feelings of helplessness due to the authoritarian approach of the parents and their psychological control.

Although most adolescents in the current study experienced conflicts with their parents, many of them were also avoiding them because they have been socialized to be submissive to parents. Conflicts with parents were regarded as 'unfilial acts'. This was also the case with Chinese adolescents (Shek, 1997). In some cases, Maltese-Australian adolescents pointed out that parents interpreted conflicts as "unrespectful" even though adolescents were asserting themselves in attempting to discuss the issue concerned. One participant pointed out "I also avoid raising the issue again for fear of creating more conflict and tension….. he [the father] takes it the wrong way. He feels 'we brought them up and they have no respect' ". Another participant commented "…we don't talk about it…it's like it never happened because there's no point. That's it. That's the answer. Bad luck".

8.2.2.c The Issue of Independence

The issue of independence among Maltese-Australian adolescents is not clear-cut. According to participants, parents seem to be aware of the need to be independent and fend for themselves as they grow up. Quite a few of them pointed out that parents, for example, encouraged them to find a part-time job. As one participant suggested:

> ……by managing my money, [parents] encourage me to get a job and start working. I have the responsibility every Saturday to either dust or vacuum. Sometimes I do the cooking. Sometimes I tell mum 'mum it's your night off. I'll do the cooking for you'. I don't do much because the kitchen is mum's territory. It's her security sort of thing. The kitchen is *her* little area.

It can be argued that in most cases Maltese-Australian adolescents are experiencing independence both in relation to intrafamilial and extrafamilial behaviours (Bulcroft, Carmody & Bulcroft, 1999) that is behaviours within and outside the family environment. In some cases, although parents encouraged adolescents to work, financial managements were controlled by the parents. One participant commented "With financial matters I'm not allowed to spend any money. Goes straight into the bank….they want me

to save up. They want me to be well off. They help me because they want me to be financially secure".

The solidarity and strong family loyalty that prevails among Maltese-Australian families may be negatively affecting the independence process, both through fear and frustration. This was also exacurbated by the fact that many of the mothers were perceived and portrayed to be quite insecure. Expressions such as "She's scared" and "mum worries a lot" were quite common.

#### 8.2.2.d Controlling Parents

Like the native Maltese adolescents, the individuals' overall data analysis indicated that many participants had psychologically controlling parents. This issue was mostly manifested within the context of parent-child conflicts. "These are the rules and we are not going to change them," pointed one participant. Imposing guilty feelings in adolescents was another way of exerting psychological control. This manipulation is one of the "lower order characterizations of psychological control" (Barber & Lovelady Harmon, 2002, p. 20). According to the participants in the current study, it was not uncommon, for example, for parents to accuse children of being "disrespectful" when the latter tried to assert themselves with parents. The parental overprotection could also be a means of psychological control (Barber & Lovelady Harmon, 2002).

### 8.2.3 Coping Strategies among Adolescents

In exploring coping strategies, three themes emerged (see Table 6). When confronted with a difficult situation, most participants tried to deal with the situation by themselves. This is partly in line with Piko's (2001) findings. Whereas this strategy was employed more by boys than girls in that study, for Maltese-Australian adolescents, it was common among both boys and girls. This strategy seems to be playing a special role. In fact, many participants in the current study pointed out that they used it as a time of evaluating and trying to find ways of dealing with it. Comments like "I try and work it out myself...I try to do things for myself and then if I can't I need to talk to others" and "I try to reason it out, why it happened and what to do about it " were quite common.

Approaching someone, such as mother, older siblings or friends was another

Table 6

Themes Emerging from Coping Strategies

| |
|---|
| Participants tend to try and deal with the problems themselves |
| Participants approach other people, such as mother, older siblings, and friends |
| Parents, especially fathers are not understanding |

coping strategy as indicated by past research (Piko, 2001). Notably fathers in the current study were not approached. Further probing revealed that fathers were not approachable "because they are not understanding". One participant commented:

> I find it easier to talk to my mum than it is to my dad….Mum understands what you're talking about whereas dad you can't talk to him without saying "Oh God what is he thinking?" But I mean he gets told everything what's going on in the household. It's just that in some areas my mum would stick up for me because she thinks it is unfair because she had a strict upbringing….

Another participant pointed out that his father gives him 'the wrong advice' and therefore he did not approach him. Data analysis also revealed the lack of availability of the father in terms of time. There were cases in which neither parent was approached due to lack of understanding. Older siblings were approached instead. One participant pointed out: "She [her sister] understands that I want to go out. My sister is like my second mum". She later went on to say that "dad I won't really tell much to dad. I don't know why. He comes from work, watches television and then go to bed. We talk a little bit about my life but not much. It's uncomfortable I guess".

### 8.2.4 The Experience of Social Support

In order to explore the experience of social support among Maltese-Australian adolescents, participants were asked "If you feel unhappy or upset whom do you go to?" In most cases, participants pointed out that they did not approach their parents because "they are not understanding" (see Table 7). This implies that parents are not in tune with

Table 7

Themes Emerging From the Experience of Social Support

| |
|---|
| Parents are available for instrumental support, but not emotional support |
| Mothers are perceived as being more understanding than fathers |
| Friends are a source of support |

their children's emotional needs. In many cases participants in the currents study, like native Maltese adolescents, feared criticism and rebuke. Such fear is inhibiting adolescents from trying to reach out to their parents in times of need. Instead of facilitating an intimate home environment, it is generating an emotional distance between parents and adolescents, thereby jeopardizing emotional social support from parents. This lack of intimacy within the family is indicative of a traditional family (Wynne, 1984). The current findings indicated that there were times, however, in which the mother was more likely to be approached than the father. According to participants, mothers had a more sympathetic ear. In some cases, the mother also seemed to have moved a little from the traditional views of child rearing practices, thereby being somewhat more understanding and tolerant of conflicting views. It was interesting to note through the principle of omission that fathers were not perceived as supportive.

There were two exceptional cases (a male and a female) in which the mothers were *authoritative*. An intimate relationship between the mothers and participants was identified. Unlike most of the other participants, these two participants felt comfortable disclosing with the mother without fearing any criticism or rebuke. Obviously there was a high level of trust. The overall data analysis of these participants indicated that they were developing quite well and expressed an optimistic future, including a vision about their career. This is in line with the findings of a study (Suldo & Heubner, 2004) that found a negative relationship between authoritative parenting and adolescent problem behaviour. The study by Fletcher et al. (1999) found that having one authoritative parent is as beneficial as having both parents authoritative with regards to psychosocial adjustment (Fletcher et al., 1999). According to Fletcher and associates "The strengths of having one

authoritative parent are so powerful that they compensate for the shortcomings of a non authoritative parent" (p. 608). Moreover, Young and Miller (1995) found that perceived maternal and paternal support are equally important in predicting life satisfaction of both sons and daughters.

The majority of participants in the current study perceived parents as supportive in instrumental support. Parents did not want them to experience the hard life they had had both in Malta and in Australia. Participants argued that "parents know what's best" for them and they want to spare their children the hard life that they had to endure, especially with regards to lack of education. Comments like "My parents want me to get a good education…They do not want me to go through what they went through because they had no education" were quite common. Another participant reflected "I can talk to my mother about my studies. I can talk to her about that kind of thing. But my father is a quiet person. All he talks about is footy".

According to most participants, parents had poor listening skills. They did not seem to be aware of their children's emotional needs that, according to Scabini and Cigoli (1997) need to be met in order not to feel alienated. One participant argued:

> My mum and dad are a lot older than me and I feel that they understand but my parents are like in an old stage in their mind. They don't see what's now. Their minds are like in olden days. They're strict…and shut you out. They do not give you a chance to let them know how you feel. And you cannot express how you feel without fearing that they will criticize you.

Participants in the current study also reported that parents were self-contained. One participant commented that when conflicts arose with her parents she said to herself "Don't you know I feel bad, like angry or something…It's like how can you act like that? They don't really show their emotions". This supports Oyserman and associates' (2002) argument that families who are high on traditionalism do not encourage emotional expression.

As expected, reaching out to friends for support was quite common, especially among girls in the current study. This is in accordance with past research (Piko, 2001) that found that this strategy was common among both boys and girls, but more so for girls. In the current investigation, comments like "I go to my friend especially like one of

them it's like a normal conversation because we just talk about anything. And because we are open about anything we rely on each other" and "I've got a couple of friends that I can really talk to" were quite common. Another participant argued "And like if I do something they don't get mad and I don't tell my parents because if I do something they get mad. They don't understand what you're going through. They think it's your fault and that's it".

Unlike native Maltese, the issue of lack of trust among friends was not as pronounced among Maltese-Australian adolescents. There were only two cases in which the fear of trust came up. They both argued that it is important whom to trust for fear of betrayal among friends. It was also interesting to note that the concept of gossip did not come up. This suggests that Maltese-Australian adolescents are experiencing some degree of freedom from the social constraints that are experienced in Malta.

### 8.2.5 Contributing Factors in Relation to Feeling Upset or Unhappy

Data analysis of life dissatisfaction among Maltese-Australian adolescents revealed a number of themes (see Table 8). For some participants, the lack of freedom due to excessive parental control was salient. They felt that parents were running their lives. One participant commented:

> You're being run by someone else. Like if you know yourself you should be yourself. You shouldn't let anyone tell you what to do. Like if you are yourself you should run your own life like you shouldn't have someone run it for you. Like God gave you a life to live and you should live for what you want to do. Parents should stand by making sure you don't do nothing wrong. But run your life as you

Table 8

Factors Relating to Feeling Unhappy or Upset

| |
|---|
| Lack of freedom |
| Lack of trust |
| Social issues, such as drugs, suicide, poverty, and war |

want it because God gave that life to have fun and freedom and things like that….you should get what you want….if not, I get upset.

Another issue that emerged is the lack of trust, both in relation to parents and friends. Some adolescents expressed the need to be trusted by their parents. One participant felt that "Australian parents trust their kids, not like Maltese parents. They don't trust you especially when you are out with friends". In some cases this lack of trust was also experienced in relation to friends, especially for girls. One participant preferred to have boys as friends "because girls are jealous of you. Sometimes they even do stupid things behind your back and they are not to be trusted". Insecure female adolescents were vulnerable to rejection when relationships with boyfriends came to an end.

Data analysis of the current investigation also indicated that social problems, such as drugs, suicide, poverty, and war were sources of distress for some Maltese-Australian adolescents. Further probing indicated it was not the social problems per se, but rather the fact that they had no control over the situations that distressed them. Indeed, the overall data analysis of these participants indicated that the control exerted by their parents was high. A sense of helplessness was salient for these participants.

### 8.2.6 Who or What Make Adolescents Feel Good?

In exploring the factors that make Maltese-Australian adolescents feel good, three themes emerged (see Table 9). The family seemed to be quite salient for some participants. "Having a family that I can talk to would make me feel good" was a common response by those adolescents who did not have an emotionally supportive family. The two participants who had authoritative mothers pointed out that being able to talk to their mother made them feel good. Data analysis indicated a desire to have intimate relationships with parents, to be able to disclose any intimate concerns without fearing criticism and rejection. This suggests that in meeting their challenges, adolescents need parental support. As Scabini and Cigoli (1997) argued adolescents need to feel free but not alone in journeying through adolescence. The need to be trusted by parents was also important for Maltese-Australian adolescents. When trusted in looking after his little nephew one participant suggested "I feel like a grown up and I feel I'm teaching him

Table 9

Themes that Reflect a Good Sense of Being

| |
|---|
| Having an emotionally supportive family environment |
| Interaction with friends |
| Music |

something, instead of I am the one that is being teached. Like I'm teaching him something good". Another participant commented "My nephew is 10 months old. My dad plays with him. Even my mum. He makes everyone happy". Such positive interactions may be enhancing the family's cohesion and perhaps reinforcing the family's solidarity, thereby giving participants a sense of security.

Interacting with friends also made Maltese-Australian adolescents feel good. For some participants it was the ability to disclose with them "without fearing any criticism" that made them feel good. For others, it was the caring that friends showed towards them. As one participant pointed out "…they actually cared you know. And they gave me comfort".

Music has also been identified as a theme that reflected a good sense of being among Maltese-Australian adolescents. Comments such as "Music usually makes me feel better" were quite common. Music may not only help them relax, but may also help them identify with the lyrics of the song which may be comforting to them. "When I just want to relax I just want to put on some good music. When I sort of want to liven things up a bit I just put on fast beat music".

### 8.2.7 National/Ethnic Identity among Maltese-Australian Adolescents

To address the question of identity, participants were asked the question "If someone asks you 'What nationality are you?' what would you say?" All participants, except one, identified themselves as 'Maltese' in terms of nationality. Some considered themselves as "strictly Maltese"; while others as Maltese, but born in Australia. Only one

participant identified herself as Australian. Notably, no participants identified themselves as Maltese-Australians.

Most of the participants had been to Malta for a holiday. In order to probe further into their ethnic identity, participants were further asked if the issue of national identity came up while they were in Malta. The answer was in the affirmative. When they were asked "What nationality are you?" while they were in Malta, some of them identified themselves as Maltese, but living in Australia. Others could not identify themselves as "pure Maltese" or "Maltese Maltese", while others identified themselves as Australians, even though in Australia they identified themselves as Maltese. One participant commented "I said I was an Aussie, I don't know why. And then I come here and 'what nationality are you?' I'm Maltese. I sound stupid I know….It's weird".

In spite of the self-labeling as Maltese, most Maltese-Australian adolescents are also embracing the Australian culture and they tend to switch roles back and forth as the situation arises. As one participant pointed out:

> I see a lot of me as Maltese…I see a little bit more as Australian….It depends where I am. Like if I am at school I consider myself more Maltese than Australian. But if I'm out shopping and that or not a necessarily a Maltese area, I'm Australian. But with the family, because they speak in Maltese, I'm more Maltese than anything else.

This strategy of biculturalism indicates that an individual may be able to use all the strategies at different times, depending on the situation. This is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Coleman and associates (2001) in the United States. These researchers found that the acculturating strategy used by immigrants was context specific. At home Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to be using a separation strategy and "feel like Maltese". One participant, for example, commented:

> ....they [parents] still speak Maltese at home even though I don't speak it. But I can understand it. There's that traditional cooking and even at church the vast majority are Maltese. So when I hear that, eat that dish, hear the Maltese program on the radio ….I feel Maltese….Even when we go over my grandfather's house. He puts on the *banda*….we got photos, videos about Malta…..it's very much part of my family.

Outside the domestic sphere Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to use a bicultural approach. In fact, many of them responded that the Maltese culture was not "affecting" them at all; that is, it was not stopping them from doing anything that otherwise they would have liked to do. According to one participant:

> ….as a teenager there is no specific activity I would do that would sort of make me different from anybody else because of my culture. I don't think I do things that just only Maltese would do….I do go to night clubs quite a bit but I go with Vietnamese people and Italian people. The school I go to is very multicultural. I think I have more Asian friends than I do have Anglo Saxon or Maltese. Being Maltese doesn't steer me away from interacting with other people of different nationalities.

Like this participant, the other participants also mixed with friends of other nationalities. For these adolescents, being Maltese was not a hindrance, at least at a behavioural level.

Although Maltese-Australian adolescents felt comfortable with their ethnic identity when they found themselves in an environment that was dominated by members of ethnic minority groups, there was some indication that when they found themselves in an environment that was dominated by Anglo-Australian adolescents, they were not so comfortable. This was the case with one participant who commented:

> I feel left out of the group because we haven't got anything in common…….Sometimes I feel I'm not as important in that group; because like not as important, just like less things in common. Like they talk about something; I don't really fit into that. So then I talk to another friend who is Maltese. I'm not picking her because she is Maltese but because we are more similar……We Maltese look different. Maybe that's why too I feel like that.

Maltese-Australian adolescents have indicated that they are quite happy living in Australia because, unlike Malta, this country has a lot to offer. At the beginning of the interview, participants were presented with a scenario "If a boy or girl the same age as you is coming to Australia from Malta, what will you tell them about life in Australia?" Relatively speaking, they showed a lot of favouritism to the in-group, namely as "Australians" (see Table 10). This finding is parallel to an argument that the in-group is

Table 10

Themes Arising from the Scenario

| |
|---|
| Australia is multicultural and tolerant of other nationalities |
| Unlike native Maltese, people in Australia are more relaxed and lay back |
| In Australia there are lots of places of entertainment |
| Relatively speaking there is more freedom in Australia than in Malta |
| People in Australia have different opinions |
| People in Australia have freedom of choice |
| Australia is more 'open' compared to Malta |

current study, for example, found that going to church every Sunday was still the norm. Only three female participants in late adolescence (aged between 17-18 years) have strongly indicated a shift from the sex stereotype roles, questioning social issues, including religious beliefs. One participant commented:

> I listen to the values that Maltese generally do have - I listen to my parents and I sort of have come away from that because I think very differently. For example, according to the Maltese culture women should be at home and take care of their husbands. I think 'No'. I don't want to get married early…I want to travel and get education first…. I am a Maltese. I do not expect to hold the traditional values that they do.

Such comments indicate that these adolescents have started the separation-individuation process (Maslow, 1970).

As already pointed out, Maltese-Australian adolescents have a good understanding of their traditional culture. This has been facilitated by a traditional Maltese home environment and by the fact that they have been to Malta for a holiday (in many cases they have been to Malta more than once). Although, at one level, there seems to be some ethnic identity confusion especially when they find themselves in an unfamiliar environment, at another level both the understanding and the practice of the

Maltese culture are helping them to feel grounded. One participant portrayed this possible asset:

> …We're based, we know who we are kind of thing. So we know we're Maltese and religion is a part. Our religion has values. So we live according to those values. So at home we don't have any problems because we all follow the same rules. But that's because we're Maltese, compared to other nationalities who like Australians they don't have religion so they haven't got a sense of unity, or you know, something which they have related to one another.

### 8.2.9 Conclusion

As expected, Maltese-Australian adolescents are dealing with a number of developmental and cultural issues. Although, at a collective level the Maltese family is perceived as a close family, at an individual level, there is a discrepancy between the adolescents' perceptions and their experiences within the home environment. Parents were reported to have poor listening skills. They were also psychologically controlling. The individual interviews revealed that most adolescents were submissive in relation to their parents' demands and expectations. These findings are a reflection of the 'broken clock' (Krupinski, 1984). Maltese-australian parents, according to adolescents, are still fully embedded in the traditional culture of origin.

The current findings identified a generation gap. Unlike their parents, Maltese-Australian adolescents have made a shift (albeit small, but yet significant) towards the non-traditional end of the traditional/non-traditional continuum. The prevalence of parent-child conflicts is, therefore, high. The lack of intimacy among family members, as well as the parents' negative attitudes towards conflicts is not creating a supportive environment that encourages the resolution of such conflicts.

However, a further interesting finding emerged. In many cases, parents were perceived as caring and meaning well. They wanted to spare their children the hardships that they endured both in Malta and Australia.

Besides developmental issues, cultural issues also seem to be impinging on the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents. These adolescents have reported a high level of ethnic identification, especially in the home environment. This is of an

advantage for them because they seem well grounded in their culture of origin. However, although they seem to have adopted a flexible approach in the employment of acculturating strategies, there is some indication that some of them are not equipped enough to deal with the Australian aspect of their identity especially when they find themselves in an environment which is predominantly Anglo-Australian. Identity confusion has also been identified when these adolescents extended their geographical boundaries and found themselves in unfamiliar situations.

## 8.3 Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, the data indicates that the daily life experiences of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents are quite intriguing. They are dealing with both cultural and developmental issues that are impacting on their life satisfaction. However, although a number of similarities can be drawn from both groups, the acculturation process of Maltese-Australian adolescents remains unique.

# Chapter 9

## Discussion about the Findings of the Qualitative Study

In order to examine life satisfaction of adolescents, the current investigation explored a number of areas in the life experiences of both native Maltese adolescents living in Malta and Maltese-Australian adolescents living in Australia. These areas included the home environment, social support, and coping strategies. For Maltese-Australian adolescents, their ethnic identity and identification were also explored.

### 9.1 Analysis for Native Maltese Adolescents living in Malta

#### 9.1.1 Overview

According to the findings, native Maltese adolescents are subjected to a traditional home environment, characterized by strong family values, authoritarian parenting styles, and parents who strictly adhere to religious values and beliefs. Through globalisation and modernisation, adolescents have made a slight (yet quite significant) move towards a non-traditional orientation. The results also indicated that adolescents are shifting from a collectivistic orientation to an individualistic one. In the following discussion, it will be argued that there is a mismatch between parental care giving provisions and the adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs that arise from contemporary society.

#### 9.1.2 The Maltese Family in Malta

Most participants perceived the Maltese family as being *"magħquda"* [closely knit]. This is in accordance with past literature (Abela, 1991, 1995; Tabone, 1995) that has investigated the Maltese family. It is also in line with the characteristics of a collectivistic society (Triandis, 1995). The case of the Maltese family could be also attributed to the need for survival. Having a history of colonization, the Maltese community required a strong sense of cohesion in order to survive over the years. The family was a social agency that ensured that the traditional values and beliefs that bounded not only family members, but also the whole community, were passed on from

one generation to another. It was also a means of social control to maintain its identity at such critical times. The current study has confirmed the parents' attempts to perpetuate a sense of cultural continuity and identity. However, at another level, such an approach can be interpreted as a means of psychological control. Its implications on the psychological well-being of adolescents will be addressed below.

According to participants in the current study, being a close family also meant containing the conflicts between its members, especially between husbands and wives. Valuing *l-għaqda fil-familja* (family unity) is grounded in religious values and beliefs (Abela, 1991). Violating that unity would incur both guilt and shame. Indeed, Abela, for example, found that the Maltese are strong adherents of the Ten Commandments compared to other European countries. He also found that the Maltese reported higher levels of guilt. At a societal level, this is a means of psychological control (Barber & Harmon, 2002). It is important to point out that, although separation of couples is legalized, divorce in Malta is not, especially for marriages that are consummated by the Church. Therefore, the possibility of the disintegration of the family is quite minimal. This situation gave adolescents in the current study a sense of security, especially when compared with other countries in which the divorce rates are escalating.

According to Ahuvia (2002) collectivism "…is a cultural survival mechanism born of necessity for group solidarity" (p. 29). It can be argued that psychological control is imperative for group solidarity, especially in vulnerable times. It binds together its members by ensuring a uniform set of values and beliefs. In the past, that psychological control (both at the micro and macro levels) in Malta has served a critical functional role for its cultural survival. However, by the passing of time (especially during this last decade) Malta, in spite of its high levels of tradition, has also gradually been shifting to a non-traditional orientation (Abela, 1991) - a cultural shift that has also been confirmed by the current findings. Therefore, that psychological control may no longer be so relevant in contemporary Maltese society. Data in the current study, for example, indicates that these adolescents are trying to free themselves from the social obligations that have bounded members of the family and society in the past. Ahuvia (2002) argued that collectivism could give way to more individualism as societies modernize and the needs of those societies change. Inglehart (2000) argued along the same lines. According to that author,

affluent societies are moving towards modern values, implying a transition from scarcity values to security values.

The issue of modernisation/globalisation in Malta, for example, is a case in point. Native Maltese adolescents are constantly pressured, especially through tourism and the media, to adapt to values and beliefs that are in conflict with the traditional culture. These adolescents require more freedom from social coercion in order to question traditional values and beliefs without having to suffer severe consequences, such as losing face and the experience of parental rejection. It seems that the needs of these adolescents, including the need for psychological control, are different from those experienced by the older generations. According to the current findings, there is a mismatch between parental care giving provisions and expectations and their children's needs.

In order to identify this mismatch, a close examination of the Maltese family, both at collectivistic and individualistic perspectives is required. This examination requires a clarification of the concept of care giving. It is important to point out that the notion of care giving in relation to the Maltese family is slightly different from that used by Green and Werner (1996). These authors argue that the most important elements of closeness-care giving include: warmth, nurturance, time together, physical intimacy (affection) and consistency. As will be indicated in the following discussion, for the Maltese family, care giving also includes psychological control, protection, and cultural continuity.

The concept of *l-għaqda fil-familja*' (family unity) also requires clarification. The high cohesion that is prevalent within the Maltese family is likely to be enmeshment considering the fact that the parents are reported to be psychologically controlling as indicated by the findings of the current study. In addition, there is a Maltese cultural issue in relation to the concepts of cohesion and enmeshment. The Maltese language is limited in comparison to the English language. For example, there is no word equivalent to 'enmeshment'. Therefore, this concept is alien for the Maltese community. The only word available is '*għaqda*' (unity, closeness) which is always considered as positive in relation to the family.

From a collectivistic perspective, the Maltese family is high in care giving. According to the current findings, parents are ensuring they pass on the traditional values

and beliefs to their children, thereby ensuring cultural continuity (Hofstede, 1991) especially at a time of significant cultural changes that are happening at a fast pace, as indicated by the current study. These values and beliefs have a strong binding element that fosters cohesion, both within the family and society. In ensuring such cohesion/solidarity, Maltese parents are also fostering a sense of belonging that is critical for the well-being of the Maltese (Abela, 1991). They are also maximising social capital that has been found to be essential for the experience of happiness both in low- and high-income countries (Bjornskov, 2003).

According to the perceptions of the adolescents in the current study, most parents are authoritarian. Such an approach suggests that parents are *enforcing* (even in subtle ways) the perpetuation of the traditional values and beliefs. The present data, for example, revealed an element of authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1996) through verbal abuse. Criticism and rebuke from parents were quite common. In one case, there was admitted physical abuse. Data also indicated that gossip still has a strong hold, both among adolescents and parents. This is in line with O'Reilly Mizzi's (1994) argument that gossip in Malta serves as a means of social control. The "law and order" mentality inherent in authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1996) is still prevalent within the Maltese family as indicated by the current findings.

Authoritarianism could be related to collectivism. Hofstede (2001) argued that "Because they are tied to value systems shared by the majority, issues of collectivism versus individualism carry strong moral overtones" (p. 210). Kemmelmeier and associates (2003) found a relationship between authoritarianism and collectivism in a sample in the U.S. From a collectivistic perspective, this control has been a useful tool in Malta as it enhanced family and social solidarity. Historically, such solidarity was critical for the Maltese to survive as a nation. Therefore, this psychological control has served a adaptive purpose in the past. For parents in contemporary Maltese society, the need for such control is still embedded in their psyche. Indeed, it has been argued (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997) that "It is through each person's active engagement in the historically constructed social realities that characteristics of these realities are transformed into characteristics of psychological processes" (p. 1263).

Through the perpetuation of traditional values and beliefs, Maltese parents are also ensuring cultural continuity (Hofstede, 1991). Indeed, the Maltese traditional culture, although historically it has been under continuous threat, has been successfully preserved over the centuries (Adams, 1996). Such a cultural continuity provides a sense of security. It provides members of the family/community with a consolidated Maltese identity. Discontinuation of this traditional culture would entail emotional upheaval, as confirmed by the current findings. By ensuring cultural continuity, Maltese parents are (perhaps even unconsciously) attempting to spare their children such an emotional upheaval. These parents could be experiencing "uncertainty avoidance" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 145) which refers to "The extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (p. 161).

For Maltese parents, care giving is highly synonymous with protection. Such a mentality is grounded in the Maltese culture. The Maltese people have a history of vulnerability as a nation. For many centuries, Malta was constantly under attack from foreign rulers. It was not until 1972 when the British troops completely moved out of the country, that total freedom from the last foreign occupation occurred. The notion of protection is also rooted in moral/religious values. Parents have a strong obligation to ensure that children embrace the religious values and beliefs as a protection against evil. They are also required to protect them from any shame that jeopardizes the honour of the family. In this sense, Maltese parents are high in care giving. This is in line with Abela's (1991) argument that within the Maltese family, the welfare of the children is very much at heart, with a strong willingness on the part of the parents to sacrifice themselves for their children.

According to Green and Werner (1996), *"openness of communication"* (p. 125) is a dimension of proximity that is separate from care giving ("Openness" refers to disclosure of intimate personal feelings, important facts about the self, and directness in discussing conflicts). This view is supported by the findings in the current study. In spite of the high level of care giving, disclosure within the Maltese family was not encouraged. This is in line with previous research (Wynne, 1984) that found that couples in highly traditional marriages were quite warm and nurturing, but not particularly self-revealing or intimate in self-expression. In the case of the Maltese family, the lack of disclosure could

be attributed to collectivistic orientation on the part of the parents. In analyzing the inhibition of emotional expression in collectivistic societies, Oyserman and associates (2002), for example, speculated that members in these societies are socialized to control their emotional expressions so as to maintain in-group harmony.

If we look at the Maltese family from an individualistic perspective, it can be argued that the family environment is no longer conducive to the psychological development of adolescents, especially now that the latter are in the process of shifting towards the individualistic end of the collectivism-individualistic continuum. In other words, there is no good "person-social environment fit" (Triandis, 2000, p. 30). According to Triandis, this mismatch results in low subjective well-being. Ruggiero (2001), in examining the psychological and socio-cultural correlates of eating disorders among adolescents in the Mediterranean area argued that "At the present time the Mediterranean world is one which tends to import western cultural standards, modern social habits and independent ways of thinking, yet attempts to retain jealously its traditional values" (p. 199). This author also identified the psychological confusion and the subsequent tension that adolescents are subjected to due to partial modernization.

As already argued, native Maltese adolescents are subjected to high levels of parental psychological control. Instead of dealing with the identity issue, these adolescents may be arrested at the control vs autonomy crisis Erikson, (1968). Therefore, their psychosocial development could be at risk. Parental psychological control is not allowing adolescents to test their new ideas that are usually at loggerheads with those upheld by their parents. Consequently, the individuation process that is critical for their psychological well-being (Maslow, 1970) is not encouraged. Native Maltese adolescents are, therefore, caught up in a push-pull situation, creating tension between them and their parents. The individual interviews in the current study not only identified emotional distance among its members, but also passive anger amongst both parents and children. Indeed, according to the current findings, feelings of anxiety and depression were not uncommon – a finding that parallels the study by Boyd and associates (2000) who found that 14.4% of adolescents in Australia suffer from depression and 13.2% suffer from anxiety.

The wide prevalence of these negative feelings among native Maltese adolescents is concerning in relation to their satisfaction with life. Although the European Survey (Abela, 1991) found that the Maltese reported slightly higher levels of satisfaction with life than other European countries, participants in the current study indicated that their subjective life experiences were presenting a different picture. It is important to point out that participants in Abela's study were older than 18 years of age. That study was also based on data collected in 1984. A lot of cultural changes have taken place since then.

The high level of cohesion within the Maltese family encourages interdependence among its members. Such dependence may be jeopardizing their level of self-esteem as it is prohibiting them from experiencing a sense of self-fulfillment and full credit for endeavours that require self-responsibility and self-control. In other words, their potential always depends on others. They cannot take full credit for their achievements. Hence, their self-esteem is likely to be low. Grob (2000), for example, found a positive relationship between perceived control and self-esteem among adolescents across cultures.

Studies that have examined self-enhancement – a construct that also reflects self-esteem – also shed more light on the issue of self-esteem, especially in collectivistic societies. Kurman and Sriram (1997) found that there was lower level of self-enhancement in a collectivistic oriented culture, namely Singapore, than in Israel. Another study (Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002) also found that Asian Americans reported lower levels of self-enhancement than European Americans. It has been argued (Kurman, 2003) that it is *cultural restrictions* rather than the lack of self-enhancement motive that are responsible for the low self-enhancement found in certain collectivistic cultures. This is in line with Brown's (2003) conclusion that collectivistic cultures discourage the self-enhancement's expression.

In the case of native Maltese adolescents, the enhancement of self-esteem is not traditionally encouraged in Malta, especially among older generations. This is partly due to the high levels of collectivism and the preoccupation with the interests of the group/family rather than the individual. Diener and Diener (1995), for example, found that whereas satisfaction with self was strongly correlated with life satisfaction in highly industrialized, individualistic western nations, satisfaction with self was less correlated

with global life satisfaction in less industrialized, collectivist nations. Having a history of survival, the Maltese parents and their ancestors were more concerned with survival issues, rather than individual needs, including the need/motivation of self-enhancement that has been identified as a supposedly universal need (Kurman, 2003). Self-esteem among the Maltese adolescents is also questionable because the concept of self-esteem is alien to the Maltese people. For example, there is no equivalent word in the Maltese language. Therefore, public awareness and education about the importance of self-esteem in relation to psychological well-being is limited.

Instead of self-enhancement, such as self-esteem, native Maltese adolescents are likely to be developing a critical self. According to the participants in the current study, parents were reported to be critical. Such an approach could be having a debilitating effect on their psychological well-being. Instead of being oriented toward self-enhancement by discovering, confirming, and expressing positively valued attributes of the self, these adolescents are oriented toward self-improvement by being attentive to and identifying negatively valued attributes of the self so as to eliminate them. This approach was also identified among adolescents in Japan (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997). In another study, Kitayama and associates (1997) found that Japanese respondents reported that self-esteem would decrease more in failure situations than it would increase in success situations. This indicates that negative attributes may carry more weight than positive ones on the psychological well-being/lack of well-being of the individual. Indeed, the current findings, for example, consistently indicated that the fear of shame through gossip was carrying much more weight than positive feelings associated with honour among native Maltese adolescents.

In the case of native Maltese adolescents, the tendency to be self-critical is grounded both at a societal level and an individual level. At a societal level, this is a means of social control grounded in the code of honour/shame (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994). At an individual level, it is grounded in religious beliefs and moral values. As already argued, the Maltese family is strongly influenced by religion. One religious practice that is common among the Maltese is confessions and the absolution of sins. These confessions require self-examination to identify negative attitudes and behaviours that violate religious values and beliefs. Confessing such behaviour is critical for the

absolution of sins and the subsequent eternal salvation. Any deviation from such a practice entails condemnation. Although the Maltese family is becoming secularized (Tabone, 1995), it may still be influenced by such beliefs. Abela (1991), for example, found that 86% of the Maltese believe in hell, 77% believe in the devil and 90% believe in sin. Although earlier in the thesis it was argued that Abela's findings are based on data that was collected in 1984 and therefore, the findings could be outdated, it is important to point out that the core elements of culture (i.e., values and beliefs) are more resistant to change (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1984).

It can be concluded that the family environment of native Maltese adolescents in contemporary society is not conducive to self-enhancement. The notion of the self and related constructs, such as self-esteem, may not be so important for native Maltese parents, but it is probably becoming increasingly salient for their children's well-being and life satisfaction. Unlike their predecessors, these adolescents do not have to deal with national survival issues. Therefore, their psychological needs require fulfillment for their psychological well-being (Maslow, 1970). Indeed Inglehart (2000) argued that affluent countries move from the fulfillment of scarcity needs to security needs.

The current study indicated that all those participants whose mothers had joined the workforce felt that there was no cohesion in the family. It seems that this cultural change is quite significant for native Maltese. The traditional sex role stereotype behaviour that is being challenged is having a great impact on the family, especially adolescents. Family cohesion is threatened. The findings suggest that there is not only no time for the family to be together, but also there is no time availability to experience intimacy. Parents are not making themselves available for their children to share some intimate time, not even during the weekend. This is in line with Wynne's (1984) argument that couples in highly traditional marriages are not particularly self-revealing or intimate in self-expression.

The problem in relation to the Maltese family seems to go beyond the long working hours. In fact, the overall analysis of most of the participants revealed that the parents were psychologically controlling and authoritarian, especially the father. It is possible that challenging the traditional norms is highlighting pre-existing conditions that are 'out-dated' and no longer relevant to the psychological development of native

Maltese adolescents in contemporary society. Although traditionally the family has been highly cohesive/enmeshed, it is possible that at an emotional level, the level of intimacy was low. The Maltese family, as indicated by the current data, is characterized by an authoritarian parenting style that usually incorporates authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1996). Such a parenting style has an element of psychological coercion that is likely to foster inhibition within a child. Indeed, corporal punishment is still an acceptable means for disciplining children in Malta (Cole, 1994). Consequently, the potential to disclose at an intimate level is minimized. Anecdotal evidence suggests that disclosure within the Maltese community was only encouraged within a religious context, namely confessing to a priest. This was the experience of the current author.

In addition, the notion of trust in relation to the Maltese family is likely to have a different meaning from that experienced in individualistic societies, such as Australia. Trust in Malta is not synonymous with disclosing. It is important to point out that the concept of listening, for example, is alien to the Maltese. This is partly because the Maltese language does not have an equivalent word. Whether a person needs to hear or listen it is always '*tisma*' '. Also, as a collectivistic society, the emotional needs of the individual may not be so important. Therefore, the need to listen to another person is overlooked. As with the notion of care giving, trust is more related to protection, community aid (more specifically material aid) and provision of food and shelter. In this sense, parents are highly trustworthy. For Maltese parents, trust also means surrendering yourself *totally* to parents, thereby idealizing them in all aspects of life. Any deviance, including questioning parents' views, would mean lack of trust and respect. This parallels the notion of trust in relation to God as taught by religious denominations, such as the Catholic Church, that are highly conservative. Indeed, Birgerard and Granqvist (2004) found a correspondence between attachment to parents and God. According to the findings of that study, the attachment relationship with God is influenced by attachment history.

As already argued, how an individual feels in Malta may not be considered as important for subjective well-being, especially among the older generations. However, comments by the participants in the current study indicate that native Maltese adolescents are expressing a need for parental *emotional* support in difficult times. Indeed, that need

was echoed continuously throughout the interviews. This finding is in line with a finding (Chou, 2003) among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. That study also found that if adolescents feel that parents do not know or understand them they are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. Since perceived emotional support encompasses an element empathy and acceptance (Sarason et al., 1983, 1987), it is possible that by not receiving emotional support from parents, native Maltese adolescents do not perceive parental acceptance. The study by Ronald and Rohner (2003) examined maternal versus paternal acceptance among university students in Korea. Results showed that the level of daughters' (but not sons') emotional empathy varied directly with the level of maternal acceptance, whereas the level of sons' (but not daughters') emotional empathy varied directly with the level of paternal acceptance.

Having made a slight shift towards the individualistic orientation, native Maltese adolescents are experiencing a need that perhaps previous generations did not have the opportunity to experience since they were preoccupied with interests that primarily served the community and its survival, thereby brushing aside their own personal needs. It is possible that the older generations, more specifically Maltese parents in contemporary Maltese society, have not moved beyond the basic level of survival in their hierarchical needs (Maslow, 1970). Although colonization in Malta was finalized in 1972 when the British forces moved out and Malta became a republic, contemporary Maltese society, especially parents, may still be subjected to the psychological implications of the past. In other words, they are still trapped within a survival mode. Now that Malta is no longer threatened by foreign invasion and since its prosperity is increasing to the extent that it has a high standard of living (Abela, 1991; Sultana, 1994), the need to move up to the next level of the hierarchical needs (Maslow, 1970), namely trust, is coming to the forefront of native Maltese adolescents in contemporary society. Indeed, many participants in the current study expressed such a need, both in relation to parents and members of the community. Inglehart (2000) also identified this need by arguing that affluent societies are in transition from scarcity values to security values.

### 9.1.2.a The Generation Gap: Its Implications

Data analysis identified the salience of the generation gap. Parents, especially fathers, were reported to be traditional, whereas adolescents showed that they started to shift (at least at a cognitive level) towards the post-traditional end of the traditional/post-traditional continuum. Previous studies (Abela, 1991; Tabone, 1995) found similar trends among native Maltese parents and adolescents. Abela argued that Malta is both traditional and post-traditional.

The current study found that, unlike their parents, adolescents started asserting themselves. They are not satisfied with the mentality that 'children should be seen but not heard'. Instead of putting faith before reason (as traditional parents tend to do) (Altemeyer, 1996) native Maltese adolescents require an inductive reasoning approach when parents object to their behaviours. They are also questioning social issues, such as religion, cohabitation, divorce and homosexuality. According to participants, their parents felt threatened by these issues, especially when religious values and beliefs were challenged. This indicates that parents are resistant to cultural changes and perhaps feel the need to maintain the status quo more than their children. However, at another level, this resistance could be suggesting an emotional insecurity that is discouraging them from taking on the challenge to embark on a cultural transition.

Parents are also not identifying the individuality of their siblings and their specific needs which arise from the contemporary adolescent culture. The need for individuality that has been identified by the current study indicates that native Maltese adolescents are leaning towards an individualistic orientation while their parents are still valuing the need to be similar to others, including themselves. In other words, parents are valuing conformity, another reflection of collectivism (Triandis, 1995).

Data in the current study further indicated that in some cases, mothers were slightly more flexible and understanding than fathers, especially with regards to going out with friends. This suggests that there are inconsistencies among parents with regards to certain areas of discipline. These situations could be jeopardizing parental intimacy, thereby increasing parental conflicts that, in turn, may impinge on the adolescent's life satisfaction as indicated by previous research (Stone, 2001). The study by Grossman and

Rowat (1995) also showed that poor parental relationship was associated with low life satisfaction and high anxiety amongst adolescents.

Parental intimacy among native Maltese could also be jeopardized by an imbalance of power. The current study identified a hierarchical system within the family. In some families it was the father who was dominant; in other cases it was the mother who ran the household. Given that a hierarchical system involves oppression (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002) antagonistic feelings are likely to arise whether it is the mother or the father who is running the Maltese household. The case of native Maltese is further complicated by the possibility that Maltese parents, being subjected to both matriarchal and patriarchal systems (Tabone, 1991; Tonna, 1996; Vassallo, 1994) are confronted with some confusion in relation to some aspects of their gender roles and parental expectations. Indeed, Miceli (1994) argued that Maltese women, for example, are getting mixed messages in relation to their social position within the Maltese society.

#### 9.1.2.b The Experience of Parent-Child Conflicts

Data analysis in the current investigation indicated that many participants experienced a lot of parent-child conflicts. These conflicts revolved mostly around schoolwork and going out with friends. Girls were often at loggerheads with parents in relation to boyfriends. Many participants reported that parents had high academic expectations that created lots of conflicts as observed in previous research among Chinese adolescents (Yau & Smetana, 1996).

The current study found that these academic expectations were stressful partly because there seemed to be a great deal of competition among students and partly because the workload was quite heavy, hardly leaving any time for entertainment and relaxation. Valois, Zullig, Huebner, and Drane (2004) found a negative relationship between physical activity behaviours and perceived life satisfaction amongst adolescents in South Carolina. Academic stress is likely to be jeopardizing the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents. Karen et al. (2003), for example, found that an increasing degree of stress reduced the feeling of happiness among school adolescents in Norway. In the case of Maltese adolescents, academic expectations encompassed the fear of failure and not meeting the parents' expectations. This was also the case of Chinese adolescents

(Shan, 2001). The fear of academic failure of native Maltese adolescents may also impede their academic performance. Indeed, many participants in the current study felt that they were not doing well academically. It is possible that these adolescents are low on the need for cognition that has been positively related to the life satisfaction of college students (Coutinho & Woolery, 2004). Leung (2004) also found that academic competence significantly predicted life satisfaction of Chinese adolescents.

Besides causing stress, these parental academic expectations could be jeopardizing the life satisfaction of adolescents by inhibiting their ability to feel satisfied with life. According to Nix et al. (1999) when parents have many high expectations, it is possible that the goals that adolescents have are not 'self-concordant goals' – that is goals that are meeting their basic needs and are not aligned with their own true self. Their goals are more driven by the need to meet their parents' expectations rather than their own needs. In other words, goal achievement is not autonomously driven. As such, goal achievement for these adolescents may be lacking the generation of the vitality and happiness that only autonomous success tends to yield (Nix et al., 1999). The importance of self-concordance was also identified by a recent study (Sheldon et al., 2004) that found that this factor is a predictor of subjective well-being in four different cultures – U. S., China, South Korea and Taiwan. These authors argued that " 'owning one's actions' – that is feeling that one's goals are consistent with the self – may be important for most if not all humans" (Sheldon et al., 2004, p. 209).

Data in the current study also indicated that many of the conflicts were unresolved (at least for the adolescents). Further attempts to resolve them on the part of the adolescents were futile, partly because that would have raised further conflicts with parents and partly because of the authoritarian approach that parents used. Conflict resolution amongst native Maltese needs to be analysed from two perspectives – the parents' and the adolescents'. Given that historically, parents have been subjected to an authoritarian approach, they could have developed a strategy that involves "polarized thinking…… [that is a] view of a conflict in which everything you do is good and everything the other person does is bad" (Johnson, 2003, p. 417). This view parallels the image of God as portrayed by authoritarian religion (Fromm, 1951). Therefore, as a figure of authority, whatever the parent say goes. So when conflicts arise and parents

respond *"Għax hekk"* or *"għax hekk għidt"* for them the conflicts are resolved. However, for the adolescents who are attempting to move from the authoritarian approach to a more democratic approach, such a response is not satisfying. Indeed, according to the data, rationalization was required. Consequently, for them the conflicts were unresolved.

According to Abela (1991) the Maltese value harmony within the family. However, "valuing harmony" could be *masking* other family dynamics as indicated by the current study. It is possible that the Maltese have a low tolerance of family conflicts. Having had a history of survival, the issue of solidarity (both at macro and micro levels) was critical for their survival. Therefore, the forcing approach and the withdrawal approach (Johnson, 2003) used by parents and children respectively in conflict resolution, have served a functional role in the past. However, in contemporary society these strategies are no longer effective. Also, parents may lack the challenge (due to fear of change and the unknown) and the skills to resolve them because they never had the opportunity to learn such skills. Indeed, according to most participants, parents had poor listening skills, suggesting that any further attempts to resolve them would have created more conflicts. Therefore, it is easier for them to sweep them under the carpet. It is also evident that parents are not willing to let go of their control. Any attempts to resolve the conflicts may involve surrendering some of that control.

Expressions such as *"għax hekk għidt"* [because I said so] suggest a parental expectation of 'blind faith' in adolescents. Therefore, rationality or inductive reasoning is not required. The approach that native Maltese parents use may no longer be relevant for the psychological development of native Maltese adolescents within contemporary society. Unlike their parents, these adolescents are experiencing more freedom (albeit small, yet significant) in questioning issues, including conflicts with parents. Therefore, a rational approach is required for the adolescent's resolution of the conflict concerned. Indeed, the approach that the parents were taking generated passive anger amongst adolescents and further emotional distance between parents and adolescents. Such situations are jeopardizing their life satisfaction. According to Heinz (2003), for example, happiness is positively related to rationality at high rationality levels and negatively at

low levels. Bush et al. (2002) also found a positive relationship between parental reasoning and adolescents' self-esteem in Mainland China.

The current study further indicated that parents were psychologically controlling. This is not surprising considering the fact that most parents were still traditional as indicated in the interviews. It is possible that parents, being so grounded in the religious belief that everything is 'in God's hands' could be identifying with the controlling God. It is also possible that, according to Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development, parents may have not resolved the control vs autonomy crisis. Indeed, belonging to a culture that is so psychologically controlling both at micro and macro levels, it is very likely that the lack of resolution of this crisis has been passed on from one generation to the other. Also, being collectivistically oriented, Maltese parents may not value autonomy. Instead, they value interdependence. Such interdependence is also grounded in religious beliefs. As already argued, the notion of determinism is highly prevalent among the Maltese. From this perspective, having a sense of autonomy is inconceivable, perhaps even impossible, especially for parents who strictly adhere to religious values and beliefs. They perceive their actions not as autonomously driven. Instead, God who is perceived as a deity outside the self is responsible for their actions.

### 9.1.3 Adolescents' Attitudes towards Religion

Data analysis indicated that for some participants, religion seemed to be losing its salience through secularization. This is in line with past literature (Tabone, 1995) that examined the transition of the Maltese family. The adolescents are more liberal in their ideas and not as conservative as the previous generations. They are experiencing more freedom to question religious values and beliefs. However, it can be argued that the adolescents are still going through the *transition*, since parents are still adhering to traditional religious values and beliefs. Like any other transition, this process involves a period of uncertainty and apprehension. It is also likely to create internal conflicts. This is partly because the traditional values and beliefs imposed upon them by the parents are still internalized and partly because as the core elements of culture, values and beliefs are more resistant to change (Rosenthal, 1984).

Although religion in Malta is going through secularization, religion still plays a significant role in the lives of the Maltese, including adolescents. Although they may not be aware of it, it seems to be enhancing their satisfaction with life in a number of ways. Rokach (2001) argued that "through affiliating with religious groups and practicing their faith, individuals gain strength, inner peace and a sense of community and belonging" (p. 15). Ferriss (2002) argued along the same lines. Most of the participants in the current study reported that they attended church every Sunday. Although this attendance is on the decline according to the traditional Maltese standards (Abela, 1991), it may still contribute to their life satisfaction. For example, Hintikka and associates (2001) found a positive association between religious attendance and life satisfaction among Finnish general population. Similar findings were also identified among Portuguese adolescents (Neto, 1995). Neto argued that religious affiliation could be a source of peace of mind and interpersonal gratification for adolescents during difficult times.

Religion in Malta could also enhance the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents in another way. Studies (e.g., Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1998) have shown that God can be considered to be an attachment figure to believers. Drawing on attachment theory as formulated by Bowlby (1969) and extended by Ainsworth and colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), these authors argued that believers' relationships with God have striking resemblances to the child's attachment to caregivers by seeking closeness to God in prayer and rituals, using God as a haven during distress and as a secure base for exploration of the environment. Such attachment is precipitated by images of God as being trusting, loving, caring, and protective. In addition to these images, Birgegard and Granqvist argue that images of God as distant and inaccessible are also present in the Western tradition. Such images imply emotional states of despair and emptiness.

A hypothesis that has been postulated, tested and supported by researchers (e.g., Birgegard & Granqvist, 2004; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2003; Kirkpatrick, 1998) is the 'emotional compensation hypothesis' that states that in the case of insecure attachment, religiousness stems from affect regulation strategies to obtain/maintain a sense of security. Individuals who are insecurely attached are more prone to turn to God as a kind of 'surrogate' attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

The attachment theory approach to the psychology of religion in the life experiences of native Maltese is critical to our understanding of their subjective experiences, such as life satisfaction. The Maltese have strong attachments to the notion of God and other religious figures, such as the Virgin Mary, saints and guardian angels. Every village, for example, has a patron saint to which people turn to in times of need. The idea that God (or any other religious figure) is available for protection and comfort in times of distress is widely upheld. Indeed, historically, the Maltese always sought for spiritual interventions in times of national threat from foreign invaders. And when victory was achieved it was always attributed to Our Lady, whether it was against the Turks during the 16th century or during World War II, when Operation Pedestal was successful and the convoy, full of wheat and food supplies entered the Grand Harbour and saved the Maltese nation that was on the brink of starvation. The concept of Our Lady of Victories became embedded in the Maltese culture and the 8th September, *'il-festa tal-Vitorija'* [the feast of Our Lady of Victories] which commemorates Our Lady's interventions on these two historical events became a national day.

According to the current data, parents are not meeting the emotional needs that are in line with the stage of adolescence in contemporary society. For example, their notion of caring/trusting is limited and does not extend to an individualistic notion that includes other needs – e.g. intimacy, understanding, and emotional expression. As already argued, parents, like older generations, could still be functioning from a basic psychological level of survival. Therefore, they never had the opportunity to meet their emotional and other psychological needs. Turning to God and other religious figures as a 'surrogate parent' (Kirkpatrick, 1992) is very likely. Indeed, both God and Our Lady are respectively referred to as *"Alla il-Missier tagħna u l-Omm tagħna Marija"* [God our Father and our Mother Mary]. Even St. Paul and St. Joseph are considered as "*San Pawl il-Missier tagħna u San Guzepp il-Missier tagħna"* (literally meaning St. Paul Our Father and St. Joseph our Father).

However, the image of God in Malta is quite conflicting. Although God is perceived as trusting, caring, and loving, He is also perceived as a fearful figure – judgmental, constantly monitoring thoughts and deeds that violate the teachings of the Church, ready to condemn and punish such behaviour. As already argued, the notions of

sin and hell are still quite prevalent among the Maltese (Abela, 1991). Given that the Maltese use God as a 'surrogate parent' these conflicting images of God could be having a debilitating effect on the processes involved in establishing internal working models of attachment. Indeed, Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz (1999) argued that when such contradictions occur in the caregiver, an "unresolvable paradox" (p. 549) occurs. These authors argue that "Competing and irreconcilable tendencies to move toward and away from the caregiver, who is both the source of alarm and the haven of safety, intensifies the infant's fears…." (p. 549), resulting in a disorganized attachment (see Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999 for a discussion). This kind of attachment, chararacterized by contradictory behaviour patterns of strong avoidance and strong attachment, jeopardizes the psychological development of the individual. It predicts, for example, dissociative symptoms and elevated psychopathology during adolescence.

The current study found that Maltese parents are authoritarian. To date no study has been conducted about the authoritarian image of God among the Maltese. However, given that traditional religions portray God as authoritarian (Altemeyer, 1996) and given that the Maltese (especially older generations) are strictly traditional, the possibility of a correspondence between the authoritarian parents and an authoritarian image of God is high. As such, the psychological implications of this phenomenon need to be acknowledged in order to elicit a bigger picture of native Maltese adolescents.

Fromm (1951) argued that an authoritarian religion is characterized by the virtue of obedience that entails a "cardinal sin of disobedience" (p. 43). Complete submission to the powerful authority of the deity is a critical requirement for the individual to be worthy of the deity's protection. Whereas God is conceived as omnipotent and omniscient the individual is considered as powerless and insignificant. In addition, Fromm continues to argue that:

> The more perfect God becomes, the more imperfect becomes man. He *projects* the best he has on to God and thus impoverishes himself. Now God has all love, all wisdom, all justice - and man is deprived of these qualities, he is empty and poor (Fromm, 1951, p. 57).

For native Maltese, this perception is entrenched in their psyche. The prayer "Lord, I'm not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed" that is uttered during mass reinforces this idea.

### 9.1.4 The Experience of Social Support

According to the findings, native Maltese parents are supportive in instrumental support, but not in emotional support, especially the fathers. The lack of paternal parenting and disconnectedness that were identified is of some concern. For example, a study by Shek (1999) indicated that paternal parenting characteristics were more important than maternal parenting characteristics in predicting life satisfaction in both boys and girls. Colarossi and Eccles (2003) also found that father support predicted depression, especially for boys.

Maltese parents are very supportive in providing material needs. However, according to Young and Miller (1995), these needs may not be as relevant to their life satisfaction. Data indicates that native Maltese adolescents seem to be lacking emotional support from parents. Criticism and even rebuke were reported to be common among parents, especially when their children challenged their traditional values and beliefs. By being critical, Maltese parents are not accepting their children for who they are, especially when adolescents are experiencing difficulties both within and outside the home environment. They are not providing an intimate environment especially during difficult times when children need to be accepted and understood. Indeed, the need for emotional support was continuously echoed throughout the interviews. Maltese parents seem to be lacking a critical component of intimacy, namely *"personal validation"* (Hook, Gerstien, Detterich, & Gridley, 2003, p. 463). These authors argue that *"personal validation"* provides "… an atmosphere of acceptance, [in which] an individual feels free to open up. Thus, personal validation gives the person who is disclosing a sense of acceptance both of what is being said and of who they are" (Hook et al., 2003, p. 463).

As already argued, Maltese parents may still be trapped in a psychological survival mode. Therefore, their basic need of intimacy (Erikson, 1968) may not have been met. Consequently, they are not in a position to provide intimacy for their children. The skills for such a provision are lacking, according to the participants in the current

study. In addition, Maltese parents are still guided by a collectivistic orientation that does not prioritise individual needs, including intimacy. Hence, in as much as they are caring, they may not be aware of this need. Indeed, like with the concept of care giving, the Maltese language lacks the concept of intimacy. The only concept available is *'imħabba'* (love) or *'qrib'* (which usually means physical proximity).

By not providing emotional support, Maltese parents are likely to hinder the successful achievements of their children's psychosocial developmental tasks. The notion of perceived emotional support, for example, is synonymous with trust (Delhey & Newton, 2003); you cannot have one without the other. Therefore, one could argue that when parental perceived emotional support is lacking, the development of a trusting relationship is jeopardized. According to Erikson's (1968) stages of psychosocial development, the crisis of trust versus mistrust needs to be resolved before the individual can move to identity formation, a task that is so critical for the adolescent's psychological well-being.

For native Maltese adolescents, the lack of emotional support from parents is concerning for another reason. According to Abela (1991), having a sense of relatedness is critical for the psychological well-being of the Maltese. Lack of perceived emotional support minimizes the opportunity to experience this level of relatedness between parents and adolescents, an experience that is likely to spill over other relationships outside the home. Indeed, Lindstrom and Axen (2004) found that lack of openness, for example, is positively associated with low trust, the miniaturization of community and low social capital. Consequently, the level of life satisfaction is jeopardized.

Those Maltese participants who felt that their parents were not supportive resorted to reaching out to friends. In many cases, these adolescents were identified as insecure and they preferred peers rather than parents 'by default' (Freeman et al., 2001) because of some negative consequences on the part of the parents. In fact, Maltese participants reported being concerned that the parents may not understand them. They also reported fear of criticism and even rebuke. However, the support from friends was not satisfying. It only made them feel good because friends helped them 'to forget' and 'have fun'. These adolescents may be lacking the required psychosocial skills to develop the capacity to develop supportive relationships with friends. Franco and Levitt (1998),

for example, found a relationship between social support provided to the child in the context of the family and the quality of children's friendships outside the family.

Data analysis in the current study also indicated a high level of distrust among friends, especially among girls. This is in line with past findings in Southern Europe (Inglehart, 1990). Although at a collective level, the Maltese community is perceived as caring and having a high level of social capital, adolescents in the current study could be experiencing "the miniaturization of community" (Lindstrom, 2004 a, p. 243). According to this concept, a community has a combination of high social participation and low levels of generalized trust of other people. The Maltese community has a high level of social participation. This is evident in the innumerable religious functions and ceremonies that are held throughout the year. However, there is also a high level of distrust between its members at an individual level, as indicated by the current findings. This is due to the high level of gossip in Malta and the strong hold it has upon the members of the community (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994).

In the current study, there were cases in which friends lied about each other, thereby creating a bad reputation for the person concerned. This could be considered as peer victimization (Coleman & Byrd, 2003; Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001). In the case of native Maltese adolescents in the current study, fearing gossip and the subsequent bad reputation caused a great deal of distress. These situations seem to be having a debilitating effect both in establishing intimate relationships outside the family and in their satisfaction with life. Indeed, it has been argued (Morris & Verna, 1998) that "the detrimental effects of negative social exchanges are more potent than the beneficial effects of positive social exchanges" (p. 4). In another study (Sim, 2000) hassles from friends contributed more to the level of depression in adolescents than did perceived social support. This is in line with Dekovic et al., (2004) who found that adolescents who reported poor communication and lack of trust and intimacy in peer relations experienced more depressive moods. Lindstrom (2004 b) also found that low trust among both men and women, and the miniaturization of community were positively related with cannabis smoking.

Lack of trust among friends and the Maltese community is detrimental for native Maltese adolescents' life satisfaction for another reason. As already argued, the notion of

relatedness and belonging is critical for the well-being of native Maltese (Abela, 1991). Although the current study found that native Maltese adolescents have shifted slightly towards the individualistic end of the collective-individualistic continuum, they are also embracing collectivistic tendencies. Indeed, studies have shown that these two constructs are not mutually exclusive. The study by Wang and Tamis-LeMonda (2003), for example, showed that mothers both in Taiwan and the United States embraced both individualistic and collectivistic child-rearing values. Lack of trust outside the home environment of native Maltese adolescents can also be debilitating the enhancement of their self-esteem. Kang, Shaver, Sue, Min, and Jing (2003) found that interpersonal relationships made individuals in collectivistic cultures not only feel good about their lives, but also feel better about themselves. It is possible that such interpersonal relationships make them feel worthy.

### 9.1.5 Coping Strategies among Adolescents

Many participants reported the initial attempt to deal with problems themselves. Therefore, they spend a lot of time thinking about them. Given that they feel that the environment (both at home and within the community) is not conducive to emotional support, it is possible that these adolescents cope by developing strategies designed to enhance self-reliance (e.g., seeing the positive side, making own decisions and problem solving) (Plunkett et al., 2000). According to Piko (2001) this type of coping seems to play a functional role. But, whereas this kind of approach is a challenge for some, for others it is alienating, as indicated by the current study.

It is possible that these native Maltese adolescents are not equipped with coping skills that are in line with the needs that arise out of contemporary society. As already argued, the lack of intimacy at home is likely to be preventing them from developing interpersonal skills, such as trusting and disclosing. This is exacurbated by the fear of gossip and peer victimization. It is important to point out that in Malta, resources are limited to seeking professional psychological help. Schools, for example, are not adequately equipped with such resources. Support is provided for spiritual matters through spiritual directors who are usually priests. Teacher's guidance is also available for academic related problems. Psychological and psychosocial problems are not usually

catered for. It was interesting to note that the participants in the current study did not use these facilities as a way of coping.

Some participants reported approaching the mother, especially if the problem was related to school matters. However, other personal matters were not discussed even with the mother. This is partly in line with a report that was conducted by Caritas (1993). That report stated that Maltese adolescents approached the mother in discussing drug related issues. In the current study, the mother was reported to be more sympathetic than the father who was hardly ever approached.

Many participants in the current study also reported approaching friends. Friends helped them enter the world of escapism. They also provided "reality confirmation support" (Richman et al., 1998, p. 310). This refers to the perception that another person is similar to you and sees things the same way. In spite of reaching out to others, some still felt very lonely and confused.

### 9.1.6 Contributing Factors in relation to Feeling Upset or Unhappy

Maltese Parents' high expectations to academic performance are not only a source of parent-child conflicts, but they are also generating a great deal of distress, especially among females as indicative by the current study. Fear of failure was quite prevalent. This fear could be debilitating. Therefore, their academic adjustment and the subsequent school satisfaction are jeopardized. Indeed, Clarke (2002) found that using approach coping in response to uncontrollable stressors was associated with poor adaptive functioning. The current study also found that some of these native Maltese adolescents seem to be unable to function in a meaningful manner and to find personal satisfaction and purpose. Whereas some of them reported to have a vision regarding a prospective future, most adolescents seem to be experiencing a relatively dismal future. In reviewing the literature in relation to adolescents in Australia, Eckersley (2004) came to similar conclusions.

The issue of drugs also contributed to distress and unhappiness of native Maltese adolescents. The use of illicit drugs is on the rise - a finding that is consistent with past research (Caritas Malta, 1998). Drug related problems, including drug overdose are also on the rise according to the findings in the current study. This is having a great impact on

the community, both young and old. This is partly because being such a close-knit community the welfare of others is a community concern. It is also because the increasing prevalence of drugs could be shattering the image that Malta may no longer be 'a safe place'.

Participants in the current study reported that they were constantly subjected to hassles from parents not to take any drugs. These hassles may be detrimental to their life satisfaction. Printz et al. (1999), for example, found that adolescent psychological adjustment was influenced more by chronic stressors than by discrete events. For native Maltese in the current study, these hassles implied to participants that they are not to be trusted. This lack of trust on the part of the parents is generating a great deal of fear and frustrations among adolescents. Indeed, some participants felt vulnerable.

Lack of trust and betrayal by friends was also a contributing factor to participants' feelings of distress or unhappiness. Indeed, a study (Plunkett et al., 2000) found that "change in relationship with people you know" was identified as the top stressful life event, followed by "close relationship problem with opposite sex friend" for both girls and boys. Also, according to another study (Sim, 2000) 70% of the variance in the incidence of depression was attributed to friends' hassles in young adolescents. As already pointed out, many participants in the current study reported being betrayed by friends. The betrayal ranged from defamation to 'stealing' boy/girlfriends. Those who did not feel that they were not betrayed were still concerned that it might happen to them. Having their reputation at stake and being very self-conscious about gossip was quite distressing for these participants.

### 9.1.7 Who or What make Adolescent feel Good?

In exploring the factors that make native Maltese adolescents feel good, two themes emerged. For most participants, friends made them feel good. This is in line with a study (Kang, 2003) that found that interpersonal relationships made individuals in collectivistic cultures feel good about their lives. In the case of some native Maltese in the current study, friends made them feel good partly because the latter could understand them better than parents did. Peer affiliation has been considered as an enhancement of social support, friendship and social activities. It is possible that the support that they are

getting from friends is a compensating strategy. It has been argued (van Beest et al., 1999) that "When perception of parents' support is negative, irrespective of what is enacted, they may look for compensatory support from peers" (p. 195). Parents and peers differ in functional roles. Parents are sources of affection, instrumental aid and alliance, whereas peers provide intimacy and companionship (Fallon et al., 1997). In providing intimacy and companionship, peers may also be helping to generate feelings of relatedness among native Maltese adolescents. Plunkett et al. (2000) argued that talking to friends could also help adolescents to stay emotionally connected with others. As already argued, having a sense of relatedness is critical for the psychological well-being of the Maltese (Abela, 1991). Among the major types of social activities that might contribute to a general sense of relatedness are participation in shared activities, having a group of friends with whom one can spend informal social time; feeling understood and appreciated (Reis et al., 2000).

For most native Maltese participants in the current study friends also made them feel good because they had a good time together and made them forget their problems. This reflects an element of escapism. It may also suggest that being with friends may help them to alleviate stress (Plunkett et al., 2000) and perhaps give them some space to work through any worrying issues.

Another factor that emerged in relation to making native Maltese adolescents feeling good was entertainment via television and music. The exploration underlying these media revealed that they provided adolescents with reality confirmation support (Richman et al., 1998). They also provided hope and comfort. The mental processes of the participant in the current study who found happiness in the paintings of Van Gogh shed more light into why television and music make adolescents feel good. These media may help them to break down their inner barriers and identify with the person concerned thereby tapping into their real self. Such experiences, therefore, become meaningful.

### 9.1.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, native Maltese adolescents are dealing with many cultural and developmental issues that are impacting on their life satisfaction. The Maltese society is undergoing a cultural transition from a traditional society to a post-traditional one.

According to adolescents, these cultural changes are taking place at a rapid pace to the extent that it is causing some concern. Not only it is broadening the generation gap between parents and adolescents, but it is also creating some anxiety among both parents and adolescents. Through globilisation, these adolescents are pressured to adopt values and beliefs that are at loggerheads with the Maltese traditional culture. It has been argued (Ruggiero, 2001) that adolescents in Mediterranean countries that are in the process of modernisation are experiencing acculturation without having emigrated to another country.

## 9.2 Analysis for Maltese-Australian Adolescents living in Australia

### 9.2.1 Overview

The interviews among Maltese-Australian adolescents explored the same issues that were explored among native Maltese adolescents. In addition, issues relating to ethnic identity and identification were also examined among these adolescents. According to the findings, the traditional culture orientation of parents, who were mostly first-generation immigrants, was prominent. As second-generation immigrants, adolescents have started making a shift towards the non-traditional culture. The implications of the adolescents' acculturation process are discussed. As with native Maltese, it is argued that there is a *mismatch* between their parents care giving provisions and the psychological and psychosocial needs of their children. Maltese-Australian parents come from a traditional culture that encourages child-rearing practices and care giving provisions that are in line with a collectivistic culture. On the other hand, their children are expressing psychological and psychosocial needs that are in line with an individualistic culture. In this sense there are lot of similarities in the experiences of native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents in relation to their parents. Since the issue about the mismatch between parental care giving provisions and the children's psychological and psychosocial needs has already been examined and discussed within the context of native Maltese, it will not be discussed below in great detail. The significance of this mismatch for Maltese-Australian adolescents and their life satisfaction is highly emphasised.

### 9.2.2 The Maltese Family in Australia

The Maltese-Australian family in the current study was perceived as traditional. This is consistent with past findings (Drofenik, 2000; Johnstone, 1994). Parents still upheld traditional customs, embracing religious values and beliefs. They were reported to using lots of Maltese artifacts in decorating their houses. Traditional food was common within the Maltese household. Going to church every Sunday and attending other religious festivities were also common. The family-centred orientation of participants was consistent with Maltese cultural norms, which emphasize familial bonds and relationships (Abela, 1991; Johnstone, 1994).

Berry (1990) argues that two issues predominate in the daily life of most acculturating individuals. "One pertains to the maintenance and development of one's ethnic distinctiveness in society, deciding whether or not one's cultural identity and customs are of value and to be retained. The other issue involves the desirability of inter-ethnic contact, deciding whether relations with other groups in the larger society are of value and to be sought" (p. 19).

Maltese-Australian parents, being first-generation immigrants are attempting to adapt to an unfamiliar cultural milieu. The traditional artifacts, for example, are more than just concrete properties. They provide personal meanings that help them to connect with their past. Having been dislocated through the immigration experience, Maltese-Australian parents need to affirm their identity on one hand, and re-establish a new one on the other. This affirmation is critical for their psychological well-being, given that "Identities locate a person in social space by virtue of the relationships that these identities imply" (Howard, 2000, p. 371). In other words, cultural identity provides a cultural continuity that enhances a sense of security, especially in critical times (Falicov, 2003).

As expected, the Maltese-Australian family was perceived as a close family, sticking together and very helpful. This is characteristic of the Maltese traditional family and its collectivistic orientation, including being "helpful". As indicated by the current findings, the family is supportive in instrumental terms. Parents, for example, do not want their children to go through the same hardships that they went through, both in Malta and

in Australia. This helpful characteristic partly originated from a history of survival as a nation and partly because of religious values and beliefs.

However, at a personal level, the closeness in the Maltese-Australian family in contemporary society, as in the case of native Maltese is questionable. It seems that the high level of cohesion is in fact enmeshment. The interviews, for example, revealed that parents were psychologically controlling. In most cases the relationships between adolescents and parents were not intimate. This was evident when the issue of social support was explored. Once again, the findings supported Green and Werner's (1996) argument that openness of communication is a dimension of proximity that is separate from care giving. In spite of the high level of care giving, disclosure within the Maltese-Australian family was not encouraged.

Lack of intimacy within the Maltese-Australian family is a by-product of the traditional family (Wynne, 1984). It is also possible that Maltese-Australian parents, like native Maltese, are still functioning at the basic psychological needs, according to Maslow's hierarchical needs (1970). In other words, they have not had the opportunity to establish intimacy. This is a legacy of their experiences prior to immigration. When they were still in Malta, the group's needs always had precedence over their own personal psychological needs. This is partly due to the Maltese having a history of foreign threat and vulnerability. It is also due to the collectivistic orientated culture that Maltese-Australian parents come from. The current findings, for example, revealed that parents have not developed good listening skills. This is also exacerbated by the fact that the Maltese language does not accommodate for the notion of listening.

This lack of intimate time with parents may be detrimental to the adolescents' satisfaction with life since it is likely to increase vulnerability in adolescents (Fallon & Bowles, 1997). In fact, most of the Maltese-Australian adolescents found these situations very stressful. This is not surprising considering that stressful family situations are the most difficult life events (Kobus & Rayes, 2000).

Maltese-Australian parents were perceived as strict and authoritarian. This is in line with the Maltese traditional culture. Being embedded in conservative religious values and beliefs the Maltese family embraces a strong sense of authority. This could be generated by their insecurities and the need to be in control, which partly result from the

fear of their children losing their culture of origin as argued by Rosenthal and Feldman (1992) in relation to Chinese parents. As already argued, the Maltese culture is a 'tight culture' in which interdependence and conformity are prevalent. Australia, however, has a 'loose culture', a term that has been coined by Triandis (2000). Such culture promotes values that are in conflict with the traditional Maltese culture. By adopting Australian elements of culture, Maltese-Australian adolescents are not only challenging their parents' values and beliefs, but they may also precipitate a fear in parents of losing control over their children thereby generating a sense of insecurity. Indeed, in most cases mothers were perceived and portrayed as insecure.

As with the native Maltese family, the Maltese-Australian family needs to be analysed both from collectivistic and individualistic perspectives. The collectivistic approach that Maltese-Australian parents are using in their child-rearing practices indicates that they are high in care giving, thereby supporting previous research (Abela, 1991) that indicated that Maltese parents provide a high level of care to the extent that they are ready to sacrifice themselves for their children. However, the care giving provisions from an individualistic perspective are lacking among Maltese-Australian parents as indicated by the current findings. It can be concluded that a mismatch exists between parental care giving provisions and the children's psychological and psychosocial needs within the Maltese-Australian family. The parental care giving provisions are highly consistent with a collective orientation that is a legacy of their traditional cultural background. Their children's needs, however, are more in line with an individualistic orientation. The discussion in relation to this mismatch with regards to the native Maltese family is also relevant to the Maltese-Australian family.

At this level, the mismatch creates a number of psychological and psychosocial implications for Maltese-Australian adolescents. These implications are similar to those experienced by native Maltese adolescents. However, the *intensity* of these implications could be stronger for Maltese-Australian adolescents. These adolescents are living in a culture that is individualistic oriented. The push/pull experience of the collectivistic vs individualistic values is likely to be stronger and perhaps more antagonistic for these adolescents. The issue of parental control (both behavioural and psychological), for example, may be more salient for Maltese-Australian adolescents. Indeed, throughout the

interviews, many adolescents compared themselves with Anglo-Australian adolescents "whose parents are not strict" and have "more freedom". This behaviour was not only perceived as desirable, but it was also perceived as *positive* with regards to their psychological and psychosocial development.

#### 9.2.2.a The Generation Gap: Its Implications

As expected, a wide generation gap between Maltese-Australian parents and adolescents was found. According to adolescents, parents are like a 'broken clock', a term coined by Krupinski (1984). Krupinski argued that for first-generation immigrants the cultural clock stops ticking and a cultural stagnation takes place. Indeed, anecdotal evidence, for example, suggests that Maltese immigrants who go back to their homeland are usually more traditional than the natives themselves. The closed mentality reported by the Maltese-Australian adolescents in the current study is indicative of a traditional culture (Triandis, 2000), accepting authority without questioning it. Maltese-Australian parents did not provide further explanations even when the children requested them. They also did not allow choices for their children. As with native Maltese parents, this is indicative of an authoritarian approach.

That Maltese-Australian adolescents are not satisfied by the response *"għax hekk għidt"* (because I said so) indicates that they have made a shift (albeit small, yet significant) towards the non-traditional end of the traditional/non-traditional continuum. Unlike their parents who have put faith before reason, these adolescents required further explanations as rationals. In other words, it could be argued that on one hand, parents are still predominantly influenced by the traditional culture that is characterized by a *total surrendering* to parents/God and their values and beliefs and, on the other hand, Maltese-Australian adolescents are attempting to challenge the traditional 'blind faith'.

This discrepancy between parental attitudes and the adolescents' expectations is having a negative impact on both the psychological and psychosocial development of adolescents. According to Heinz (2003), happiness is positively related to rationality at high rationality levels and negatively at low levels. Bush et al. (2002) also found a positive relationship between parental reasoning and adolescents' self-esteem in Mainland China. Like native Maltese, the parental approach towards reasoning/lack of

reasoning generated feelings of passive anger and emotional distance among most Maltese-Australia adolescents in the current study.

These adolescents seemed to be aware of the cultural background of their parents in terms of time and place. In some cases the understanding of where the parents are coming from seems to be helping them to tolerate the generation gap and to contextualise the parent-child conflicts. These adolescents also seem to have developed a counteracting strategy by perceiving the parents as caring. In reviewing the literature, Lincoln (2000) shows that "positive and negative social interactions exert independent effects on psychological well-being, such that both types of interactions can occur simultaneously within relationships" (p. 234). In the case of Maltese-Australian adolescents the parents' preoccupation to 'monitor them was also interpreted as caring.

Such positive perception among Maltese-Australian adolescents seems to have a lot of bearing on their subjective well-being as they keep journeying through adolescence. In fact, Formoso (2000) found that monitoring was negatively related to depression and conduct problems, whereas Young and Miller (1995) found that adolescents' perception of how their parents felt about them (including being interested in them) was the most important factor associated with their satisfaction with themselves and their lives.

#### 9.2.2.b The Experience of Parent-Child Conflicts

As expected, parent-child conflicts were common, a finding that is consistent with past research (Borg, 1999) that found that Maltese-Australian adolescents reported significantly more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australian adolescents. Data analysis in the current study indicated that they revolved around schoolwork, going out, and friends. In some cases, adolescents reported ongoing family discord that was emotionally taxing. Indeed, Borg, in conducting a path analysis found an indirect positive effect between ethnicity, parent-child conflicts, and stress among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

Although most adolescents in the current study experienced conflicts with their parents, many adolescents also avoided situations that precipitated further conflicts. For example, instead of attempting to resolve conflicts, many adolescents submitted to their parents' demands and expectations. This was because they have been socialized to be

submissive to parents. They were also intimidated by the fear of disrespect. In trying to assert themselves, the adolescents were confronted with accusations of not being 'respectful' to their parents, even if the former requested an explanation. The issue of respect could be masking other family dynamics. Parents, because of their insecurities, are not in a position to let go of their controlling behaviour. Also, given that these parents come from a culture that endorced a precedence of the group's needs over individual needs, they are likely to lack the interpersonal and psychosocial skills required for conflict resolution that are suggested by Johnson (2003). The discussion about the parents' response *"għax hekk għidt"* (because I said so) and its implications in relation to native Maltese adolescents is also applicable to Maltese-Australian adolescents. Although the conflicts may be resolved for the Maltese-Australian parents they are far from being resolved for their children. Such avoidance in conflict resolution can create distance and feelings of disengagement with significant others (Reis et al., 2000). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that in the case of Maltese-Australian adolescents it could be impacting on their level of satisfaction with life.

The current study indicated that these conflicts generated a number of negative feelings that could be jeopardizing their satisfaction with life. As already argued, feelings of anger and alienation were quite common. In most cases the anger was repressed and internalized resulting in further emotional distance. Such repressed feelings are likely to be debilitating, as they continue to add layer upon layer in shielding the inner self. Instead of feelings of vitality, such feelings are likely to give way to psychiatric symptoms, such as neurosis, anxiety, and depression (Engel, 2004). The authoritarian approach of the parents and their psychological control also led to feelings of helplessness among adolescents in the present study. Such feelings are likely to generate feelings of depression that are detrimental to life satisfaction (Headly et al., 1993; Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2001). Indeed, the study by Olsen et al. (2002) found a positive relationship between maternal psychological control and internalizing behaviour of children.

Parent-child conflicts of Maltese-Australian adolescents could also jeopardize their self-esteem. Indeed, the study by Borg (1999) found a strong negative relationship between parent-child conflicts and self-esteem. As indicated by the current findings,

Maltese-Australian parents tend to be critical of their children's behaviour. This was also the case of other European countries (Ruggiero, 2001). Such tendency to criticize is likely to come to the forefront when parent-child conflicts arise. If, for example, the conflict evolves the issue of appearance, the parent might criticize the adolescent for being a disgrace to the family. Such criticisms are incorporated into the self, leading to a negative self-image.

#### 9.2.2.c The Issue of Independence

The issue of independence among Maltese-Australian adolescents is not clear-cut. According to the findings, it can be argued that in most cases Maltese-Australian adolescents are experiencing independence both in relation to intrafamilial and extrafamilial behaviours (Bulcroft, Carmody, & Bulcroft, 1999) that is behaviours within and outside the family environment. However, in some cases, the issue of independence highlighted the high level of control that parents are exerting over their children, such as in financial matters.

The strong family loyalty that prevails among Maltese-Australian families may affect negatively the independence process, both through fear and frustration. York (1990), for example, argued that the Maltese immigrants, especially women, may never break the apron strings, even after they get married. A similar vein was found among Hispanic American young adults (Gnaulati & Heine, 2001). In the case of Maltese-Australian adolescents in the current study, this was also exacerbated by the insecurities of the parents, especially mothers.

In spite of all this however, it is possible that Maltese-Australian adolescents resort to their inner resources and "build internal working models of relationships that allow for self-acceptance and healthy levels of closeness" (Gnaulati et al., 2001, p. 68). This possibility may also explain why there has been a tendency to perceive the parents as caring in spite of the parents' 'misgivings'. The above discussion in relation to the mismatch between native Maltese parents' care giving provisions and the adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs is also relevant to Maltese-Australian parents and their adolescents. As indicated by the current study, Maltese-Australian parents are not only traditional, but they also have a mentality (at least in part) that originated out of a

collectivistic orientation. Their children, however, are in the process of embracing individualistic values and beliefs.

#### 9.2.2.d Controlling Parents: Implications on Life Satisfaction

Like the case of native Maltese adolescents, the individuals' overall data analysis indicated that many participants had psychologically controlling parents. This is partly due to the cultural traditional background of Maltese-Australian parents and partly because of the new insecurities embedded in the acculturation process. It has been argued (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) that immigrant parents, in an attempt to counteract the loss of cultural continuity seem to exert more control in dealing with their children. The need to be in control may be some sort of a compensating strategy for the underlying insecurities. In fact, many cases among Maltese-Australian participants in the current study revealed that controlling parents were also insecure, especially the mother. Along the same lines, it has been argued (Vaes & Wicklund, 2002) that status anxiety of immigrant parents is responsible for adopting an authoritarian discipline within the family. This anxiety results from the lower status in society as immigrants. The high control that parents are exerting within the Maltese-Australian family environment seems to be indicative of such status anxiety. It has been argued (Colarossi & Eccles, 2000) that parents who are secure adopt more flexible and adaptive parenting measures. By the same token, parents who are insecure are more likely to be rigid in their approach. The controlling characteristic of Maltese-Australian parents is also partly attributed to religious values and beliefs. As already argued, the idea of a 'controlling God' is prevalent within the Maltese culture. It is possible that Maltese-Australian parents are identifying with the controlling God.

Like the native Maltese, Maltese-Australian parents could still be trapped in a psychological survival mode, especially mothers who were reported to be insecure. These parents come from a nation that historically has been under continuous threat. They could still be under the influence of the psychological implications incurred by foreign invasions. Indeed, it has been argued (Shulman, 2003) that "the authoritarian tradition [within the family] can function to unify a society and provide it with stability" (p. 171). In the case of the Maltese, the authoritarian, hierarchical tradition was centred round the

family as the social unit. The social traditions were to be perpetuated through the family, whose stability was necessary to the stability of the Maltese society. As indicated by the current findings, Maltese-Australian parents are still perpetuating such tradition. Therefore, for these parents maintaining *'l-għaqda fil-familja'* (family unity) is critical, even if that means exerting psychological control. The underlying motive for such psychological control is fear and unresolved traumas that have been passed on from one generation to another. In addition to these traumas, Maltese-Australian parents are likely to experience unresolved trauma of immigration. The immigration process involves a number of losses (e.g., cultural, personal, and environmental) that entail a sense of loss, grief, and mourning (Falicov, 2003). Such losses are likely to generate feelings of insecurities. Therefore, the need to maintain solidarity within the family is paramount for the parents' psychological well-being.

However, from a collectivistic perspective the parents' attempts to enforce and perpetuate the traditional culture on their children also indicate that parents are *caring* and mean well for their children. Indeed, this approach had a historical functional role, namely to protect their children. As in the case of native Maltese, this authoritarian approach is creating a mismatch between parental attitudes and behaviour and the adolescents' psychological needs (see Section 9.1.2 for an intensive discussion).

Having such controlling parents seems to impact on the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents in a number of ways. These adolescents felt, for example, that they were not in control and therefore, experienced a sense of helplessness that could generate a state of depression. It has been argued (Dumont et al., 1999) that a strong sense of self-control helps adolescents to deal with daily stressful situations by enhancing their self-esteem. It can, therefore, be argued that when that sense of self-control is lacking, the ability both to deal with daily stressful experiences and to enhance their self-esteem is minimised. Indeed, according to a study (Borg, 1999) Maltese-Australian adolescents reported significantly lower levels of self-esteem than Anglo-Australian adolescents. Such controlling situations could, therefore, be minimising the potential to feel satisfied with life, since both depression (Headley et al., 1993) and lack of self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995; Dumont & Provost, 1999) contribute to dissatisfaction with life.

### 9.2.3 Coping Strategies among Adolescents

When confronted with a difficult situation, most participants tried to deal with the situation by themselves. It is possible that the environment of Maltese-Australian adolescents, both at home and at school, is not conducive enough to encourage them to reach out to others. As already argued, intimacy within the Maltese-Australian family is lacking. The fear of criticism and rebuke deterred adolescents from reaching out to parents. Maltese-Australian parents come from a culture that has strongly relied on supernatural interventions as a way of coping. As for schools, although help, such as counseling, may be available, it may not be sensitive to the Maltese culture. It has been argued (Briffa, 1998) that the needs of the Maltese-Australian community have been overlooked, a view that was also echoed by Proctor (1998). Given that the environment is not conducive enough to encourage Maltese-Australian adolescents to reach out to others, it is possible that Maltese-Australian adolescents cope by developing strategies designed to enhance self-reliance (e.g., seeing the positive side, making own decisions and problem solving) (Plunkett et al., 2000). According to Piko (2001) this type of coping seems to play a special role. In fact, many participants in the current study pointed out that they use it as a time of evaluating and trying to find ways of dealing with it.

Approaching someone, such as mother, older siblings or friends was another coping strategy as indicated by past research (Piko, 2001). However, as already argued, approaching the mother for Maltese-Australian adolescents was limited. Notably fathers in the current study were not approached. Further probing revealed that fathers were not approachable because of their lack of understanding.

### 9.2.4 The Experience of Social Support

The investigation of social support among Maltese-Australian adolescents revealed that parents are high in instrumental support. The majority of participants in the current study perceived parents as supportive in instrumental support. Parents do no want them to experience the hard life they had both in Malta and in Australia. However, as in the case of native Maltese, emotional support was lacking. This implies that parents are not in tune with their children's emotional needs. Once again, this could be attributed to the psychological survival mode that parents are still functioning from and the

collectivistic orientation that, according to Triandis (2001), emerges as a collective survival strategy. In many cases participants in the current study, like the native Maltese adolescents, feared criticism and rebuke. Such fear is inhibiting adolescents from trying to reach out to their parents in times of need. Instead of facilitating an intimate home environment, it is generating an emotional distance between parents and adolescents, thereby jeopardizing emotional social support from parents. This lack of intimacy within the family is indicative of a traditional family (Wynne, 1984). The current findings indicated that there were times, however, in which the mother was more likely to be approached than the father. According to participants, mothers had a more sympathetic ear. In some cases, the mother also seemed to have moved a little from the traditional views of child-rearing practices, thereby being somewhat more understanding and tolerant of conflicting views. It was interesting to note that fathers were not perceived as supportive.

Participants in the current study reported that parents were self-contained. Such an attitude is a matter of concern. Parents seem to be lacking compassion since they are not in tune with their children's needs and feelings. In such situations, family cohesion is also jeopardized as parental awareness of their children's daily hassles stressors was found to be a prerequisite for a cohesive family (Lohman & Jarvis, 2000). So is perceived parental social support.

As expected, reaching out to friends for support was quite common, especially among girls. This suggests that some Maltese-Australian adolescents are extending their psychosocial boundaries, developing trusting relationships that go beyond the family environment. This is in accordance with a finding (Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001) that during early adolescence friends begin to value loyalty and intimacy more, becoming more trusting and self-disclosing. The case of Maltese-Australian adolescents also indicates that those adolescents who reach out to friends are likely to resort to inner resources that have helped them to build internal working models of relationships (Gnaulati et al., 2001), in spite of the fact that parents have not likely developed the skills to foster intimacy among their children.

### 9.2.5 Contributing Factors in Relation to Feeling Upset or Unhappy

Data analysis of life dissatisfaction among Maltese-Australian adolescents revealed a number of themes. For some participants, the lack of freedom due to excessive parental control was salient. This lack of freedom (both behavioural and psychological) hinders the development of a free will. Indeed, a struggle of power between parents and adolescents has emerged – a situation that made adolescents feel quite angry. Rather than pursuing their own interests and goals, they are still possessed by their parents' expectations. Goal achievement for these adolescents may be lacking the generation of the vitality and happiness that only autonomous success tends to yield (Nix et al., 1999). By lacking autonomy these Maltese-Australian individuals may be discouraged from pursuing their own interests and from asserting their individuality that is so critical during adolescence. According to Erikson's (1968) model of psychosocial development, instead of focusing on the development of their identity, these Maltese-Australian adolescents most likely have not resolved the crisis of control vs autonomy.

Another issue that emerged is the lack of trust, both in relation to parents and friends. Some adolescents expressed the need to be trusted by their parents. It is possible that for these adolescents the issue of trust vs mistrust according to Erikson's model is still salient. For them, the issue of trust is not resolved. Instead, a sense of mistrust has emerged (at least at one level). As already argued, the psychological needs (Maslow, 1970) of Maltese-Australian parents most likely have never been met because of their cultural heritage. Consequently, the psychosocial development of their children is likely to be jeopardised.

In some cases this lack of trust was also experienced in relation to friends, especially for girls. Insecure female adolescents were vulnerable to rejection when relationships with boyfriends came to an end. It is possible that such situations are bringing to the forefront another issue, namely the children's vulnerablity to rejection. Assuming that most Maltese-Australian parents are still functioning from a psychological survival mode, it is possible that their children are not securely attached. Indeed, the study by Muris et al. (2003) found that securely attached adolescents perceived their parents as more emotionally warm, less rejective and less overprotective than insecurely attached parents.

Data analysis of the current investigation also indicated that social problems, such as drugs, suicide, poverty, and war were a source of distress for some Maltese-Australian adolescents. Further probing indicated it was not the social problems as such, but rather the lack of control over the situations that made them feel upset. Indeed, the overall data analysis of these participants indicated that the control exerted by their parents was high. A sense of helplessness was salient for these participants. This feeling of helplessness could be 'spilling over' other situations, such as the above-mentioned social issues. It is also possible that these adolescents used the collective self as a defense mechanism to distance themselves from the individual selves that are more likely to be personal and perhaps feel more threatened (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). A mechanism of 'intellectualisation' (DeVos, 1980) where the individual focuses the content of his/her thought to outside events and concerns which have nothing to do with personal feelings could have also been employed.

### 9.2.6 Who or What Make Adolescents Feel Good?

Data analysis indicated a desire to have intimate relationships with parents, to be able to disclose any intimate concerns without fearing criticism and rejection. This suggests that in meeting their challenges, adolescents need parental support. As Scabini and Cigoli (1997) argued adolescents need to feel free but not alone in journeying through adolescence. The need to be trusted by parents was also important for Maltese-Australian adolescents.

Interacting with friends also made Maltese-Australian adolescents feel good. Such interactions provided *emotional support* that in most cases was not provided by the parents. Indeed, talking to friends can be a very useful strategy. It has been argued (Plunkett et al., 2000) that one way that adolescents may attempt to alleviate stress is to stay emotionally connected to friends by talking to them. For those participants that sought diversion through friends also found the experience 'helpful' by diffusing the distressful situation concerned. This is in line with Plunkett et al.'s argument that seeking diversion refers to alleviating stress through relaxing.

Music has also been identified as a theme that reflected a good sense of being. The previous discussion (see Section 9.1.7) on music in relation to native Maltese is also

applicable to Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 9.2.7 National/Ethnic Identity among Maltese-Australian Adolescents

All participants, except one, identified themselves as 'Maltese' in terms of nationality. Some considered themselves as strictly Maltese; while others as Maltese, but born in Australia. Only one participant identified herself as Australian. Notably, no participants identified themselves as Maltese-Australians. This suggests that their Maltese identity is salient whereas their Australian identity may not be so salient. It may also suggest that the situation/context in which that question was asked could have encouraged the participants to sample their ethnic identity; that is the presence of the researcher who was Maltese-Australian could have precipitated such a response.

Most of the participants had been to Malta for a holiday. In order to probe further into their ethnic identity, participants were further asked if the issue of national identity came up while they were in Malta. The answer was in the affirmative. According to the data, it is evident that at some level there is some identity confusion, especially when these adolescents do not find themselves in an environment that is not dominated by members of ethnic minority groups. This is consistent with Cauchi's (2002) argument that immigrants do not have a sense of belonging, neither in the host country, nor the country of origin.

In spite of the self-labelling as Maltese, most Maltese-Australian adolescents also embrace the Australian culture and they tend to switch roles back and forth as the situation arises. This strategy of biculturalism indicates that an individual may be able to use all the strategies at different times, depending on the situation. This is in line with other findings (Coleman et al., 2001). At home, Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to use a separation strategy. This strategy could be enhancing their satisfaction with life. Sam, (2000) for example, found that family values mainly contributed to the life satisfaction of immigrants in Norway. When outside the home environment, Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to be bicultural. In fact, many of them responded that the Maltese culture was not 'affecting' them at all; that is, it was not stopping them from doing anything that otherwise they would have liked to do. For these adolescents, being Maltese was not a hindrance, at least at a behavioural level. However, it is important to

point out that the participants in the current study lived in an area where there was a high concentration of members of various ethnic minority groups. According to the individual interviews, Maltese-Australian adolescents felt comfortable living in such an environment. Mixing with members of other ethnic minority groups made them feel good because of their *similarities*, namely as members of ethnic minority groups. In some cases, another common thread bound them together through having religious beliefs, even though these were different from those embraced by Maltese-Australian adolescents. At this point in life these adolescents do not have much opportunities (if any) in which they find themselves in situations that are dominated by Anglo-Australians. According to the findings, there is already some indication that such situations precipitate a feeling of inferiority. Given that Maltese-Australian adolescents (aged between 18-22 years) have a lower self-esteem than Anglo-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999), it is likely that feelings of inferiority would come to the forefront when the opportunity arises.

As participants in the current study are integrating both Maltese and Australian cultures suggests that at this stage of development, there may be positive psychological adaptation for Maltese-Australian adolescents (at least at one level). Acording to Sam's (2000) findings, immigrants' successful adaptation involves the balancing of both the culture of origin and the host culture. Another study (Virta et al., 2004) found that integration was the most adaptive strategy for Turkish immigrants in Norway and Sweden. In the case of Maltese-Australian adolescents, it is possible that, being mostly second-generation immigrants, these adolescents are adapting with the passing of time. Indeed, Virta et al. found that the psychological adaptation of Turkish immigrant adolescents was as good as their host national peers.

### 9.2.8 Ethnic Identification and Life Satisfaction

The examination of ethnic identification and life satisfaction of Maltese Australian adolescents need to be investigated on two levels – the home environment and the ethnic community levels. In the previous section, it was argued that these adolescents are using a 'separation' strategy or perhaps a strategy that is heavily leaning towards the traditionl culture. That small percentage that is not traditional (on the part of the adolescents) is quite significant. It is also important to point out that this thesis is taking

the view that the traditional and the host cultures are bi-directional (Szapocsnik et al., 1980).

#### 9.2.8.1 The Home Environment Level

Maintaining the Maltese traditional culture in the home environment is part of the acculturation process. This is in line with past research (e.g. Berry, 1997; Borg, 1999; Sam, 2000; Sam & Berry, 1995; Ward, 1996; Virta et al., 2004) that constantly indicates that the culture of origin plays a significant role in the acculturation process. It provides family members with a focal point of reference and a sense of shared values and beliefs. It also provides an opportunity for children in becoming deeply involved in learning about their ethnicity and take constructive action in affirming the value and legitimacy of their group (Tajfel, 1978). Consequently, it is likely to facilitate a shift from a moratorium to a secure achieved ethnic identity for adolescents (Phinney, 1990).

However, according to Berry's (1990) model of acculturation, Maltese parents seem to use a separation/marginalisation strategy. The literature generally indicates that integration, that is embracing both the culture of origin and the host culture to be the most adaptive mode of acculturation and the most conducive to immigrants' subjective well-being, whereas marginilisation is the least adaptive strategy (Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001). Having strictly traditional parents, the Maltese-Australian home environment is not allowing adolescents to integrate the Australian culture. These adolescents having made a slight (yet significant) move towards the non-traditional culture are experiencing a pull/push situation that is creating great deal of tension, especially among the older adolescents who are attempting to experience the separation-individuation process (Maslow, 1970). In this case, the home environment of Maltese-Australian adolescents is a risk factor. Indeed (Borg, 1999) found that Maltese-Australian adolescents reported higher levels of stress than Anglo-Australian adolescents. According to Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, the family environment can be both a moderator and a risk factor to acculturative stress.

Having such a strong Maltese ethnic identification may also be beneficial at another level. According to Kinket and Verkuyten (1999) "….many ethnic minority groups are rich in culture and history and do not have to create new dimensions of

comparison or rework old ones in order to develop a positive identify in relation to the majority group" (p. 223). Maltese-Australian adolescents have a good understanding of the Maltese culture, the grass roots of their identity. Such understanding can be enriching their sense of identity, at least in part. It is also providing an opportunity to experience the need to feel both similar and distinct from others (Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002) – a need that is likely to enhance their sense of being.

Not surprisingly, most participants are still embracing the traditional values and beliefs, especially those who are in early adolescence (aged between 14-16 years). This supports an argument (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992) that values and beliefs, being the core elements of culture, are more resistant to change. The current study, for example, found that going to church every Sunday is still the norm. Only three female participants in late adolescence (aged between 17-18 years) have strongly indicated a shift from the sex stereotype roles, questioning social issues, including religious beliefs. Such a stance indicates that these participants are in the process of individuation (Maslow, 1970). Having experienced a deep grounding in their Maltese ethnic identity, they have reached a point in which they are now shedding off the old traditional culture as they 'see fit', while embracing new post-traditional values and beliefs. It could also be argued that these adolescents are becoming more secularized in their religious approach. This process is facilitated by the dominant culture. Australia is a secularized country, characterized by freedom/the ability to question and embrace various religious values and beliefs. In this sense, Maltese-Australian adolescents viewed Australia as more 'loose' rather than 'closed' as Malta is. Such a feature was considered to be to their advantage with regards to their psychological well-being.

#### 9.2.8.2 Ethnic Community Level

In exploring the satisfaction with life of immigrant adolescents, it is important to examine it within a community setting. Ethnic identity, for example, is more than an ascribed status. It must be understood within the context of social relationships. Such relationships start within the family and continue to develop and evolve with the community at a societal level. All Maltese-Australian adolescents who were interviewed attend (or have attended) Maltese social and religious functions. Such participation seems

to be helping adolescents in establishing relationships that help them contribute to the negotiation of their ethnic identity. These social ties are a major force in their understanding of who they are (Ajrouch, 2000).

Many Maltese-Australian adolescents pointed out a number of benefits of living in a multi ethnic community. It makes them feel good. Interactions with other immigrants seem to help them promote a feeling of closeness, capitalizing on the underlying similarities as immigrants, rather than on their differences. They also seem to be drawing social support from each other. According to Ajrouch (2000) "….ethnic identity is often synonymous with ideas of family and closeness" (p. 465). Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to segregate themselves from the Anglo-Australians and congregate with other ethnic minority groups. This seems to be of an advantage to them and could be playing a positive role in their psychological well-being. Sam (2000) found that segregation was positively related to life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents in Norway. It was argued that "minority group members have the tendency to compare themselves and their situation more with similar ones (minority members) than with dissimilar and advantaged others, a mechanism that buffers self-esteem" (p. 20). It is possible that the same mechanism is at play in maintaining satisfaction with life among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

Although most Maltese-Australian adolescents identified themselves as Maltese, they seemed to employ a strategy of 'us' and 'them' (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999) thereby distinguishing between in-group and out-group respectively. At one level, the Maltese-Australians are the in-group while the Anglo-Australians are the out-group. At another level, Maltese-Australians are the in-group while native Maltese are the out-group. This strategy has been facilitated by having been to Malta for a holiday and by not being native Maltese or Anglo-Australians.

In an attempt to deal with some underlying threat from the out-group (Vaes & Wicklund, 2002) whether it is native Maltese or Anglo-Australian, Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to have been oriented towards defending and reaffirming their in-group by highlighting positive characteristics about the Australian and Maltese aspects of their identity. Maltese-Australian adolescents spoke favourably of the 'Australian culture' when comparing themselves to native Maltese. However, when they spoke of the Maltese

culture in relation to Anglo-Australian adolescents and their culture, Maltese-Australian adolescents spoke in favour of the Maltese culture (at least in some aspects e.g. Maltese parents are more caring and highly value the family). This finding is parallel to an argument that the in-group is used more favourably to them than the out-group (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). The findings regarding the Australian characteristics in the current investigation are in line with other findings (Fisher & Sonn, 2002). The strategy that is employed by Maltese-Australian adolescents could impact on their life satisfaction. In fact, many participants indicated that parents are constantly reminding them of the hard life they have endured back home and how lucky they are to be in a 'prosperous' country such as Australia.

### 9.2.9 Conclusion

As expected, Maltese-Australian adolescents are dealing with a number of developmental and cultural issues. Although, at a community/collective level the Maltese-Australian family is perceived as high in care giving and as a close family, at an individual level, there is a discrepancy between the adolescents' perceptions and their experiences within the home environment. The needs that parents are providing are more in line with a collectivistic orientation. However, the needs of adolescents arise from an individualistic orientation. Such a home environment is likely to impact on their psychological and psychosocial development.

According to adolescents, parents are still adhering to a traditional culture. In a way, this is problematic for the growing adolescent who is attempting to acculturate in a non-traditional country. The prevalence of parent-child conflicts is, therefore, high. In addition, the lack of intimacy among family members, as well as the parents' negative attitudes towards conflicts is not creating a supportive environment that encourages the resolution of such conflicts. However, a further interesting finding emerged. In many cases, parents were perceived as caring and meaning well. They wanted to spare their children the hardships that they endured both in Malta and Australia. Such a perception could be outweighing the parents' shortcomings.

Besides developmental issues, cultural issues also seem to impinge on the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents. These adolescents have reported a high

level of ethnic identification, especially in the home environment. This is of an advantage for them because they seem well grounded in their culture of origin and in a way this ethnic identitfication is facilitating the acculturation process. However, although they have adopted a flexible approach in the employment of acculturating strategies, there is some concern that some of them are not equipped enough to deal with the Australian aspect of their identity especially when they find themselves in an environment which is predominantly Anglo-Australian. Some identity confusion has also been identified when these adolescents extend their geographical boundaries and find themselves in unfamiliar situations. This identity confusion in conjunction with the high levels of stress that have been identified by a previous study (Borg, 1999) suggests that these adolescents are 'in between cultures' (Choi, 2001). They are still in the process of finding their place in a society that challenges them on a cultural level.

## 9.3 Overall Conclusion

A number of parallels can be drawn between native Maltese adolescents living in Malta and Maltese-Australian adolescents living in Australia. Both groups are dealing with both cultural and developmental issues. Whereas contemporary Maltese society is going through a modernisation and globilisation process through which a shift is taking place towards the non-traditional end of the traditional-non-traditional continuum, the Maltese-Australian community, more specifically adolescents, is faced with two distinct cultures – the culture of origin and the Australian culture. According to adolescents, parents of both groups are still oriented towards the traditional culture, whereas adolescents are shifting away from the non-traditional culture. Indeed, traces of traditional child-rearing practices are still prevalent. In both groups, for example, parental psychological control is quite high. Parents still strictly adhere to religious practices, values and beliefs. As expected, parent-child conflicts are pronounced for both groups. Parents are not using explanations as rationals for their controlling behaviour, leaving their children with a great sense of helplessness. Whereas for parents the conflicts were resolved, for adolescents they were unresolved. Therefore, feelings of anger were not uncommon especially among adolescents. What was striking was the *difference* in the expression of anger between the two groups. Maltese-Australian adolescents reported

passive anger; while native Maltese reported feelings of depression. In both cases, the expression of anger can be considered as maladaptive since it is not channelled in a constructive manner. For native Maltese adolescents, the need for the parents to show understanding and be in tune with their needs, especially in difficult times, is salient.

Both native and Maltese-Australian adolescents perceive the Maltese family as a close-knitted family. However, an examination of the individual cases shows that the family does not encourage emotional intimacy among its members – that is intimacy that goes beyond physical closeness. Indeed, according to adolescents, parents have "poor listening skills" and they are less likely to endorse the emotional support that the adolescents require for their psychological development. The parents' expression of love towards their children seems to be more in line with their basic needs of survival – namely instrumental support and protection. The high level of cohesion within the Maltese/Maltese-Australian family seems to be enmeshment.

Friends play an important role in the lives of adolescents of Maltese origin, both in Malta and in Australia. This is partly because, like adolescents of other western cultures, they are inclined to extend their psychosocial boundaries during adolescence; partly because parents are not meeting their emotional needs; and partly because relatedness is critical for the well-being of the Maltese (Abela, 1991). However, in many cases, intimacy among friends is threatened by lack of trust and fear of betrayal, more so for native Maltese.

Another striking common observation is with regards to coping strategies. Adolescents in both groups reported an initial attempt to deal with the problem themselves. Since in most cases, parents' listening skills are not only limited, but also maladaptive (parental negative criticizism and rebuke were quite common), it can be argued that the home environment is not conducive for disclosing and reaching out in times of need. It is possible that adolescents of Maltese origin have, therefore, developed a self-reliant strategy through which inner resources come into play. As the interviews have indicated, this strategy is not necessarily non-productive as argued by Frydenberg and Lewis (1995). In the case of Maltese adolescents a lot of constructive thinking takes place.

A common thread also seems to run among the factors that contribute to a sense of unhappiness for the two groups. Whereas in Malta the factors included parents' high academic expectations, the wide prevalence of drugs among adolescents and lack of loyalty among friends, in Australia the factors included lack of freedom, lack of trust and social issues, such as drugs, suicide, poverty, and war. The issue of trust is important for both groups. However, whereas in Malta it is in relation to friends, in Australia it is in relation to both parents and friends. Moreover, although the issue of drugs is important for both groups, it is more pronounced for native Maltese where it is having a significant impact.

Adolescents in the two groups differed in the experience of gossip. In Malta, participants demonstrated a great deal of preoccupation about gossip. Maltese-Australian adolescents, however, did not demonstrate such preoccupation. It needs to be pointed out that the individual interviews (both in Malta and in Australia) did not specifically explore the issue of gossip. However, its significance consistently came up within the interviews among native Maltese adolescents to the extent that it was identified as a critical issue. Maltese-Asutralian adolescents, on the other hand, did not show such preoccupation.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the daily life experiences of both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents are quite intriguing and complex. They are dealing with both cultural and developmental issues that are impacting on their life satisfaction. Both groups are undergoing a shift from the collectivistic orientation to an individualistic orientation. However, although a number of similarities can be drawn from the experiences of both groups, the acculturation process of Maltese-Australian adolescents remains unique. Their status as members of an ethnic minority group has a great deal of psychological and psychosocial implications for their subjective well-being. Also, since these adolescents are living in a country that endorses an individualistic culture, the issues that have been identified in the transition process are perhaps more pronounced for these adolescents than they are for native Maltese. Having set the scene for a further investigation, the above discussion will shed more light on the following systematic study of the areas concerned.

The analysis of the qualitative study, both in Malta and Australia, identified a number of important issues/factors (e.g., parental trust, interpersonal skills among parents

and adolescents, self-esteem, individualism-collectivism, the generation gap, etc.) that are considered to be impacting on the life satisfaction of adolescents. For practical reasons, however, the following quantitative study did not examine all these factors. Instead, it was limited to these areas: the family environment, social support, and coping strategies.

# Chapter 10

## Method for the Quantitative Study

### 10.1 Participants

Three groups of participants were selected for this study - a native Maltese group (n=113), a Maltese-Australian group (n=108), and an Anglo-Australian group (n=111). All were secondary students, recruited from the same social economic background, namely a working class background. This socio-economic class was predominant among students in the schools of the Western suburbs of Melbourne from which the Maltese-Australian sample was drawn. The participants in the other 2 groups were, therefore, matched with this demographic variable. All participants were also recruited from intact families, that is, families in which both parents were living together, thereby matching the demographics of the participants in the qualitative study.

Overall, there were 199 females and 133 males. The mean age of participants was 15.49 years (range between 14-18 years of age). Table 11 shows the number of participants in each group and the average age for each group.

#### 10.1.1 Native Maltese Group

This group included Maltese adolescents born and living in Malta. Both their parents, as well as their maternal and paternal grandparents, were also born in Malta. These participants were recruited from 6 government-funded secondary schools both in

Table 11

Number and Age of Participants

| | Native Australians | | Maltese-Australians | | Anglo-Australians | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| N | 56 | 57 | 34 | 74 | 43 | 68 |
| Age | 15.52 | 14.91 | 15.53 | 15.85 | 15.30 | 15.68 |

Malta and Gozo. The names of the schools in Malta were provided by the Education Department on the basis of convenience for the researcher and the high prevalence of students who came from the same socio-economic background as the participants in the other two groups. The 3 schools in Gozo were the only secondary schools on the island.

### 10.1.2 Maltese-Australian Group

Participants who belonged to this group identified themselves as Maltese or Maltese-Australians. Their place of birth was either Malta or Australia with both parents and grandparents of a Maltese background. This definition of Maltese-Australian using objective and subjective strategies was based on the work of Kalin and Berry (1995). Newly arrived Maltese adolescents were excluded from this study as the cultural shock due to the contact of a host culture that is so different from the culture of origin would still be prevalent. Participants were required to be in Australia for at least 10 years.

Eighty-five percent of these participants were recruited from two state government schools and two Catholic schools in the Western suburbs of Melbourne. These schools were selected because they had a high rate of students of Maltese background. The rest of the participants were recruited through Maltese social functions.

The Maltese language could not be used as part of the criteria because the Maltese language is not generally spoken at home or if it is spoken, it is used in conjunction with English (Borg, 1999). In addition, Terry et al. (1993) found that although a significant number (87.8%) of students were exposed to the Maltese language at home, the knowledge of the language itself seems to be quite minimal.

### 10.1.3 Anglo-Australian Group

For the purpose of this study, Anglo-Australians were defined as being racially Caucasian, identifying themselves as Australians and born in Australia. Both parents' place of birth was one of: Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Canada or the United States. Most participants (90%) were recruited from 3 government state schools and 3 Catholic schools in the metropolitan area of Melbourne. These schools were selected because of the high prevalence of students who fitted the above criteria. The rest of the

participants were recruited through friends. The demographic variables of the participants in this group also matched those of the other 2 groups.

### 10.2 Instruments

Participants completed a questionnaire that comprised the following scales: Family Environment Scales (FES) Form R. The Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1974) comprises 10 subscales, each of which consists of 9 true-false items. These subscales are for Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Organisation, and Control. The FES has an adequate internal consistency (ranging from .61 to .78) and a good eight-week test-retest reliability ranging from .68 to .86 (Moos & Moos, 1986). Because families from different ethnic groups were included in its norming sample, this scale was considered to be appropriate for the current study.

Individual scores were obtained for each subscale.

Short Form Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ6). Perceived social support was measured by using The Short Form Support Questionnaire (Sarason et al., 1987). This is the short version (6-item scale) of the original 27-item scale (Sarason et al., 1983). Each item has two parts: the first part of each item examines the number of available others the individual thinks he/she has to turn to in case the need arises (Number or Perceived Availability Score). Up to nine people can be listed. The second part of each item measures the individual's degree of satisfaction (Satisfaction score) with the perceived support in a specific situation. A 6-point scale, with 'very dissatisfied' on one pole and 'very satisfied' on the other, is used to indicate how satisfied they are. The internal reliabilities of the items range from 0.90 to 0.93 for both Number and Satisfaction. This test also has good test-retest reliability (Sarason et al., 1987).

Two scores were derived. The first score related to the first part and ranged from 0 (no supporting individuals) to 9 (supporting individuals). The second score related to the second part and ranged from 1(very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied). This total score ranged from 6 to 36 for all six items.

Adolescent Coping Scale. Coping strategies were assessed by using the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS –Short Form) (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993). It is based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Ways of Coping Checklist (WOCC), using similar development procedures and format. The ACS consists of 18 items, which are the basis for three scales, Problem-Focused, Reference to Others and Non-productive Coping. The three scales have a moderate reliability. The validity of the Short Form was established through the correlation of the items and the scale of which it was a part (0.70). Further statistical tests also revealed a consistency between the coping strategies measured in the Short and Long Forms (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993).

Scores of individual items were added to get a total score for each participant. However, the questionnaire was also scored for the three coping styles that underlie the 18 coping strategies to get a better understanding of the differences and/or similarities among the sampling groups.

The Adolescent Coping Scale (Short Form) has been selected for this study because it is "a reliable surrogate for the Long Form when coping styles are being investigated" (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993, p. 43).

Satisfaction With Life Scale. Satisfaction with life was measured by using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) that was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). Studies conducted by these authors revealed a test-retest reliability of 0.82 and an alpha coefficient of 0.87. The validity of the scale has also been examined and confirmed through the positive and negative relationships with other measures of subjective well-being (e.g., self-esteem) and neuroticism and emotionality respectively. Its reliability and validity are quite acceptable even when the scale was translated and administered to Portuguese (Neto, 1992) and Chinese participants (Shek, 1992). Social desirability bias has also been tested and was found to be abscent through a low correlation of 0.02 with the Marlowe-Crowne measure.

A 7-point scale was used to measure the responses: 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Scoring was derived by adding the ratings for each item. Scores ranged from 5 to 35. The lowest score suggested minimal life satisfaction and the highest score suggested maximum life satisfaction.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM): This instrument was used for the current study to measure aspects of the ethnic identity of Maltese-Australian adolescents. The scale was developed by Phinney (1992) to assess three components of ethnic identity: affirmation and belonging (5 items), ethnic identity achievement (5 items) and ethnic behaviour orientation (2 items). This measure has been quite reliable (Cronbach's alpha was 0.81) with diverse ethnic high school samples (Phinney, 1992). For the purpose of the current study, only the component of affirmation and belonging was used. Ten items were used to tap into the level of identification with both the Maltese and Australian cultures. The view that biculturalism was bidirectional rather than unidirectional (Szapocznik et al., 1980) was adopted.

In addition to the items measuring affirmation and belonging, two items were added to measure negative attitudes. According to Phinney "the presence of actual negative attitudes can be seen as a denial of one's ethnic identity" (p. 505). Five further items were used to measure self-identification. Three of these items, using three possible options (Maltese, Australian, and both Maltese and Australian) measured subjective ethnicity; the other two items measured the level of ethnic identification as Maltese and as Australian with 'not at all' and 'very much' on both ends of the scale. The combination of these two measures was considered essential to identify any possible discrepancy that may occur between the self-identification label and the level of ethnic identification (Phinney, 1990).

Scores were derived by reversing negatively worded items, summing across items and obtaining the mean. Scores ranged from 4 (indicating high ethnic identity) to 1 (low).

### 10.2.1 Maltese Language-based Surveys

A steering committee from the Maltese community was set up to examine the translated questionnaire into Maltese by the researcher. The Maltese version was then back-translated to English by a professional Maltese interpreter. The discrepancies between the original English version and the English translation of the Maltese version were examined by the steering committee. Three concepts, Sunday School, Passover and Little League in the Family Environment Scale were not applicable. The closest concept to Sunday School is *duttrina* (religious instructions) which is organised by religious

organisations such as *L-Azzjoni Kattolika, I-Mużew and* "The Legion Of Mary". Such instructions are held outside school hours, both during the week and on the weekend. For 'Passover', the word Easter was used in accordance with the Maltese Bible. Little League is alien to the culture in question, therefore, a similar concept, *il-kampjonat tal-ballun għaż-żgħar* (Juniors' Football) was used. This activity is considered to be more culturally relevant.

The possibility of different meanings of the concepts in different countries cannot be overlooked in cross-cultural studies (Minsel, Becker, & Korchin, 1991). One such concept in the Maltese questionnaire was 'distress'. Initially, it was translated as *dwejjaq*. But in cross-checking, its translation was 'depression'. Another version of this word that was considered was *niket.* This concept, however, has a connotation of sorrow and grief. After a great deal of discussion, the word *dieqa* was considered as the most appropriate word even though it is the singular of *dwejjaq.* In some cases, concepts were not translated; the English version was maintained because they have become assumed into the Maltese language. Such concepts are factory, technician, hairdresser, salesperson executive, boy/girlfriend, movies, sport, camping, lectures, stress, support and fit. Although some of these words do have a Maltese version, the English version was maintained because it was considered to be more comprehensible for contemporary adolescents.

The translation of the Maltese questionnaire was meant to be verbatim, however, this was not totally possible. For example, in the Adolescent Coping Questionnaire, the items start with a neutral verb. In the Maltese version, the conjugation of the verb is not neutral; it indicates the person that it corresponds to. This means that even though the noun/pronoun is omitted it still refers to a particular person. Thus for example, *Nitkellem* (I talk) although the subject "I" (*Jiena)* is omitted it still indicates that it is referring to "I". In the cross translation, the subject "I" was included.

English expressions, such as "Family members often try to one-up or out-do each other" (item 73 in the Family Environment Scale) were translated according to the meaning, keeping in mind the subscale that it represents. This item was, therefore, translated as: *Xi membri tal-familja sikwit ikunu iridu li jidhru aħjar minn l-oħrajn*. Other

items within the same instrument were also translated taking into account the subscales that they belonged to.

## 10.3 Data Collection Procedure

### 10.3.1 Data collection in Australia

Permission from the Education Department of Victoria, the Victorian School of Languages, and the Catholic Education Office were sought. Subsequent letters to school principals were sent out. Participants in the Maltese- and Anglo-Australian groups were mainly recruited from 2 main sources, secondary schools (Year 9 - Year12) and Maltese language classes mostly from the Western suburbs of Melbourne where there is a high concentration of Maltese immigrants. Some participants were also recruited individually through friends and at Maltese social functions.

Once approval was gained from the Principals of the schools, potential participants both from Maltese- and Anglo-Australian background were given a letter which included information about the project and consent forms for both parents and students. The consent forms were collected prior to the administration of the questionnaires. Participants who returned the forms were requested to attend a session for the administration of the questionnaires in small groups. This procedure was considered to be more practical for the schools, as well as for the researcher concerned. Sessions for data collection were held on the schools' premises. At the beginning of the session, the purpose of this study was explained. Issues regarding confidentiality and anonymity were also clarified. In addition, participants were informed that participation was voluntarily and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Each session lasted for about 40 minutes.

In those cases where participants were recruited through sources, other than schools, I handed out the questionnaires myself. This gave the participants the opportunity to discuss the required procedure. Consent forms were collected before the questionnaires were completed. Participants filled out the questionnaires in their own time. A contact phone number was given to them in case clarifications were required. The completed questionnaires were mailed to me.

### 10.3.2 Data Collection in Malta

Data collection in Malta followed the same procedure as data collection in Australia. Permission was gained from the Education Department. Principals of prospective schools were sent a letter that included information about the research project. Once approval was sought, arrangements were made for data collection to take place. Consent forms were collected from both parents and participants before the administration of the questionnaire. Unlike data collection in Australia, data collection in Malta did not include individual recruiting. Therefore, administration of questionnaires only took place in a group situation in schools and a youth group centre. I administered the questionnaires during school hours. This made it possible for participants to ask any questions.

Overall, there were no major problems with regards to data collection. However, it is noteworthy to point out that participants, both in Australia and in Malta, asked a lot of questions regarding the Family Environment Scale.

# Chapter 11

## Results for the Quantitative Study

In order to explore the life satisfaction of adolescents, a number of related areas were examined by administering a questionnaire to three different ethnic groups – native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. The areas that were examined were family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies. In addition to these, ethnic identification was also explored among Maltese-Australian adolescents. The scales included the Family Environment Scale (FES), Short Form Social Support Questionnaire, Adolescent Coping Scale, Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWL).

### 11.1 Measurements of Internal Reliability

A measure of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated for each of the scales. Table 12 shows the alpha coefficients for the Family Environment subscales. These coefficients were mostly low to moderate, ranging from 0.31 for Independence to 0.73 for Conflict. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1989), reliability estimates that

Table 12
Estimates of Internal Consistency by Sex for FES Subscales

| Subscale | Male | Female | Entire Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cohesion | 0.70 | 0.67 | 0.68 |
| Expressiveness | 0.28 | 0.47 | 0.41 |
| Conflict | 0.75 | 0.72 | 0.73 |
| Independence | 0.17 | 0.38 | 0.31 |
| Achievement | 0.26 | 0.50 | 0.43 |
| Intellectual-Cultural Orientation | 0.51 | 0.65 | 0.62 |
| Active-Recreational Orientation | 0.44 | 0.62 | 0.53 |
| Moral-Religious Emphasis | 0.64 | 0.70 | 0.68 |
| Organisation | 0.64 | 0.58 | 0.61 |
| Control | 0.47 | 0.52 | 0.50 |

are lower than 0.70 are considered to be inadequate for data analysis. In the current study, only Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis had an alpha coefficient that met the criterion. These findings are not consistent with previous reported data for the Family Environment Scale (see Moos & Moos, 1986). However, they are consistent with other findings (Boyd, Gullone, Needleman, & Burt, 1997). Additional analysis for the individual ethnic groups in the current study indicated that the alpha coefficients were similar for each group. Further analysis in the present study will, therefore, include only Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis.

Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated for the two components of Perceived Social Support. For the first component, the level of satisfaction of Perceived Social Support, an internal consistency coefficient of .89 was obtained. For the number of people in the support system, the internal consistency coefficient was .89. The Satisfaction With Life Scale had an alpha coefficient of .83. A strong reliability coefficient of .82 was also found for ethnic identification among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 11.2 Comparisons

Means and standard deviations were calculated for Cohesion, Conflict, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Satisfaction With Life, Perceived Support, Number of People in Support, Non-Productive Coping, Solving Problems, and Reference to Others (see Table 13). The results of the subscales of FES were consistent with previous reported data (Boyd et al., 1997; Moos & Moos, 1986). One sample t-tests were conducted for Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis in order to see if the means differed from those reported by these authors. The results indicated these means were not significantly different.

A univariate analysis of variance indicated no significant differences in the levels of life satisfaction for the three ethnic groups. Figure 4 shows that 18% of the sample fell within the extremely satisfied range and 29% fell within the satisfied range. However, 22% fell within the slightly satisfied range, 6% fell within the neutral range, and 25% below the neutral range of life satisfaction.

In order to conduct further analysis, the sample was divided into 3 groups –

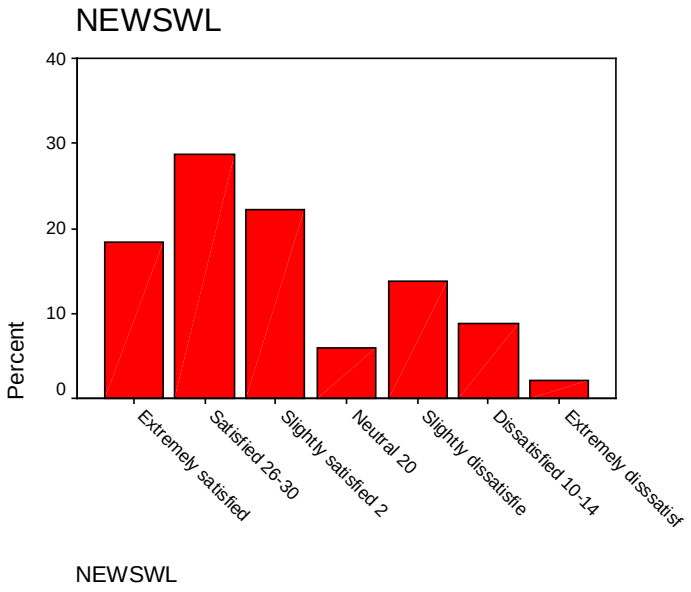


Figure 4 Percentages of Participants in Different Levels of Life Satisfaction

*satisfied group* (which comprised the participants who scored within the satisfied and extremely satisfied ranges); *slightly satisfied group* (which comprised the participants who scored within the slightly satisfied, neutral, and slightly dissatisfied ranges); and *dissatisfied group* (which comprised the participants who scored within the dissatisfied and extremely dissatisfied ranges).

A One-Way ANOVA was conducted for these three groups to see if they differed in Cohesion, Conflict, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Perceived Support, Number of People in Support, Non-Productive Coping, Solving Problems, and Reference to Others. Table 14 shows that the means and the standard deviations of these variables across the *satisfied*, *slightly satisfied*, and *dissatisfied groups*. Significant differences were found in Cohesion ($F(2, 331) = 32.15$, $p = .000$) with the satisfied group scoring more ($M = 7.08$, $S.D. = 1.72$) than the slightly satisfied ($M=6.39$, $S.D. = 2.04$) and the dissatisfied ($M=4.25$, $S.D.=2.25$) groups. Significant differences were also found in Conflict ($F(2, 331) = 25.20$, $p=.000$) with the satisfied group scoring less ($M=3.07$, $S.D.=2.39$) than the dissatisfied group ($M=5.97$, $S.D.=1.89$). The groups also significantly differed in Moral-

Religious Emphasis ($F(2, 331)=8.18$, $p=.000$) with the satisfied group ($M=5.19$, $S.D.=2.05$) scoring more than the slightly satisfied ($M=4.50$, $S.D.=2.17$) and the

dissatisfied (M=3.78, S.D.=2.10) groups. Perceived Support was another variable on which the groups significantly differed (F(2, 330)=8.65, p=.000) from each other, with the satisfied group (M=31.53, S.D.=4.49) scoring more than the slightly satisfied (M= 29.84, S.D.=4.49) and the dissatisfied (M=27.78, S.D.=7.37) groups. The groups also significantly differed in Number of People in Support (F(2, 331)=5.16, p=.000) with the satisfied group (M=25.04, S.D.=11.69) scoring more than the slightly satisfied (M=21.13, S.D.=11.32) group. Significant differences also occurred in Non-Productive Coping (F(2, 331)= 8.91, p=.000) with the dissatisfied (M=62.00, S.D.=10.59) group scoring more than the satisfied (M=53.22, S.D.=11.48) and the slightly satisfied (M=54.96, S.D.=11.15) groups. The results also showed that significant differences occurred in Solving Problems (F(2, 331)=32.52, p=.000), with the satisfied group scoring more (M=72.52, S.D.=10.13) than the slightly satisfied (M=66.15, S.D.=10.46) and the dissatisfied (M=58.50, S.D.=10.26) groups. Finally, the groups differed in Reference to Others (F(2,331)=10.47, p=.000) with the satisfied group (M=60.48, S.D.=15.60) scoring more than the slightly satisfied (M=55.17, S.D.13.63) and the dissatisfied (M=49.17, S.D.=15.23) groups.

In order to test for gender or ethnicity effects, 2 x 3 (Sex x Group) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. However, before this analysis was conducted, the homogeneity of variance assumption was tested. According to the Box's Test of Equality of Covariance some differences were found. However, according to Gravetter and Wallnau (1991) "There is reason for concern if one variance is more than two times larger than the other" (p. 282). This approach was used to test the homogeneity of variances within the 3 groups on all the dependent variables. Since further calculations met that criterion on *all* the variables, the assumption in question was not violated. This indicated that the powers of the tests were robust. Therefore, the results of the MANOVA could be meaningfully interpreted.

The results of the MANOVA analysis showed that significant multivariate effects were found for both variables. Sex had a Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .22$ and Group had a Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.33$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .42$. There was no significant interaction effect for Sex by Group. There was a significant main effect for Sex, $F(1, 330) = 4.76$, $p < .05$. Males scored significantly higher than females on Satisfaction With Life ($M$=25.36, $SD$=5.90,

*F*=10.42, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$=.03), and Solving Problems (*M*=69.98, *SD*=11.43, *F*=4.83, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$=.02). Females scored significantly higher than males on Support (*M*=31.13, *SD*=4.85, *F*=7.99, $\eta^2$ =.02), Number of People in Support (*M*=24.27, *SD*=11.37, *F*=24.27, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$=.02), and Non-Productive Coping (*M*=56.36, *SD*=11.19, *F*=5.80, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$=.02).

Table 13 presents the means and standard deviations between males and females for each variable. A multivariate analysis indicated that the difference in Satisfaction With Life between males and females is significant. Male adolescents reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than female adolescents (*F*(1, 330) =10.42, *p* < .05, $\eta^2$ =.03 ). Female adolescents reported significantly higher levels of perceived support (*F*(1, 330) =7.99), *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ =.02), number of people in the support system (*F*(1, 330) =4.77, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ =.02), and non-productive coping (*F*(1, 330) =5.80, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ =.02) than male adolescents. The latter reported significantly higher levels of solving problems (*F*(1, 330) =4.83, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ =.02) and reaching out to others (*F*(1, 330) =2.10, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ = .01) than female adolescents.

Table 15 shows that the means and the standard deviations of variables across the three ethnic groups. Significant differences were found between the groups (*F*=14.1, *p* <.05, $\eta^2$ =.42). Scheffe´ tests indicated that native Maltese scored significantly higher levels of Cohesion than Maltese- and Anglo-Australians. Native Maltese reported significantly lower levels of Conflict than the other two groups. Notably, Maltese-Australian adolescents scored higher levels of Conflict than native Maltese. Both native Maltese and Maltese-Australians scored significantly higher than Anglo-Australians on Moral-Religious Emphasis.

### 11.3 Predictors of Life Satisfaction among Adolescents for the Entire Sample

To determine the predictors for the three life satisfaction outcomes, three steps were carried out. First, correlations among variables were calculated. Second, variables that were significantly correlated with the outcome variable were chosen as potential predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Finally, regression analyses were carried out. The following sections will examine these three steps, first for the entire sample and then for the individual ethnic groups.

### 11.3.1 Analysis for the Entire Sample

Pearson's product correlations among the variables of interest were conducted. Results in Table 16 show that Sex, Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Non-Productive Coping, Perceived Support, Number of People in the Support System, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis were significantly correlated with Satisfaction With Life. These variables were, therefore, considered as potential predictors of Satisfaction With Life for the entire sample. The correlation matrix of these variables showed that there was no correlation greater than .55, suggesting that all predictor variables could be used without the danger of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

To further clarify the relationship between the potential predictor variables and life of satisfaction, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted. The results indicate that Solving Problems, Cohesion, Non-Productive Coping, Reference to Others, Support, and Sex were identified as significant predictors of Satisfaction With Life (see Table 17). The results were significant, $F(6, 324)=31.68$, $p<.05$. Altogether, 36% of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables that significantly contributed to the variance. It was also found that Solving Problems was the first variable to enter the regression equation of Satisfaction With Life ($t(330) =9.34$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .46$), followed by Cohesion ($t(330) = 6.26$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .30$), Non-Productive Coping that yielded a negative beta, ($t(330) = -4.07$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.19$), Reference to Others ($t(330) = 2.88$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .15$), Support ($t(330) = 2.35$, $p = .05$, $\beta = .11$) and Sex that also yielded a negative beta ($t(330) = -2.70$, $p <.05$, $\beta = -.12$).

### 11.3.2 Analysis for Native Maltese Adolescents

In order to identify different patterns of variables contributing to life satisfaction among the three ethnic groups, separate statistical analyses were conducted for each individual ethnic group. A Pearson's product correlation was conducted in relation to all the variables in question for native Maltese adolescents. Results in Table 18 show that Sex, Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis significantly correlated with Satisfaction With Life. These variables were therefore, considered as potential predictors of life satisfaction for the

Table 17

Stepwise Regression Statistics for Predictors of Satisfaction With Life for the Entire Sample

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | *t* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Solving Problem | 0.21 | 0.21 | 0.46 | 9.34 [a] |
| 2 | Cohesion | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.30 | 6.26 [a] |
| 3 | Non-Productive Coping | 0.31 | 0.32 | -0.19 | -4.07 [a] |
| 4 | Reference to Others | 0.35 | 0.34 | .15 | 2.88 [a] |
| 4 | Support | 0.36 | 0.35 | 0.11 | 2.35 [a] |
| 5 | Sex | 0.37 | 0.36 | -0.12 | -2.70 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$

native Maltese adolescents. Notably, the correlation coefficients were not greater than 51. Therefore, these variables could be used as potential predictors with a minimised possibility of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

To further examine the relationship between the potential predictor variables and Satisfaction With Life, a stepwise regression was conducted. Satisfaction With Life was entered as the dependent variable. Sex, Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral Religious Emphasis were entered as potential predictors. According to the results, Support, Solving Problem, Moral-Religious Emphasis, and Sex were identified as predictors of Satisfaction With Life (see Table 19). The results were significant, $F(4, 108) = 10.36$, $p < .05$, accounting for 25% of the variance. It was also found that Support was the first variable to enter the equation regarding Satisfaction With Life ($t(112) = 3.60$, $p = .05$, $\beta = .32$), followed by Solving Problem that yielded a beta weight ($t(112) = 3.32$, $p = .05$, $\beta = .29$). Notably, Sex yielded a negative beta weight ($t(112) = -2.61$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.22$).

### 11.3.3 Analysis for Maltese-Australian adolescents

Results of Pearson's product correlations among variables show that Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis were significantly correlated with Satisfaction With Life (see Table 21). These variables were, therefore, considered as potential predictors of Satisfaction With Life for Maltese-Australian adolescents. The correlation matrix of these variables showed

Table 19

Stepwise Regression Statistics for Predictors of Satisfaction With Life for Native Maltese Participants

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | *t* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Support | 0.11 | 0.10 | 0.32 | 3.61 [a] |
| 2 | Solving Problems | 0.19 | 0.17 | 0.29 | 3.32 [a] |
| 3 | MRE | 0.23 | 0.21 | 0.21 | 2.54 [a] |
| 4 | Sex | 0.28 | 0.25 | -0.22 | -2.61 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$
Key: MRE – Moral-Religious Emphasis

that the correlation coefficients were not higher than .56. These variables could, therefore, be used as potential predictors with a minimised possibility of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

To evaluate the contribution of each potential variable in predicting Satisfaction With Life, a stepwise regression was conducted. Satisfaction With Life was entered as the dependent variable. Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis were entered as potential predictors.

The results indicate that of these variables, Solving Problems and Cohesion were identified as significant predictors of Satisfaction With Life (see Table 21). The results were significant, $F(1, 106) = 40.28$, $p < .05$. Altogether, 42% of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables that significantly contributed to the variance. It was also found that Solving Problems was the first variable that entered the equation of Satisfaction With Life ($t(107) = 7.24$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .58$), followed by Cohesion ($t(107) = 4.38$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .37$).

In order to find out if ethnic identification plays a significant role in Satisfaction With Life for Maltese-Australian adolescents, further analysis was conducted. A Pearson's product correlation between Satisfaction With Life and identification with the Maltese culture shows that these two variables were significantly correlated ($r = .20$). However, the relationship between identification with the Australian culture and Satisfaction with Life was not significant. Maltese ethnic identification was, therefore,

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Table 21

Stepwise Regression Statistics for Predictors of Satisfaction with Life for Maltese-Australian Participants

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | *t* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Solving Problem | 0.33 | 0.32 | 0.40? | 4.77 [a] |
| 2 | Cohesion | 0.43 | 0.42 | 0.37 | 4.38 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$

considered as a potential predictor. However, when it was included in the regression model, it failed to result as a significant predictor.

11.3.4 Analysis for Anglo-Australian Adolescents

Pearson's product correlations were conducted for the Anglo-Australian adolescents. Results in Table 22 show that Sex, Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Non-Productive Coping, Number of People in the Support System, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis were significantly correlated with Satisfaction With Life, at least at p <05. These variables were, therefore, considered as potential predictors of Satisfaction With Life for the Anglo-Australian adolescents. The correlation matrix of these variables showed that there was no correlation greater than .48, suggesting that there was the possibility for multicollinearity among the potential predictors was minimised (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

To further examine the relationship between the potential predictor variables and life satisfaction, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted. Satisfaction With Life was entered as the dependent variable. Sex, Solving Problems, Reference to others, Non-Productive Coping, Number of People in the Support System, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis were entered as potential predictors. The results indicate that Solving Problems, Non-Productive Coping, Cohesion, Reference to Others, and Sex were identified as significant predictors of Satisfaction With Life. Satisfaction With Life (see Table 23). The results were significant, $F(5, 105) = 15.10$, $p < .05$. Altogether, 39% of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables that significantly contributed to the variance. It was also found that Solving Problems was the first predictor that entered

Table 23

Stepwise Regression Statistics for Predictors of Satisfaction With Life for Anglo-Australian Participants

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | *t* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Solving Problem | 0.19 | 0.18 | 0.43 | 4.98 [a] |
| 2 | Non-Productive Coping | 0.31 | 0.29 | -0.35 | -4.31 [a] |
| 3 | Cohesion | 0.35 | 0.33 | 0.23 | 2.75 [a] |
| 4 | Reference to Others | 0.38 | 0.36 | 0.20 | 2.28[a] |
| 5 | Sex | 0.42 | 0.39 | -0.21 | -2.59 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$

the equation with regards to Satisfaction With Life ($t(110) = 4.98$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .43$), followed by Non-Productive Coping that yielded a negative beta weight ($t(110) = 23.71$, $p = .05$, $\beta = -.35$). Notably, Sex yielded a negative beta weight ($t(110) = -2.59$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.21$).

11.4 Analysis for Males and Females for the Entire Sample

In order to examine any possible different patterns of predictors of Satisfaction With Life with regards to gender, separate analyses were conducted for males and females. Pearson's product correlations were conducted among the variables of interest for male adolescents. Table 24 indicates that Satisfaction With Life significantly correlated with Solving Problem, Reference to Others, Support, Number of People in Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis. Having significantly correlated with Satisfaction With Life, these variables were considered as potential predictors. It is also important to point out that all the correlation coefficients were lower than .55. The danger of multicollinearity was, therefore, reduced.

A stepwise regression was conducted using Satisfaction with Life as the dependent variable. All the other variables were entered as independent variables. The results indicate that among these variables Solving Problems, Cohesion, Number of People in Support, and Reference to Others were identified as predictors of Satisfaction With Life (see Table 25). The results were significant, $F(4, 131) = 10.14$, $p < .05$, accounting for 22% of the variance. It was also found that Solving Problems was

Table 25

Stepwise Regression Statistics for Predictors of Satisfaction With Life for Male Participants

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | **t** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Solving Problem | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.36 | 4.38 [a] |
| 2 | Cohesion | 0.18 | 0.17 | -0.35 | 2.81 [a] |
| 3 | Number of Support | 0.21 | 0.19 | 0.23 | 2.31 [a] |
| 4 | Reference to Others | 0.23 | 0.21 | 0.20 | 1.99 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$

the first variable to enter the equation with regards to Satisfaction With Life ($t(131) = 4.55.60$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .37$), followed by Cohesion ($t(131) = 2.74$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .23$), Number of People in Support ($t(131) = 2.32$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .19$, and Reference to Others ($t(131) = 2.02$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .17$) respectively.

In order to examine Satisfaction with Life among female adolescents, Pearson's Product correlations were conducted for this subgroup. Table 26 indicates that Satisfaction With Life significantly correlated with Solving Problems, Reference to Others, Support, Non-Productive Coping, Support, Number of People in Support, Cohesion, Conflict, and Moral-Religious Emphasis. Notably, both Non-Productive Coping and Conflict negatively correlated with Satisfaction with Life. These variables were therefore, considered as potential predictors of Satisfaction With Life. It is important to point out that all the correlation coefficients were lower than .57. Therefore, the possibility of incurring multicollinearity was minimised (Tabacknich & Fidell, 1989).

A stepwise regression was conducted using Satisfaction with Life as the dependent variable, while all the other variables were entered as independent variables. The results indicate that Solving Problems, Cohesion, Non-Productive Coping, and Reference to Others were identified as predictors (see Table 27). The results were significant, $F(4, 198) = 37.41$, $p < .05$. Altogether, 42% of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables that significantly contributed to the variance. It was also found that Solving Problem was the most significant predictor of Satisfaction With Life ($t(198) = 8.02$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .50$), followed by Cohesion ($t(198) = 6.02$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .36$),

Table 27

Stepwise Regression Statistics for predictors of Satisfaction With Life for Female Participants

| Step | Variable | $R^2$ | Adj.$R^2$ | Beta | **t** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Solving Problem | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.50 | 8.00 [a] |
| 2 | Cohesion | 0.37 | 0.36 | 0.36 | 6.03 [a] |
| 3 | Non-Productive Coping | 0.42 | 0.41 | -0.24 | -4.08 [a] |
| 4 | Reference to Others | 0.43 | 0.42 | 0.18 | 2.66 [a] |

a $p < 0.05$

Non-Productive Coping ($t(198) = -4.13$, $p < .05$, $\beta = -.24$, and Reference to Others ($t(198) = 2.67$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .18$) respectively. It is also interesting to note that Non-Productive Coping yielded a negative beta weight.

### 11.4 Summary

This chapter examined the experience of life satisfaction of native Maltese, Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents. According to the results, the levels of life satisfaction between these 3 groups did not significantly differ from each other. Most of the adolescents were satisfied with life. However, 25% of the participants scored below the neutral range and 53% scored below the satisfied range on the Life Satisfaction Scale.

Interestingly, the means to attain life satisfaction varied for the 3 groups. For native Maltese, the variables included perceived support, solving problems, moral-religious emphasis and sex. Only 2 variables – solving problems and family cohesion - entered the equation for Maltese-Australian adolescents. As for the Anglo-Australian group, solving problems, non-productive coping, family cohesion, reaching out to others in times of need, and sex predicted their satisfaction with life. Notably, solving problems was a common factor among the 3 groups. However, its predictive power varied for the 3 groups. Accounting for 21% of the variance, it proved to be more important for Maltese-Australian adolescents.

The results also indicated a significant difference in life satisfaction of male and female adolescents in the entire sample. Male adolescents reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction. The means to attain it was almost the same for the 2 groups. For males, the predictive factors included solving problems, family cohesion, number of people in the support system, and reaching out to others in times of need. Whereas for females, the factors included solving problems, family cohesion, non-productive coping, and reaching out to others in times of need.

Following this chapter is a discussion on these findings.

# Chapter 12

## Discussion of the Quantitative Study

Over these last three decades, there has been a great interest in life satisfaction across nations. However, studies that examined this phenomenon among adolescents were scarce as those studies available mostly involved college students. The current study was unique in that it examined life satisfaction from a non-college student population. It is also a study that investigated this phenomenon from a cross-cultural perspective, more specifically among native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. Life satisfaction was examined in relation to a number of areas – family environment, perceived social support, and coping strategies. In addition to these areas, ethnic identification was also examined among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 12.1 Life Satisfaction of Adolescents

The results of the current study indicate that overall, most adolescents, irrespective of their cultural background, are satisfied with life. These findings corroborated with those of other studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2001; Gilman & Heubner, 2003; Grob, 2000; Sam, 1998) which found that most youths are satisfied with their lives and pretty happy. A literature review conducted by Diener (1984) revealed that, although there seems to be a slow rise in life satisfaction with age, young people appear to experience higher levels of happiness. The current study found that 18% of the sample fall within the extremely satisfied range and 29% fall within the satisfied range. However, 22% fall within the slightly satisfied range, as 6% fall within the neutral range, and 25% below the neutral range of life satisfaction.

The percentage of adolescents who are not satisfied with life raises some concern. These adolescents seem to be having problems in dealing with their challenges in life. Results in the present study, for example, showed that those who are not satisfied with life significantly differed in constructive problem solving strategies than those who are satisfied or fairly satisfied with life. Instead, they are using significantly more non-productive coping strategies than those who reported higher levels of life satisfaction.

These strategies can jeopardize their life satisfaction. Indeed, a negative correlation between these non-productive coping strategies and life satisfaction was found. This finding is similar to another study (Freeman & Brown, 2001) that found that passive coping factors play a negative role in the psychosocial health of adolescents. Conversely, solving problems plays a significant positive role in the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents, irrespective of their ethnicity, as confirmed by the current study.

Adolescents who reported lack of satisfaction with life in the current study also have problems in reaching out to others in times of need, a strategy that also contributed positively to life satisfaction for the sample in the present study. This is in line with past research that has shown that adolescents who experience high parental support experience less depression and less antisocial behaviour (Sim, 2000); while acceptance by both parents is significantly positively related to satisfaction with life (Seibel & Johnson, 2001).

Adolescents who experience lack of life satisfaction also come from families that lack cohesion. Indeed, the present study has shown that those who are dissatisfied with life reported significantly lower levels of family cohesion than those who were satisfied or fairly satisfied with life. In addition, a significant positive correlation has been found between cohesion and life satisfaction. This finding is in accordance with O'Connor's study (1998) that showed that a sense of being connected to family members had a significant protective effect against suicidal thoughts or attempts, and emotional distress in young adolescents.

Finally, dissatisfied adolescents are mostly women who could be experiencing more emotional problems and lack of self-esteem. Past research has shown that female adolescents were found to experience more emotional problems than male adolescents (Helsen et al., 2001). They were also found to experience lower levels of self-esteem (Colarossi et al., 2000; Dukes et al., 2000; Quatman & Watson, 2001). The current study identified a negative relationship between sex and life satisfaction. It also showed that women, irrespective of their ethnicity, experienced significantly lower levels of life satisfaction.

## 12.2 Levels of Life Satisfaction among the Ethnic Groups

In the current study it was hypothesized that Maltese-Australian adolescents would report lower levels of life satisfaction than native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents. According to the results, no significant differences in life satisfaction were found between the three groups. This finding is not in line with previous studies (e.g., Sam, 2000; Ullman & Tatar, 2001). However, it partly corroborates with the findings of another study (Neto, 2001). In that study, life satisfaction of adolescents from three ethnic minority groups – Cape Verdean, Indian, and Angolan – was examined in relation to the ethnic majority group, namely native Portuguese adolescents. Adolescents of Cape Verdean or Indian origin did not differ from native Portuguese adolescents, whereas adolescents of Angolan origin reported lower levels of life satisfaction compared to the ethnic majority group.

There are a number of reasons, as well as interpretations, of the findings in the current study. This inconsistency with other findings could be due to the differences in the composition of the samples. In Sam's study, for example, almost 50% of the participants were first-generation immigrants who had been residing in Norway for almost 10 years. In the current study, 96% of the participants in the Maltese-Australian group were second-generation immigrants. It is possible that these adolescents have acculturated to the extent that they have caught up with both native and Anglo-Australian adolescents in their level of life satisfaction. Maltese-Australian adolescents may no longer experience the aversive conditions that their parents have been subjected to through the immigration experience. It has been argued (Perez & Padilla, 2000) that second- and third- generation immigrants have an extremely high potential for acculturation that could have influenced their level of life satisfaction. Indeed, Neto (1995) found a consistent association between life satisfaction and psychological adaptation among Portuguese youth born in France.

Another possible explanation with regards to the lack of differences in life satisfaction among the three groups in the current study is related to the cultural experience of negative emotions. Given that a previous study (Borg, 1999) has shown that Maltese-Australian adolescents experienced higher levels of stress than Anglo-

Australian adolescents, it is possible that negative emotions might be interpreted by the Maltese as a normal feature of human experience and may be independent of life satisfaction. This was the case of university students of Nepal in relation to depression (Simpson & Schumaker, 1996).

Although previous research (Borg, 1999) indicated that Maltese-Australian adolescents experienced more stress than Anglo-Australian adolescents, it is possible that the Maltese, (both in Malta and Australia) in making an overall judgment of life satisfaction may not focus as much on negative emotions, even though they appraise certain aspects of their lives in a negative way. A study showed that negative emotions did not play a significant role among the Chinese population (Diener et al., 1995). Such findings indicate that a person who is experiencing negative emotions may not necessarily be experiencing life dissatisfaction. Loneliness, for example, was not important for life satisfaction among a Japanese adult population (Schumaker & Shea, 1993). In another study (Sam, 2000), although the Turkish group had the highest score of mental illness (depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic symptoms) they did not score the lowest in life satisfaction. It seems that for the Turkish group these dimensions do not reflect one another.

The experiences of negative emotions among Maltese-Australian adolescents may also have a cultural meaning that perhaps is enhancing life satisfaction. From a historical perspective, the Maltese tendency to accept one's fate has been an important element in maintaining a tenacity of spirit (Briffa, 1998). This acceptance may have affirmed a willingness to be satisfied with life. Maltese people may have learnt to accept sacrifice and hard work because they were necessary to survive as a nation over the centuries.

A further explanation for the findings in the current study could be related to the possibility that there are national differences in the level of life satisfaction between the three ethnic groups. However, the instrument that was used did not identify these differences. Both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents come from a culture that promotes fatalism that is grounded in strong religious beliefs. Items like "If I could live my life again, I would change almost nothing" may have been inconceivable. So is the notion of life satisfaction itself. Given that the Maltese strongly uphold the view that

God determines eveything and the living conditions need to be accepted wholeheartedly, the concept of life satisfaction may not be a salient one for adolescents of Maltese origin.

In addition, the collectivistic orientation may also have a bearing on life satisfaction. Assuming that the level of collectivisim is high in the Maltese culture, how an individual "feels about him- or herself is less relevant to his life satisfaction than his or her view of whether he or she behaves properly in the organized social order" (Diener & Diener, 1995, p. 662). These authors argued that in collectivist nations the appraisal of life satisfaction may be more influenced by negative factors, such as problems and social conflicts encountered by the individual.

## 12.3 Comparisons of Variables between the Three Ethnic Groups

In order to get a better understanding of adolescents' life satisfaction, this study conducted a 2x3 (Sex x Group) MANOVA on a number of variables – family cohesion, parent-child conflicts, moral-religious emphasis, perceived social support, and life satisfaction. According to the results, no significant interaction was found. However, significant differences in the variables concerned were found between the 3 ethnic groups. The following section will examine these differences.

### 12.3.1 Family Cohesion

According to the results, native Maltese adolescents reported significantly higher levels of cohesion than both Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents. This is in line with past literature (Abela, 1991) that indicated that the Maltese family is very close. It is interesting to note that, unlike native Maltese, the Maltese-Australian adolescents did not report higher levels of cohesion than Anglo-Australian adolescents. According to Johnstone (1994), the Maltese-Australian family is closely knitted. It seems that for the adolescents in the current study, it is not as close as it is usually perceived in comparison to Anglo-Australian adolescents. It is possible, that the Maltese-Australian family is still in the process of acculturation, especially the parents who are mostly first-generation immigrants. Their level of stress that is usually associated with acculturation (Berry, 1997; Borg, 1999) is more likely to be affecting their effective parenting skills.

### 12.3.2 Parent-Child Conflicts

The results of the current study indicate that Maltese-Australian adolescents did not report significantly more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australians, but reported significantly more parent-child conflicts than native Maltese. This is not in accordance with past research (Borg, 1999) that found a significant difference in parent-child conflicts between Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents. In that study, Maltese-Australian adolescents reported higher levels of parent-child conflicts than their counterparts. This could be due to the difference in the mean age of the samples used. In the latter study, the mean age was 18.9 years, whereas the mean age of this study was 15.5 years. It is possible that as they grow older, Maltese-Australian adolescents are more likely to be at loggerheads with their parents, especially at this age when they are more likely to be at the stage of moratorium in their identity development (Zuo & Tao, 2001). Therefore, they are more likely to be questioning the values and beliefs imposed upon them by the parents. Such behaviour could generate more parent-child conflicts.

Maltese-Australian adolescents in the current study significantly reported more parent-child conflicts than native Maltese adolescents. Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that Maltese-Australian adolescents are not only dealing with developmental issues, but they are also dealing with cultural issues that are likely to come to the forefront during this developmental stage. These findings may suggest that Maltese-Australian adolescents are somewhere in between native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents in their process of adaptation. It is possible that the gap in adaptation between Maltese-Australian and Anglo-Australian adolescents is narrowing. However, in contrast to native Maltese, there is a discrepancy that seems to indicate that Maltese-Australian adolescents are still in the process of acculturation and adaptation.

### 12.3.3 Moral-Religious Emphasis

Both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents reported significantly more moral-religious emphasis than Anglo-Australian adolescents. This is not surprising, partly because both the Maltese (Abela, 1991) and Maltese-Australian (Johnstone, 1994) families highly value religion; and partly because, being value laden, religion and religious values and beliefs are more resistant to change as core elements of culture

(Rosenthal, 1984) whether it is in relation to secularization or acculturation in Malta and Australia respectively. In contrast, Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study were found to experience less moral-religious emphasis than the other 2 ethnic groups. This is in accordance with past research (Bouma & Lennon, 2003) that found, for example, only 10% of households in Australia engage in some form of religious activitiy in the course of the day. This is partly due to secularization and partly because, according to Bouma and Lennon, Australians are more spiritual than religious.

### 12.3.4 Perceived Social Support

Of particular interest is the finding in the current study that native Maltese adolescents did not significantly differ in perceived social support than Anglo-Australian adolescents, even though, for example, the results also indicated that native Maltese adolescents reported higher levels of family cohesion than Anglo-Australian adolescents. It is possible that the items of the subscale of cohesion do not differentiate between enmeshment and cohesion (Barber & Buehler, 1996). The item "There is a feeling of togetherness in our family", for example, is a case in point. According to Barber and Buehler, a high level of cohesion is considered as enmeshment that has positively correlated with adolescents' problem behaviours. In addition, for native Maltese in the current study, the concept of closeness / togetherness does not conceptually differentiate between cohesion and enmeshment due to limited words / concepts in Maltese. It is always considered as *għaqda fil-familja* (family unity). Native Maltese adolescents may have, therefore, interpreted the items differently from Anglo-Australian adolescents.

Earlier in the thesis it was argued that there is a strong solidarity amongst the Maltese community, especially in Malta. This is partly due to the small size of the island and partly because of the continuous threats of foreign invasions over the centuries. It is possible that the Maltese community is perceived as close at a collective level, but not at an individual level. Therefore, the perceived levels of social support reported by adolescents in the current study are not necessarily high in comparison to those reported by Anglo-Australian adolescents. It has been argued (Frank et al., 2001) that people in collectivist societies are likely to perceive higher levels of social support than people in individualistic societies. It is possible that the underlying motive of such perception is a

*need* to experience high levels of support. Therefore, although the native Maltese adolescents in the current study reported the same level of perceived support as Anglo-Australian adolescents, that level of support may not be sufficient to meet their psychological needs.

### 12.4 Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction

The current study also aimed at investigating life satisfaction in relation to gender. According to the results, no significant gender differences were found within the three ethnic groups. However, significant gender differences occurred for the entire sample. Male adolescents experienced higher levels of life satisfaction than female adolescents. This is not surprising given that girls seem to experience higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem than boys (Marcotte et al., 2002; Tomori et al., 2000) . Tomori et al. also found that suicidal ideation was more common in girls than in boys.

Besides depression and self-esteem, other factors come into play with regards to the experience of life satisfaction among girls. Given that girls experience less satisfaction with the family (Quatman et al., 2001), more alienation (Vinokurov et al., 2000), and more family conflicts (Tomori et al., 2000) than males, it is possible that females are finding it hard to go through the separation-individuation process through lack of security. Indeed, Quatman et al. (2001) found that male adolescents were more emotionally secure than female adolescents. Another study (Van Wel et al., 2000) found that whereas for boys parental bonding stabilized after mid-adolescence girls experienced greater fluctuations in the relationship with their parents right throughout adolescence. This possible lack of separation and individuation could be having an adverse effect on life satisfaction of female adolescents.

Although in the current study females scored higher in perceived support and in the number of people in the support network system, the level of perceived support may not be high enough to cater for their emotional and psychosocial needs, given that the need for connectedness is stronger for girls than for boys (Van Wel et al., 2000). Vinokurov et al. (2000), for example, found more alienation among female Soviet Jewish refugees than their male counterparts. Assuming that perceived support encompasses a sense of acceptance by another person (Heights, 2002; Roberts et al., 2000) and given

that women have a lower self-esteem than men (Marcotte et al., 2002; Tomori et al., 2000) female adolescents require higher levels of perceived support to counteract such lack of self-esteem.

A further explanation for the gender differences in life satisfaction may be related to coping strategies. In accordance to Piko's (2001) study, the current study showed that males were more equipped with constructive coping skills than females. Males reported more productive coping strategies than females. The current study also showed that females tend to use more non-productive coping skills than their counterparts. This is also similar to Piko's study. Such tendency may be embedded in a belief system that things are out of their control, thereby generating a sense of helplessness, which may be a deterrent to successfully deal with their developmental crisis (Erikson, 1968). Heubner et al. (2001), for example, found that locus of control serves as a mediator between chronic negative experiences and school satisfaction.

## 12.5 Gender Differences on Various Outcomes of Variables

In order to unravel the underlying issues relating to gender differences in life satisfaction this section will examine the gender differences that occurred in perceived support, number of people in support system, non-productive coping, productive coping, and reaching out to others in times of need.

### 12.5.1 Perceived Social Support

According to the results in the current study, female adolescents reported significantly higher levels of perceived support than male adolescents, thereby supporting past research (Schwarzer et al., 1994). This is not surprising considering that the 'social self' was found to be more salient (Ullman & Tartar, 2001) for females than for males. Given that girls experience higher levels of depression and emotional lower levels of self-esteem (Marcotte et al., 2002), and more parent-child conflicts than boys (Borg, 1999; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984; Smetana, 1988), they are more likely to reach out to others in times of need, thereby maximising the opportunities to establish a stronger supportive network system that can be utilized when necessary.

### 12.5.2 Number of People in the Support System

The current study also found that female adolescents have significantly more people in their supportive network system than males did. This is not parallel to past findings (Frey & Rothlisberger, 1996) where girls did not report a larger number of supportive relationships than boys. This could be related to the characteristics of the samples. Frey and Rothlisberger conducted their study among elementary and secondary healthy students (mean age 13 years of age), whereas the mean age of adolescents in the current study was 15.49 years. The findings in this study could be due partly to the psychological (Marcotte et al., 2002) and psychosocial needs of female adolescents, such as the need to feel connected (Van Wel et al., 2002), and partly due to the fact that females are more equipped with psychosocial tools that enable them to establish a broad, supportive network system. Studies, for example, have provided evidence that women tend to invest in intimate, emotional, and self-disclosing relationships that are likely to generate a supportive response from the person concerned (e.g. Patterson & McCubbin, 1987; Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1990).

### 12.5.3 Non-Productive Coping

Female adolescents in the current study also reported significantly higher levels of non-productive coping. This is in line with the findings of another study (Piko, 2001) that found that female adolescents utilized significantly more passive coping strategies than male adolescents. It is possible that such strategies are rooted in sex-stereotype roles. For example, females tend to use crying as a way of coping (Blanchered & Bologni, 1995; Chan, 1994; Copeland & Hess, 1995). This could be a reflection of stereotypical expectations for females to be emotional. Unlike males, females have also been found to have an external locus of control and a strong sense of hopelessness (Rubinstein, 2004). Therefore, they are more likely to feel that things are out of their control, a non-productive coping strategy that has been identified by Frydenberg and Lewis (1991).

### 12.5.4 Productive Coping

As expected, male adolescents in the present study have been found to use significantly more productive coping strategies than females. Once again, this could be

embedded in sex-stereotyped roles. Masculine roles, for example, are considered to be 'instrumental', emphasising competence and rationality (Ullman & Tartar, 2001). These characteristics are more likely to enhance the belief that the individual has control over the situation, thereby spurring him/her to act accordingly during difficult times. Indeed, according to Rubinstein (2004), men were found to have an internal locus of control that facilitated more constructive behaviour.

### 12.5.5 Reaching out to Others

Another interesting finding in the current study is related to another coping strategy, namely reaching out to others in times of need. Male adolescents used this strategy more than female adolescents. This is not in accordance with past research (Sarason et al., 1990; Stokes et al., 1984) that found that women tend to seek more social support than men. This difference with regards to this finding could be due to the different eras that these studies have been conducted. It could be that in contemporary society there is more public awareness and education about reaching out to others in times of need, than there was a decade ago. In addition, reaching out to others may no longer be viewed as a 'weakness', but rather as a strength. Such paradigm shift could be encouraging male adolescents to employ this strategy.

It is important to note, however, that reaching out to others in times of need positively correlated with non-productive coping for the male (and female) adolescents in the current study. Since male adolescents have reported more frequent use of the reaching out to others strategy than female adolescents, and since they significantly experienced less perceived support than their counterparts, it is possible that the experience of reaching out to others may not be as satisfying for male adolescents as it is for female adolescents. According to one study (Stokes & Wilson, 1984), men must have a close relationship with another person before they can talk about their feelings or receive support, whereas women are more subject to disclosure, even if the relationship is not close. Therefore, the more they reach out to others, the more they are likely to use non-productive coping, such as feeling that the difficult situation is out of their control or hoping that a miracle would happen.

## 12.6 Predictors of Life Satisfaction among the three Ethnic Groups

What constitutes life satisfaction among ethnic groups? This is a question that the current study also attempted to answer. This section will examine the set of predictors for the entire sample and for the three different ethnic groups concerned. According to the regression models, different sets of predictors emerged for native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents.

Table 28 shows the overall set of predictors of life satisfaction for the entire sample. These predictors included solving problems, family cohesion, non-productive coping, reaching out to others for support, perceived support, and gender. It was interesting to note that the variable that contributed most to life satisfaction was problem-solving. It accounted for 21% of the variance. It is possible that solving problems may generate a sense of achievement that in turn generates a sense of self-fulfillment. It may also generate a sense of empowerment, which serves as an incentive to take on new challenges in life. Success feeds off success. Rather than being caught up in a self-defeating cycle, adolescents who solve problems are more likely

Table 28

Predictors of Life Satisfaction for Groups

| Entire Sample N=332 36% of the variance | Native Maltese N=113 25% of the variance | Maltese-Australian N=108 42% of the variance | Anglo-Australian N=111 39% of the variance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Solving Prob | Support | Solving Prob | Solving Prob |
| Non-Prod | Solving Prob | Cohesion | Non-Prod |
| Refothers | MRE | | Cohesion |
| Support | Sex | | Refothers |
| Sex | | | Sex |

Key: Solving Prob - Solving Problems; Non-Prod - Non-Productive Coping; Refothers - Reference to Others; MRE – Moral-Religious Emphasis

to move on in life and charter their way through adolescence rather successfully. Finally, solving problems may also enhance the adolescent's internal locus of control that is considered to be important for the resilient adolescent (Steward et al., 1998) who is more likely to experience life satisfaction in the face of adversity.

The model for the entire sample in the current study accounted for 36% of the total variance. This means that a substantial amount of variance is unaccounted for by the present study. Further research is required to identify other predictors of life satisfaction among adolescents, irrespective of their culture.

Although this study found that the levels of life satisfaction were similar across the three ethnic groups, the means to attain it varied from one group to another (see Table 28). This finding was similar to previous studies (Diener et al., 1995; Sam, 2001).

### 12.6.1 Predictors of Life Satisfaction of Native Maltese

Among native Maltese, the predictors of life satisfaction included perceived support, solving problems, moral-religious emphasis, and sex. These predictors accounted for 25% of the variance.

#### 12.6.1.1 Perceived Support

The most important factor influencing life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents was perceived social support that accounted for 11% of the total variance. Given that perceived social support encompasses an element of acceptance (Heights, 2002; Roberts et al., 2000), this perception is likely to provide these adolescents with a sense of belonging that is critical for subjective well-being in native Maltese (Abela, 1991; Proctor, 1998). Such sense of belonging is more likely to anchor these adolescents as they challenge both cultural and developmental tasks.

The finding about the significant role that perceived social support plays in the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents could be attributed to the collective elements that are characteristic of the Maltese culture. It has been argued (Frank et al., 2001) that people in collectivist societies are likely to perceive higher levels of social support than people in individualistic societies. In addition, although contemporary society in Malta is still mainly traditionally orientated, Malta is both traditional and post-

traditional (Abela, 1991). Over these last few years, for example, traditional values and beliefs have been (and still are) challenged, especially by the youth. Social issues, such as drugs and homosexuality, are creating some concern. Also, the stereotype images of the traditional women are being challenged as the rate of married women joining the paid work force, for example, is gradually increasing (Vassallo et al., 2002). Therefore, the availability of the mother is decreasing. These radical social changes could be very anxiety provoking since the status quo is challenged/threatened. Consequently, the issue of perceived social support becomes salient, especially among youth who need to shed away old values, morals, and beliefs that have been imposed upon them by their parents. As already argued, a developmental task during adolescence is the separation-individuation process that has been identified as a significant contributor to life satisfaction even in cultures that are predominantly collectivistically orientated (Diener et al., 1995).

The salience of perceived social support among native Maltese is also rooted in the historical events that shaped Maltese contemporary society. Earlier in the thesis, it has been argued that Malta has a history of colonization and foreign rule. As a nation, the Maltese felt threatened and solidarity became paramount for its survival. A strong sense of perceived social support has subsequently emerged and is still salient among the Maltese, more specifically among the youth. Although Malta is no longer threatened by foreign rulers, great historical events were taking place at the time of data collection that took place in late 1998 and early 1999. Negotiations were well on the way for Malta to enter the European Union. Such a political event could have created a great deal of apprehension among the youth and the need to mobilize their inner resources, such as perceived social support could have once again come to the forefront.

In addition, the Maltese society, like any other Western nation, is being confronted with globilisation issues. Maltese adolescents, for example, need to redefine their identity within a 'global village' (Nelson, 1999), a task that complicates the process of identity development. Such challenging task can be threatening, especially if the generation gap is broad. As already argued, Malta is both traditional and non-traditional. On one hand, parents are more likely to adhere to traditional values and beliefs. On the other hand, adolescents are more likely to embrace the non-traditional ones (Abela,

1991). However, the traditional values and beliefs imposed by the parents may still be internalized by adolescents, since these are more resistant to change than the overt elements of culture (Rosenthal, 1984). Consequently, internal conflicts are likely to arise. In their attempt to go through the separation-individuation process, native Maltese adolescents need to shed away the traditional values and beliefs, and embrace new ones. This task can be threatening, given that parents are likely to be psychologically controlling. Since the notion of perceived support encompasses an element of acceptance (Heights, 2002; Roberts et al., 2000) it can create a safe space for adolescents to test new ideas, values, and beliefs, thereby becoming more salient during this time.

#### 12.6.1.2 Solving Problems

Although the contributions of the other predictors to the life satisfaction of native Maltese were small, they were still significant. Solving problems contributed 7% of the total variance. As with Anglo- and Maltese-Australian adolescents, this variable is essential for the life satisfaction of native Maltese. This is not surprising considering that developmental tasks, such as identity formation, are universal across nations in Western countries. In addition to developmental tasks, native Maltese adolescents are also confronted with enormous cultural changes that are challenging traditional views (Abela, 1990; Tabone, 1995; Vassallo et al., 2002). As argued earlier, these changes are anxiety provoking. Maltese adolescents are, therefore, required to be equipped with constructive problem-solving skills to be able to deal with such challenges. Such repertoire is likely to generate a sense of life satisfaction. Indeed, the current study found that solving problems is positively related to life satisfaction.

#### 12.6.1.3 Moral-Religious Emphasis

Another factor that has been identified as a significant contributor to the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents was moral-religious emphasis. This finding is in line with another study (Hintikka et al., 2001) that found a positive relationship between religious attendance and life satisfaction among the general population in Finland. The current study also found a positive relationship between moral-religious emphasis and life satisfaction. Since church attendance in Malta is still high compared to

other countries in Europe (Abela, 1991) adolescents may be experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness that could be enhancing their life satisfaction by reinforcing the sense of community which is so central to the Maltese. Indeed, it has been argued (Maton, 2001) that religion and spirituality have the potential for community building through shared values and beliefs. Moreover, the notion of God and other religious figures could be enhancing the tenacity of spirit of Maltese adolescents as they deal with their developmental crisis (Erikson, 1968). Once again, this tendency to maintain such a tenacity is rooted in a historical origin. It was not uncommon, for example, for the Maltese to associate war victories with supernatural interventions. The feast of Our Lady of Victories, for example, commemorates the Great Siege of Malta and the glorious victory that the Maltese people had over the Turks in 1565. The historical success of the mission of Operation Pedestal, the convoy that eventually entered the Grand Harbour, while being constantly bombarded by the enemy and saved the Maltese people from the brink of starvation during the Second World War, was also attributed to Our Lady's intervention. This tenacity of spirit could still be prevalent among Maltese adolescents who still adhere to their religious values and beliefs, even though they may have started questioning them (Abela, 1991). Indeed, Abela found, for example, that the notion of God is still very important in spite of the secularization of the church in Malta.

#### 12.6.1.4 Sex

As indicted by previous studies (e.g., Diener, 1984; Neto, 1995) sex also contributed significantly, albeit weakly, to the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents. As already argued, Malta is still very traditional. Sex-stereotype behaviour is, therefore, highly valued to the extent that it is contributing to life satisfaction of adolescents. However, its contribution is a negative one. It is possible that adolescents, especially women, are not happy with their sex stereotype roles. This was the case of Italian female adolescents in Australia (Rosenthal & Grieve, 1990).

### 12.6.2 Predictors of Life Satisfaction of Maltese-Australian Adolescents

Two regression analysis of life satisfaction were run for Maltese-Australian adolescents. The first regression analysis included all the potential variables just like the

previous regressions that were run for the other 2 ethnic groups. In addition to these potential variables, the second regression analysis included ethnic identification.

The predictors that emerged were solving problems and family cohesion, both when ethnic identification was included and excluded from the regression analysis. These two variables were also positively related to life satisfaction. Notably, sex was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction. This is in agreement with a previous study (Leung & Leung, 1992), but not in line with Diener (1984) who found that sex made a small, yet significant contribution to life satisfaction.

#### 12.6.2.1 Solving Problems

Like the Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study, Maltese-Australian adolescents reported solving problems as the most contributing factor for their life satisfaction. However, the predictive power of this variable was different for these two groups. Whereas for Anglo-Australians, solving problems accounted for 19% of the variance of life satisfaction, for Maltese-Australians it accounted for 33% of the variance.

As already argued, Maltese-Australian adolescents are confronted with more threatening problems than both native and Anglo-Australian adolescents due to the acculturation process. Indeed, the results indicated, for example, that Maltese-Australian adolescents experienced more parent-child conflicts than native Maltese adolescents. This is in line with a previous study (Borg, 1999) that found that Maltese-Australian adolescents experience more parent-child conflicts than Anglo-Australians. Having to deal with such threatening issues, Maltese-Australian adolescents may find a lot of satisfaction in coping constructively with adverse situations.

#### 12.6.2.2 Family Cohesion

Family cohesion has also been identified as a predictor of life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents. This is in accordance with a study (Henry, 1994) that found that bonding among family members contributed to the life satisfaction of Caucasian students. Another study (Aydin & Oztutuncu, 2001) found that Turkish adolescents who perceived higher family cohesion experienced less depression.

Embedded in family cohesion is support from members of the family, especially parents. Although the current study found that the level of life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents is at par with that reported by both native Maltese and Anglo-Australian adolescents, these adolescents are still in the process of acculturation to some extent or another. Their level of stress is most likely to be high (Borg, 1999) compared to the other 2 ethnic groups. Therefore, the need to feel supported by family members becomes salient.

Also, given that family cohesion encompasses a sense of belonging (Moos & Moos, 1981, 1994), Maltese-Australian adolescents seem to be valuing this aspect of culture to the extent that it contributes to their life satisfaction. There are 2 possible explanations for this finding. As already argued, this sense of belonging is entrenched in the Maltese culture. Maltese-Australian adolescents could have inherited this legacy from their parents. It is also possible that family cohesion is highly valued because of some underlying *need* to feel bonded to members of the family – a need that perhaps is precipitated by an underlying fear that the family is more likely to disintegrate through separation or divorce. Unlike in Malta where divorce is not legalized for native Maltese whose marriage is consummated through the Church, in Australia there may be more self-awareness about such a possibility, especially among Maltese-Australian adolescents.

In addition, the Maltese-Australian family could be threatened by a *psychological dissonance* among its members. In their attempt to acculturate, Maltese-Australian adolescents need to adopt a bicultural approach for their psychological well-being (Berry, 1984; Szapocznic et al., 1980). Besides the integration of the Maltese culture, these adolescents are required to integrate the Australian culture. As already argued, the discrepancy between the Maltese and Australian cultures is broad. Although past research has indicated that immigrants can be high on both the culture of origin and the host culture (Coleman et al., 2001), there may be a level at which these 2 cultures cannot co-exist, especially if clashes arise in values and beliefs. The immigrant adolescent needs to give up some aspects of the culture of origin in order to embrace the opposing aspect of the host culture. Therefore, the Maltese-Australian household is likely to experience a psychological disintegration among its members with parents still holding on to

traditional values and beliefs, while their adolescents are embracing differing ones. Shared values and beliefs have the potential for community building (Maton, 2001). Conversely, the absences of these aspects of culture are likely to create disintegration. This situation can be threatening and anxiety provoking for Maltese-Australian adolescents, even though that threat may not be imminent at a behavioural/practical level.

As already argued, values and beliefs are more resistant to change (Rosenthal, 1984). However, as second-generation immigrants, Maltese-Australian adolescents may already have started taking on board, at least at a cognitive level, the values and beliefs of the Australian culture. Therefore, the psychological threat and the subsequent insecurities of this impending psychological disintegration may already be present. Consequently, family cohesion for Maltese-Australian adolescents becomes crucial in order to counteract such possibility.

It is interesting to point out that although family cohesion was also a predictor of life satisfaction for Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study, its predictive power was stronger for Maltese-Australian adolescents than for Anglo-Australian adolescents. Whereas for the former group it accounted for 10% of the variance of life satisfaction, for the latter group it accounted for 4% of the variance.

#### 12.6.2.3 Ethnic Identification: Why is it not a Predictor of Life Satisfaction?

Earlier in the thesis, it was argued that ethnic identity and identification are important aspects of acculturation and play a significant role in the life satisfaction of immigrant adolescents. It is worthwhile to note that in the current study ethnic identification failed to emerge as a predictor of life satisfaction among Maltese-Australian adolescents. This finding offers support to a previous study (Adams, 1999) in which measures of identity did not emerge as predictors of life satisfaction among African American adolescents. One possible explanation for the finding in the current study could be attributed to the high level of collectivism in Malta, elements of which may still be prevalent among Maltese-Australian immigrants. Personal factors, such as ethnic identification may not be as salient for life satisfaction. Indeed, Suh et al. (1995) for example, found that at an individual level, emotions were far superior predictors of life satisfaction than norms in individualistic cultures, whereas norms and emotions were

equally important as predictors in collectivistic cultures. These authors concluded that "For the collectivist, perceived norms about whether one should be satisfied have a strong influence on whether life is thought to be good. In contrast, for the individualist, the key to whether life is good is found internally in one's happiness" (Suh et al., 1998, p. 491).

Another possible reason for the finding in the current study with regards to ethnic identification is related to the possible stage of diffusion/foreclosure (Phinney et al., 1990) among Maltese-Australian adolescents. Sixty-six per cent of the sample was either in early or middle adolescence, aging between 14 and 16 years of age. According to the literature (Zuo & Tao, 2001), these adolescents are either in a diffused or a foreclosed state; in other words, they have not been actively engaged in the exploration of their identity. As for the rest of the sample that ranged from 17 to 18 years of age in the current study, they may also still be at the stage of foreclosure, as Maltese-Australian adolescents have controlling parents. They live in a family environment that calls for obedience and conformity – commitments that reflect parental beliefs and expectations, rather than individual self-choices.

Although ethnic identification was not a predictor of life satisfaction in the current study, it significantly and positively correlated with it. Another study (Sam, 2000) found similar results among immigrants in Norway. According to Sam's study, traditional family values were found to be important for life satisfaction amongst immigrant adolescents. It has been argued that the family environment may be an important aspect of life satisfaction of adolescents of immigrant background. Strong family values that are an integral part of the Maltese-Australian culture, for example, may facilitate a strong sense of security in the belief that the family is less likely to disintegrate through separation or divorce (Abela, 1991). This could in turn be enhancing the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 12.6.3 Predictors of Life Satisfaction of Anglo-Australian Adolescents

Among Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study, the predictors included solving problems, non-productive coping, family cohesion, reference to others as a way of coping, and sex. Furthermore, both non-productive coping and sex were negatively correlated with life satisfaction.

#### 12.6.3.1 Solving Problems

Like with the Maltese-Australian adolescents, solving problems was the most significant predictor of life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents, contributing for 19% of the variance. The salience of this variable could be attributed partly to the important role that the developmental challenges play in the life satisfaction of adolescents, irrespective of their culture. It could also be attributed to the possibility that solving problems empowers adolescents by appraising a sense of mastery that has been found to be the most contributing factor among adolescents of immigrant background in Norway (Neto, 1995). Given that solving problems in the current study was the most significant predictor for both the ethnic groups in Australia, this sense of empowerment is more salient in Australia where individualism is highly emphasized.

#### 12.6.3.2 Non-Productive Coping

It is interesting to note that non-productive coping negatively contributed to the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents. This is in line with a previous study (Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000) that found a link between avoidant coping and depression. Passive and risky coping factors also played a negative role in psychosocial health (Freeman et al., 2001). As already argued, being in control may be important for the Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study. Therefore, by employing non-productive coping strategies, these adolescents may be relinquishing their sense of control, thereby jeopardising their satisfaction with life.

#### 12.6.3.3 Family Cohesion

With the rising divorce rates in Australia (Mead, 2003), Anglo-Australian adolescents may be strongly valuing family cohesion to the extent that it contributes to their life satisfaction. Throughout this thesis, the central role that the family continues to play in the life of the adolescent has been strongly emphasized. Since family cohesion also contributes significantly to the experience of life satisfaction of Anglo-Australians suggests that this factor crosses cultural boundaries.

#### 12.6.3.4 Reference to Others

Reference to others also emerged as a significant predictor in the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents. In their attempt to deal with life stressors, these adolescents may find comfort and solace in reaching out to others. According to Eckersley (2004) Australia lacks social cohesion. Reaching out to others in times of need, can, therefore, minimize that social cohesion, thereby maximizing the adolescents' satisfaction with life. This may also ease the burden and alienation that are usually associated with dealing with the problem on your own. Reaching out to others involves a risk with regards to disclosing to others. It can, therefore, be argued that it is a challenge in itself. As a challenge, it may generate a sense of self-fulfillment that in turn enhances life satisfaction.

#### 12.6.3.5 Sex

Finally, sex also contributed significantly to the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents, even though its contribution was small. As already argued, this is in line with past research (Diener, 1984; Neto, 1995). Like with native Maltese adolescents, sex role stereotype behaviour is probably salient for Anglo-Australian adolescents. The contribution that sex yielded in the experience of life satisfaction of this ethnic group was also negative. It seems that sex-role stereotype behaviour contributes (at least in part) to life satisfaction/dissatisfaction especially for women, both in traditional and non-traditional countries.

## 12.7 Predictors of Life Satisfaction of Male and Female Adolescents

Both genders appear to depend on similar resources in their pursuit of life satisfaction. The predictors of life satisfaction for males and females were similar (see Tables 29). This is partly consistent with past research. Diener et al. (1995) found great similarities between males and females in the experience of life satisfaction. In the current study, the predictors for males were solving problems, family cohesion, number of people in the support system, and reference to others. For females, the predictors were solving problems, family cohesion, non-productive coping, and reference to others. It is noteworthy to point out that although solving problems was a common predictor, it

Table 29

Predictors of Life Satisfaction for Males and Females

| Males | Females |
|---|---|
| N=332 | N=11 |
| 22% of the variance | 42% of the variance |
| Solving Problem | Solving Problem |
| Cohesion | Cohesion |
| Number of Support | Non-Productive Coping |
| Reference to Others | Reference to Others |

Key: Solving Prob - Solving Problems; Non-Prod - Non-Productive Coping; Refothers Reference to Others; MRE – Moral-Religious Emphasis

was more important for females than it was for males. For females, it contributed 25% of the variance whereas for males it contributed 14% of the total variance. Female adolescents may find more satisfaction in solving problems than their counterparts. They may find this experience more meaningful and challenging. Solving problems may also generate a sense of control and mastery.

Gender differences in the predictors of life satisfaction occurred in relation to 2 variables – number of people in the support system for males and non-productive coping for females. Although past research (Van Wel et al., 2000) has shown that women have a stronger need than males to connect with others, the males in the current sample need to feel supported by the people around them in order to enhance their satisfaction with life. Indeed, this study also found a positive correlation between these two variables – the more people they had in their support network system, the more they experienced satisfaction with life. Perhaps, the need to be accepted by others, especially in difficult times, is more salient for male adolescents.

For female adolescents, non-productive coping also contributed to life satisfaction in a negative way. As already argued, by engaging in this type of coping, women are more likely to feel that things are out of their control, thereby reinforcing a sense of

helplessness. This strategy not only disempowers them, but it also contributes to lower levels of self-esteem which are likely to impact on their satisfaction with life. By believing that a miracle would happen, for example, or that things are out of their control, women are depriving themselves of the satisfaction and self-fulfillment of having mastered the difficult situation that confronts them.

## 12.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, most adolescents are fairly satisfied with life. However, there is a significant percentage (25%) that is not satisfied with life. These adolescents are not coping well in mastering their developmental tasks. They also come from non-cohesive families and families that are ridden with parent-child conflicts. They also lack perceived social support and people in the support network system.

Although no significant differences were found in the life satisfaction of native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents, the means to attain it varied for the three groups. It was interesting to note that solving problems was a common predictor. However, its predictive power was more important for Maltese-Australian adolescents.

Also, whereas for both native Maltese and Anglo-Australians the regression models of life satisfaction included four and five predictors respectively, for Maltese-Australian adolescents only two predictors successfully entered the equation. However, these two predictors – solving problems and family cohesion- accounted for more variance than all the other predictors for the other two groups. This highlights the importance of these two factors in relation to the life satisfaction of Maltese-Australian adolescents. The findings also suggest that although these adolescents, who are mostly second-generation immigrants, are adapting well with the passing of time, they are still in the process of acculturating. Indeed, it could be argued that these adolescents are 'in-between cultures' (Choi, 2001).

The following discussion will draw conclusions from the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative studies.

# Chapter 13

## Final Discussion

And the end of all exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(T. S. Elliot, Four Quartets, Little Gidding)

### 13.1 Overview of the Findings of Each Individual Study

The current investigation of life satisfaction was carried out over two studies. The first study explored a number of life experiences of adolescents of Maltese background, both in Malta and in Australia by using in-depth individual interviews. These life experiences revolved around the home environment, coping strategies, and social support. According to the findings, native Maltese adolescents in contemporary society are dealing with many cultural and psychological issues. This has been mainly attributed to the discrepancy between the predominant collectivistic orientation of the parents and the more individualistic orientations of adolescents. It was argued that there is a mismatch between parental care-giving provisions and the psychological and psychosocial needs of native adolescents. Adolescents feel that although the Maltese, including parents, are high in instrumental support, emotional support is lacking, therefore, their social support system is limited. Reaching out to others in times of need is quite unlikely, especially if they need to disclose to others. This issue is complicated by the code of honour and shame and gossip within the community.

For Maltese-Australian adolescents, ethnic identity, and identification were also explored. According to adolescents, Maltese-Australian parents are still traditional in their child-rearing practices. Adolescents, on the other hand, started embracing the host culture that is quite conflicting with the traditional culture. Once again, a mismatch has been identified between parental care-giving provisions and adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs. Although a number of similarities can be drawn between native

Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents, the acculturation process of the latter adolescents remains unique.

The second study looked at a systematic investigation of life satisfaction. More specifically, it examined the levels of life satisfaction of native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. No significant differences were found between the three ethnic groups. Although most adolescents across cultures are satisfied with life, 25% are not. Results also showed that those who are mainly satisfied with life report higher levels in family cohesion, perceived social support, constructive coping strategies, and lower levels in conflicts within the family and non-productive coping strategies than adolescents who are less satisfied with life.

A 2x3 (Gender x Ethnicity) MANOVA found a significant main effects for gender, but no interaction. Male adolescents seem to be more satisfied with life than female adolescents. They also use more solving problems strategies and reach out to others more in difficult times. Female adolescents report more social perceived support and employ more non-productive coping strategies in difficult times.

This study also shows that the factors that contribute to life satisfaction vary across cultures. For native Maltese adolescents the factors were perceived social support, solving problems, moral-religious emphasis, and sex. For Maltese-Australian adolescents two factors entered the equation – solving problems and family cohesion. The factors that contributed to the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents were solving problems, non-productive coping, family cohesion, reaching out to others in difficult times and sex. A substantial amount of variances are unaccounted for by the current models for ethnic groups under investigation.

The following discussion includes a further examination of life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures based on the findings of both studies. This examination identifies a number of issues that will be dealt with individually. It will be argued that culture plays a significant role in the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents, irrespective of the predominant cultural orientation (i.e., collectivistic or individualistic) that they come from.

## 13.2 Issues Arising from the Combined Results of Both Studies

Both studies show that life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures is multifaceted and multidimensional. The complexity of this phenomenon is embedded in a number of cultural and developmental layers that need to be unravelled and teased out. In the light of the current findings, the following discussion will seek to address the following issues:

1. Discrepancy between Reported Levels of Life Satisfaction and Life Experiences: A General Trend
3. Cultural Variations in the Daily Contexts of Adolescents
4. The Need for Effective Interpersonal Relationships: A Universal Need
5. To What Extent are Cultural Values and Beliefs meeting the Personal Needs of Adolescents?
6. Going Beyond Factors of Life Satisfaction
7. Gender Differences in the Experience of Life Satisfaction

In a way, these issues take us back to the point of departure where we started the exploration of life satisfaction of adolescents in this thesis. However, they now need to be re-examined in a new light.

### 13.2.1 Discrepancy Between Reported Levels of Life Satisfaction and Life Experiences: A General Trend

According to Eckersley (2004), although statistically most adolescents report that they are satisfied with life, their life experiences portray a somewhat different picture. He continues to argue "But if we look beyond the statistics on self-reported health and happiness, a different picture emerges, sometimes even within the same study" (p. 154). It can be argued that the findings of the current study in relation to adolescents of Maltese origin (both in Malta and in Australia) are in line, at least in part, with this argument. Eckersley argued that there is a similar trend among Australian adolescents.
Although the current qualitative study did not examine the life experiences of Anglo-Australian adolescents, a close examination of the findings of both studies point in that direction. The quantitative findings, for example, indicated that native Maltese adolescents scored significantly higher in family cohesion than Anglo-Australian

adolescents. However, according to the qualitative study, that level of family cohesion was not adequate to meet the psychological and psychosocial needs of native Maltese. Not only was there emotional distance between parents and adolescents, parents were also reported to lack understanding, that is, they were not open and receptive to the adolescents' emotional needs. At the same time, the need for these adolescents to experience understanding from parents was continuously echoed throughout the interviews. If the case of native Maltese adolescents appeared to be salient in relation to family cohesion when they scored significantly higher than Anglo-Australian adolescents, how much more salient it is for the latter? Indeed, Eckersley (2004) argued that Australia lacks 'social cohesion' and adolescents feel alienated. It is possible that that lack of social cohesion is a reflection of a lack of family cohesion amongst the Anglo-Australian family. It is important to point out that family cohesion has also been found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents in the current study.

In the light of the current findings, the issue of family conflicts also needs to be reconsidered for Anglo-Australian adolescents. Native Maltese adolescents, for example, scored significantly lower than Anglo-Australian adolescents on this variable. The qualitative study revealed that parent-child conflicts were not only quite common among native Maltese, but they were also having an adverse effect on their psychological and psychosocial well-being. Once again, the question arises: If parent-child conflicts of native Maltese adolescents appeared to be salient when they scored significantly lower than Anglo-Australian adolescents on family conflicts, how much more salient is it for the latter? Although 'family conflicts' is not a predictor of life satisfaction in Anglo-Australian adolescents these two variables negatively correlate with each other for these adolescents. Results also indicate that those who are satisfied with life significantly experience less family conflicts than the dissatisfied group.

The quantitative study indicated the importance of reaching out to others in times of need for the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents. Other analysis also showed that there were no significant differences between native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents on this variable. This suggests that there is a general trend in the *accessibility* and/or *ability* to reach out to others when adolescents

find themselves in difficult situations. The qualitative study indicated that both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents found it difficult approaching parents because of lack of understanding. Approaching friends was another alternative. However, in many cases, such an approach was threatened by lack of trust among friends. It is possible that Anglo-Australian adolescents find themselves in similar situations. Following the above discussion about their family cohesion, these adolescents may find it difficult to reach out to parents in times of need. Assuming that Australia lacks 'social cohesion' (Eckersley, 2004), reaching out to friends may also be threatened for Anglo-Australian adolescents, especially female adolescents. The current study found that, overall, male adolescents tend to reach out to others more than female adolescents.

The above discussion suggests not only that there is a need to go beyond statistics to understand the life satisfaction in adolescents irrespective of their ethnicity, but it also suggests that their life experiences portray a somewhat different picture. This indicates another possible trend among adolescents, namely that in making an overall judgment of their life satisfaction adolescents could be over estimating their level of satisfaction with life. Indeed, according to Fromm (1951) people always tend to claim that they are satisfied with life more than they actually are. Hagerty (2003) in examining intertemporal judgments of life satisfaction in 71 studies in 9 countries found that judgments of change in people's own life satisfaction are positively biased. It is possible that people, more specifically adolescents, are inclined to experience a self-enhancement bias – a bias that crosses cultural boundaries. This possible trend requires further research.

### 13.2.2 Cultural Variations in the Daily Contexts of Adolescents

The life satisfaction of adolescents is integrally shaped by the daily contexts in which they grow and develop, as indicated by the findings of both studies in the current investigation. Societies differ in the emphasis they place on certain values and resources. As expected, the current investigation identified cultural variations in the daily contexts of adolescents across cultures. Parent-child relationships in families of Maltese origin, for example, have an important cultural basis – a finding that is in line with previous research (e.g., Borg, 1999; Tabone, 1995). This cultural basis is embedded in a predominant traditional and collectivist culture. Second-generation Maltese-Australian adolescents

who are subjected both to the culture of origin and the host cultures are influenced by both cultures, more so by the former culture in which the ethnic identity is rooted.

Societies, both in developed and developing countries are undergoing major transformations in a number of areas, including families, economy, demographics, and technology. These changes are changing the daily contexts of adolescents, as well as their visions of the future (Eckersley, 2004). Adolescents are faced with more challenges and demands, both developmental and cultural (Larson et al., 2002), more so for adolescents who are 'acculturating' whether through the immigration experience or whether they are living in a predominantly traditional society that is in the process of embracing non-traditional culture through globilisation and other factors. To what extent are these changes affecting the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures? Although not explicitly stated, this is one of the questions that this thesis attempted to answer.

In those predominantly traditional societies that are in the process of shifting towards the non-traditional end of the traditional/non-traditional continuum, the experience of adolescence is more complicated than that experienced by adolescents, such as Anglo-Australians who already belong to a non-traditional culture. The current study, for example, indicated that parents of native Maltese adolescents are still predominantly traditional, while adolescents have started to embrace non-traditional values and beliefs, a finding that is consistent with previous literature (Abela, 1991, 1995, 1999). Therefore, the psychological and psychosocial needs of these adolescents differ from the care-giving provisions of their parents. The case of native Maltese adolescents is further complicated (at least at one level) by the high level of collectivistic cultural orientation that permeates Maltese society, especially older generations. These adolescents are faced with the task of challenging cultural norms that are highly conflicting with the non-traditional culture – a task that is impacting their subjective well-being, namely life satisfaction. Feelings of anxiety and helplessness, for example, were quite common among native Maltese adolescents.

As expected, the daily life experiences of second-generation immigrants are also entrenched in both the traditional culture of origin and the host culture. These adolescents are still in the process of acculturation. The home environment is still embedded in the

Maltese culture. The interviews have also indicated that these adolescents started to embrace the Australian culture. Indeed they are 'in between cultures' (Choi, 2000). The current findings indicated for example, that Maltese-Australian adolescents are experiencing an ethnic identity confusion (at least at one level). On one hand these adolescents are not "pure Maltese" because they are not born in Malta. On the other hand, they are not Australians because their "parents are Maltese". The findings also showed that Maltese-Australian adolescents reported higher levels of family conflicts than native Maltese adolescents. Although the adolescents in both these groups did not differ in moral-religious emphasis, the role that religion plays in life satisfaction was different. For native Maltese, this factor was a predictor of their life satisfaction, whereas for Maltese-Australian adolescents it was not.

These findings further support previous research (e.g., Bjornskov, 2003; Larson et al., 2003; Triandis & Suh, 2003) that consistently showed that there are cultural variations in the daily contexts of adolescents. These cultural variations need to be taken into account when examining the life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures.

### 13.2.3 The Need for Effective Interpersonal Relationships: A Universal Need

Adolescents need "not abstract 'social competencies' but rather relationships themselves" (Larsen et al., 2002, p. 49). The current investigation of life satisfaction of adolescents in contemporary societies indicates that there is a universal trend, namely that the vehicles to attain satisfaction with life are mainly embedded in positive/effective interpersonal relationships, both within and outside the family environment. In the light of the current findings, effective interpersonal relationships refer to relationships that are likely to meet the psychological and psychosocial needs of adolescents in *contemporary* society. The vehicles are different for the three ethnic groups. However, a close examination of these factors indicates that the experience of most (perhaps all) of these elements (including problem-solving strategies) depend on a repertoire of effective interpersonal relationships.

As confirmed by the current findings, adolescents need a family environment that is conducive to their subjective well-being, including satisfaction with life. The quantitative findings indicate that those adolescents who are mainly satisfied with life

experience significantly higher levels of family cohesion, perceived social support, reach out to others in times of need and experience less conflicts within the home environment than those who are not satisfied with life.

Consistent with past literature (e.g., Kwak, 2003; Scabini & Cigoli, 1997; Steinberg, 2001) parents still play a significant role in helping adolescents face both developmental and cultural challenges. As indicated by the current study, parental styles and practices vary across cultures. However, there seems to be a global trend that indicates that an authoritative style of parenting is more desirable and effective in terms of meeting the psychological and psychosocial needs of adolescents in contemporary societies. This trend was also identified by Steinberg (1990) who conducted an intensive literature review in relation to harmony in the family and adolescents from a global perspective. Both native Maltese adolescents and Maltese-Australian adolescents in the current study have consistently expressed a need to have parents who are authoritative in their parental approach.

An authoritative home environment is more likely to foster the development of an effective coping style, namely problem-solving, that has been identified as a predictor of life satisfaction in native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents. Indeed, according to Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) improving relationship with others is considered as one of the coping strategies that constitute the problem-solving factor. Adolescents whose parents encourage freedom of expression (both verbal and emotional), for example, are more likely to resolve successfully parent-child conflicts when they arise. Therefore, the chances of enhancing their relationship with their parents are maximised. Adolescents who have authoritative parents are more likely to develop a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) and face the difficult situations in a way that will help them to overcome the obstacles in order to move on in life. Therefore, they are more likely to use strategies that may help them to solve problems. In other words, the *incentives* to meet their challenges and to use constructive strategies are likely to be stronger than for those of adolescents who feel insecure.

### 13.2.4 To what Extent are Cultural Values and Beliefs meeting the Personal Needs of Adolescents?

The current study confirmed the salient need for societies to consider the cultural norms and the ways that these norms are promoting or impeding the life satisfaction of adolescents, especially in traditional societies that are in the process of moving towards the non-traditional end of the traditional/non-traditional continuum. Since predictors of life satisfaction differ from one culture to another, as confirmed by the current study, culture plays a significant role in the attainment of life satisfaction in adolescents. These differing cultural factors are embedded in cultural values and beliefs.

The notion of perceived social support, for example, is a case in point. As indicated by the quantitative study in the current investigation, this construct contributed the most to the life satisfaction of native Maltese adolescents. The qualitative examination of their life experiences both within and outside the home environment revealed a number of cultural issues that are impinging on their perceived social support. The psychological needs of these adolescents go beyond the parental care-giving provisions that are in line with the traditional cultural norms. As the perception of social support is intrinsically intertwined with acceptance and understanding (Ronald & Rohner, 2003; Sarason et al., 1983, 1987), this notion has taken on a new meaning for native Maltese adolescents. For them, perceived social support is incorporating *emotional* support in addition to instrumental support. Consequently, there needs to be more alignment between cultural norms and the means to attain these adolescents' personal needs. Cultural norms, therefore, need to be redefined in a way that they accommodate for the needs and values of adolescents in order to optimise the attainment of their satisfaction with life.

The notion of family 'cohesion' is also another construct that needs to be redefined both within the native Maltese family and the Maltese-Australian family. Unravelling the complexity of '*l-għaqda fil-familja'* (unity within the family), the current study showed that this notion is not only taking a new meaning, but it also requires a different approach in order to attain it. Whereas in the past, the unity of the family has been predominantly experienced through authoritarian parenting styles, adolescents in contemporary society are expressing a need for a cohesive family that is characterised by

an authoritative parenting style. In other words, a cultural shift needs to take place. This shift requires an initial paradigm shift in the meaning of cohesion, followed by a shift in the means to attain *'l-għaqda fil-familja'* in order to facilitate the satisfaction of life in adolescents of Maltese origin.

Although the above discussion has been focused on the Maltese and Maltese-Australian cultures, the Australian culture also needs to accommodate for those aspects of culture that are likely to enhance the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents. Non-productive coping strategies are a case in point. According to the current findings, non-productive coping is a factor that negatively contributes to the life satisfaction of Anglo-Australian adolescents. The question therefore, arises "In what ways is the Australian culture encouraging/hindering the use of non-productive coping strategies"? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine popular culture in Australia. However, it is important to point out that the media, for example, has a lot to answer for in the promotion of alcohol intake among adolescents as a way to solve problems.

The Australian culture also needs to take into account the needs of immigrant adolescents. As indicated by the findings of the current study, the life experiences and the subsequent life satisfaction of immigrant adolescents are different from those of adolescents who belong to the host culture. Consistent with the literature (e.g., Berry, 1997; Borg, 1999; Neto, 1995, 2001, 2002; Sam, 2000, 2003; Ward, 1996), this study also showed the salience of the traditional culture of origin during the acculturation process of immigrant adolescents. Therefore, the Australian culture needs to be culturally sensitive to minimise racial discrimination, promote ethnic identity and identification and to enhance a sense of belonging in the settlement country.

### 13.2.5 Going beyond Factors of Life Satisfaction

Considering the 'acculturating' process that both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents are undergoing in addition to their developmental tasks, one would expect that the life satisfaction of these adolescents would be lower than that of Anglo-Australian adolescents. The adolescents in the latter group, having been originally enculturated in an individualistic society, are spared that 'acculturating' process – a process that is quite threatening as indicated by the qualitative findings in the current

investigation. The results of the quantitative study indicate that adolescents of Maltese origin are at par with Anglo-Australian adolescents in their level of life satisfaction. Although this section will focus on native Maltese adolescents, the discussion also applies to Maltese-Australian adolescents, given that they are also grounded in the Maltese traditional culture.

It is possible that there are moderating and/or mediating factors (personal and/or cultural) that are affecting the overall satisfaction with life in both native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents. For example, the qualitative study indicated that adolescents perceived (at a cultural level) the Maltese family as caring, generous, and close-knitted (this last characteristic was perceived as positive). In spite of the discrepancy that was identified between parental care-giving provisions and adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs, these adolescents could be sampling these perceptions of the Maltese family from the collective cultural perspective. This perception could be playing a significant role in the experience of life satisfaction. Indeed, it could be buffering other factors, such as parent-child conflicts and parental psychological control, that have been identified as having an adverse effect on the psychological well-being of both native and Maltese-Australian adolescents. Rudy and Grusec (2001), in examining correlates of authoritarian parenting in individualist and collectivist cultures amongst Anglo-Canadians and Egyptian-Canadians (18-62 years of age) found that warmth was negatively associated with authoritarianism in the Anglo-Canadian but not Egyptian-Canadian group. Their findings also showed some evidence that authoritarianism is more likely to be linked with negative affect and maladaptive thinking in the individualist but not the collectivist group.

Family cohesion, as experienced by adolescents of Maltese origin could also be a factor that is helping them (directly and/or indirectly) to extend their cultural and developmental boundaries, thereby enhancing their experience of life satisfaction. The current study identified a Maltese 'family cohesion' that is characterised by psychological control and enmeshment. If viewed from an individualistic perspective in contemporary society, this family cohesion is not psychologically adaptive. However, when it is viewed from a historical and collective perspective this 'cohesion' has been quite adaptive.

It is possible this 'cohesion' is providing a sense of security/belonging that is

grounding adolescents at a deep level. In other words, it is providing adolescents with a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) that is helping them to extend both their psychological and psychosocial boundaries. Indeed, it can be argued that at one level (i.e., the collectivistic level), adolescents of Maltese origin are so secure that they have endeavoured (willingly and/or unwillingly) to embark on a journey that is helping them to extend/cross boundaries and penetrate their individualistic domain. Further research is required to investigate this "secure base" among adolescents of Maltese origin and examine how it is affecting their satisfaction with life.

The case of native Maltese adolescents and the possibility of a "secure base" is further intriguing because of the deeply culturally entrenched concept of a loving God. Earlier in the thesis, it was argued that the perception of an authoritarian God is predominant. Given that there is a correspondence between attachment to parents and God (Birgerard & Granqvist, 2004), it is possible that at some level there is a correspondence between the loving God and the individual. In other words, there is an *identification* with the loving God and all the positive characteristics that are encapsulated in this concept. Although native Maltese adolescents (like all other members of the Maltese society) perceive God as an entity outside themselves, at another level they could have unconsciously internalised the loving God. This perception could be providing a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1969) which is directly or indirectly helping native Maltese adolescents to meet their demands and challenges that eventually lead them to experience the factors that contribute to their life satisfaction. Indeed, according to the current findings, moral-religious emphasis is not only a predictor of life satisfaction (although a small contribution, yet significant), but it also positively correlates with life satisfaction for native Maltese adolescents. For Maltese-Australian adolescents it is not a predictor. However, it significantly correlates with their satisfaction with life.

The discussion in this section adds another dimension that could be operating in the life satisfaction of native Maltese (and to some extent Maltese-Australian) adolescents and their satisfaction with life. This possible dimension of a "secure base" needs to be taken into account in understanding the life satisfaction of these adolescents. It, therefore, requires further research.

### 13.2.6 Gender Differences in the Experience of Life Satisfaction

The current quantitative study found a significant difference between male and female adolescents in the reported levels of life satisfaction. Male adolescents reported higher levels of life satisfaction than female adolescents in the entire sample. Although no interaction was found between gender and ethnicity, the results are significant because they further support the extensive literature that consistently indicates that females, irrespective of ethnicity are less satisfied with life than males.

The current study also showed that both genders appear to depend on similar resources in their pursuit of life satisfaction. This is partly consistent with past research. Diener et al. (1995) found great similarities between males and females in the experience of life satisfaction. However, if we look at some of their personal experiences we find that these experiences may be having a different impact on their subjective well-being than they are having on males. The quantitative study indicated that females reported higher levels of perceived social support than male adolescents. However, further analysis indicated that females tend to reach out to others as a coping strategy less than males. Theoretically, these findings are not consistent. It is possible that there is a self-enhancement bias in females' perception of social support. In other words, these perceptions are not as high as they claim to be. Another possibility is although the level of perceived social support is higher for females than that reported by their counterparts, that level is not satisfying enough to meet their needs. It therefore, discourages them from reaching out to others in times of need. Indeed, one female adolescent who participated in the qualitative investigation when asked how she feels when parent-child conflicts arise, commented:

> I feel on my own not because there are no….. (paused and did not finish the sentence). I have lots of friends. But because I am the youngest I always feel lonely. I don't know why. I feel very lonely……I feel cut out from everybody. We have guidance and that. But no matter how many people there are you feel on your own. It's like there is nobody who understands you.

This reflects not only a high level of alienation, but it may also suggest that as a female, there is nobody to understand her. The guidance she was referring to was in relation to the 'Guidance Teacher' who also was a female. It is important to point out that during the

interview this participant indicated that she had good interpersonal skills and her body language did not indicate that she is inhibited.

Another interesting observation that emerged from the qualitative study is the many problems that girls were having in relation to friends, ranging from defamation to stealing boyfriends. One participant commented that she prefers to have a male as a friend than a female "because females are jealous of each other". As argued by Eckerman (2000) we still need to know much more about the life experiences of women and how these experiences are affecting their subjective well-being, such as life satisfaction. This issue crosses cultural and national boundaries, as indicated by the current study.

### 13.3 Where to From Here?

The above discussion addressed a number of issues that emerged from the current investigation. It indicates that the experience of life satisfaction in adolescents is quite challenging - for some perhaps more than others, depending on their ethnicity. In facilitating this process, both cultural and individual/developmental issues need to be taken into account. In other words, the collective and the individualistic domains of adolescents cannot be ignored, whether they come from a society that is predominantly oriented towards the collectivistic or individualistic culture.

What is also important is the *intersection* of these two domains. At one level, these two domains are not only two separate dimensions (Triandis, 1994), but they are dimensions that they do not intersect. In other words, they are dimensions that always run parallel with each other. A person can be high/low in both domains. Indeed, Sinha and Tripathi (1994) in examining individualism in a collectivist culture, India, presented "a case of coexistance of opposites" (p. 123). Triandis argued that "individualism and collectivism are "cultural syndromes"; that is, beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, values, and behaviors found in certain cultures converge and also differ in expected ways from beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors found in other cultures (Triandis, 1994, p. 50). The current qualitative study indicated that at another level these dimensions intersect with one another. This intersection can be conflicting, especially if the discrepancy between the collective and the individualistic domains is broad, as in the case of native Maltese and Maltese-Australian adolescents.

### 13.3.1 Implications and Recommendations

The current investigation indicates also that there is lot of room for improvement in the life experiences of adolescents across cultures. It also reflects many implications in their satisfaction with life. This means that a number of recommendations are required. In making these recommendations two levels are taken into account: the collective and the individual levels. The latter level requires a two-pronged approach: parents and adolescents.

#### 13.3.1.1 Societal/Collective Level

As indicated by the current study, the life satisfaction of adolescents depends on the experience of culture. Society, therefore, plays a significant role in the process of its attainment. As such, it is responsible (at least in part) for its enhancement, irrespective of its predominant cultural orientation (i.e. individualist and/or collectivist orientation). According to Prilleltenski and Nelson's (2002) model of subjective well-being and the findings of the current study, society (i.e. the collective) plays a significant role in the experience of life satisfaction. As a process, life satisfaction does not take place in a vacuum. A conducive environment is critical both within the private and public spheres. In addition to the ways in which society/culture needs to meet the needs of adolescents as discussed earlier, in this section we look at another way that society can contribute to the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents within the context of the current findings.

As already argued, societies need to accommodate a culture that meets adolescents' psychological and psychosocial needs and that is going to help them meet their challenges in life and experience the cultural specific factors that contribute to their satisfaction with life. The current findings show that in both predominantly collectivist and individualist societies, the gap in these needs is narrowing. For example, adolescents in both societies need an authoritative parenting style. Society needs to be viewed and experienced as '*the macro authoritative family*' that meets the psychological and psychosocial needs of its members. Therefore, the notion of a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) can be emphasised. The literature is replete with evidence that suggests that such an environment is beneficial (even critical) for the well-being of

the individual (see Fisher et al., 2002). As they extend their psychosocial boundaries, adolescents need to experience a sense of belonging that anchors them as they face the world and launch themselves in quite a 'grey area' as part of their developing process.

However, the sense of community, especially in traditional and collectivist cultures, need to be grounded in 'unconditional love'. The case of Maltese society that is characterised by a strong sense of community, for example, indicates that this society at a collective level is still highly oriented towards conditional love that generates fear in most (perhaps all) aspects of life, whether it is in relation to gossip/shame or in relation to the authoritarian God. Earlier in the discussion it was argued that native Maltese adolescents could be grounded in a "secure base".

However, there seems to be a level, which I will attempt to call the *functional/experienced level*[1] at which they are feeling insecure. The sense of community that adolescents (perhaps all members of society) need to experience is to be grounded in a "*psychological home*" (Sigmon, Whitcomb, & Snyder, 2002, p. 25) that applies across all cultures both at individual and collective levels.

Society's institutions need to create a democratic approach in dealing with adolescents, especially in those societies that are predominantly traditional and hierarchically oriented. Such an approach can start at school, even at an elementary level. Children and adolescents need to experience a sense of empowerment to counteract the sense of helplessness that has been identified in the current study. This is also likely to increase their competence and their ability to use problem-solving strategies that are so critical for their experience of life satisfaction, irrespective of ethnicity. Indeed, the literature (e.g., Farrah & Cole, 2004; Leung et al., 2004) consistently points in that direction.

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[1] This level that I am proposing is different from the level at which the "secure base" that seems to originate from the concept of a loving God that I discussed in section 13.2.5. That level is more conceptual, that is based on *beliefs*. The *functional/experienced level* is the level of their daily life experiences. This level seems to suggest that adolescents are quite insecure. Assuming that this is the case, the "secure" and "not secure" concepts are two separate dimensions, in other words they are mutually exclusive

#### 13.3.1.2 Parent-Centred Approach

The current investigation provided further evidence of the central role that parents continue to play in the experience of life satisfaction of adolescents, irrespective of their ethnicity. It also showed that parents, especially of Maltese origin, may not be aware of the discrepancy between parental care-giving provisions and the psychological and psychosocial needs of adolescents in contemporary society. Education programs targeting parents, therefore, need to raise awareness about this mismatch. Such programs, for example, require raising an awareness that an authoritarian parenting style may have served a useful purpose in the past. However, this style is no longer adaptive. An authoritative parenting style is more effective to meet the adolescents' developmental needs in contemporary society. An awareness also needs to be raised about the need to resolve parent-child conflicts. Parents need to be educated about effective conflict resolution skills.

The current study indicated that parents, irrespective of their ethnicity require a repertoire of effective interpersonal communication skills for the life satisfaction of adolescents. Educational programs that are geared towards effective parenting skills, therefore, need to include ways in which parents can enhance their interpersonal communication skills with their children. Such an enhancement is more likely to create a home environment that fosters the subjective well-being and therefore, the life satisfaction of adolescents who, through post-modernism are moving from scarcity needs to security needs (Inglehart, 2000), as confirmed by the current study.

Educational programs regarding effective parenting skills are important for another reason. It has been argued (Reuter & Conger, 1998) that parents play a critical role in adolescents' interpersonal problem-solving skills. The current study has shown that problem-solving skills contribute to life satisfaction of all adolescents, irrespective of their culture. Reuter and Conger found that negative parental behaviour was negatively related to adolescents' problem-solving skills, whereas positive parental behaviour was related to adolescents' increase in problem-solving skills. In the light of these findings, Reuter and Conger argued that efforts directed solely at improving the adolescents' interpersonal problem-solving skills are not sufficient, especially when parents are harsh and inconsistent. Parents need to be equipped with effective parenting skills. Short-term

parenting programs are essential.

Since both studies of Maltese-Australian adolescents in the current investigation have shown that they are 'in between cultures' (Choi, 2001) suggests that most likely these adolescents are at a diffused stage of identity development. Indeed, it has been argued (Noller, 1994) that parents, especially mothers, of adolescents in a diffused state are very controlling. Although Maltese-Australian adolescents have a good understanding of their Maltese origin, they may still be having problems integrating the Australian aspect of their identity because of the high level of parental control. Being in a diffused stage may have a potent effect in their struggle to consolidate their identity.

Educational programs targeting parents are, therefore, essential. Such programs need firstly raise awareness about acculturation issues that are affecting the psychological and psychosocial well-being of their adolescents. The Maltese-Australian community is still very much in the dark regarding these issues. As with native Maltese, an awareness needs to be raised about the preferred parenting style, namely the authoritative style. The high level of psychological control they are exerting on adolescents, although it served a cultural purpose in the past, is no longer relevant for the psychological and psychosocial adjustment of their adolescents in contemporary society.

#### 13.3.1.3 Adolescents-Centred Approach

Besides the home environment, schools are also required to create an environment that promotes effective coping skills for adolescents. It is suggested that problem-solving skills be introduced in the school curriculum. Schools need to prepare young people in identifying, formulating, and solving problems even beyond the classroom. Interventions ought to be implemented within the regular classroom to teach students how to handle problems. Students need opportunities to confront personally relevant problems and strategies for solving these problems. Tate and Wasmund (1999) offer a strength-based intervention plan:

1. Identify the problem contextually;
2. Identify the needs behind the problem behaviours; Identify strengths and abilities;
3. Verify with the student and other caregivers that the methods selected to solve the problem are realistic and available.

Although this plan is targeted at delinquent adolescents, it can be extended to youth in general. Strategies may also include counselling interventions that encourage students to examine their own thought processes as they approach problems. Such an approach would help students develop problem-solving abilities.

Educational programs involving adolescents also need to cater for an improvement in their interpersonal communication skills. Such skills empower them by encouraging them to utilise social resources that are so critical in contemporary societies in which the daily contexts of interpersonal relationships are so diverse (Larson et al., 2002). In addition, interpersonal communication skills help them not only to facilitate conflict resolution, but they also help them to assert themselves when the opportunity arises, thereby counter acting the sense of helplessness that was identified in the current study. Solving-problem skills (a strategy that has been identified as a significant contributor of the life satisfaction of adolescents, irrespective of their ethnicity) that include an attempt to improve interpersonal relationships (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993) are also likely to be enhanced.

#### 13.3.1.4 Recommendations in Relation to Female Adolescents

The findings in the current study suggest that the means to attain life satisfaction for both males and females are similar. However, the *processes* to attain these means are different. Female adolescents, for example, significantly use more non-productive-coping strategies than males. They are also less likely to reach out to others and solve problems less than males when they find themselves in difficult situations.

The findings in the current study suggest important implications for those professionals, such as school psychologists, who seek to promote the psychological health of individual female adolescents. Health needs of women are widely recognized internationally. Their health status is inferior in relation to men's health (see Eckerman, 2000 for an intensive discussion) as confirmed by the current findings. According to Eckerman, we still know very little about women's subjective sense of health and well-being. Gender-specific measures have been recommended by the same author to explore "the intricacies of women's unique health experience. This information could be used as

the basis for evaluating existing services and interventions and for devising appropriate health promotion strategies and public health policy generally" (Eckerman, 2000, p. 47).

The results of the present study point to possible directions for the design and implementation of prevention and intervention programs in relation to women within the home environment. Such programs, for example, need to target both adolescent females and their parents, by addressing mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships. Both parents and daughters need to be equipped with positive coping skills to resolve parent-child conflicts. Although the current study showed no significant differences in such conflicts among males and females, their psychological impact may be more debilitating for women. Instead of resolving them, female adolescents may spend more time brewing over the concerned issues and perhaps experience more passive anger that in turn may generate feelings of depression. Indeed, the current study found that female adolescents significantly used more non-productive coping skills than male adolescents. Parents also need some educational programs that help them understand the experience of adolescence and its culture in relation to women.

### 13.4 Directions for Future Research

The current investigation of life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures raises a number of issues that require further investigations in order to be able to fully understand this phenomenon.

The models of life satisfaction adopted in this study can explain 25%, 42%, and 39% of the variances in life satisfaction of native Maltese, Maltese-Australian, and Anglo-Australian adolescents respectively. In other words, a much larger variance is still unexplained for the life satisfaction of the populations in question. These largely unexplained variances suggest that further explorations of contributors of life satisfaction across cultures are needed.

The qualitative study in the current investigation has identified a strong sense of parental psychological control among adolescents of Maltese origin. Further studies are required to find out the locus of control and how it is affecting their general sense of well-being, given that locus of control has been identified as a mediator between chronic negative experiences and school satisfaction (Leung & Leung, 1992). Past studies (e.g.

Diener et al., 1995; Roer-Strier & Rivlis, 1998) have also indicated the importance of autonomy that is synonymous with parental control.

Further models of life satisfaction need to incorporate self-esteem. The literature consistently shows the important role that this variable plays in the life satisfaction of adolescents. Although the current study did not include this variable, the qualitative study identified a tendency among parents of Maltese origin to use a (negative) critical approach as a parenting style. It also identified a strong sense of helplessness among adolescents that is likely to be affecting their self-esteem. These issues could be threatening their self-esteem. Indeed, there is already some indication that Maltese-Australian adolescents, for example, have a lower self-esteem than Anglo-Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999).

The current study has also demonstrated that the relationship with parents continues to play a significant role in the life experiences of adolescents. Maltese parents, both in Malta and in Australia, are not in tune with the emotional needs of their children on the individualistic level of culture. A strong emotional distance between parents and adolescents has been identified, thereby jeopardising their life satisfaction. Indeed, Leung and Leung (1992) found that relationship with parents was found to be the best predictor of life satisfaction of Chinese adolescents. Further research of life satisfaction needs to include the relationship with parents.

In investigating the life satisfaction of adolescents, cross-cultural studies need to address the following questions that have emerged from the current investigation:

1. What are the cultural specific and personal needs that are likely to promote life satisfaction in adolescents?
2. What are the universal vehicles (if any) that are likely to help adolescents across cultures achieve the means to attain life satisfaction?
3. Assuming that both developing and developed countries are still in the process of shifting from scarcity needs to security needs (Inglehart, 2000), to what extent are societies meeting the security needs of adolescents in contemporary societies?
4. Are cultural norms across nations/cultures meeting the psychological and psychosocial needs of adolescents in contemporary societies?

5. In what ways are societies promoting the cultural values and beliefs that are likely to enhance the life satisfaction of adolescents?
6. How are multicultural societies facilitating an acculturation process that optimises the satisfaction of life in immigrant adolescents?

These questions need to be addressed in the light of the current findings, taking into account a number of theoretical issues in relation to individualism and collectivism. The concepts of family cohesion and perceived social support, for example, have a different meaning at different levels, as argued in the current thesis. Although the current study acknowledged that individualism and collectivism are not a dichotomy (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994) (i.e., a person can be high/low in both of them) it also identified that at some other level these two constructs intersect with one another thereby conflicting with one another. The current study, therefore, adds to the complexity of these constructs as indicated by the literature (e.g. Triandis, 1994; Berry, 1994). However, it also reflects the richness that these constructs encompass in attempting to understand psychological phenomena from a cross-cultural perspective.

Although the current thesis established a case for a Maltese culture that is predominantly a collectivistic oriented culture, more research is required to confirm these speculations. It would also be interesting to further investigate the "secure base" and how it is impacting on the subjective well-being of Maltese origin.

### 13.5 Limitations

The current study has a number of limitations. Being cross-sectional in nature, the generalize ability of its findings may be limited. Longitudinal studies are needed to fully understand the complex, reciprocal interactions of environment and intrapersonal factors that are likely to influence life satisfaction of adolescents. The current study was also correlational in nature. Therefore, no causal determinants of life satisfaction can be established. Such an examination will require more rigorous designs, such as structural equation models.

The quantitative study in the current investigation was limited in the exploration of a number of factors that contribute to the life satisfaction of adolescents, such as self-esteem, parental control, locus of control, and relationship with parents. The literature

indicates that these variables have an impact on the life satisfaction of adolescents as confirmed by the qualitative findings in this study. Also, The Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1974) that has been used in the current study may not have been as culturally sensitive as it claims to be – an argument that was also echoed by Boyd et al. (1997). Adolescents across cultures may also be interpreting the items differently from other populations. Indeed, out of the 10 subscales that comprised this instrument, only three subscales were used in the present study due to low internal reliability coefficients that were found in the other subscales.

The qualitative aspect of this investigation also has some limitations. The life experiences that are likely to impact their life satisfaction were not explored among the Anglo-Australian adolescents. Although this thesis was able to elucidate a bigger picture of these adolescents based on the findings of both studies among adolescents of Maltese origin (see section 13.2.1), further research is required using a qualitative approach among Anglo-Australian adolescents. The results of the qualitative component of the current study in relation to the home environment also need to be interpreted with caution since the parents' perspectives were not explored. It is possible that parents and adolescents are not on the same wavelengths in their perceptions of certain experiences within the home environment. Therefore, future studies of life satisfaction of adolescents need to include both parents' and adolescents' perceptions to further enhance the credibility of the current findings.

## 13.8 Final Conclusion

In spite of its limitations, this investigation sheds lots of light on the life satisfaction of adolescents across cultures. It unravelled a number of complexities that both encompass and entail this universal phenomenon. As a process, culture plays a significant role in its attainment. However, it has been argued that at another level, there is a common element that drives adolescents as they experience the various culturally constructed domains that constitute their satisfaction with life. This element is positive interpersonal relationships, both within and outside the home environment. Although this element crosses cultural boundaries, the means to attain these relationships are culturally

constructed. At one level, therefore, culture *is* both the means and the end of life satisfaction of adolescents irrespective of their ethnicity.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

## QUESTIONS THAT GUIDED THE QAULITATIVE STUDY

## Interview Questions

1. Suppose a boy/girl of your age is coming from Malta to live in Australia what will you tell him/her about life in Australia?
2. How much do you see yourself as Maltese? Or How much Maltese do you feel?
3. What makes you feel like this?
4. How do feel about being Maltese?
5. When you say you're Maltese what do you mean?
6. How much being Maltese affect
   a) the type of activities you engage in
   b) the people you engage in
   c) the way you see things (your life)
      - How do you see the Maltese family?
      - How do you see religion?
      - How do you see education?
7. What can you tell me about the Maltese culture?
8. In what ways does the family practice the Maltese culture?
9. In what ways does the Maltese culture affect the way things are done at home? / or what goes on at home?
10. Young people often disagree with parents:
    - In what areas do you disagree with your parents?
    - What do you do when you disagree with your parents?
    - How do you feel when you disagree with your parents?
    - What do your parents do when you disagree with them?
    - How often do you disagree with your parents?
11. To what extent are you allowed to do things for yourself at home or somewhere else?
12. In what ways do your parents encourage you to be independent?
13. What are the things that you would like to do but your parents won't let you?
14. What are the things that make you unhappy or upset about life?
    - How come?
    - How often does this happen?
15. If you feel unhappy or upset about life whom do you go to?
    Why? (explore also why they would not approach mum and/or dad?)
16. If you find yourself in any difficulty what do you do?
17. Who or what make you feel better?

# APPENDIX B

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS IN AUSTRALIA

**CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

## VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

## LIFE SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

In this study, I am interesterd in finding out how students feel about life in general in relation to family environment, social support and coping strategies. As you will notice from the questionnaire, I am interested in students from a Maltese background. However, I am also interested in the experiences of students from other ethnic backgrounds. This questionnaire does not require you to include your name or any other information that will identify you. In this way you can be assured of **anonymity** and **confidentiality**.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Your part in this study is voluntary, and if, for any reason you would not like to continue taking part, you can stop and quit whenever you like.

Some questions might cause some discomfort and/or distress. In this case talk to your teacher or the person in charge of this study so that the necessary steps are taken.

If you have already answered these questions you do not have to answer them again.

Please answer these questions and give them back to the person in charge of this study.

It is of the utmost importance to answer **all** questions.

**Your co-operation in this study is greatly appreciated.**

**PART A**

**Put a tick in the appropriate bracket:**

1. Sex: MALE [ ]
   FEMALE [ ]

2. Age _____years

3. Place of Birth: AUSTRALIA [ ]
   MALTA [ ]
   OTHER [ ]

4. How old were you when you arrived in Australia? _____ years

5. How long have you been in Australia for? _____ years

6. Where were your parents born?
   (Place a tick in the appropriate bracket)

   i) FATHER MALTA [ ]
   AUSTRALIA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____ specify

   ii) MOTHER MALTA [ ]
   AUSTRALIA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____ specify

7. Where were your grandparents born?
   (place a tick in the appropriate bracket)

   i) MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER (i.e. your mother's mother)
   MALTA [ ]
   AUSTRALIA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____ specify

   MATERNAL GRANDFATHER (i.e. your mother's father)
   MALTA [ ]
   AUSTRALIA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____ specify

   ii) PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER (i.e. your fother's mother)
   MALTA [ ]
   AUSTRALIA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____ specify

PATERNAL GRANDFATHER (i.e. your father's father)

| | |
|---|---|
| MALTA | [ ] |
| AUSTRALIA | [ ] |
| ANOTHER COUNTRY | [ ] _____ specify |

8. What is the current occupation of your father and mother?

**Father:**

[ ] Unskilled: labour, farmer, food services, cleaning job, house cleaning, factory work

[ ] Skilled labour: for example technician, cabinet maker, barber/hairdresser, tailor

[ ] Office work – for example clerk, salesman, secretary, small business

[ ] Professional work; doctor, lawyer, teacher, executive

[ ] Presently unemployed – out of work, retired, homemaker, student

[ ] Other (Specify) _____

[ ] I do not know

**Mother:**

[ ] Unskilled labour, field work, food services, cleaning job, house work, factory work

[ ] Skilled labour – for example technician, cabinet maker, hairdresser, dressmaker

[ ] Office work – for example clerk, saleslady, secretary, small business

[ ] Professional work; doctor, lawyer, teacher, executive

[ ] Presently unemployed – out of work, retired, does housework, student

[ ] Other (Specify) _____

[ ] I do not know

9. Who is living with you at present?
(Please tick the appopriate box/es)

[ ] Mother

[ ] Father
[ ] both parents
[ ] brothers and sisters
[ ] extended family – grandparents, aunties, uncles, etc.

10. What language / s do you speak at home? _____

***Students from a Maltese background please go to Part B. Other students go to Part C.***

**PART B (for students of Maltese background only)**

**People can think of themselves in various ways. For example, they may feel that they are members of various ethnic groups, such as Italians, Greek, German, Chinese, and others. They can also feel that they are part of the larger society, Australian. These questions are about how you think of yourself in this respect.**

1.1 How do you think of yourself? Check one answer.

[ ] As Maltese
[ ] As Australian
[ ] As both Maltese and Australian

1.2.1 Now how much do you think of yourself:

| | Not at all | A little | Some-what | Quite a bit | Very much |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. As Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| b. As Australian | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

**How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Not sure/ neutral | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel that I am part of Maltese culture. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 2. I am proud of being Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 3. I am happy to be Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 4. I feel that I am part of the Australian culture | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 5. I am proud of being Australian | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 6. I am happy to be Australian | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 7. Being part of Maltese culture makes me feel happy. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 8. Being Maltese is uncomfortable for me. | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 9. Being part of Maltese culture makes me feel happy | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 10. Being Maltese makes me feel | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

**People differ in how important they consider aspects of themselves to be. How important are the following aspects of yourself to you?**

| | Not at all important | A little important | Not sure/ Neutral | Important | Very important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. That I am Australian | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 12. That I am Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 13. That I am a person/human being | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 14. That I have a religion | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 15. That I am male or female (boy or girl) | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

| | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Neutral | Not sure/ agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I have spent time trying to find out more about Maltese culture | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 17. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by being Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| 18. I have talked to people or read books, to learn about the Maltese culture | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

19. **Please indicate how similar you consider yourself with respect to:**

| | Very different to myself | Different to myself | Neutral | Similar to myself | Very similar to myself |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Vietnamese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| b. Anglo-Australians | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| c. Maltese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| d. Italians | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| e. Greeks | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |
| f. Chinese | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] | [ ] |

**PART C**

## THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT SCALE

In this section there are 90 statements about the family. You need to decide which statements are ***True*** or ***False***. If you think the statement is True or generally True regarding your family, mark the box (that says) **T** (True). If you think the statement is False or generally False, regarding your family, mark the box F (False).

| | Statements | T | F |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The members of the family really help and support each other. | | |
| 2. | The members of the family generally keep to themselves as they feel. | | |
| 3. | We argue a lot in our family. | | |
| 4. | In our family we do not do things on our own frequently. | | |
| 5. | We feel it is important to be the best in whatever you do. | | |
| 6. | We often talk about politics and social problems. | | |
| 7. | Generally we spend the weekend and the evenings at home. | | |
| 8. | The members of the family go to church, the synagogue or the doctrine (religious instructions) often. | | |
| 9. | The activities in our family are very carefully planned. | | |
| 10. | The members of the family are generally ordered around. | | |
| 11. | We seem to spend too much time at home. | | |
| 12. | At home we say whatever we like. | | |
| 13. | The members of the family do not let out their anger. | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 14. | In our family, we are strongly encouraged to be independent. | |
| 15. | It is important for our family to be ahead in life. | |
| 16. | We rarely attend lectures, the theatre or concerts. | |
| 17. | Friends often come for dinner or just to visit. | |
| 18. | We do not pray in our family. | |
| 19. | Generally we are very polite and do things the proper way. | |
| 20. | In our family we do not have many rules to follow. | |
| 21. | We take time and interest in whatever we do at home. | |
| 22. | It is difficult to let go without bothering any member of the family. | |
| 23. | Sometimes the members of the family are so angry that they throw things. | |
| 24. | In our family everybody fends for himself. | |
| 25. | In our family it doesn't matter how much one earns. | |
| 26. | In our family it is very important to learn new and different things. | |
| 27. | No one in our family is involved in sports or bowling etc… | |
| 28. | We often talk about the religious meaning of Christmas, Easter, Good Friday and any other feasts. | |
| 29. | In our house it is often very difficult to find the things you need. | |
| 30. | One of the family members makes most of the decisions. | |
| 31. | There is a sense of unity in our family. | |
| 32. | We tell our personal problems to each other. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 33. | Members of the family rarely lose their temper. | |
| 34. | We do whatever we like in our family. | |
| 35. | We do believe in competing and may the best man win. | |
| 36. | We are not very interested in culture. | |
| 37. | We often go to the movies, sporting activities, camping, etc. | |
| 38. | We do not believe in heaven or in hell. | |
| 39. | It is very important to be punctual in our family. | |
| 40. | In our family everything has to be done in the same way. | |
| 41. | We rarely do the necessary things voluntarily. | |
| 42. | If we want to do anything spontaneously, we just do it. | |
| 43. | Members of the family often criticise one another. | |
| 44. | There is not much privacy in our house. | |
| 45. | We always try to do a bit better than the last time. | |
| 46. | We rarely discuss intellectual topics. | |
| 47. | Everyone in our family has one or two hobbies. | |
| 48. | Members of the family have strict ideas of what is right and what is wrong. | |
| 49. | The members of our family change their minds very often. | |
| 50. | Rule observation is given great importance in our family. | |
| 51. | Members of the family help each other a lot. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 52. | If anyone ever complains it is generally the one who takes offence easily. | |
| 53. | Sometimes members of the family hit each other. | |
| 54. | Members of the family nearly always fend for themselves when they are faced with a problem. | |
| 55. | Members of the family rarely worry about job promotions, school grades, etc… | |
| 56. | One in our family plays a musical instrument. | |
| 57. | Members of the family are not much involved in recreational activities outside work or school. | |
| 58. | We believe in some things one must have strong faith. | |
| 59. | Members of the family make sure their room is tidy. | |
| 60. | Everybody takes equal share in decision-making. | |
| 61. | There is not much sense of unity in our family. | |
| 62. | We talk openly between us about money and paying bills. | |
| 63. | If there is lack of agreement in our family we do our utmost to smoothen things and maintain the peace. | |
| 64. | Members of the family strongly encourage each other to obtain their rights. | |
| 65. | In our family we do not strive much in order to succeed. | |
| 66. | Members of the family often go to the library. | |
| 67. | Members of the family often attend courses or take lessons in a hobby or any other things of interest. | |
| 68. | In our family every person has his or her own ideas of what is right and what is wrong. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 69. | In our family everyone knows exactly what duties to perform. | |
| 70. | We do what we like in our family. | |
| 71. | We get along well with each other. | |
| 72. | Generally we are careful what to say to each other. | |
| 73. | Members of the family often want to have their own way. | |
| 74. | It is difficult to be alone without hurting anyone in your family. | |
| 75. | Work before play is the rule in our family. | |
| 76. | In our family it is more important to watch T.V. than to spend time reading | |
| 77. | Members of the family go out a lot. | |
| 78. | The Bible and/or other religious book are very important in our family. | |
| 79. | In our family money is not managed sensibly. | |
| 80. | The rules in our family are very strict. | |
| 81. | Every member of the family is given lots of time and attention. | |
| 82. | There are lots of prompt decisions in our family. | |
| 83. | In our family we understand that nothing is achieved by raising one's voice. | |
| 84. | We are not greatly encouraged to speak for ourselves when necessary. | |
| 85. | Members of the family are often compared with other people regarding how well they are doing at work or at school. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 86. | Members of the family love music, art and literature. | |
| 87. | Generally we pass time watching T.V. or listening to the radio. | |
| 88. | Members of the family believe that if you err you will be punished. | |
| 89. | The plates are washed straight after we eat. | |
| 90. | In our family you don't get away with anything so easily. | |

**PART D**

# SOCIAL SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instructions**

The following questions are about people who are in your surroundings and who help or support you. Every question is in two parts. In the first part, write down the names of the people you know, except yourself, and who you are sure they help and support you in the way explained below. Write down the first letter of every person and how they relate to you (see example below). Do not put more than one name down near each question number. Do not put down more than nine people for each question.

For the second part use the scale below and mark with a circle how much you feel satisfied with the help and support they give you.

| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very Satisfied | Truly Satisfied | Not very Satisfied | Less Satisfied | Not wholly Satisfied | Not Satisfied at all |

If you have no support for a question tick the words 'Ihave no one', but still rate your level of satisfaction. The example below has been completed to help you. All your responses will be kept confidential.

**Example**

Who do you know whom you can trust with information that can get you in trouble?

(a) I have no one. 3) ASS (Friend) 6) 9)

1) Ten (Brother) 4) PEN (Father) 7)

2) LM (Friend) 5) LM (Employer) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**(1) Who can truly help you to forget some of your troubles when you are under a lot of pressure?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(2) Who can truly help you to feel more relaxed when you find yourself under presure or tensed?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(3) Who is ready to accept you completely as you are, with what is best as well as what is worst?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(4) Who is truly prepared to take care of you in any situation?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(5) Who is truly ready to help you when you feel depressed?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(6) Who do you think will be able to console you when you are worried (feel upset)?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**PART E**

## ADOLESCENT COPING SCALE

Students worry about certain things as in work, the family, friends, the world and suchlike things. Below is a list of how someone your age copes with various difficulties or problems. Please indicate by putting a circle around the things that you do to cope to cope with your concerns or problems. Put a circle around 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 for each sentence. The replies are neither right nor wrong. Do not waste much time on each sentence but mark the answer that you think is most appropriate.

For example, if you **sometimes** cope with your difficulties that you have by talking to others to see what they would do if they had that problem, you would circle number 3 as hereunder.

| | **Doesn't apply or don't do it** | **Used very little** | **Used sometimes** | **Used often** | **Used a great deal** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I would talk with others to see what they would do if they had that problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | Doesn't apply or don't do it | Used very little | Used sometimes | Used often | Used a great deal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Talk to other people about my concern to help me sort it out | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Work hard | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Would worry about what would happen to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Spend more time with my boy/girl friend | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Improve my relationship with others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Wish a miracle Would happen | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I have no way of dealing with the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Find a way to let off steam; for example cry, scream, drink, take drugs etc… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Join with peoplewho have the same concern | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Shut myself off from the problem so that I can avoid it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. See myself at being at fault | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Don't let others know how I feel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Ask a professional person for help | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Make time for leisure activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Keep fit and healthy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Write down other things you would do to cope with things that worry you most | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## PART F

## SCALE OF LIFE SATISFACTION

Below are five statements that you might agree with or you might not. Use a scale of 1 to 7 to show to what degree you agree with each by marking the suitable number in the box close to the statement.

Please be honest in your replies. The scale from 1 to 17 is:

1. I do not totally agree
2. I do not agree
3. I do not quite agree
4. I do not agree and I do not disagree
5. I agree slightly
6. I agree
7. I totally agree

[ ] In many things my life is very close to the way I like it according to my ideal.

[ ] My life conditions are excellent.

[ ] I feel satisfied with my life.

[ ] Up to now I have the important things I want in life.

[ ] If I had to live my life again, I would hardly change anything

# APPENDIX C

# ENGLISH VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

# FOR PARTICIPANTS IN MALTA

**CONFIDENTIAL**

## VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

## LIFE SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

In this study, I am interested in finding out how students feel about life in general in relation to family environment, social support and coping strategies. As you will notice from the questionnaire, I am particularly interested in students from a Maltese background. This questionnaire does not require you to include your name or any other information that will identify you. In this way you can be assured of **anonymity** and **confidentiality**.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANT**:

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you may withdraw at any stage.

Some questions may cause discomfort and/or distress. In this case, approach the researcher or the teacher concerned and appropriate measures will be taken.

If you have completed this Questionnaire before, you will not be required to complete it again.

Please complete the Questionnaire and return it to the researcher.

Please answer **all** questions, unless otherwise directed.

**Your cooperation in this study is very much appreciated.**

**Part A**

**Place a tick in the appropriate bracket:**

1. Sex: MALE [ ]
   FEMALE [ ]

2. Age: _____years

3. Place of birth: MALTA [ ]
   OTHER [ ] _____specify

4. Where were your parents born?
   (Place a tick in the appropriate bracket)

   i) FATHER MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

   ii) MOTHER MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

5. Where were your grandparents born?
   (Place a tick in the appropriate bracket)

   i) MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER (i.e. your mother's mother)
   MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

   MATERNAL GRANDFATHER (i.e. your mother's father)
   MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

   ii) PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER (i.e. your father's mother)
   MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

   PATERNAL GRANDFATHER (i.e. your father's father)
   MALTA [ ]
   ANOTHER COUNTRY [ ] _____specify

6. What is the current occupation of your father and mother?

Father

[ ] Unskilled: farm labor, food service, cleaner, house cleaner, factory work
[ ] Skilled work, such as technician, carpenter, hairdresser, seamstress
[ ] White collar (office) work, such as clerk, salesperson, secretary, small business
[ ] Professional: doctor, lawyer, teacher business, executive
[ ] Not currently working: unemployed, retired, homemaker, student
[ ] Other (Specify): _____
[ ] Don't know

Mother

[ ] Unskilled: farm labor, food service, cleaner, house cleaner, factory work
[ ] Skilled work, such as technician, carpenter, hairdresser, seamstress
[ ] White collar (office) work, such as clerk, salesperson, secretary, small business
[ ] Professional: doctor, lawyer, teacher business, executive
[ ] Not currently working: unemployed, retired, homemaker, student
[ ] Other (Specify): _____
[ ] Don't know

9. Who is living with you at present?
(Please tick the appropriate box/es)

[ ] Mother
[ ] Father
[ ] both parents
[ ] brothers and sisters
[ ] extended family - grandparents, aunties, uncles etc

10. What language/s do you speak at home? _____

## Part B

There are 90 statements in this section. They are statements about families. You are to decide which of these statements are true of your family and which are false. If you think the statement is ***True*** or mostly *True* of your family, tick the box labeled **T** (true). If you think the statement is ***False*** or mostly *False* of your family tick the box labeled **F** (false).

Refer to the items of the Family Environment Scale which is handed out separately from this questionnaire.

| **Item No.** | *T* | **F** | | **Item No.** | **T** | **F** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | 20 | | |
| 2 | | | | 21 | | |
| 3 | | | | 22 | | |
| 4 | | | | 23 | | |
| 5 | | | | 24 | | |
| 6 | | | | 25 | | |
| 7 | | | | 26 | | |
| 8 | | | | 27 | | |
| 9 | | | | 28 | | |
| 10 | | | | 29 | | |
| 11 | | | | 30 | | |
| 12 | | | | 31 | | |
| 13 | | | | 32 | | |
| 14 | | | | 33 | | |
| 15 | | | | 34 | | |
| 16 | | | | 35 | | |
| 17 | | | | | | |
| 18 | | | | | | |
| 19 | | | | | | |

| Item No. | T | F | | Item No. | T | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36 | | | | 54 | | |
| 37 | | | | 55 | | |
| 38 | | | | 56 | | |
| 39 | | | | 57 | | |
| 40 | | | | 58 | | |
| 41 | | | | 59 | | |
| 42 | | | | 60 | | |
| 43 | | | | 61 | | |
| 44 | | | | 62 | | |
| 45 | | | | 63 | | |
| 46 | | | | 64 | | |
| 47 | | | | 65 | | |
| 48 | | | | 66 | | |
| 49 | | | | 67 | | |
| 50 | | | | | | |
| 51 | | | | | | |
| 52 | | | | | | |
| 53 | | | | | | |

| Item No. | T | F | | Item No. | T | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 68 | | | | 80 | | |
| 69 | | | | 81 | | |
| 70 | | | | 82 | | |
| 71 | | | | 83 | | |
| 72 | | | | 84 | | |
| 73 | | | | 85 | | |
| 74 | | | | 86 | | |
| 75 | | | | 87 | | |
| 76 | | | | 88 | | |
| 77 | | | | 89 | | |
| 78 | | | | 90 | | |
| 79 | | | | | | |

**PART C**

# SOCIAL SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instructions**

The following questions are about people who are in your surroundings and who help or support you. Every question is in two parts. In the first part, write down the names of the people you know, except yourself, and who you are sure they help and support you in the way explained below. Write down the first letter of every person and how they relate to you (see example below). Do not put more than one name down near each question number. Do not put down more than nine people for each question.

For the second part use the scale below and mark with a circle how much you feel satisfied with the help and support they give you.

| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very Satisfied | Truly Satisfied | Not very Satisfied | Less Satisfied | Not wholly Satisfied | Not Satisfied at all |

If you have no support for a question tick the words 'Ihave no one', but still rate your level of satisfaction. The example below has been completed to help you. All your responses will be kept confidential.

**Example**

Who do you know whom you can trust with information that can get you in trouble?

(a) I have no one. 3) ASS (Friend) 6) 9)

1) Ten (Brother) 4) PEN (Father) 7)

2) LM (Friend) 5) LM (Employer) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(1) Who can truly help you to forget some of your troubles when you are under a lot of pressure?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(2) Who can truly help you to feel more relaxed when you find yourself under presure or tensed?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(3) Who is ready to accept you completely as you are, with what is best as well as what is worst?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(4) Who is truly prepared to take care of you in any situation?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(5) Who is truly ready to help you when you feel depressed?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**(6) Who do you think will be able to console you when you are worried (feel upset)?**

(a) I have no one. 3) 6) 9)

1) 4) 7)

2) 5) 8)

(b) How satisfied are you?

6 5 4 3 2 1

**PART D**

## ADOLESCENT COPING SCALE

Students worry about certain things as in work, the family, friends, the world and suchlike things. Below is a list of how someone your age copes with various difficulties or problems. Please indicate by putting a circle around the things that you do to cope to cope with your concerns or problems. Put a circle around 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 for each sentence. The replies are neither right nor wrong. Do not waste much time on each sentence but mark the answer that you think is most appropriate.

For example, if you **sometimes** cope with your difficulties that you have by talking to others to see what they would do if they had that problem, you would circle number 3 as hereunder.

| | **Doesn't apply or don't do it** | **Used very little** | **Used sometimes** | **Used often** | **Used a great deal** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I would talk with others to see what they would do if they had that problem. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | Doesn't apply or don't do it | Used very little | Used sometimes | Used often | Used a great deal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Talk to other people about my concern to help me sort it out | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Work hard | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Would worry about what would happen to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Spend more time with my boy/girl friend | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Improve my relationship with others | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Wish a miracle Would happen | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I have no way of dealing with the situation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Find a way to let off steam; for example cry, scream, drink, take drugs etc… | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Join with peoplewho have the same concern | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Shut myself off from the problem so that I can avoid it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. See myself at being at fault | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Don't let others know how I feel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Ask a professional person for help | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Make time for leisure activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Keep fit and healthy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Write down other things you would do to cope with things that worry you most | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## PART E

## SCALE OF LIFE SATISFACTION

Below are five statements that you might agree with or you might not. Use a scale of 1 to 7 to show to what degree you agree with each by marking the suitable number in the box close to the statement.

Please be honest in your replies. The scale from 1 to 17 is:

4. I do not totally agree
5. I do not agree
6. I do not quite agree
7. I do not agree and I do not disagree
8. I agree slightly
9. I agree
10. I totally agree

[ ] In many things my life is very close to the way I like it according to my ideal.

[ ] My life conditions are excellent.

[ ] I feel satisfied with my life.

[ ] Up to now I have the important things I want in life.

[ ] If I had to live my life again, I would hardly change anything

# APPENDIX D

# MALTESE VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

# FOR PARTICIPANTS IN MALTA

# APPENDIX E

# CONSENT FORMS

# FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

## PARENT'S CONSENT FORM

**The role of family environment, social support and coping strategies in the life satisfaction of Maltese adolescents**

**Victoria Borg, B.A. (Hons) PhD candidate**

Dr. Cynthia Leung – Principal Supervisor
Department of Psychology, Victoria University of Technology.
Telephone. 9 366 9896

Dear Parent

I would like your permission for your son/daughter to take part in a research study conducted through the Psychology Department at Victoria University of Technology by Victoria Borg. This study has the approval of the education Department. The aim of the research is to explore how students feel about life in general in relation to family environment, social support and coping strategies. As a result of this study I hope to increase the understanding of the issues that relate to life satisfaction in students, especially from a Maltese background. However, I am also interested in students of other nationalities. In order to get the necessary information for this study, I am giving out the questionnaire to students of **all nationalities** in Years 9-12. These questionnaires will be completed in class.

In addition, students of Maltese background are also invited to participate in one individual interview that will go for about one hour. The purpose of this interview is to explore the above-mentioned areas in more depth. This interview will also be held during school hours. Please note that students may want to participate **only** in completing the questionnaire.

Students are invited to participate in this study voluntarily and they can withdraw from this study at any time. All information given is strictly confidential. Also, names are not required so that students will not be identified.

Your permission is kindly required for your child to participate in this study. If you give consent, could you sign the attached form and return it to school as soon as possible. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Victoria Borg

**CONSENT FORM**

**Questionnaires**

**(For students of <u>ALL</u> nationalities including students of Maltese background)**

Please return this completed form to by

**1. Parent Permission**

I have read the above explanatory statement and understand that it involves my son/daughter in a study on issues relating to life satisfaction. I give permission for him/her to take part in this study.

Signed: ……. Date: ……

**2. Student Permission**

I consent to participate in the study described above, which has been fully explained to me. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

Signed: ……. Date: …….

**CONSENT FORM**

**Individual Interviews**

**(For students of Maltese background only)**

Please return this completed form to by

1. **Parent Permission**

   I have read the above explanatory statement and understand that it involves my son/daughter in a study on issues relating to life satisfaction. I give permission for him/her to take part in this study.

   Signed: ……. Date: ……

2. **Student Permission**

   I consent to participate in the study described above, which has been fully explained to me. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

   Signed: ……. Date: …….

# APPENDIX F

# DOCUMENTS OF APPROVAL

# APPENDIX G

## SAMPLE OF MATRIX USED FOR QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS