

**THROUGH THE WOMEN'S EYES:  
LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE  
OF IMMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA**

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(MSc. Psychology)

**Thesis submitted to the School of Social Science and Psychology  
in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY  
FACULTY OF ARTS, EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**

Melbourne, Australia

August 2008

## ABSTRACT

Although immigration has been widely investigated, academic research regarding the female immigration remains limited. As a result of relocation, immigrant women – compared to male immigrants – are considered to experience greater hardships, often connected to the influence of traditional gender values and roles, restricted political support, and the lack of adequate social services to facilitate their integration.

Australia is, essentially, a land of immigrants. International immigration represents one of its major sources of population and economic growth. However, the integration of immigrants is a controversial and often conflictive issue. In spite of Australia's endorsement of multiculturalism, the influence of the historic white Australian ideals remains as an informal expectation to assimilate ethnically divergent minorities.

The Latin American community in Australia is large and has contributed, not only to the economic prosperity of the country, but also to its cultural diversity. Despite official discourses, however, Latin American immigrants do not encounter the same labour and economic opportunities, and often experience severe social challenges and discrimination.

In seeking to understand the specific acculturation challenges of Latin American females in Australia, 13 women – living in Australia for an average of 32 years – were interviewed using an open-ended schedule. The data from the interviews was qualitatively analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Main findings indicate that most participants – although some achieved positive levels of labour integration – remained socially separated from the mainstream society, exchanging mostly with other immigrants. The maintenance of traditional gender roles

within their households, restricted sources of social support and family assistance in Australia, and poor support from the mainstream society translated into low levels of psychological adjustment. These factors interacted, rather than operating as separate variables. Under the socio-politic and ideological circumstances encountered in Australia, a complete integration was not possible. Acculturation, to most women, was experienced as a never-ending process where many conflictive issues remained unresolved.

## DECLARATION

“I, **Romina Iebra Aizpurúa**, declare that the Doctor of Philosophy exegesis entitled “**Through the Women’s Eyes: Latin American Women’s Experience of Immigration to Australia**” is no more than 100,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, 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:

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will always be thankful to my supervisor, Adrian Fisher, whose support and belief in me represented one of the main reasons I came to Australia. Your guidance through my academic journey was invaluable. Thank you for not only directing me through many unknown territories but also for giving me so much freedom to find my own path. I am especially grateful to you for understanding my own acculturation challenges and support me in difficult moments.

I am thankful to Lesley Birch who also made everything possible before and during my PhD. You will remain in my memory as the most helpful and efficient university member.

I am grateful to Victoria University and to the Department of Education, Science and Training of the Australian Government for financially supporting me during my studies.

I want to sincerely thank each one of the participants included in this research and all the women who helped me in the recruitment process in a city and a culture where I had everything to learn about. To my participants, thank you for allowing me into your most private experiences and feelings. You became a very important part of my life. I am grateful to all those women who indicated me places and people to interview and who became supporting friends during this journey. It was because of your good will to help me and participate that everything was possible.

Thank you Terezinha Féres-Carneiro and Bernardo Jablonski, who always wanted the best for me, wherever that was. Your guidance, love and friendship means a lot to me.

A big thank you to Diego Quarrato, for being an unconditional friend and one of the major gifts of my Australian experience. Thank you for so many days and awaken nights sharing my homesickness. You are a beautiful soul.

I could not be any more grateful to my parents, brother and best friends in Argentina, Brazil and other corners of the world for holding my hand and believing in me even when I didn't. Your love and support empowered me every day to face my own cultural challenges, the distance and the absence of the people and the things I treasure. Thank you for representing what I call "home". I love you all.

Finally, I am grateful to Manish, who was always present, patient, supporting and loving. Thank you for being my "comfort zone" in a new country and for renewing me everyday with your love and smiles.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Nevis and David, and to my brother, Leonardo, for reminding me, everyday, that I wasn't alone, far or lost. The result of this journey is as much yours as it is mine.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS OF LATIN AMERICANS IN AUSTRALIA**

#### **1.1 Introduction to the phenomenon of immigration and acculturation**

Leaving one's homeland is never an easy decision. The reasons to immigrate to a new and distant place can be related to several issues, conflicts or needs. Nevertheless, most immigrants will face a personal and challenging process trying to adapt to a new society's demands. Very frequently, the decision to immigrate is related to the hope of a better future for oneself and family members – seeking a better quality of life, freedom, democracy, or broader economic and professional opportunities (Fisher & Sonn, 2005). In this way, immigration often carries the expectation to make of the new land a place that could be called “home”.

However, this transition is not free from difficulties. Trying to adapt to a new country's values, traditions and language can be a demanding and stressful experience. The challenges of immigration are not only related to the immigrant's personal background, but also to the economic, political and social opportunities found in the new country, along with the attitudes and responses from the receiving society.

When immigrants and members of the host culture meet and interconnect, the acculturation process takes place. The concept of acculturation was originally developed in 1936 by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits to identify the socio-cultural changes result when

individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds meet and interconnect. In this process, members from minority and dominant groups are expected to influence and/or be influenced by parts of the other group's culture. According to Berry (1990, 1997), immigrants are relatively free to decide their adjustment path. As a consequence of intercultural contacts with the host country, individuals follow an acculturation strategy that best matches their interest, values, skills and expectations. As Berry introduced, there are four possible acculturation strategies that takes place during the adjustment process to a new culture: assimilation, integration, separation or marginalisation.

Immigrants' acculturation strategies are not only a result of their personal background, skills and capacity to adapt the new environment, but they are also connected to the opportunities and the historic, ideological, political and economic contexts found in the receiving country. Although integration is often observed as the ideal and healthiest acculturation result for immigrants and their receiving communities, it does not always take place.

Challenges related to the adaptation process are multiple, and are often experienced differently according to the gender of the immigrant. Female immigrants often find a more challenging and difficult reality than their male counterparts, mainly because of the complex combination of their historical invisibility within immigration policies, restricted social services, labour gender discrimination and the influence of traditional gender values still attached to women's roles (Dion & Dion, 2001; Fernández Kelly, 2005; Sullivan, 1984). As a result of these, and other combined factors, immigrant women are often trapped in a complex set of challenges that impact negatively on their acculturation outcomes.

As has been observed with several minority groups, immigration from more traditional countries does not always translate into an improvement of women's lives (Morokvasic, 1983). If the host country's services and policies do not fully contemplate the specific nature and needs of immigrant women – who are often unskilled or semi-skilled and need to join the labour market, and who often have children, no sources of social or family support, restricted knowledge of the host country's language and lack of available time to pursue further education – the benefits from immigration would be delayed or, possibly, never fully experienced.

There are many factors that intervene on immigrants' adaptation. Although, as many authors indicated (e.g., Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2006; Sam, 2000; Smits, Mulder, & Hooimeijer, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, 2000), factors such as the reasons to immigrate, age, gender, previous educational and economic background, skills and motivations to adjust to the new country play a crucial role on immigrants' adjustment, this only represents one half of the phenomenon. Acculturation is also the result of inter-group relationships (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this way, immigrants' adjustment is associated to the host country's attitudes and expectation towards minority groups (Leong, 2008; Nesdale, 2002; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, White Stephan, & Martin, 2005).

To fully understand the adaptation process and the acculturation outcome of the participants of this research is necessary to observe the influence, over time, of the White Australian policy on mainstreamers' ideology and the subsequent discrimination attitudes perceived by minority groups (Hage, 2000; D. Johnson, Terry, & Louis, 2005; Jupp, 2002). In spite of being an officially multicultural country supporting the integration of all ethnic groups, the Australian community seems to still expect – in subtle ways – the assimilation

of culturally divergent immigrant groups (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Ward & Masgoret, 2008).

## **1.2 Latin American immigration to Australia**

The immigration of Latin Americans to Australia originated during the 1960's, when the first officials were sent to South America in order to encourage immigration, promote the population growth and counter the labour shortage in Australia (Botzenhart, 2006). Although most Latin immigration took place during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, the main wave of Latin Americans arrived to Australia during the 1970's, when most political and economic constraints occurred in the home countries.

The present thesis intends to investigate and understand the challenges and conflicts encountered by a group of 13 Spanish-speaking Latin American women living in Melbourne for an average of 31.5 years. Most of these women immigrated during the 1970's for a variety of reasons and under different socio-political contexts, however, once in Australia, most of them experienced several cultural challenges trying to adjust to a new environment.

Most participants immigrated with basic, or no, levels of English knowledge and were not asked to provide any proof of professional or educational background as most of them relocated as family dependants. Later, some of these women experienced difficulties trying to validate their educational or work experience, and, combined to restricted language and social support resources, remained trapped in a cycle where mostly unskilled or semi-skilled jobs were available to them. The gender factor compounded this situation as

most immigrant women experienced high levels of work overload dealing with outside work and the fulfilment of traditional domestic and family duties.

As a result of their labour outcomes, and the restricted social and family support to share childcare duties, most of the women did not have available time to pursue language or professional education and presented restricted levels of labour and social integration. Due to this complex combination of factors, many of the women experienced high levels of acculturative stress, with conflictive socio-cultural issues that remained unresolved until the moment of the research. On the other side, women who reached higher educational levels, mastered the host country's language and presented satisfactory labour integration also experienced several degrees of social separation and restricted levels of psychological adjustment. Regardless the educational and professional outcome of Latin American women, most of them faced similar socio-cultural challenges that were not able to resolve during their acculturation process and that represented significant barriers for their integration to the Australian community.

The understanding of the complex – and often conflictive – factors involved in Latin American women's adaptation to Australian labour and socio-cultural contexts seems necessary in order to pinpoint when, how and why immigrant women experienced challenges and conflicts, the opportunities they had to resolve them and what could be suggested to facilitate a better acculturation outcome of immigrant women in Australia.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The theoretical framework introduced in the previous section served as basis to structure the present research. The thesis is divided in nine chapters, each with several subsections.

**Chapter two** presents a theoretical framework for the phenomenon of immigration and acculturation. Although diverse definitions are presented for the concept of acculturation (IOM, 2004; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936), Berry's (1990; 1997; Berry & Sam, 2006) model will be used as a main guide to understand immigrants' adjustment process to a new country. Special attention is given to the relevance of immigrants' sense of ethnic identity and to the way they deal with the perceived cultural distances between their own and the mainstream values. The encounter with an unfamiliar culture and its impact on immigrants' adjustment was explained as part of the phenomenon of "culture shock" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986) or "acculturative stress" (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). According to Berry (1990), immigrants' adjustment process is the direct result of the way they balance the resulting acculturative stress, and how they decide to maintain their own values and/or incorporate new cultural/ideological elements from the receiving society. The adaptation process is analysed considering factors prior to acculturation such as immigrants' personal, educational and social background (Berry, 1980, 1990) and factors taking place during acculturation, related to inter-group relationships with the mainstream society where expectations, ideals and values from both sides meet and influence each other (Leong, 2008; Nesdale, 2002; Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003).

**Chapter three** introduces the phenomenon of female immigration and explains why it is considered by many authors as a more complex, and often more difficult, phenomenon than the male case (e.g., Dion & Dion, 2001; Sullivan, 1984; Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 2005). Within this process, the presence of traditional gender values still attached to women's roles have a negative impact on their lives, limiting their social, educational and labour acculturation in the new country (Boyd, 1984; Darvishpour, 1999, 2002; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997). Sources of family, ethnic and broader social support are also connected to the ways immigrant women deal with diverse acculturative challenges (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006; Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999; Thoits, 1982) and observed as having a direct effect on their psychological adjustment.

**Chapter four** explores the main factors involved in Latin American immigration to Australia and the subsequent three main periods of Latin Americans' relocation to this country. The section also presents a brief introduction of the three home countries of the research participants – Chile, Argentina and Uruguay – in order to better understand the contexts and backgrounds attached to women's immigration.

**Chapter five** discusses the receiving Australian context. This section presents the transition from the White Australian policy – with the expectation to assimilate all immigrants to the mainstream culture – to the contemporary official goals of multiculturalism and integration (Jupp, 2002). The influence of white Anglo-Saxon ideals over the attitudes and responses of the broader community towards immigrants are analysed in order to understand acculturation challenges, opportunities and outcomes for minority groups in Australia (Jakubowicz, 1997; Vasta, 1993; Vasta & Castles, 1996).

**Chapter six** provides an overview at the methodology of the research. For this purpose, a phenomenological framework (Husserl, 1960, 1970) is presented providing the basis for the data analysis. Within this context, interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2003) is chosen as the methodology to collect and analyse data from the interviews. **Chapter seven** specifies the method of the thesis, overview of the participants, materials, procedure and analysis of the data.

**Chapter eight** develops the research results while establishing connections with the relevant literature. At the end, the chapter resumes the overall results and presents the main findings of the research.

**Chapter nine** In this section the researcher connects and discusses the findings with the existing literature, indicating limitations and contributions of the thesis and presenting some recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTERNATIONAL IMMIGRATION AS AN ACADEMIC PROBLEM

Immigrants can be considered as people who have made, as Fisher and Sonn (2005) defined, a relatively free choice to change their geographical residence looking for social improvement. The forces that lead to immigration can be various (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2006). Furnham and Bochner (1986) pointed out that most research has focused on demographic, historical or structural variables of immigration, and from these assumptions have been derived about the motives to emigrate. Among them, a main importance has been given to economic limitations in the home country, which is seen by the authors as an appropriate referent, but also as a simplistic conclusion.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), research on the reasons to immigrate need to consider at least three main issues: the kind of immigration (internal/international; voluntary/forced; legal/illegal; temporary/permanent); the reason or context to emigrate; and the existing policies of the receiving country (facilitating, or not, certain types of immigration). In this way, the immigration process is affected by variables in both the country of origin and destination. As Furnham and Bochner indicated, it would be very difficult for individuals to simply work out a balance sheet of positive and negative aspects of immigration, considering altogether economic, political and life-style factors. People frequently immigrate under the pressure of combined reasons, and the motivations to do it should not be understood only as the result of individualistic decisions. The decision to

immigrate could be influenced by family members, friends and employers and it could also be related to the access to information and the existing immigration policies of the host country.

Immigrants can be divided into different analytical categories related to their reasons to immigrate (Fisher & Sonn, 2005). Individuals who have decided to leave their home countries as a result of a relatively free choice, seeking to improve social and economic conditions of life are considered immigrants. On the other extreme, refugees are individuals forced to relocate because of perceived life threat. Some of the contexts of refugees' relocation are characterized by political persecution, social crises and wars. Sojourners move under specific goals, in most cases, for education or work for a specific period of time, often considering returning home after their objectives are accomplished. In spite of these precise boundaries for relocation, sojourners share with other immigrants cultural and social challenges while acculturating to a new country, and also need to re-acclurate when they return home.

The main challenges of the immigration process are related to the difficulties of changing cultural referents that served to shape people's sense of identity. Many theoretical concepts have been developed in order to describe and understand immigrants' cultural adjustment and the subsequent changes in values, behaviours, language and identity that they often experience in a new country – their acculturation process. Although early uses of the concept of acculturation are related to Redfield et al. (1936), one of the most referred contemporary acculturation models was developed by John Berry (1990; 1997). According to Berry, immigrants have to deal with two basic questions: the first related to the

maintenance of cultural references, “is it of value to maintain my cultural heritage?” and the second, referring to relationships with other ethno-cultural groups, “is it of value to maintain relations with other groups”? The way immigrants relate to these two basic issues will impact on their acculturation outcome.

During the acculturation process, and as a result of inter-group contact among individuals of different cultural backgrounds, conflicts may arise at the individual and group level. At a personal level, immigrants could encounter diverse levels of acculturative stress (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et al., 1987) or, as also referred to, culture shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). At a broader social level, conflicts relate to discrepancies on acculturation expectations hold by immigrants and the receiving society (Johnson et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; Van Oudenhoven, 2006). Although integration has been indicated as the ideal acculturation outcome of most immigrants (Berry, 2005; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989), the host society’s values, ideals and policies significantly affect immigrants’ acculturation paths. Moreover, the receiving society’s expectations about immigrants’ level of adoption of the mainstream values and the maintenance of ethnic traditions play a great part in the acculturation process.

As some studies have indicated (Ghuman, 2000; Liu, 2007; Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006), in spite of Australia’s recent multicultural discourse, the ideals and values attached to a white Anglo-Saxon community still play a significant influence on immigrants’ adjustment. Often in a subtle way, many immigrant groups – especially individuals more culturally distant – are still expected to assimilate to the mainstream culture. Although an officially multicultural country, many

scholars have highlighted Australia's ethnocentrism and the influence of an Anglo-dominant perspective where ideals of assimilation still prevail and reinforce discrimination and cultural inequality (Dixson, 1999; Forrest & Dunn, 2006, 2007; Johnson, 2002). According to Fisher and Sonn (2007), Australia's ideal of whiteness is rooted in a history of colonization and still represents a strong influence on the acculturation outcome of certain immigrant groups.

## **2.1 Immigration and acculturation**

The concept of acculturation refers directly to the cultural changes resulting from the encounters between immigrants (non-dominant group) and members of the receiving society. The first formal definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield et al., (1936) indicating the "phenomena which results from when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149).

Three types of outcomes were identified as a result of the acculturation process: acceptance, adaptation and reaction (Redfield et al., 1936). Acceptance would take place when individuals incorporate a greater portion of another culture and, consequently, lose most of their cultural heritage. In this case, the assimilation process would embrace not only behavioural patterns, but also inner values of the other culture. Adaptation occurs when individuals combine both original and foreign cultural attributes and create a harmonious and integrative cultural identity. Finally, the reaction outcome arises as a

contra-acculturative movement where individuals maintain their cultural traits and frequently takes place as a result of oppression or lack of cultural acceptance by the dominant society.

Redfield et al.'s (1936) concept of acculturation entails the idea that, in theory, both cultural groups influence reciprocally each other when they interact. However, power resources are frequently unequal between host societies and immigrants. Due to complex causes, one group frequently exerts a dominant cultural influence in the acculturation process. As Sam (2006b) indicated, this notion facilitated the impression of a one-sided acculturation process, whereby only non-dominant groups tend to suffer cultural transformations and, as a result, assimilate into the broader group. To Sam, further studies in acculturation should direct equal attention to the effects and changes in both dominant and minority groups.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggested a new explanation for Redfield's concept in 2004, defining acculturation as "the progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (ideas, words, values, norms, behaviour, institutions) by persons, groups or classes of a given culture. The partial or total adaptation is caused by contacts and interactions between different cultures through migration and trade relations" (IOM, 2004, p. 5).

According to Sam (2006b), Redfield et al. (1936) and IOM's (2004) definitions of acculturation failed to notice that the process does not necessarily mean the adoption and transformation of certain cultural values but also the possibility of rejection or resistance to certain elements of the other culture.

One of the most cited models of acculturation was developed by John W. Berry, who explained the immigrant's adaptation process as the result of a relatively free-choice strategy (Berry, 1980, 1990, 1997, 1999). According to Berry, the acculturation process can be understood as four potential strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization. When there is a balanced concern in preserving the original culture and participating in a broader sense with the receiving society, the integration option takes place. Assimilation occurs when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and pursue direct interaction with the other culture choosing to identify and adopt the host society's values, behaviours and institutions. This outcome also takes place when the host country expects immigrants to adopt and blend with the broader main culture. Separation occurs when immigrants place great value on their cultural background and avoid any kind of interaction with the dominant group. Finally, marginalization arises when individuals do not have interest or possibilities to maintain their cultural heritage and present limited interest in interacting with others, frequently as a result of some kind of discrimination.

According to Berry (1997), the acculturation strategies are not adopted randomly. The various results are closely related to the ways individuals respond to two factors, the maintenance of their own ethnic and cultural background, and the incorporation of new elements from the dominant society. Within this perspective, the acculturation strategies are observed as an outcome and not just a correlate, since individuals often do not have absolute influence over many of the group-level factors. Ideally, immigrants can only "freely" choose the integration strategy when the dominant society appears to be open and inclusive in its cultural terms.

As previously mentioned, a key phenomenon leading to a positive adaptation among immigrants is the way in which they balance the cultural maintenance and the contact interaction with the new society. Nevertheless, the integration outcomes take place only when non-dominant groups adopt some values of the receiving community while the dominant group is prepared to accept institutional and cultural changes that would reflect the needs of a multicultural society. Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992) indicated that a multicultural environment needs to establish certain conditions to promote integration: an extensive acceptance and freedom to express and maintain cultural diversity; relatively low levels of discrimination and racism, positive attitudes among different ethno-cultural groups; and a certain level of identification with the main receiving society.

Building on Berry's theory, Ward and Kennedy (1996) proposed an amendment to the acculturation model. They said that acculturation should be considered as a two-dimensional process in which both psychological and socio-cultural adjustment takes place. The first process, best analysed within a stress and individual coping framework, relates to psychological or emotional wellbeing. Socio-cultural adjustment is understood within a social learning framework and refers to individual's capacity to use and/or learn adequate skills to successfully accomplish daily tasks in the new environment or, as the authors indicated, immigrants' ability to "fit in" with the new culture. According to Ward and Kennedy, researchers should consider these two adjustment outcomes as separate concepts, although they are interconnected in the acculturation process.

As indicated by Ward and Kennedy (1996), psychological and socio-cultural adjustments are processes predicted by different variables. Personality, life situations and

sources of social support directly impact on psychological adjustment, and could be perceived in diverse levels of depression or mood disturbance (Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992b; Ward & Searle, 1991). Socio-cultural adjustment, connections to the challenges encountered in daily life, is affected by length of residence in the new environment, language skills, perceived cultural distance and relationships with the broader community (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992a, 1993). Apart from being influenced by different variables, these two processes often present dissimilar acculturation strategies and fluctuations over time.

Research developed by Ward and colleagues (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Masgoret, 2008; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) supported Berry's idea that integration is the healthiest acculturation strategy for immigrants and their host communities (Berry, 1990). Integrated individuals were connected to more positive psychological levels than immigrants following any other strategy. At the same time, those who followed assimilation reported lower levels of social conflicts. As previously presented, Ward and colleagues observed the existence of two adaptive dimensions, referring to ethnic identity as the main variable connected to individual psychological wellbeing. Identification with the host community values and culture was the main factor favouring a more positive socio-cultural adjustment.

More recently, Berry (2006) introduced a "map" of acculturation phenomena, distinguishing cultural and psychological aspects of the acculturation process of both groups in contact (immigrants and host members), with changes occurring at the cultural and individual level. Changes at the cultural level are related to three main aspects:

previous ethnographic knowledge of both cultural groups, the specific context/reasons/characteristics of their contact, and the changes resulting from their interactions. Acculturation changes at the individual level include behavioural shifts; presence, levels and ways of dealing with acculturative stress; and – considering Ward’s (1996) contributions to this issue – psychological adaptation (a balanced mental health and positive levels of wellbeing) and socio-cultural adaptation (social skills used to harmoniously adjust and interact with a new socio-cultural context).

## **2.2 Ethnic identity and acculturation**

Even if the motivations to immigrate are complex and varied, the initial intention is, in most cases, to make one’s home in the new land. However, as Fisher and Sonn (2005, p. 305) mentioned, “the transition entails the severing of community ties, the loss of social networks, resources and familiar bonds and of course, the loss of taken-for-granted systems of meaning. The experience is often traumatic”. Immigration is, essentially, a process of rupture with some basic socio-cultural references for the sense of identity, and it embodies great and stressful challenges to immigrants. The outcome of this process depends much on the conditions found in the host country, the personal background of the individuals, the forces that impelled them to move, and the flexibility to create new alternatives for the personal identity, social relationships and new labour demands.

Immigrants have to face enormous personal challenges and, in many cases, the need to review social referents and values that once shaped their identity in a cultural context

that has been left behind. As Sonn (2002, p. 205) defined, the “immigrant-adaptation can be construed as a process of community making that involves the negotiating and integration of cultural systems and identities developed in one context to a new context and the development of ties with the new country”. Following this perspective, Sonn locates immigrants as active members in the reconstruction of cultural references and not merely recipients of acculturative forces.

Other authors (Berry & Sam, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Phinney, Cantou, & Kurtz, 1997; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001) have highlighted the relevance of a positive ethnic identity in the acculturating process, especially among minority immigrant groups. A strong ethnic identity could operate as a buffer of external stressors and has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem and well being among minority groups.

The ethnic identity has been understood by Phinney et al. (2001) as the feeling of self-identification, belongingness and commitment to a community group, where values, ideals and attitudes are also shared. Moreover, Berry et al. (1992) explain this concept as “a complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their culture group membership” (1992, p. 357). These attitudes are expected to emerge when people are exposed to direct contact with different cultures and communities, and most frequently, when individuals are considered to be members of a minority group. To many authors, the maintenance of a positive ethnic identity is observed as an influential factor promoting better acculturation and psychological outcomes (Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Siewert, & Tacata, 2002; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Noh & Avison, 1996; Phinney, 2002).

Phinney et al. (1997) reached similar conclusions as a result of their survey with 669 American-born high school students (372 Latinos, 232 African American, 65 whites). The findings of their research demonstrated that membership in a lower status ethnic group does not account for high or low levels of self-esteem. Regardless of how the ethnic group is valued by the mainstream society, individual levels of commitment and feelings about the values shared with other members of the group seem to be the main factors attached to a positive ethnic identity. This research confirmed other findings (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1989; Wright, 1985) suggesting a significant relationship between self-esteem and a positive attachment to one's ethnic or racial group.

This positive relationship proved to be equally valid for all minority groups of the survey, where white adolescents were a small minority in a context that was predominately non-White. The ethnicity factor proved to have more positive outcomes when individuals are located in minority groups where the need for group solidarity is stronger. Another relevant enhancer of self-esteem for minority ethnic groups – especially in the case of Latinos – is the individual's family relationships, a very important source of social support. Apart from that, better feelings of self-esteem are closely related to a positive acculturation outcome with the host society, which, at the same time, is related to language proficiency, educational backgrounds and perceived discrimination from the broader community (Phinney et al., 1997).

As mentioned previously, the acculturation strategies are directly connected to the ways immigrants balance two main dimensions, cultural maintenance and the contact interaction with the new society. As Berry et al. (1992) explained, the way individuals think

of themselves is constructed along two dimensions, the identification with their personal heritage or ethno-cultural group, and the identification with the dominant society. Considering these two dimensions, some similarities can be pinpointed with Berry's acculturation strategies. When individuals emphasize in both identities (identification with personal cultural heritage and with values of the broader society), the outcome would be similar to an integration strategy. When individuals feel neither type of identification, marginalization would take place. When one type of identity overpowers the other one, the identity outcome would resemble either the assimilation or separation strategies.

### **2.3 Culture shock and acculturative stress**

The encounter with a new and different culture may represent a stressful experience to many individuals. Indeed, Suarez-Orozco (2000) believed that immigration is one of the most stressful experiences a person can undertake. As a result of relocation, individuals lose most social networks and predictable contexts of meaning. In this sense, the author indicated that "immigrants are stripped of many of their sustaining social relationships, as well as of their roles which provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world. These changes are highly disorienting and nearly inevitable lead to a keen sense of loss" (Suarez-Orozco, 2000, p. 195) Researchers have approached this conflictive adjustment process creating various concepts, some of the most referred are the ideas of "cultural shock" and "acculturative stress".

The experience of facing an unfamiliar cultural environment has been conceptualized as the phenomenon of “cultural shock” by many authors. As Furnham and Bochner (1986) indicated, the circumstances leading to cultural shock depend directly on a variety of factors, such as previous travelling experiences and interactions with other cultures, the degree of distance between the original and receiving cultural values, immigration policies, sources of social support, and also individual psychological characteristics.

Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1954; 1960) first introduced the concept of culture shock in 1954. According to Oberg, this phenomenon could be considered a “disease” that individuals suffer as a result of the loss of well-known cultural settings, symbols and values, leading to feelings of anxiety, frustration and helplessness.

After the initial reference to culture shock, many academics have used the main idea of this concept to indicate different types of stressful experiences caused by the immigration process (Bock, 1970; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kohls, 1984; Rhinesmith, 1985; Taft, 1977). In general, the process of culture shock would affect most individuals in different degrees and levels, depending on the various demands for adjustment experienced at the cognitive, behavioural, emotional social and physiological levels. In other words, as Bock (1970) suggested, the phenomenon of culture shock could be seen as a primarily emotional reaction to the individual’s incapacity of understanding, controlling and predicting the behaviour of members of the new culture.

Nowadays, the concept of culture shock is observed as a temporary stress reaction where psychological and physical rewards are generally unpredictable and, as a result,

difficult to control (Furnham, 1997). The process of cultural shock could be better understood as a sequence of four primary stages, originally developed by Oberg (1960) and later presented by Furnham and Bochner (1986).

First of all, the “honeymoon or tourist phase” indicates an initial reaction of enchantment, enthusiasm and admiration with the new environment where all cultural differences are seen as part of an exciting and interesting package of the immigration process. Although some feelings of anxiety and stress could be experienced, these are observed as a positive ingredient of the process.

After this phase, the “crisis” period takes place in most cases. The previous honeymoon phase gives way to unstable stage that depends mainly on individual characteristics, preparation and environmental factors. Feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety and anger emerge most commonly after few weeks to a month after arrival, derived from minor initial problems, negative experiences and first cultural reactions.

A process of “recovery” and reorientation characterizes the third phase where individuals learn to successfully adjust to the new cultural demands, symbols and values. During this period, the new culture begins to represent a more comprehensible world, where everything begins to make more sense and can be better managed in everyday interactions. Negative reactions to adversity are diminished as the individual agrees to be more flexible and understanding to the differences and distances in cultural values, signs and communication symbols, facilitating a broader sense of acceptance and adaptation. The learning of the host country’s language and cultural values frequently leads to this stage.

Adaptation is seen as the last phase of this process, and it is achieved when individuals successfully manage to balance the new country's cultural background with their own. A positive resolution for this stage makes of the culture shock phenomenon a relatively beneficial experience. As a result of adaptation, individuals are very likely to transform substantial part of their values and reorganize their personal identifications, leading, most probably, to the structure of bicultural identities.

According to Furnham (1997), the resolution of culture shock is best achieved by the learning of new skills in order to communicate and interpret cultural values and symbols. This process would lead to the incorporation of different attitudes and behaviours commonly used in the new society. Although the concept of culture shock has been broadly associated to negative consequences, the author believes that mild doses of these experiences may be important for self-development and personal growth.

Berry et al. (1992) contributed to the issue developing the concept of "acculturative stress", defined as the "response by individuals to life events (that are rooted in intercultural contact), when they exceed the capacity of individuals to deal with them" (1992, p. 362). Acculturative stress is also related to high levels of depression (related to the feeling of cultural loss) and anxiety (related to the uncertainty of how to behave in the new culture and the incapacity to predict or control behaviours of the new society). The various ways individuals deal with the acculturative experience, stressors, and acculturative stress are closely related to factors such as the nature of the broader host society; type of acculturating group, modes of acculturation, and demographic, social and personality

characteristics (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et al., 1987; Berry, Wintrob, Sindell, & Mawhinney, 1982; Donà & Berry, 1994).

Based on Berry's model of acculturation, Donà and Berry (1994) developed a research with 101 Central American refugees living in Toronto. The findings of this work supported their theoretical perspective indicating that individuals who follow an integrationist strategy present lower levels of acculturative stress than those choosing an assimilation or separation paths. It is believed that immigrants, refugees and sojourners have a relatively free choice to incorporate parts of the host culture and decide to which extent maintain their ethnic cultural background. In this process, it is possible to evidence diverse degrees in the adoption and maintenance of cultural traits. As it was observed by the experiences of this group of refugees in Canada, individuals who rarely interact with their own culture seem to lack basic social support and, thus, do not deal effectively with the struggles minority members often have to face in daily life. On the other extreme, refugees stressing too much of a connection to their ethnic community often find difficulty in integrating and show higher levels of dependency and anxiety. Moreover, refugees who extremely intensify their ethnic identification might often suffer of psychological stress due to constant feelings of homesickness. Refugees who exaggerated a positive attitude towards the Canadian society also presented high levels of stress as they maintained high expectations regarding life in the new society, possibly underestimating adjustment problems such as finding employment and creating new social networks.

Independent variables such as acculturation modes, acculturative experience, cultural maintenance, and values have not shown a direct impact on somatic stress, but did

present a relation to psychological stress (Berry & Sam, 2006; Richmond, 1993; Suarez-Orozco, 2000). In the research developed by Donà and Berry (1994), the best predictor of psychological stress was the level of maintenance of the Latin American culture and values. Individuals showing a medium level of continuance of their ethnic background presented significant lower levels of psychological stress.

#### **2.4 Ethnic social support as a buffer of acculturative stress**

There is wide academic interest on the relevance of effective social support to buffer the consequences of stressful experiences related to the acculturation process (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Lin & Ensel, 1989; Lin et al., 1999; Mossakowski, 2003). Sources for social support could be confined to the immigrants' own ethnic community, or they can extend to other communities and to the host society.

Noh and Avison (1996) sought to identify whether support from the same ethnic community would have more effective results in mediating successfully with stressful experiences or not. The results of a study with a group of Koreans in Canada showed that there are diverse factors that help immigrant to better deal with stressful experiences and then prevent psychological discomfort and depression. Individual psychological resources played a central role in the stress process of this group. Self-esteem and mastery perception of events in life (an individual's perception of controlling events in his/her life) along with previous exposure to stressful events had a significant effect on the individual's

psychological distress. Apart from that, support from the same ethnic social network had a direct effect on depressive symptoms and an indirect impact on other life events. As the authors concluded, “an interesting observation is that general social support from the broader community plays almost no role in this process. While it may be a truism to state that not all sources of support are equally effective in reducing psychological distress, our results provide convincing evidence that is consistent with the hypothesis of socio-cultural similarity” (Noh & Avison, 1996, p. 202).

It seems that an effective support relationship occurs when there is socio-cultural or situational similarity between the support provider and the receiver or when there is a complementarity between the needs and values of both parties. New immigrants would be expected to empathize with other immigrants as they feel they have in common main life experiences and, as a result, they would be better able to fully understand the nature of new immigrant’s acculturation conflicts.

Vega, Kolody and Valle (1987) confirmed these arguments researching Mexican immigrant women in California. Their findings reinforced the idea that satisfactory adjustment of immigrants is dependent on resolving the interpersonal stressors resulted from the breaking-up of social networks in their country of origin and replacing those ties in the host country. The perception of a large distance between immigrant’s values and the culture of the host society also facilitated the presence of depressive symptoms and feelings of marginality and discrimination. In order to solve this conflictive reality, many immigrants tended to feel comfortable and adjust more easily in their own ethnic enclaves where social discrimination is reduced, rather than living in less ethnically dense settings where they might have a daily experience of being “outsiders”.

Nevertheless, Kuo and Tsai (1986) believe that immigrants can live separated from the dominant society and not, necessarily, suffer severe social isolation. As long as the immigrants are able to re-establish strong social networks in the new country, the chances to experience a better health status increase. Within this kind of ethnic support groups, immigrants not only have better chances to cushion the life stressors as a minority group in the new country but also can have better access to specific knowledge that help them to evade economic and labour exploitation as new immigrants.

Sonn and Fisher (1998) indicated that community settings such as sporting clubs, churches, and family and friendship networks greatly enhance immigrants socialization with similar others. These contexts are seen by the authors as activity settings where immigrants have a chance to reinforce and maintain cultural values and traditions while negotiating with the new receiving cultural environment. Activity settings would promote the sharing of experiences and the creation of common understanding and meaning for the immigration and acculturation process.

Sonn (2002) concluded from his research with groups of “coloured” South Africans and Chileans in Melbourne that social settings within these immigrant communities have played protective and integrative roles. Participation in cultural and social activities helped immigrants not only to reinforce their common sense of identity and sense of connectedness, but also gave meaning and direction to their experiences while connecting to the broader society. These findings support the idea that community ethnic support functions as a buffer of external social pressures, supplying immigrants with a more resilient attitude to adapt to the new environment.

Experiences of discrimination also have a strong impact on immigrants' lives. Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, and Reuter (2006) observed that discrimination episodes had a significant connection to individuals' psychological wellbeing among three groups of Finish, Russian and Estonian immigrants in Finland. As expected, the more immigrants experienced discrimination from the broader society, the lower their level of psychological wellbeing in general, and anxiety, depression and psychosomatic symptoms in particular. In this case, the levels of psychological distress due to discrimination remained significant, regardless the frequency of contact with social support networks. To the authors, it seems that the positive and protective effects of ethnic social support in the new society enhance feelings of psychological wellbeing, only when immigrants are not subjected to discrimination. Following the authors' hypothesis, immigrants who perceive discrimination from the broader society would tend to avoid ethnic behaviour and interaction with similar ones in order to protect themselves from enhancing the causes of further discriminatory experiences.

## **2.5 Factors impacting on the acculturation process**

There are many factors that play a crucial role in the acculturation strategies individuals choose and in the resulting levels of psychological stress. Some of these factors are constituted by personal characteristics built within a specific demographic, psychological and cultural context playing an influential role prior to immigration and during the acculturation process. Reasons that lead to immigration (the "pushing-out" forces), age, gender, level of education and knowledge of the host country's language and values

significantly impact on immigrants' adjustment process to a new cultural environment. However, forces affecting individuals' adjustment are complex and varied and not limited to immigrants' willingness and skills to integrate to a new country. Responses from the receiving society, including attitudes and expectations towards immigrants' acculturation outcomes also greatly impact on their adaptation process.

The phenomenon of inter-group relationships allows researchers to observe historical, ideological, economic and political forces affecting the acculturation process of immigrants and host societies. Differences in acculturation expectations between host members and immigrants could lead to in-group bias and the development of prejudice or discrimination. This phenomenon often provokes disappointment, frustration and stress among immigrants.

Within countries where immigration is a significant source of social and economic growth, integration is observed as the most positive adjustment outcome for immigrants and receiving societies. By accepting acculturation as a relational process where many factors intervene, multicultural countries should engage in effective educational programs, integrative media discourses and immigration policies that will not only help minorities to integrate but also assist host members to adapt to cultural, ideological and economic changes brought by immigration.

### **2.5.1 Factors Prior to Acculturation**

Some of the moderating factors existing prior to the relocation process are related to the immigrant's age, gender, educational level, reasons, motivations and expectations to immigrate, cultural distance between the individual's background and the host society and personality characteristics.

First of all, the circumstances and reasons surrounding the relocation can play a significant role in the way individuals deal with the adjustment process. Although there are not clear conclusions about the impact of these factors in the acculturation results, many authors believe that this process might be different whether individuals have been pushed or pulled out of their country of origin. Following this argument, voluntary immigrants who have left their country by the expectation of better economic, professional or adventure opportunities would present a proactive response and would be more positively disposed to the challenges of the immigration experience. On the other hand, individuals who have been "pushed out" from their home land due to political, religious or ethnic conflicts would present a reactive attitude and could experience more psychological adaptation problems (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2006; Vega et al., 1987).

However, the relationship between reasons to immigrate and levels of stress and adaptation is not always linear. As Berry and other authors (e.g., Berry & Sam, 2006) assert, not only reactive immigrants seem to be at risk. Highly proactive individuals could also be exposed to high levels of psychological conflict due to strong expectations about life in the new country, which do not always materialize.

Immigrants' age is one factor that can affect the outcome of the acculturation process. It is well known by researchers that if acculturation begins at an early stage of life (prior to primary school), the adaptation process to a new cultural environment will be smoother (Sam, 2000, 2006a; Suarez-Orozco, 2000). As the socialization process has not fully advanced in the home society, young immigrants would remain more flexible in cultural terms and experience lower levels of acculturation conflict. However, adolescent immigrants might face substantial problems while acculturating to a new country. This is probably related to the fact that adolescents would normally experience greater conflicts between peers and parents during that period of life. The pressure of adapting to a new cultural environment and affirming one's ethnic identity could also be combined to the problematic transition from childhood to adulthood. Apart from that, parents' ideals often play an influential role in adolescents' acculturation process, as young immigrants are often expected to integrate to the receiving community while maintaining ethnic languages, traditions and norms.

According to Aronowitz (1992) there is no research evidence that would confirm more social and emotional disorders among populations of immigrant children. However, when such disorders manifest, they generally relate to behavioural deviance and identity conflicts. As the author suggests, immigration *per se* does not necessarily reflect on conflictive adjustment outcomes. Parental attitudes towards social change and new experiences are observed as important mediators of a successful adjustment of their children. In this way, the overall result of children adaptation relates closely to the way the process has been mediated by their parents.

Gender is another factor that influence the acculturation outcome, and many authors believe that female immigrants are potentially more at risk than males (Berry & Sam, 2006; Darvishpour, 2002; Dion & Dion, 2001; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997). This unequal situation for women is related to specific gender values of the two societies (home country and host society), overload of external work and domestic responsibilities after immigration due to the lack of family and social support and, as a result, the limited time to learn new skills and language necessary to progress in the host country (Smits et al., 2003). Women's situation is also restricted by the host country's immigration policies, where women are often considered dependents of their husbands' legal and professional status (Berry & Sam, 2006).

Education is also observed as a factor that greatly influences the acculturation results. As Berry and Sam (1997) present, studies have shown that higher levels of education are related to lower levels of stress after immigration. In this context, education is considered to be a useful personal tool for problem analysis and problem solving, contributing to better adaptation outcomes. From another perspective, education also provides individuals with greater chances of work mobility, better occupational and social status, and more qualified skills to learn and adapt to the new values, norms and language of the new society. In addition to these factors, the knowledge of the host country's language is, clearly, a main advantage in the acculturation process.

Education is also closely related to the individuals' outcome in financial terms. However, a very common experience for educated and skilled migrants is a combination of status loss and limited status mobility. Most frequently migrants' status in the home

country is higher than the entry status as their credentials are often devalued in the new country. Berry indicated that “sometimes this is due to real differences in qualifications, but it may also be due to ignorance and/or prejudice in the society of settlement. The usual main goal of immigration (upward mobility) is thwarted, leading again to risk for various disorders, such as depression” (Berry, 1997, p. 22). Frequently immigrants from middle class backgrounds are the ones to experience the most significant losses in prestige, finding employment in positions far below their training and qualifications. This is often related to the immigrants’ language limitations and restricted recognition of their certifications in the new country.

Immigrants’ limited knowledge of the new country’s social axioms (common beliefs that guide social behaviours) has also been reported to impact on the adaptation process to a new social environment (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992a) . It has been observed that the greater the cultural differences between the immigrant’s and the host society’s culture, the more difficult would be the culture shedding, facilitating a poorer adaptation outcome for immigrants (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2006) .

#### **2.5.1.1 Knowledge of the Host Country’s Language**

As it is expected, the lack of language mastery of the host country along with the exposure to a whole new set of values, norms and communication ways expose immigrant

to various levels of stress and depression (Delander, Hammarstedt, Mansson, & Nyberg, 2005; Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Various authors (Chiswick, 1991; Hayfron, 2006; Kossoudji, 1988; McManus, Gould, & Welch, 1983) have reported that the ability to effectively speak the host country's language is a determining factor of the immigrant's positive adaptation in labour and social contexts. Good communication skills are necessary for the performance of daily tasks in the new country, such as establishing new interpersonal relationships with individuals from the mainstream society or looking for job opportunities. An effective knowledge of the dominant language helps immigrants to adjust to the host society as this process promotes the understanding and exchange of cultural values among individuals of different ethnic backgrounds. In this way, successful communication skills are basic components of an integration strategy.

Immigrant's knowledge of the host language is also correlated with better professional offers and higher incomes. Delander et al. (2005) indicated, as a result of their study with minority immigrants in Sweden, that learning the dominant language functioned as "an instrument to attain something that is important for the integration process, such as to create opportunities for individuals to support themselves and to participate in social life" (2005, p. 25). Because of the lack of efficient English knowledge, most Latin American immigrants analysed by Stone, Morales and Cortés (1996) encountered serious difficulties in finding and securing a job in Australia. Their research reinforced the notion that English language skills are closely related to immigrants' occupational status (McManus et al., 1983; Pendakur & Pendakur, 1998). Moreover, immigrants' chances to learn the dominant language, especially for women, are closely related to their educational

background, immigration policies, family and childcare support provided in the new country, and effective communication between immigrants and the language services providers organized by the Government.

In this way, even if the host society presents high levels of job vacancies, immigrants' employability and earning levels will greatly depend on their level of language mastery. Apart from the fact that most job offers are advertised in the dominant language, most employers highly prefer candidates who can successfully speak it. As expected, a poor language mastery will not only exclude immigrants from higher-paying jobs but also will facilitate a general social and labour segregation and stigmatization (Chiswick & Miller, 1995). Statistical data demonstrated the positive rewards of language mastery in the labour market: Australian Census in 1986 showed that English-language fluency is related to up to 6.4% higher earnings among immigrants from non English-speaking backgrounds (Hugo, 1989, 1991 ).

The knowledge and confidence in the host country's language has impacts on many aspects of immigrants' lives. Learning the dominant language has shown to have close relations to identity change, cultural assimilation and psychological adaptation. As previously mentioned, immigrants' positive attitude towards learning the dominant language seems to be a powerful ingredient in order to reach the ideal integration strategy indicated by Berry (1997).

However, this process is not always linear and, as Clément, Noels and Deneault (2001) pointed out, a positive attitude towards one specific acculturation strategy does not necessarily guarantee that it will be achieved. The authors conducted a research with four acculturating groups of students at the University of Ottawa, an officially bilingual

institution. These four groups were constituted by Francophone majority students (from Quebec), Francophone minority students (from Ontario), Anglophone majority students (from Ontario) and Anglophone minority students (from Quebec), all sharing the same campus.

Based on Berry's strategies of acculturation, Clément et al. (2001) confirmed that the majority (over 80%) of the students fell into the separation strategy. Apart from the analysis of the students' ingroup and outgroup identification, the authors observed the significance of language acquisition and its impact on students' identity choices. The results of this section strengthen Lambert's (1963; 1978) concept of subtractive and additive bilingualism.

According to Lambert (1963), the phenomenon of additive bilingualism frequently takes place when individuals from a dominant language group learn the language of a minority group. This process facilitates identification and adjustment with the minority group without greatly affecting individuals' previous identity and social values. The opposite occurs when a minority group learns the dominant language. In this case, the process of subtractive bilingualism often takes place. For these individuals, mastering skills in the dominant language impacts on their acculturation process and identity choices. Lambert indicates that individuals from minority groups frequently experience some level of erosion of their ingroup identification, decrease the mastery of their own language and tend to follow an assimilation pattern of acculturation.

The results of Clément et al. (2001) research reinforce the gains that result from inter-group contact and the relevance of a second-language learning. However, the benefits

from this were mainly observed among individuals from a dominant culture. Anglophone students were the only ones to present additive bilingualism, with signs of an integrative identity process of both cultural backgrounds, impacting positively on their adjustment process. An assimilation pattern was observed among Francophone minority students, presenting a tendency of losing proficiency in their own language as their knowledge of English increased. It seems that the chances for individuals from minority groups to retain identification with their own ethnic background while adapting to a dominant society are somehow restricted, not being able to fully benefit from integration in a multicultural society

### **2.5.2 Influence of the host society on immigrants' acculturation process**

Acculturation is not an isolated process that only depends on individual, historical and educational backgrounds of immigrants. A complete understanding involves the consideration of inter-group relations between immigrants and the host communities, along with the influence of diverse ideological, political, social and economic factors.

Although Berry's (1997) acculturation model is widely used, there are relevant conceptual shortcomings from his initial theoretical framework. As indicated by researchers and Berry himself (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Horenczyk, 1997), one of the limitations of his early model of acculturation is that it places the emphasis of the acculturation process on the immigrant group, frequently indicating that individuals have an relatively "free choice" when pursuing acculturation strategies. However, the acculturation process is a

phenomenon where intra and inter-group relations take place, and where immigrants and the host society acculturation attitudes meet and relate. The dominant society's expectations of immigrants' acculturation impact greatly on the final outcomes and the place immigrants have in the host country.

While more research is needed to better understand the content and intention of host society's attitudes and expectations towards acculturating groups, some authors (e.g., Horenczyk, 1997; Ward, 1996) have already stressed on the impact of these attitudes on immigrants' adjustment process.

Based on Berry's (1997) acculturation concept, Bourhis and colleagues (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997) developed the "Interactive Acculturation Model" in order to understand the influence of the acculturation expectations of host societies and the strategies followed by immigrants. This model explains that members of host societies can adopt one of five acculturative orientations towards immigrants: integration, segregation, assimilation, exclusion and individualism. The first three are based on Berry's model. The last two are variations of marginalisation, where members can either believe that immigrants are a threat to the national community and that the country should be closed to immigration (exclusion), or where host members and/or immigrants believe that there are no "right or wrong" identification choices, and that individuals should feel free to combine or select any strategy they are more comfortable with (individualism).

The understanding of the strategies and expectations immigrants and receiving societies endorse is useful as discrepant acculturation attitudes are often connected to social conflictive outcomes. According to Liu (2007), differences between dominant and minority acculturation expectations and attitudes are frequently associated to ingroup bias and

perceived prejudice or discrimination. On this issue, Horenczyk (1997) believes that contradictions between a positive general orientation of the dominant society towards immigrants and less positive reactions within the immigrants immediate social context might lead to frustration and disappointment among acculturating individuals. Due to the social, economic and political complexity of nations, similar immigrant groups might decide to acculturate in diverse ways in the same country, according to the local host community they are socially exchanging with.

Regarding the complex impact of the host society's attitudes towards immigrants and the way these are perceived by acculturating groups, some scholars (e.g., Ghuman, 2000; Van Oudenhoven, Van der Zee, & Bakker, 2002) sought to compare similar minority groups (sharing ethnic, social and economic characteristics) while adjusting to diverse countries open to immigration. For example, Van Oudenhoven et al. (2002) researched over 1500 Frisian (Netherlands) immigrant men and women in Canada, USA, and Australia. The three host countries, apart from being nations significantly open to immigration, were considered to share comparable economic, language and socio-cultural backgrounds. Participants were also very alike in all three countries. Levels of perceived wellbeing and acculturation outcomes were observed. According to the authors, immigrants in Canada and USA reported more successful adaptation results, presenting higher levels of integration with the receiving society while maintaining ethnic identity references. Results in Australia were the less positive, representing a higher percentage of marginalisators, more health problems and self reported a less successful acculturation outcome if compared to other Frisians in Canada or even USA.

Differences on these results were mainly related to immigration policies and social responses from the dominant society towards immigrants. According to the authors (Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2002), Canada presented the most integrative experience with multiculturalism among the analysed countries, while Australia, although officially an multicultural country, was still under the ideological influence of assimilation.

Responses from the receiving society and the resulting inter-group relations between host members and immigrants depend on a complex series of factors. Within the Australian multicultural context, members of the receiving society may feel that the intake of minority groups from distant cultural and language backgrounds could represent a threat to the maintenance of national values and symbols (Fisher & Sonn, 2007; Johnson et al., 2005; Liu, 2007). Apart from the cultural factor, mainstreamers can see immigrants as an economic threat if competition for scarce resources is perceived (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Jackson & Esses, 2000). As a result of perceived threat by the host society (Stephan et al., 2005), prejudice and discrimination often arises, having negative effects on the integration process of immigrants.

As Liu (2007) pointed out, in accordance to the social dominance theory (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004), minority immigrant groups in Australia often see multiculturalism as a benefit while members of the dominant society still observe it more as a threat. Within this case, host members observe multiculturalism as a threat to their cultural dominance and existing higher social status. When this is perceived, cultural boundaries are reinforced by accepting those who are similar and rejecting and discriminating those culturally or physically more distant. The social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) helps to understand these in-group and out-group

comparisons, where individuals develop categories and concepts of accepted values, ideals and behaviours seen as positive and favour those individuals who present or follow these tendencies. Minority immigrants who do not fit into national ideals or are not considered “worthy” due to their colour, cultural background, language skills or accent are often victims of rejection and discrimination (Fisher & Sonn, 2007). It seems that the influence of a long history of hierarchy of acceptability in Australia still presents a negative impact on the acculturation of minority immigrants, often making them feel that they can stay, but that they are not really welcomed. This could be a significant factor why many immigrants do not feel at home in Australia, in spite of spending most of part of their lives in the new country (Colic-Peisker, 2002; Forrest & Dunn, 2006; Liu, 2007). According to Liu (2007), a country with visible multicultural symbols such as ethnic restaurants, festivals and shops – to name a few – does not necessarily translate into a fair multicultural society where mutual acceptance and equal ethnic participation is truly valued. Unfortunately, minority immigrants under conditions of greater perceived discrimination would more likely separate or marginalize rather than assimilate or integrate to the dominant community (Barry & Grilo, 2003).

Apart from the factors discussed, the acculturation strategy that immigrants follow is also closely related to their capacity to reorganize sources of social support within the mainstream community, or within their own ethnic group. Suarez-Orozco (2001) pointed out that one of the most important factors having a positive impact on immigrants’ adaptation is the availability of a relevant social support network in the new environment. The presence of healthy social support resources could greatly facilitate immigrants’ (and

most especially women's) adjustment in the new country, diminishing risks of stress and depression. Interpersonal relationships not only provide guidance on how to proceed in the new society but also act as supporting groups where domestic, family and other responsibilities can be shared. As the author indicated, a well-functioning social support network could help to a great extent in the adjustment process of immigrants.

More recently, referring to dominant acculturating groups, Berry (2003, 2006) presented the term "acculturation expectations" to indicate the ideals and views held by members of the receiving society about the way immigrants should acculturate. Apart from these expectations, members of the host society follow different levels of endorsement of the concept of "multicultural ideology" on how they should change to accommodate other minority groups in the broader community (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977). Attitudes and expectations from the dominant society greatly impact on immigrants' acculturation strategies, and are also directly related to their levels of acculturative stress, psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.

The tendency to create a "melting pot" occurs when members of the dominant society support an assimilation expectation of minority groups. The exclusion of minority groups takes place when the mainstream group reinforces marginalisation. Multiculturalism, ideally, sees diversity as a key whole component of the country's identity and seeks the integration of minority and dominant groups respecting and reinforcing cultural multiplicity. However, for multiculturalism to exist, it is necessary that non-dominant groups accept, respect and value core components of the receiving society, while

the mainstream community is prepared to adjust itself and its institutions to better address the needs of a plural society, promoting positive levels of adjustment.

Discrepancies regarding acculturation preferences of dominant and immigrant groups could lead to social and psychological conflicts, and are often experienced as “acculturative stress” by acculturating individuals. According to Berry (2006a), recent findings support the idea that one of the most significant influence on immigrants’ acculturation outcomes is linked to the attitudes and behaviours endorsed by members of the receiving community towards them. Prejudice and discrimination seem to have a significant negative impact on immigrants’ capacity to adapt to the new social context. In this direction, an international study of over 5000 immigrant youth (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) showed that discrimination represented the most salient factor limiting immigrants’ positive psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.

## **2.6 Immigrants’ acculturation outcomes and its relation to psychological wellbeing**

Immigrants’ mental health and its relationship to the acculturation outcomes has been observed by many researchers (Berry et al., 1989; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Mossakowski, 2003; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Weaver, 1993). Miranda and Umhoefer (1998) investigated a group of 450 Latinos (average age of 31 years old) who immigrated to the United States and had been living there for an average of 19 years. The analysis of the acculturation process and its effects on mental health showed that bicultural Latinos, those individuals who decide to preserve components of their native

culture and incorporate some values, practices and behaviours of the host society, obtained significantly lower scores on depression and higher scores on social interest when compared to high acculturated individuals (following an assimilation strategy) or low acculturated immigrants (marginalized). In this sense, integration promoted biculturalism, representing the acculturation strategy more beneficial to the mental health of this group of Latin immigrants. The fact that participants who followed a bicultural perspective showed less depressive symptoms and more social interest reinforces Berry's (1990) idea that integration is the ideal strategy to adjust to a new society.

The research work of many authors (e.g., Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Lopez, Haigh, & Burney, 2004) had weakened the conventional belief that assimilation with the broader host culture would increase immigrant's social or psychological wellbeing. A study with a group of first and second generation of Latin Americans in Melbourne, developed by Lopez, Haigh and Burney (2004) reinforced the idea that as immigrants become more assimilated to Australian values and culture, their levels of stress rises. Differences in stress levels between first and second generation might be related to the fact that first generation immigrants were recruited through social ethnic clubs where the impact of stress can be better buffered by the community support. In the case of the second generation of Latinos, they were recruited through friends and relatives and represented, overall, a group much more assimilated to the broader society and less participative in maintaining their ethnic cultural identity through community clubs.

Therefore, as stated by Miranda and Umhoefer (1998), the best possible outcome for immigrants would be to encourage the identification and participation within communities who share similar cultural values and traditions but, at the same time, the

inclusion of new cultural elements of the host society. This position would enable immigrants to deal in a functional and balanced way with both cultural repertoires. As the researchers explained, “psychological resiliency during the acculturation process may depend on the individual’s ability to become bicultural (...) Those individuals who are able to incorporate functional skills from the host culture fit better in the new environment and do so with fewer detrimental effects to their mental health” (Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998, p. 6).

As these academics have shown, integration seems to be the ideal and healthier strategy in theory, although the conditions encountered by some minority groups in many countries do not always favour this outcome. In many occasions, new immigrants do not feel empowered with a free-choice acculturation strategy, as stated by Berry (1990; Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 1989).

## CHAPTER 3

### THE INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON OF THE FEMALE IMMIGRATION

The close attention paid to women within the immigration process represents an academic focus of, approximately, the last three decades. Before this, immigrant women were frequently stereotyped as dependant wives, unproductive and isolated members of the community not included in most analysis of the reasons, ways and effects of immigration. Until the 1970's, as mentioned by Morokvasik (1983), the traditional female role was reinforced in some European labour migration systems, with the ideal "to promote women so that they can play fully their role for which they are made, the one of helpmate, of housewife and of educator" (Morokvasic, 1983, p. 17).

The growing interest on female migration resulted, mainly, from two specific social phenomena, one is the feminist perspective on women's role in the society since the 1970's, and the other is the acknowledgment of women as economically productive members. Within the American academic context, the so-called "new ethnicity" and "identity politics" movements of the late 1960's, along with the feminist values, promoted the entrance of many women into graduate schools placing a special interest at the historical records of women and migration (Sinke, 2006).

It was between 1975 and 1990 that historians and sociologists within an interdisciplinary context of academic influences (such as American, Ethnic and Gender studies) developed the first research works with immigrant women from Asia and Latin

America (Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). During the 1990's, immigration academics started focusing on the psychological and social impacts of this process in women and men's lives, studying the adaptation and acculturation into the new society. As a result, immigration studies considered gender as a significant geographically and culturally related construct.

The concept of gender can be understood as “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1991, p. 14). Complementing this notion, Wade and Tavris (1999) had explained gender as a sum of duties, rights and behaviours that a specific culture attributes and expect from femininity and masculinity. In this way, gender roles and expectations are a direct result of cultural socialization, and they vary depending on historical, economic, political and cultural contexts. A good understanding of the characteristics and influence of gender values in society seems to be extremely important in social analysis as it shows possible socially constructed mechanisms for female oppression and subordination (Pedraza, 1991; UNESCO, 2003).

The relevance of research on female immigration is based on the assumption that, as many authors indicated (e.g., Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997; Sullivan, 1984), immigrant women are more likely to experience greater hardships in comparison to immigrant men. These challenges are a result of a combination of factors. Immigrant women with limited family or social support networks in the new environment and limited skills in the host country's language often experience restricted access to information and knowledge resources of the labour market in the new country, mainly as a result of the accumulation of domestic and motherhood responsibilities.

Immigrant women frequently experience an overloaded reality, trying to combine the pressures of paid work with family and domestic duties. In most cases, these women have to find this a difficult balance without social or family support to help them, especially with children care (Alcorso, 1991, 1995a; DIEA, 1985).

This situation often leads to a serious shortage of time to pursue education, learn new social skills and the language of the host country. In many cases, these circumstances become a trap for female immigrants who do not have many opportunities to work on a positive integration strategy. As a result of the combination of traditional female responsibilities, restricted family or social support networks and the relative isolation from the mainstream society, immigrant women often experience high levels of psychological stress, and, even, depression (Noh, Wu, Speechley, & Kaspar, 1992; Vega et al., 1987).

Immigration from more traditional countries to more egalitarian ones does not necessarily represent a way to improve women's status in the society. Morokvasic (1983; 1984) has stressed this point, stating that unless immigration is followed by substantial changes in women's reproductive role within the family with a subsequent renegotiation of female's productive position in labour and educational contexts, relocation *per se* does not represent a major source of social change for women. If these factors remain unaffected, the expected benefits from immigration might be delayed or might not even be perceived by women.

### **3.1 Challenges related to female immigration**

Various authors (e.g., Apfelbaum, 1993; Boyd, 1984; Darvishpour, 1999, 2002; Dion & Dion, 2001; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997) have argued that immigrant women do not encounter the same social conditions in a new country as immigrant men and, on many occasions, the expected benefits of immigration might be delayed for them. Dion and Dion (2001) suggested that the negotiation of expectations and responsibilities related to family functions is a conflictive challenge that women have to face while acculturating to a new country. The constraints and values attached to traditional female gender roles not only impact women's family and personal life, but also affect their labour outcomes in the new country.

Boyd (1984) observed, in her analysis of immigrant women in Canada, that foreign born individuals do not find the same economic and labour opportunities as native born and often experience some levels of discrimination in the new society, closely related to immigrant's lower level of education, occupational skills, language knowledge and country of origin. Immigrant women not only face more stratification within the workplace and the society in general, but also are more likely to suffer from a "double disadvantage", where gender values intersect the already conflictive process of immigrating and adjusting to a new culture.

Gender relations and power resources were particularly observed by Darvishpour (2002) within a group of immigrant families in Sweden, as that country shows the higher rates of family conflict and separation among most groups of immigrants than among the wider society. Results from national Swedish statistics showed not only that family

instability and separations are more frequent among immigrants than Swedes, but that non-European immigrants divorce more than European immigrants. Among these groups, South American (Chilean) and Iranian families with children were the two groups at greatest divorce risk than any other immigrant group in the period 1991-1992. Darvishpour interviewed 30 Iranian participants – men and women – divorced between 1984 and 1995 living in Sweden. The author found that the immigration process had, very often, been a painful process of readjusting traditional family structures and relations between men and women in a completely new social environment. Education and professional development showed to be relevant resources that impact on family life and the unequal power relationships. Within this study (Darvishpour, 2002), the biggest changes were observed in families where housewife immigrants had the opportunity to progressively decrease their dependency on their husbands by continuing with their education and entering the paid workforce in Sweden. On this point, the author indicated that “sociopolitical measures in various ways, by increasing the power resources of women, have made it easier for women to solve the social and economic problems that can arise in connection with a divorce” (Darvishpour, 2002, p. 280). Along with the modification of power resources between the spouses comes an intense risk of family conflict and separation. The high incidence of divorce among immigrant families suggest that it is the changed women’s role in society and their fight for liberation rather than a change in men’s role, that leads to conflictive breakdowns.

This research (Darvishpour, 2002) indicated how female immigrants’ lives dramatically changed due to new social and economic empowering resources in Sweden, playing a more significant role in the decision-making process of the family structure.

Apart from the understanding of some causes for divorce among immigrant families, this research has shown a growing family pattern among immigrants, constituted by single mothers with children.

However, the transformation of more traditional values does not occur in many immigration stories. Fernández Kelly (2005) presented the impact of immigration on the economic, political and ideological aspects of gender in two groups of Hispanic women working in factories of Florida and California. The author examined the changes that working immigrant women provoke in the negotiation of roles within the household. It was observed that these immigrants still presented an unambiguous acceptance of patriarchal values that define male and female roles and behaviours. Most of these Hispanic immigrants did not have previous working experience and the entrance into the paid labour force in the new country mainly represented the need to maintain the family integrity and to conquer better class-related standards. On this, Fernandez Kelly argued that “the meaning of women’s participation in the labour force remains plagued by paradox (...) Paid employment responds to and increases women’s desires for greater personal autonomy and financial independence” (Fernández Kelly, 2005, p. 354). This situation could have a positive impact on women’s abilities to negotiate unfavourable gender division of duties in the private and public spheres.

The study (Fernández Kelly, 2005), nonetheless, shows that women’s search for external paid work is, in many cases, the result of a severe financial need, rather than seeking more egalitarian values of life. In this context, women work as a result of a vulnerable and weakening situation and not an empowering process. The author concludes

that “exile did not eliminate these [patriarchal] values; rather, it extended them in telling ways” (Fernández Kelly, 2005, p. 354).

Jones-Correa (1998) reached similar conclusions in his study with Latin American women in New York City, observing that women’s participation in the new society is very limited by traditional family responsibilities unaffected after immigration. Discussing female labour participation, he stated that women’s inclusion into the workforce does not relieve them of traditional social expectations. In this way, the author stated that immigration greatly restricts women’s work experience as, more likely than men, they try to adapt to flexible jobs in smaller business, with lower pay and closer to their homes. This is, most probably, a result of their need to stay nearer their families so they can balance paid work, domestic duties and, in particular, childcare. Nevertheless, as stated previously, female exposure to paid work also leads to positive changes, where immigrant women with financial resources feel more empowered to negotiate with their husbands and take important decisions within their families.

In spite of the female exposure to the paid workforce and the ideological gender revolution, immigrant women still face an overload of responsibilities within their families. Pesquera (1993) and Franco, Sabattini and Crosby (2004) found that for employed Latinas living in the USA the ideological shift did not necessarily reflect a change in family behaviours. The wish to demand a more egalitarian division of responsibilities with their partners did not represent a direct increase in male’s housework participation. Although gender values were socially accepted and seen as necessary, it did not assure behavioural endorsement.

Apart from that, the vulnerable financial reality and the limited public policies protecting and supporting immigrant women – a situation connected to the restricted historical visibility in academic research – has been observed as one of the reasons why many female immigrants remain in unequal and disadvantaged positions within their families and societies. In the particular case of female immigrants with children, their situation is constrained by the limited policies and childcare programs aiming to facilitate their availability to paid employment (Dion & Dion, 2001; Riaño, 2003; Toro-Morn, 1995). Women who immigrate with low levels of the host country's language are often employed within unskilled or low paid jobs, working long hours under tough conditions. Within this scenario, immigrant working women are often overcharged with domestic and childcare duties. Due to the lack of low or free of cost childcare, immigrant women struggle to find available time to upgrade educational and professional skills and then, remain trapped in a vicious cycle that impacts negatively on their integration outcome (Alcorso, 1989, 1991, 1995a; DIEA, 1985; Stone et al., 1996).

For many reasons, immigrant women seem to be more financially vulnerable than men, struggling to transform a basic survival matter into a gender values negotiation with the society. Research undertaken by Hayfron (2002) outlined the unequal position of immigrant working women in Norway. In spite of increasing higher levels of female participation in the labour force, women's earnings are always lower than men's. Moreover, average earnings for immigrant women are lower than for Norwegians. This situation reinforces the double disadvantage position of immigrant women, since they experience the compounding effects of gender and immigration. Seeking to identify the impact of factors such as gender and ethnic background among immigrant women, the

author confirmed that the gender effect far outweighs the ethnicity effect. As observed, the gender factor is more important than ethnicity to explain the earnings gap between Norwegian men and immigrant women.

### **3.1.1 Gender values and its impact on immigrant women's psychological wellbeing**

Most immigrants experience some degree of stress trying to adapt to a new society. The conflictive demands derived from the acculturation process, where cultural values between the society of origin and the new country often differ, could lead to role and identity crises and the occurrence of discrimination episodes. Apart from the challenges related to the acculturation process, immigrant women with children are at high risk of suffering from stress and depression due to the overwhelming combination of responsibilities in the new country, without – in most cases – any source of family or social support.

The relationship between socially induced stressors and their consequences for the mental health of immigrants has been observed by several authors (Lin & Ensel, 1989; Lin et al., 1999; Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Noh et al., 1992; Thoits, 1982). Some evidence drawn from these studies reinforces the idea that the immigration process has different effects on men and women, that traditional gender values still play an important role in everyday life of these individuals and that the overload of responsibilities has a direct impact on women's health and acculturation process, especially if they do not have strong social support in the new society.

Noh and his colleagues (1992) studied a large sample of Korean immigrants in Toronto with the purpose of identifying what factors contributed the most to gender differences in reported depression. The authors looked at two alternatives, the “double burden hypothesis” and the “power hypothesis”. The “double burden hypothesis” emphasizes that negative psychological outcomes like stress and depression are mainly due to role overload (domestic and family duties combined with external paid work). On the other side, the “power hypothesis” proposes that psychological stress partially results from the ways power is allocated within the family. Within this perspective, factors such as external paid work are considered potential enhancers of women’s power capacity within the family and the community in general, promoting lower levels of psychological stress.

The results reached by Noh et al. (1992) indicated that immigrant women presented a higher incidence of depression than immigrant men. The employment factor (being employed) appeared as a particular strong risk factor for women. Among the observed participants, employed immigrant women were almost eight times as likely to experience depression. Gender differences in depression were more evident in the most “advantaged” immigrant group (greater income, higher educational level) where men presented a much lower tendency for depression than their partners.

It seems likely that the approval of more traditional gender values within the family is one of the causes for different gender levels of depression and stress. Within this context, employment is observed as a stressful factor if combined with the fulfillment of domestic and family roles, as the double burden or role overload hypothesis propose. As Dion and Dion (2001) referred, “it is also possible that the greater reported depression among employed women might be partly attributable to the process of renegotiating family,

specifically, spousal roles, as a result of changed circumstances associated with immigration” (2001, p. 514)

Other factors have been considered in order to understand the relationship among the stressors, mediators and coping resources and the distress/health outcome in immigrants. In a more recent study with a large group of Koreans in Toronto (who had immigrated at the age of 18 or older), Noh and Avison (1996) analysed how coping resources function to mediate or buffer the potentially harmful impact of social stressors resulted from the acculturation process. A basic assumption of this research is that it is not just the exposure to life stressors that determine immigrant’s mental health, but also the pre-existing resources that individual possess in order to deal with these conflicts (such as personality, self-esteem, coping skills, and sources of effective social support). Research findings indicated that immigrants’ self-esteem (also connected to previous stressful experiences) had a direct impact on their levels of psychological distress and that not all sources of social support are equally effective in reducing immigrants’ psychological distress. According to this study, ethnic social support plays a significant influence on immigrants’ depressive symptomatology, while social support from the broader community has almost no role in this process. In this way, empathetic relationships among immigrants of similar ethnic backgrounds represent a powerful tool to deal with the challenges resulting from the acculturation process.

## CHAPTER 4

### LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA

From the late 1960s onwards, many Australian officials were sent to South America to develop immigration programs in order to increase Australian population (Botzenhart, 2006). In 1968, the first Australian immigration officer in Latin America took office at the Australian Embassy in Buenos Aires, promoting the flow of migrants from the region. At first instance, a special prominence was given to the recruitment of Northern European refugees who had relocated to Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

As Botzenhart (2006) indicated, the influence of the White Australian Policy was reflected by the fact that 10% of all Latin Americans who arrived in Australia until 1974 were born in Europe. In the case of Argentina, this number was even higher, reaching approximately the 20%. The discriminatory vestiges of the White Australia Policy remained at the administrative levels even long after its abolition in 1973. During the period of 1974 and 1985, 17% of all Argentineans arriving in Australia were European born.

The major Latin American immigration wave occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. After that period, the number of Latin immigrants stabilized, a change related to the end of dictatorships in most affected countries and more favourable economic conditions. Nevertheless, the Latin immigration in Australia can be divided in three major periods of time, one occurring during the late 1960s, the second during the 1970s and the third one during the 1980s.

Until today, Chileans have accounted for the largest group of Latinos in Australia, followed by Argentineans and Uruguayans. The 1996 Australian Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999) registered 61,471 Latin American born people living in Australia. Approximately half of these immigrants were Chileans. In 2005, Chileans represented more than 40,000 residents in Australia, and the estimate for Argentineans and Uruguayans is about 10,000 residents each.

Most immigrants from the region related two main causes to leave their countries: economic hardships and political persecution. In this brief description of Latin American immigration in Australia, special attention will be given to Chilean, Argentinean and Uruguayan immigration not only because they are the biggest Latin American immigrant groups in Australia, but also because they represent the home countries of the participants of these research.

#### **4.1 Chile**

The first immigration wave from Chile arrived in Australia during Frei's Presidency in the late 1960s, prompted by economic difficulties and an unstable political situation that dominated the Christian-Democrat government during the period 1968-1970. However, the most significant movements of Chilean migration occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. The election of Chilean Socialist Salvador Allende in 1970 promoted the second major migration movement. By 1972, Chile was experiencing a severe climate of economic frustration and political violence. Many Chileans from a more advantaged economic class emigrated to Australia fearing a Soviet-style system, and favoured by a new program

oriented to skilled immigration. These immigrants were considered a very similar group to the one that migrated during Frei's presidency, constituted by middle class Chileans (professionals, business managers, technicians and tradesmen) with relatively high levels of education and some basic knowledge of English. As Jupp (2001) explains, few of these Chileans relied on assisted migration packages or any other help from the Australian Government, they were not lodged in hostels and sought not to live in areas with high levels of immigrants. In fact, many of these Chileans – considered as the “anticipatory refugees” – returned to their home country after the military coup of 1973.

By 1973 the Chilean economic crisis was at its highest. It was in September of 1973 that Pinochet's military coup took over Allende's democratic government. The third wave of Chilean immigrants occurred as a consequence of Pinochet's coup, a dictatorship that eliminated all left wing political parties, dissolved the Congress and trade unions, restricted constitutional rights and allowed the government to rule by decree. The 17 years of military dictatorship motivated the third and most significant emigration flow (Botzenhart, 2006). Nevertheless, as the Australian Embassy in Santiago did not organize a political refugee program during Pinochet's government, most Chileans sought asylum in European or other South American countries. As Jupp (2001) pointed out, the end of the military presence in 1990 did not reflect on a significant number of Chileans returning to their home country, as it would have been expected.

Until the 1990s, the Chilean community grew considerably in Australia, representing the largest Spanish-speaking ethnic group. After Pinochet's government, with improved living conditions in the country, the migration rates of Chileans significantly decreased.

## 4.2 Argentina

During the 1970s took place the biggest Argentinean migration to Australia, when the country was affected by serious political instability. Argentina, considered one of the six wealthiest countries in the world – wealthier than France in 1955 – and a very prosperous recipient of European immigrants, experienced emigration as its economy seriously declined during the 1970s. Many Argentineans decided to emigrate during Peron's government. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, as Botzenhart (2006) explained, an important amount of scientists and other highly-qualified Argentineans left the country forced by an increasing economic decline and a administration that did not favour non-Peronist intellectuals and professionals.

Argentineans also suffered the effects of military dictatorships and reached out for help during the so-called “dirty war”, a period of repression, torture and violation of human rights during the 1970's and early 1980's. However, it seems that most Argentinean migration to Australia did not belong to the politicized intelligentsia, nor were they activists, militant unionist or students. Most Argentineans seem to have migrated because their country was offering restricted economic opportunities, with low perspectives of future improvement. Only a relatively few Argentineans immigrants in Australia reported political reasons as triggers for migration. Many Argentinean immigrants moved to Australia under the Assisted Migration Scheme (Jupp, 2001) during the late-1970s. In fact, over 80% of the Argentinean-born immigrants who came to Australia between 1974 and 1982 received travel assistance and stayed initially in hostels in New South Wales and Victoria. Most of them came from Argentina's most influential cities and looked to settle in

the biggest Australian urban centres, such as Sydney or Melbourne. Despite some relatively high concentration of Argentines in certain suburbs, there have not created any Argentinean suburbs as seen with other ethnic communities.

After General Videlas' dictatorship (1973–1983), democracy was finally restored with the election of President Alfonsín in 1983. Following that period, the Argentinean population grew modestly in Australia until the 1990's, mainly prompted by family reunion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999).

### **4.3 Uruguay**

Uruguay was considered as one of the most progressive Latin American countries, popularly known as the “Switzerland of America” because of its high levels of literacy and good standards of economic life. From 1939 until 1973 the country had experienced uninterrupted democratic governments. However, the political crisis of the late 1960's and early 1970's led to the 1973's coup. This military dictatorship produced a serious economic stagnation, high levels of unemployment and an increased unequal income distribution in the population. These economic and political conditions induced Uruguayans to migrate to more stable and democratic societies (Botzenhart, 2006).

The first migration wave of Uruguayans arrived in Australia in the late 1960's, and it reached its highest number in 1974. Uruguayan emigration during the period 1963–1985 represented 12% of the country's 3.5 million inhabitants. Out of that total number of emigrants, 7 per cent chose Australia as a final destination (Jupp, 2001). It is believed that

at least half of these immigrants was sponsored by the Assisted Passage Program of the Australian Government. Most of them initially stayed at hostels in Sydney and Melbourne.

Jupp (1995) indicated that Uruguayans are considered a social group that manifest high value to family network and to their neighbourhood or ethnic community connection. As observed with other immigrants from Argentina and Chile, religion *per se* does not appear as a major social source that develops more community bonds between Uruguayans in Australia. Opportunities to maintain traditions and strong social ethnic connections are favoured through the use of the Spanish language within the households, through the organization of Uruguayan festivals, dancing schools and community clubs. Uruguayan immigration gradually decreased after the return of democracy in 1985. Since 1986, the Uruguayan immigrant group in Australia has remained stable.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**AUSTRALIA: BETWEEN SIMILATION**  
**AND INTEGRATION**

Immigration has been the major source of population growth in Australia. Apart from the Aborigines, all Australians connect in some way to international immigration. Between the 1880s and the 1960s, Australia's immigration policies followed a path of isolation based on racial factors by adopting the White Australia Policy. This program, officially known as the restrictive immigration policy of the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, sought to exclude non-European immigrants from coming to Australia based on racial discriminatory beliefs.

The basic purpose of the White Australia policy was to promote an ethnically homogeneous society, where all immigrants would assimilate to Australian-British values and behaviours. Despite its strong impact, the exclusion of non-European immigrants was never a written law. The 1901 Act was empowered with absolute discretion regarding its ways to allow immigrants into Australia and never had to specify the basis or reasons for not accepting some minority groups (Vasta & Castles, 1996). However, the Chinese case was different as the colonial legislation was very clear about the undesirability to accept immigrants from that country (Jupp, 1995). One of the well-known mechanisms to implement the White Australia Policy was the implementation of a dictation test of 500 words in any European language to any potential candidate. Although it was not officially stated, it was understood that the immigrant would not know the test language. As a logic

result, this test was a very successful technique to isolate Australia from all its closest neighbouring countries.

The dictation test was abolished in 1958 with the Migration Act and simpler mechanisms to allow immigrants in Australia were implemented. Gradually during the 1970s, the limitations of the White Australia Policy became clearer. As Jupp (1995) mentioned, Australia's migration policy shift towards a more open system occurred not only as a result of the growing loss of interest from Europeans to migrate to Australia (due to better life conditions in Europe), but also as a national economic, social and political need to be better connected to the recently independent Asian countries. Apart from that, theories and attitudes based on racial discriminatory values were gradually losing support among the international academic and political environments.

The most significant shift in immigration policies took place as a result of Whitlam's government, elected in late 1972. Whitlam formally abandoned any kind of discrimination based on race, colour or nationality for migration purposes. The previously adopted ideal to assimilate immigrants to the broader society gradually lost force and a new direction towards multiculturalism was politically accepted since 1973. From that period on, immigrants from different ethnic groups were allowed and even encouraged to maintain their customs and traditions. During this government, an Office of Commissioner for Community Relations was organized in 1975 in order to avoid any further racial discrimination in the country. Apart from that, language classes were available for non-English speaking immigrants, the SBS (Special Broadcasting System) was created in order to provide media programs for several ethnic groups and some administrative measures

were taken to facilitate immigrant's access to social services and programs (Jupp, 2002; Ozdowski, 1985)

With multiculturalism, any kind of racial discrimination had to be put aside as the regional sources for immigrants have changed. In spite of the welcoming of Middle Eastern immigrants and recruitment campaigns in Latin America during the late 1960s and 1970s, the immigrant intake in Australia was not enough to counter the declining European intake. According to Jupp, "it became absurd to exclude professional Indians and Chinese while still encouraging the arrival of Balkan, Middle Eastern and Latin American unskilled workers" (Jupp, 1995, p. 209). With the shift towards a skilled migration, Australia tried to resolve the trained population shortage in some specific professional areas. As a consequence of this change, any kind of racial exclusion and immigrant assimilation expectations in Australia have been officially abandoned.

Nevertheless, as Jupp (1995) believes, Australia has been protected from reality and isolated from the rest of the world by the British Empire until 1942 and by the White Australia Policy until 1973. In spite of new migration policies and modern political discourses, the strong ideology of the White British-Australia impacted in the integration process of non-European immigrants during the 1970s and 1980s and, until today, subjectively determines who is Australian and who is an outsider (Fisher & Sonn, 2007; Sonn, 2002).

## **5.1 From the White Australian policy to Multiculturalism**

Immigrants' assimilation into Australian values and culture was one of the main goals of the migration policies until the 1970s. Through assimilation, immigrants would be culturally and socially absorbed by the dominant society and would, eventually, become indistinguishable from the Anglo-Australian population (Castles, 1992; Taft, 1964). Indeed, the term "new Australia" stripped away home culture (Fisher & Sonn, 2005).

As cultural pluralism and the formation of "ethnic communities" were not officially promoted, assimilation was to be achieved when nobody from the broader society would notice the physical or cultural presence of immigrants. Jupp (2002) presents two possible ways to understand the term "assimilation". At an earlier stage, assimilation in Australia was identified as the disappearance of any characteristics that would differentiate individuals from each other. This perspective, officially adopted until late 1960's, was the main component of the "White Australia Policy" and a requirement for admission in the country. Within this definition, colour or any physical ethnic features made non-Europeans unsuitable. In spite of later changes in Australian migration policies and the official shift from White Australia to a multiethnic country, the term assimilation continued to be used. However, what was expected from immigrants at a later stage was the adoption of Australian values, culture and language, which were considered to be uniform and evident in its British tradition.

The belief that all Australians adhere to the same cultural values and that they can trace their origins in the same monoethnic society was one of the misconceptions supporting the ideal of assimilation (Stratton, 1988, 2000). Apart from neglecting all cultural and social

impact of post-war immigration, official supporters of assimilationism also denied the presence of Indigenous people in Australia.

By the end of the 1960s the ideal to make almost invisible all immigrants, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, along with the purpose to promote the maintenance of a homogeneous Australia seemed unrealistic. Most immigrant workers suffered from serious labour and social segregation, had low levels of English knowledge and were living in industrial suburbs close to their workplaces in relatively poor conditions (Jupp, 2002).

The ideal of assimilating immigrants into the broader British-Australian society still influences the national ideology. In spite of the immigrant intake from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the support provided to these ethnic groups to maintain their values and traditions was somehow limited. In fact, different ethnic groups were allowed to conserve their traditions such as religion or food preferences as long as this occurred within the privacy of their domestic boundaries or communities.

The shift towards multiculturalism embodies the need for Anglo-Australians to respect and accept cultural differences and the significance of promoting ethnic communities and institutions. Since Prime Minister Malcom Fraser (1981) took office, the ideal of a multicultural country sought to ensure that individuals from minority backgrounds were able to maintain their ethnic identity. Fraser's government reshaped multiculturalism with an emphasis on a culturally pluralistic country, redirecting the provision of welfare services for immigrants to specific ethnic organizations (Jupp, 1995, 2002). Within this context, multiculturalism was expected to provide a better sense of national unity in an ethnically diverse country. The creation of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA)

and, as previously mentioned, the organization of the Special Broadcasting Service providing multicultural television and radio services to ethnic groups were part of the measures to ensure that the specific needs of immigrants were taken into consideration.

A political change towards multiculturalism, by accepting the relevance of the linguistic and cultural differences of each ethnic community, was expected to promote a better integration and social participation of immigrants in the Australian society. Apart from that, multiculturalism sought to leave behind racist and isolationist components of the Australian identity. As a result of this change, the country followed a more open direction towards a fair integration of immigrants, in particular those from non-English speaking countries. Nevertheless, there are still many contradictions regarding the application of multicultural policies and the real integration of ethnic minorities into what it means to be Australian.

The transfer of the immigrant's welfare services from the mainstream social system to ethnic groups and organizations is one of the criticized aspects of the multicultural policies (Castles, 1992). This shift resulted to be a cost-effective solution for the government as staffing levels and conditions could be lower than in mainstream agencies. However, with the growing recognition of the immigrants' potential to represent political votes, the funding of certain services enabled the government to decide which community group they would officially support and resulted, as Castles mentioned, in "a useful form of political patronage which tended to strengthen the role of traditionalist leaders" (Castles, 1992, p. 555). Apart from that, as the author pointed out, the service delivery based on ethnicity tends to segregate even more immigrants from the broader society. At the same time, ignoring ethnicity and providing their assistance within the mainstream welfare system might neglect specific needs and promote more discrimination. It seems that, in either case,

there is a mainstream deficiency in the successful application of multicultural ideals such as equity and inclusion. Besides this, minority immigrants in Australia are continually underrepresented within political, public and private institutions. It seems that Australian organizations have not changed yet in order to reflect a multicultural society and remains, until present, very much structured in British standards. People who differ from those in power because of their appearance, accent or values do not have an equal opportunity to be politically or economically represented (Castles, 1992; Jakubowicz, 1997; Jupp, 2002).

As Jupp concludes on this issue, multiculturalism has provided at the national level the awareness of various population groups, but has failed in culturally transforming its institutions. In this way, it seems difficult to understand the conservative political reaction against multiculturalism and the hostility to ethnic change during the 1990's with the One Nation party, as multiculturalism "did not challenge the predominance of English-speaking Australian-born politicians, public servants and opinion leaders" (Jupp, 2002, p. 121).

Moreover, multiculturalism in Australia still struggles in promoting real integration. Language is observed as one of the major distinctive characteristics of a culture and a successful way to preserve values and traditions. However, courses and institutions promoting the maintenance of the community languages for second generation of immigrants are scarce. Ethnic languages in Australia are considered as "foreign" languages, in spite of the fact that 17% of the population speaks a community language (Smolicz, 1997). As assimilation is having a deeper impact especially within the second generation of immigrants who often loose mastery of their ethnic language, Smolicz (1997) proposed the encouragement of community language programs at school levels in order to favour real integration and multiculturalism in Australia.

The idea of the Australian Nation is, to a large extent, still based on Anglo-British cultural and monoethnic concepts. This fails to reflect the contemporary Australian reality. The fear of otherness, as Smolicz believes, would disappear “when the acceptance of cultural diversity becomes part of the overarching framework of shared values in a multicultural nation” (Smolicz, 1997, p. 182). Following that ideal, political leaders should do more to disentangle job, residential and identity segregation for minority groups, advancing on a deeper multicultural understanding that goes beyond food and festival contacts. To integrate immigrants and their families means to incorporate them into a changing Australian reality, acknowledging their role and significance in the present and future stories of the country.

Multiculturalism in Australia has certainly progressed in providing more social acceptance towards cultural differences and has promoted community organizations able to better understand the needs of different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there are still many measures to be taken in order to equally incorporate first and second generation of immigrants from minority groups into the social fabric of the country and to be truly accepted as Australians. There is still the need to work at the political and educational levels in order to promote an ideological shift attached to the construction of Australian identity, an identity that until today is related to the white Australian dream (Hage, 2000; Vasta & Castles, 1996).

Zevallos’ (2003) research with young women of Latin American background in Australia reinforced this point. Participants of this study reported that, from their perspective, the contemporary Australian identity is still very much linked to an Anglo-Celtic ideal. Most of those young women do not see themselves as Australians as they feel

they are not accepted or seen as such by the dominant society. The constant question “Where are you from?” that most first and second generation of immigrants encounter seems like a “double edged sword question”. From one side it represents the acknowledgement of various cultural groups in Australia and could promote respect and understanding of different ethnic traditions. At the same time, this kind of question embodies the potential to isolate immigrants and their descendants due to their physical or linguistic differences. This question also implies that the person being asked “must not be Australian”, mainly as a result of stereotypes still attached to the national white identity. To the author, multiculturalism is still used in a descriptive way, serving to acknowledge and to accept the ethnic diversity of the country but without necessarily reviewing the parameters that constitutes the contemporary national identity.

Still based on external values such as physical appearance or language accent, Australian multiculturalism fails to integrate first and second generation of immigrants as members of the same society (Lopez et al., 2004) As Zevallos (2003) concluded, there are still great discrepancies between the official ideology of a multicultural and integrating Australia and the lived experiences of several immigrant groups.

## **RATIONALE AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

Immigration is a challenging transition that involves not only geographical relocations but also the adjustment to new economic, political and social environments. Within this process, taken for granted values, ways of communicating and behaving have to be re-evaluated as immigrants need to understand and adjust to new cultural parameters (Fisher & Sonn, 2005). This phenomenon is often more challenging to immigrants who do not possess the necessary language skills and do not have an effective social support network in the new country. The specific case of the female immigration has been under-investigated until an academic shift that originated during the 1970s (Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Until then, immigrant women were mostly considered as dependents wives out of the labour force (Morokvasic, 1983, 1984).

However, studies indicated higher indices of labour participation for immigrant women than for local women in many host countries. Although most immigrant women work, they are often part of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, where they work long hours under stressful and unhealthy conditions. Manufacturing or cleaning services are common labour environments for immigrant women with low levels of education and limited language skills (Alcorso, 1989, 1991; Boyd, 1984). This is a common outcome in Australia where immigration policies do not completely help to incorporate individuals' educational and professional experience into the new environment (Alcorso, 1995a; Cass, Wilkinson, & Webb, 1992; DIEA, 1985). Within this scenario, immigrant women often face a more complex reality than male immigrants. Apart from adjusting to a new cultural setting and working long hours within difficult conditions, they continue to be in charge of most

domestic and family duties (Amézquita, Amézquita, & Vittorino, 1995; Moraes-Gorecki, 1991).

The specific contexts involved in the adjustment process of immigrant women still need to be investigated. The understanding of the complexity involved on female immigrants' adjustment process seems of great value to identify conflictive factors limiting women's educational, labour and acculturation outcomes in the new society. Further research on the issue can also suggest policy and social changes in order to provide a fair multicultural environment for newcomers and host members.

Although the Latin American immigrant community in Australia is not one of the largest immigrant groups, it represents a significant social source adding to the cultural and economic growth of the country (Botzenhart, 2006; Jupp, 2001). It certainly needs to be considered and understood. How Latin American women – who immigrated to Australia mostly during the 1970s – experienced the acculturation process and how it impacted on their lives has never been investigated.

The present research intends to explore the value of the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters, also indicating possible limitations. The researcher expects to contribute to further academic knowledge by pinpointing factors involved in the specific case of immigrant women's lives in Australia, their acculturation process and outcomes (understanding social, labour and political sense of integration) and ways to improve their levels of adjustment within the Australian multicultural context.

## FOCUS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research is oriented towards the investigation of the following main issues:

- (a) The way women experienced the immigration and acculturation process in Australia: main conflicts and challenges encountered as immigrant women in the new country.
- (b) Impact of the immigration and acculturation processes on their professional, social and private lives.
- (c) Self-perceived acculturation outcomes, ideals to return to the home countries and expectations for the future.

A special attention will be given to the impact of Latin American values and gender ideals on their acculturation experiences in Australia.

In this way, there are some broad guideline questions functioning as parameters for the data analysis:

- How did women experience the immigration and acculturation processes in Australia?
- How did the fact of being a woman and a Latin American impacted on participants' adjustment to Australia?
- What are the acculturation outcomes for this group of immigrant women after an average of 31.5 years in Australia?
- How do they value/see now their decision to immigrate to Australia? Would they go back to their countries of origin?

The methodology of analysis planned for the current research is based on interpretative phenomenological analysis, a qualitative methodology developed by Jonathan Smith (2003; Smith et al., 1999). This methodology intends to allow the researcher to explore in depth how and why each participant describe her own experience, deriving from this process the main themes that can be associated to the goals of the research and to other participants' narratives.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **6.1 Introduction to phenomenology and its connection to the Social Sciences**

Transcendental phenomenology was originally formulated by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1960; 1970) during the mid-1890s. The main intention of transcendental phenomenology is to return to things themselves, acknowledging that what we think of objects, people or phenomenon is absolutely related and particular to a specific context and time. Phenomenology, in this way, is related to the phenomena present in our consciousness while we interact with the world (Willig, 2001).

According to Husserl (1960; 1970), the phenomenological method would allow the philosopher to move from a fresh perception of the phenomena to the extraction of the essence that provides the unique meaning of that event. The knowledge derived from the phenomenological method would be free from common-sense notions, scientific explanations or any kind of abstractions present in most attempts to explain the world. On the contrary, a phenomenological method would favour an understanding of the world as it appears to human beings while they engage with it.

Although phenomenology was not a dominant movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it represented a significant philosophical method with many adherents. Some of the major contributors to this school of thought are Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur and Levinas. While they disagree in some aspects, these authors reinforce a focus shift from the thing and nature toward human beings and the world as they perceive it, and they consent

that the focus of philosophy should be consciousness, human existence, and the nature of being itself (Giorgi, 2005).

It was Alfred Schutz who originally worked on a social phenomenology seeking to connect Husserl's (1970) philosophical phenomenology to sociology. Schutz (1962; Schutz, 1964; 1967; 1970), reinforcing the constitutive nature of consciousness and interaction, was interested in the way individuals experience and constitute meaning in everyday life in the world. As every person takes for granted the experiential world, Schutz was interested in the ways this process occurs. For this, attention should be given to the study of social interactions that occur within a natural attitude, or a posture that considers the world to be "out there" – existing before and after individuals can experience it. Schutz recommended that, in order to understand the experiences in the world, the analyst should first "bracket" individuals' taken-for-granted perspective. In this way, the analyst should "temporarily set aside belief in its reality in order to bring its apprehension into focus" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005, p. 485). This would enable researchers to understand constitutive processes and the ways in which a separate world becomes an objective reality.

In order to comprehend the subjectivity of the life world, Schutz focused on the ways individuals produce practical and commonsense knowledge to objectify social interactions. Schutz (1962; 1967) indicated that individuals apply a stock of knowledge constituted by constructs and categories (a combination of images, values, ideas, and attitudes) to provide meaning to all experiences in life. Through these constructs and categories, individuals are able to interpret and predict interactions with other people, objects or events. Consequently, individuals react with a set of typifications to understand lived experiences, making things and events possible to identify as part of the subject's previous categories. Nevertheless,

typifications are part of a continuous open-ended creative process, and have an indeterminate, flexible and changing character.

Within this context, language is seen as the major means subjects use to typify and then, provide meaning to their interactions. As Holstein and Gubrium (1998) explained, words – considered as typifications – are constitutive building blocks of everyday reality, and, while interactions take place, they assist in constructing and giving meaning to understand the world. Frequently, individuals take for granted that everyone shares the same categories of meaning and value and that everyone experiences the reality of the world in a similar way. On this point, Schutz pointed out the need to focus on everyday subjective meaning and experience, seeking to understand how individuals give sense to objects and events while communicating it in everyday life.

## **6.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is considered a qualitative methodology developed by Jonathan Smith (2003; Smith et al., 1999) specifically for psychological research. According to the author, “the aim of IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53)

IPA emphasizes that the discovery of meaning is a mutual process resulting from the interaction of participants and researchers in a specific context, where the analysis of data should reflect the individuals’ experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon under

investigation (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997; Smith et al., 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2004). Consequently, a phenomenological approach is interested in the individual's personal perception of events or circumstances, and does not expect to elaborate objective conclusions, test hypotheses or derive quantitative measures from the participants' personal stories.

This methodology takes an idiographic approach and, in contrast to nomothetic studies, seeks to understand contingent, specific and subjective phenomena. Generalizations are not part of any interpretative phenomenological attempt. Frequently, research projects applying IPA are conducted with small groups, with a maximum of 15 participants, in order to preserve the intimate contact with participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The main goal of a researcher employing interpretative phenomenological analysis is to understand how individuals think and feel of a specific phenomenon through their cognitive and emotional verbal and written responses (Willig, 2001). To do so, IPA is based in two basic assumptions. The first indicates that perceptions provide evidence of the world as it is lived, not as it is thought to be. In this way, what individuals experience and feel about the world is essential to phenomenology. Secondly, individuals are conscious of the world while experiencing it, and thus, any meaning given to their perceptions is context dependent involving specific relationships, things, people, and events (Morse & Richards, 2002).

What it has been outlined about IPA could be summarized into Spinelli's (2005) explanation of the three basic rules for the phenomenological method within psychology: epoché, description, and horizontalization. Epoché refers to the suspension of expectations and assumptions while interacting with the immediate data. In this procedure, the analyst

needs to bracket any kind of ideas and prejudices in order to promote an unbiased experience of the phenomenon. Although other authors (e.g., Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Willig, 2001) have indicated the researcher's impossibility to achieve a complete act of bracketing of assumptions and beliefs, an advanced stage of recognition of the analyst's biases would positively impact the research experience.

The second rule to be followed is the description of the phenomenon. In this, the analyst should always seek to describe, but not explain the data experienced. With an open attitude favoured by the rule of epoché, this stage requires the analyst to remain focused on the immediate and concrete impressions of the phenomenon rather than trying to elaborate theoretical explanations or generalizations of the data. Again, trying to explain the data would require the researcher to use preconceived theories and categories of analysis that may limit the complete perception of the phenomenon. This is also a source of academic controversy, as no descriptive attempt can be absolutely free of explanatory components. Nevertheless, the description rule remains as an ideal to be followed within the immediate sensory-based experiences where researchers should refrain from verifying concepts or theories out of the data available.

The last step in this method requires horizontalization, where all items of the phenomenological descriptions are placed with equal significance to the eyes of the researcher. By avoiding bringing external hierarchies or prejudices to the experienced data, the researcher is enabled to pursue a fair and equal description of all phenomena. As Spinelli (2005) indicated, an absolute horizontalization also remains as an ideal difficult to be reached. However, this step reminds researchers to refrain from bringing external

categories or values to specific experiences, while alerting them to critically recognize personal prejudices and importance biases.

IPA provides a systematic methodology to collect and analyse data, and present adequately research findings. This methodology allows the researcher to identify emerging themes from the participants' experiences, and to progressively integrate and connect them into a cluster of main themes. Master themes are expected to represent the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2001)

As a result, IPA has been the methodology chosen for this project as it allows the researcher to understand how participants' describe and make sense of their own experiences, from their own perspective. As this research does not seek to provide objective generalizations, nor was initiated with specific research hypothesis, IPA helps in maintaining an open attitude to the way participants answer to the interview. Each experience is considered unique within its own context and connected to the individuals' past and present experiences, thoughts and emotions. Within this scenario, IPA assists the researcher to understand how and why individuals experience certain phenomena. From this open observant attitude – and becoming immersed in the participants' world – the investigator is able to derive themes related to the main research question. In this way, IPA seems useful as it does not pre-elaborate parameters of analysis or categories, but remains flexible to any phenomenon individuals would choose to describe, and therefore, is open to new perspectives connected to the main research theme.

## CHAPTER 7

### METHOD

#### 7.1 Participants

This study includes 13 South American immigrant women who moved to Australia in the late 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's, when most political and economic changes occurred in South America. On average, these women have been living in Australia for an average of 31.5 years (between 26 to 42 years). All participants are natives of Spanish-speaking countries in South America: Argentina (9), Uruguay (1) and Chile (3). These, with El Salvador, are the only Latin American countries whose communities in Australia exceeded 9,000 people in the 1996 Census (Botzenhart, 2006). The women in this study came from national capitals or major urban centres in their countries and presented an average age of 57.9 years old (ages were between 45 to 74 years old).

The reasons for immigration were directly related to economic conditions and life threatening factors associated to military dictatorships and political instability. Nevertheless, most of these women are economic immigrants.

Of the participants, six had completed higher education, four had finished Secondary School, and the remainder three had only a primary school level education.

Six of these women currently work full time in professional environments related to their academic training, four women work in cleaning or factory positions, two women are self-employed (hair dresser, and tailor) and one is a housekeeper. Regardless their

educational levels, more than half of the participants had a temporary experience of factory or cleaning work at the beginning of their lives in Australia.

At the time of the research, six of the participants were married, four were divorced, and three were widows. Most of the divorced women and widows had remarried in Australia by the time of the research. All participants had been married to Latin Americans or had a Spanish-speaking partner. Only one woman, after divorcing her Latin American partner, married an Anglo-Saxon man. Most women (9) have only 2 children, few have only 1 son (2) or 3 to 5 children (2).

## **7.2 Materials**

This study used an in-depth, semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A) to be analysed in a narrative mode. Qualitative data in the form of personal narratives and responses to questions was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was built within a phenomenological perspective, expecting to derive interpretations and not general facts or universal laws. As a result, this approach facilitates the intersection of personal biographies, specific historical context and broader cultural and social values ( Smith et al., 1997; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Willig, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews are frequently used methods in qualitative studies as they allow participants the freedom to reflect and explore their ideas without the constraints of researcher-imposed assumptions and language. This is possible through an open and flexible attitude at the moment of the interview planning, discussion and interpretation. The categories of analysis are expected to emerge from the review and comparison of each life

story and narratives, along with their own complexity of patterns and meanings and not as a predetermined set of categories usually found in quantitative studies.

Based on the research and theory presented on the theoretical chapters, the interview questions covered issues related to three main themes. The first theme connects to participants' acculturation process in Australia, exploring the impact of discrimination experiences, language knowledge, educational and work opportunities, and women's social and cultural life. The second major theme refers to personal and family issues, observing the impact of immigration, acculturation and gender values on marriage and domestic life. The last theme intends to investigate the overall impact of a life as an immigrant woman, participants' intentions to return to their home countries and perspectives for the future.

### **7.3 Procedure**

Participants were contacted at multicultural, Spanish-speaking, Latin American and other community centres in Victoria, during the months of August, September, October and November 2006. In these visits, the candidate presented herself and the research project to potential participants in a brief public speech. Women interested in participating provided their contact details on that day or telephoned the candidate in order to schedule an interview.

Data was collected in in-depth, open-ended individual interviews. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and tape-recorder for later transcription. Transcriptions were completed in Spanish and then English. Interviews lasted between one hour to two hours, however, informal conversations with most of the participants resulted in a approximately 3

hours encounter. The research candidate performed all transcriptions and translations. The candidate has fluent command of Spanish and English, with Spanish her native language. The candidate has also formal training and experience teaching Spanish at the tertiary level and has performed Spanish translations for various academic research projects in South America. Transcript review and thematic analyses were initially conducted by the candidate in Spanish, with the outcomes subsequently presented in English for the thesis. Therefore, there was no need of back-translation of the materials for further accuracy.

When arranging the interview, participants would be asked for a place of preference to conduct it. Most occurred at the participants' own residential addresses, where they felt more comfortable. In other occasions, some interviews took place at public cafés, libraries or the participants' work place.

Before the interviews began, the researcher would explain the ethics procedure and then ask the participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix B). The researcher would also explain briefly the duration and main structure of the interview along with the main goals of the research project. Participants would acknowledge at this stage when the thesis will be finalized and what kind of printed report they would receive as a result of their participation in this research.

None of the participants had any problems with the recording of the interview, but instead of censoring themselves in some issues they would ask me not to transcribe few personal comments.

The interview was planned in a way to cover many aspects of the women's private and public lives. At the same time they were asked to mention or explain in further details anything that they would consider important to their immigration experience.

The interview was initiated with a general question about the reasons and contexts that led to emigration. Each woman provided a detailed picture of her previous education and work experience, family relationships and personal expectations at that moment.

As a result of this 15-20 minutes talk, the participant entered into the next section of the interview with a more open and relaxed attitude, having a closer connection with the researcher. The interview had several sections previously planned, but they remained flexible to changes due to the characteristics of each individual narrative.

At first instance, interviews would develop issues related to general adaptation and acculturation in Australia, covering also main conflicts and challenges during this process. Some of these questions were: How was your adaptation to Australia? What main difficulties or challenges did you face after arriving in Australia? Did you ever feel any kind of discrimination or racism? Do you now feel integrated to the Australian society?

The connecting issues were related to English knowledge, educational and work experiences in the host land. The participants' family, domestic and social life would be discussed along with the maintenance of any traditions or values from their country of origin. Special attention would be taken to issues directly related to Latin American gender values and roles and possible changes of these after immigration. The influence of religion was another subject to be covered throughout the interview but did not gain much relevance in most of the women's narratives. Some sample questions for this section are: How did your language skills influence in your everyday life, family, social and professional aspects? Are you satisfied with the outcome of your professional development in Australia? Why? What traditions or rituals from your country of origin do you maintain here? What differences do you find between your country of origin's culture and the Australian culture?

To what extent do you think the Australian way of life has changed any of your family values or had any impact in the way the members of your family interact?

At a final stage of the interview, the researcher would encourage participants to describe the overall experience of being an immigrant woman in Australia and to explain the final acculturation outcome of the migration process. The researcher would also inquire if participants would consider returning to their home countries and how they foresee their future. At the end of the discussion, participants were asked to refer to anything not covered by the interview and that would be worth mentioning about the immigration experience.

#### **7.4 Analysis**

The data from the interviews was qualitatively analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA emphasizes on a sense-making process involving participants and researcher, where the main objective is to understand the participants' lived experiences of the phenomena under investigation. Instead of seeking a definite "true" understanding of the subjects' experiences, IPA stresses that analysed results are inevitably a co-construction between participants and researcher in a specific context. In this way, any description of the experiences would emerge from the researcher's engagement with the data through the participants' narratives and perspectives.

In order to understand the content and complexity of the participants' narratives, the researcher engaged in an interpretative analysis of the transcripts. Interview transcripts were analysed one by one, read and re-read in order to identify potential themes. While doing the initial readings of the transcripts, the researcher elaborated some initial notes and

codes on the margin of the text in relation to any responses or phrases that were of interest or significant relation to the research questions. At this stage, it was essential to listen and read the interviews as many times as necessary in order to become intimate with the responses. As a result, it became possible to build some preliminary connections between different aspects of the data.

Due to small number of participants and the nature and scope of the research project, it was not necessary to use qualitative data analysis softwares in order to develop a profound phenomenological understanding of the historic, personal and social circumstances related to participants' experiences.

Statements about the meaning of specific experiences were grouped into temporary emerging themes. These themes were re-read many times in order to ensure that they appropriately representing the data. Each theme would encapsulate some significant phrases in order to illustrate in the participants' words the experience of the phenomenon. This process was repeated throughout the whole interview with each one of the participants.

At a second stage, the researcher sought for possible associations among themes and participants. Similar phrases were often found in different themes, providing a basis to establish connections between themes. However, attention was not only given to the frequency of the themes, but also to the meaning of the expressed language, body language, emotions and silences. Themes were clustered into thematic categories facilitating the identification of different manifestations of a particular phenomenon.

This process was repeated with the responses of every interview. Emerging themes were supported by direct quotations from the interviews in order to validate and provide transparency in the data analysis (see Appendix D).

## **7.5 Researcher Statement**

I am an Argentinean woman, an overseas student in Australia. A sojourner. These are some factors that I believe greatly contributed to the development of this research. I consider that participants identified with the fact that I am a Latin American woman with previous immigration experience, being approximately the same age they were when they decided to leave their country of origin. At the same time, I realized that being a psychologist may have facilitated in a subjective way their willingness to share and value their experience as immigrant women. In many cases, due to the lack of relatives or limited social support to rely on in Australia, the sharing of these stories resulted in an empowering experience.

As a result, many factors closely related to my cultural background, travelling experience and academic training had enhanced the conduction of the interviews, the rapport with participants and further analysis of the results.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section intends to present the immigration and acculturation experiences of 13 Latin American women living in Melbourne for an average of 31.5 years. Responses were organized in seven main emerging themes representing relevant phenomena connected to participants' acculturation processes.

The initial theme is related to the main conflicts and challenges Latin American women encountered as immigrants in Australia. Within this topic, language barrier, restricted educational and work opportunities and experiences of discrimination related to language skills, accent, skin colour or gender status were the most salient issues reported by participants.

The second theme focuses on participants' cultural and social life and the relevance of maintaining values and traditions from their countries of origin. Among those, participants stressed on conserving the Spanish language and traditional ethnic food – to be shared with family and friends – and to motivate their children to participate in Latin American dance and music schools in Australia. This theme also discusses immigrants' sources of social support, observing whether they have socialized with the broader Australian community or within ethnic enclaves and the reasons and contexts behind any selected social network. The significance of having a local family support or a strong social network appeared to have an essential positive impact on women's lives as immigrants.

The third major theme relates to immigrants' private lives. Within this section, participants describe the experiences of being a Latin American immigrant woman in

Australia. This section also develops issues connected to immigrants' family life, discussing marriage, motherhood experiences and whether family and gender values have been affected after immigration and acculturation to Australia.

The fourth theme is related to participants' immigration outcome, where females describe their own acculturation results within the Australian society. On this point, the combined influence of factors such as the perceived cultural distance between Australian and Latin American values, limited sources of support from family, friends and social services, restricted labour opportunities and other conflictive issues will be discussed in order to better understand women's adjustment results in Australia.

The final three themes present participants' ideals of returning to their countries of origin, the final personal impact of the overall immigration experience, and finally, their own perspectives and expectations for the future.

From the presentation and discussion of these themes it is expected to better understand some of the main issues involved in the acculturation process of Latin American women in Australia, recognizing the various forces that have impacted on immigrants' adjustment process.

The objective of this chapter is to present women's experiences in Australia through their own perspective, to link them with previous academic research in the area, and to identify factors that need a better understanding and could be further investigated. Apart from providing a rich description of the acculturation process of this group of women, this chapter will provide the necessary academic background to pinpoint socio-political and labour conflictive forces that could be modified in order to promote a healthier adaptation and higher levels of integration for immigrant women in Australia.

## **8.1 Challenges encountered as immigrant women in Australia**

The focus of this section is to observe how a group of Latin American women experienced the immigration process to Australia, exploring the main challenges encountered while adjusting to the new country.

Of the main challenges, the language barrier was one of the most discussed; together with the limited opportunities they encountered to learn English in Australia. Low communicational skills in the host country's language deeply impacted on immigrants' educational and work experiences, negatively affecting their acculturation outcomes.

Although many participants' acknowledged the existence of English programs organized by the Australian government, their assistance in improving immigrants' communicational skills was very limited. Offered at free cost during immigrants' first two years in Australia, English classes were often out of reach of recently arrived individuals who had other priorities to consider, such as finding new accommodation and a first job, or taking care of their children. In many cases, immigrant mothers also referred to the lack of free of cost or low fees childcare services, and the subsequent inability to attend English classes. Consequently, initial opportunities to learn English were very restricted for most immigrant women. As part of a daily cycle of responsibilities as working mothers, most participants did not find many chances to strengthen their English skills.

Other conflictive experiences participants described were related to discrimination episodes in Australia. Occurrences of racism and discrimination were directly connected to women's English knowledge, accent, skin colour and gender status. These experiences had several levels of negative impact on immigrants' psychological health, exacerbated by the

limited family or social support networks to share feelings and thoughts from these experiences. As described by many women, the scarcity of social support in Australia aggravated the emotional impact of discrimination episodes.

### **8.1.1 The language barrier**

The first challenge most women faced was directly related to the limited English knowledge and the restricted family and social support in the new country. These two interconnected factors represented permanent struggles that some women had to deal with until the time of the research, approximately three decades after their arrival in Australia. This phenomenon was confirmed by some authors (e.g., Botzenhart, 2006; Santos, 2006; Stone et al., 1996) indicating that the major problems faced by Latin Americans in Australia have been, first of all, language knowledge, and, then, finding adequate employment matching immigrants' labour experiences and educational backgrounds.

Low levels of knowledge of the host country's language represent a significant obstacle to pursue a complete adaptation (Berry & Sam, 2006; Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Spitzberg, 1988; Ward & Kennedy, 1992a). Immigrants' communicational skills are believed to constructively impact on their acculturation process as the more they learn the language, the more they are able to interact and participate in the broader community. At the same time, the more immigrants connect to the host society, the more chances they have to increase their levels of mastery in the foreign language (Clément et al., 2001). However, immigrants' opportunities to interact with individuals from the broader community and

learn the language do not entirely depend on their motivation, availability and skills but also on a complex set of social, cultural and labour circumstances.

#### **8.1.1.1 Recently arrived immigrants and their opportunities to learn English**

Most women in this study immigrated with very basic levels of English or no knowledge at all. Once in Australia, they followed three residential paths that influenced the acknowledgement of government programs destined to facilitate immigrant's adaptation: five (5) women were accommodated in community hostels subsidized by the Australian government where social services (not in Spanish) and English classes were provided free of cost; seven (7) spent the first days in private hotels and immediately rented their own accommodation; and only one (1) participant was received during the first months by relatives (brother-in-law's family) until she rented her own house few months later.

Women initially accommodated at government hostels had the opportunity to access English classes in the same environment. Although this represented a helpful service, only one participant reported having actually benefited from these classes. The remaining women did not encounter many opportunities to learn the language, as most of their initial time in Australia was destined to look for employment, housing outside the hostels, and childcare.

Apart from those factors, as one participant mentioned, previous educational backgrounds played a significant role in women's attendance to English classes. Isabel<sup>1</sup>, a university professor, indicated that, very frequently, she was the only student at the English classes:

*Women wouldn't study at the Hostel! Afterwards I got to know that the Chilean consulate did a Census and they discovered that Chilean immigrant women in Australia had a low rate of education. First of all, they marry very young, and second, they would only finish primary school. As a result, there was no interest in studying the language here. Sometimes I even had a teacher just for myself at the Hostel!*

Education is considered by some authors (e.g., Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1997; Jayasuriya, Sang, & Fielding, 1992) as a relevant factor promoting healthier adaptation outcomes and less acculturative stress. A previous educational background not only facilitates immigrants' learning process of a new language, but also provides them with tools to deal with problem analysis and problem solving in a new culture. Apart from that, education is often associated to a more positive labour integration in the new country and is expected to be rewarded with higher income levels and social and occupational status than unskilled individuals. As Colic-Peisker (2002) indicated from her research with Croatian immigrants in Western Australia, limited previous formal education made the learning process of a second language a much more difficult attempt for immigrants.

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<sup>1</sup> All names used in this research are pseudonyms in order to protect participants' identity and privacy.

Latin Americans' low educational background was often associated to difficulties in achieving an efficient English mastery and consequently, a very limited integration outcome. Once in Australia, most of the women without an extensive educational and professional training had to immediately work due to economic constraints. Consequently, they missed out on the opportunity to attend English classes that would enable them to achieve a better labour outcome in the future. These women only had job opportunities in manufacturing or cleaning services, where English was not a requirement at that time. Within these contexts, the chances to improve levels of communicative English were very low or almost nil. Rita, an Argentinean who worked for 25 years at a factory in Melbourne, describes her experience:

*Whatever English I learnt I did it listening to people at the factories, a very bad spoken English, a language spoken by immigrants...talking like Tarzan! [she laughs] so I started talking like Tarzan! You get used to talk to people who don't speak English properly.*

This phenomenon was also described by immigrants interviewed by Santos (2006), explaining the reasons why their language level remained as a “factory English”. Within these work environments, immigrants with no formal language education learnt very basic and limited communication skills while interacting with other colleagues – most of them, also immigrants –.

The low levels of immigrants' initial attendance to English classes and their subsequent language struggles appear to be one of the major factors interfering with their

involvement with the Australian culture and social institutions (Santos, 2006). There is a scarcity of updated academic research in Australia developing the connection between recently arrived immigrants, their initial specific needs, priorities and the real opportunities to access English classes. The context in which DIEA's (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs) English program was offered and its real contribution to immigrants' adaptation to Australia has not been systematically analysed yet. Research on this phenomenon might bring some light on the reasons why so many immigrant women did not benefit from language classes, and how they could be offered in a more efficient way.

More than a decade ago, Stone, Morales and Cortes (1996) reached some conclusions on this issue with their study of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Victoria. According to the authors, the attendance and efficiency of DIEA's English program (510 hours of English tuition offered within the immigrants' first two years in Australia, free of cost) was low and limited due to a combination of reasons. Traditional gender roles played a significant influence on women's access to English classes. The lack of available time to pursue language education is connected to the scarce free or low cost childcare services to help them with motherhood responsibilities. As a consequence, many immigrant women have to remain at home taking care of their children, not being able to upgrade their language and educational background. This phenomenon worked as a trap for many immigrant women, also exacerbated by the restricted social support resources capable to bridge their cultural gap and social isolation from the mainstream community. Santos (2006) analysed this issue with a group of immigrants from El Salvador in Victoria, indicating that the absence of an efficient social support group, especially from their same ethnic community, was directly related to the lack of knowledge of specific services

destined to facilitate immigrants' adjustment to Australia. The limited results associated to DIEA's English program were also related to other factors. Individuals who finished the language course experienced that the English level achieved was not enough to meet social and labour markets' needs, especially for those who arrived to Australia with higher levels of education and previous professional training (Goldflam, 1993; Santos, 2006).

Isabel – the only participant who attended English classes offered at the Hostel – had to pursue further language education for over two years to be able to find a work offer according to her professional and educational training:

*After studying English at the Hostel, I went to La Trobe University to study a TAFE English course. I was there for two semesters and the teachers told me “look, Isabel, you are already fine, now you have to look for work, you have to go to the Department of Education and get a job”. So I went and the man there treated me in a very rude way, he told me that my English was bad and that I needed to practice more. I left almost crying of anger because I didn't believe that my English was that bad. Then, what would I do? I went to clean hotels with other Chilean ladies, but the way they treated us was an abuse. I only got my first offer as a teacher through someone I met at the hotel who believed my English was good, wanted to help me and had a contact at the Department of Education.*

The overall reasons why most participants did not attend initial English classes were attached to the lack of time and conditions to do so, where the immediate need to find a job to sustain their families, the influence of traditional gender values attached to

motherhood and domestic life and the restricted available and affordable childcare services for immigrant women compounded their daily lives.

#### **8.1.1.2 Knowledge of the host country's language and its relation to professional outcomes**

According to Alcorso (1991), the limited professional mobility of non-English-speaking women and their over concentration in manufacturing industries is directly related to their urgent need to find paid work as soon as they arrive in Australia. The absence of relatives to help women with childcare duties and the restricted governmental childcare programs, combined with the shortage of intensive English classes, greatly interfered with women's chances to move out of factory environments. In these conditions, it often takes many years for immigrants to achieve a successful level of English that would allow them to enter white-collar or professional jobs. Participants reflected on this combination of factors:

*When I came here I did it thinking about applying what I knew. In Chile, I did a short course in nursing and also worked for some years at a telephone company. I came wanting to present all my documents but I didn't have English proficiency, which was very important. I could have tried working as a nurse, but I didn't feel confident with my language, I don't know...I didn't have the courage. So I started working in factories. Later on, in 1986, I had a horrible accident at work, so I stopped working. That was 20 years ago...After some time, I tried to get back to*

*work, but I was still struggling due to the accident. So I started working in community things, and I started feeling good (Laura)*

*I worked at the factory for 28 years. I stopped 2 years ago. I stayed there because it was good that I could go back home quickly to be with the kids. But the lack of family support also affected me in the sense that I didn't have time to study English, so I had to stay in that factory (Rita)*

The high concentration of immigrant women in manufacturing industries, semi-skilled or unskilled paid work in Australia was identified by many authors (Alcorso, 1991, 1995a; Amézquita et al., 1995; Cox, Jobson, & Martin, 1976; Pettman, 1992; Stone et al., 1996). Very often, immigrant women had to deal with the psychological and physical effects of these labour environments, where workers are rarely rewarded and work long hours under unpleasant, and, sometimes, unhealthy conditions. It is also common that non-English-speaking immigrant workers in this type of industries are not provided with information regarding work rights in their own language, something that aggravates their vulnerable working condition.

Women working within factory or cleaning services also felt overwhelmed by not being able to share with close relatives their stressful working experiences. This increased feelings of helplessness and solitude:

*I was a hairdresser in Argentina, but here all the hairdressers were Italians and they wouldn't hire a professional older than 18-19 years old. So... what would I do?*

*I went to do what my mother always feared us to do...cleaning. I used to tell her that I was working in a factory, which was true, but I was in charge of cleaning!*  
(Dora)

*My first job was as a cleaner, there I cried the biggest tears of my life. Later I started working at the factories and that was another storm to pass through. I would sit to work at the factory, and I wouldn't be able to even look at my side! This is a silly thing that immigrants do, because Australians would take their 5 min. and go for a smoke. And you don't do it because of the language, or because of fear! Scared of what? I wonder? You don't go because the other thing you want to do is to please the people, then you work like an animal until you reach home completely exhausted! And on top of that, I had my own family, I would reach home and kept on working...The worse thing is that if I ever told my parents, they would not be able to believe it, because over there I always had everything, and then I came to Australia to suffer what I never suffered before! So I couldn't tell anyone... (Mara)*

When participants were asked about their levels of satisfaction regarding their professional outcome in Australia, their responses were mixed and were related to many factors, especially if they were able to work and progress in the fields were they had previous educational training or not. These are some responses reflecting positive experiences:

*When we arrived we didn't have problems to start working straight away, we were both hairdressers. Unfortunately, 3 months after our arrival, my husband had a big accident and I remained working alone to sustain the kids and rent the house. In that sense, I am thankful to Australia because I don't think that other countries would help as much (Julia)*

*The first job offer that I had in Australia as a teacher was at a girls' school, in the western suburbs. It's a coincidence, I've always worked teaching girls. That first place was full of immigrants from all over the world, and you learn so much! Afterwards, I was transferred to another school where there was not even one Hispanic-speaking student, most of them were Arabs, but it was also a girls' school. I've been extremely happy. I feel that wherever we are, we are going to give what we couldn't give in Chile, because they didn't let us! (Isabel)*

*Australia has definitely given more opportunities to develop myself and I am so convinced that my contribution to the community was much greater here than it would have been in Argentina (Esther)*

Immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds often faced problems with the recognition of their professional or trade qualifications in Australia, experiencing frustration and downward social mobility (Pettman, 1992). According to Carmen, an Argentinean who pursued sociology studies in Australia and worked with immigration issues, one of the main breakdowns of most immigration services is that they fail to

incorporate individuals' previous educational and labour background in an effective way into the Australian community:

*I've always worked with immigration issues. This present job [as a director of an immigrants' centre] fits perfectly into all that, trying to bring to immigrant's consciousness the meaning of his/her function as an immigrant, and about the immigrant's meaning to this place. You are not here because "they let you be here", you are here because you came and because you brought so many things along with you! It's not true that you didn't have anything before coming here, or that you come here and you delete everything and start all over again from zero. It's not a rebirth, on the contrary, this country benefits from what you brought. Yes, you must be grateful for being here, but they have to be grateful too. We need to humanize things a little bit, to me it's a matter of dignity and not charity. I can't accept that, as an immigrant, I was born the day I arrived here. The day I arrived here it's important, but what I did before it's important too, because it's a part of my experience, of my training, of who I am. Here none of the centres for immigrants ask what they used to do before they came to Australia. The system fails in that. Then, you wonder...what do you do with your qualifications if they can't absorb that and your previous experience? (Carmen)*

### **8.1.1.3 Immigrants' social support resources and its impact on the language learning process**

Apart from immigrants' educational and professional background, the social resources found in Australia also played a significant role in their capacity to access language classes. The combination of limited social support (family and friends in the host country) to assist recently arrived immigrant women with childcare, limited knowledge of courses organized by the government or incapacity to access them due to the emergency of other financial priorities limited the opportunities to pursue language training.

This phenomenon was indicated by Alcorso (1989; 1995b), who analysed the reality of non-English-speaking immigrant women in Australia. According to the author, recently arrived immigrant women in Australia with low levels of education and little English knowledge are mostly unable to access work out of the manufacturing sector due to the combination of those two factors and the restricted low-fees childcare services. Having a serious negative impact on their acculturation process, the limited access immigrant women have to social resources is compounded by the presence of racism within the working class and labour movements as well as among employers, forcing women to remain at a subordinate social status.

The group of Latin American women who immigrated with their husbands and found their own accommodation reported not knowing about language courses or even about the existence of specific community services for Latin American immigrants. The reality of these women functioned as an isolating factor from many opportunities available to new immigrants. Due to the lack of family support to share childcare responsibilities,

most of them did not have any available free time to take English classes, and remained at home taking care of domestic duties and looking after their children.

Not only the limited social network played a significant isolating role, but also participants' level of English impaired them to acknowledge the existence of these programs when advertised through radio or TV programs. Within these boundaries, it was difficult to benefit from government programs destined to help immigrants' adaptation into the country.

As mentioned, for women working at unskilled or semi skilled positions with little communication skills in English, the chances to balance language classes with family and domestic responsibilities were almost non-existent. This phenomenon is exemplified by Rita and Mara's experience:

*I couldn't take any English classes because I started working and I had to go back home and take care of the kids, my husband used to work many more hours than me and I couldn't leave them alone all day. I started taking some classes close to home and I used to take the kids along with me. The problem is that they were already tired after 7 hours of school, feeling hungry, and ...it didn't work (Rita)*

This reality perpetuated the education and skills gap of many immigrant women, as it was Mara's experience:

*I felt particularly frustrated because the years passed and I couldn't finish my education. Here I had the barrier of the kids! Because I didn't have anyone who*

*could take care of them! Now, I am 53 years old and I'm trying to take some courses, but you find that the language barrier is still there. That you are still missing something in English...*

The limited family support and available social resources to share childcare responsibilities greatly affected female immigrants in their personal and labour outcomes in Australia. Researching overseas born women in Sydney, Cox, Jobson and Martin (1976) reached the conclusion that childcare was the major problem working immigrant women faced in Australia. Immigrants' work, educational and language experiences were always related to their domestic reality and the available resources to assist them with their children. According to the authors, Australian government policies ignored the needs of working women by not fully considering the difficulties and traumas of immigrating to a new country with no family or social support resources, doing paid work and being in charge of domestic responsibilities.

As observed in the current research, due to immigrants' little English knowledge, restricted social networks and their labour experiences as immigrants in Australia, many women remained isolated from interacting with the broader society during their first years in the new country.

Only one participant of the research doubted the lack of opportunities to study English that many women reported, pointing out that what immigrants need to adapt is the motivation and willingness to learn the host country's language. In this sense, Julia, an Argentinean hairdresser, explained that she never faced problems with English even though she never took any language class in Australia. She said that her knowledge of English

came from her own motivation and need to be in contact with clients, who were mostly Australians. Language is a fundamental tool leading to a positive integration, as she explained:

*English is the key of everything. If you want to listen to the news and get to know what's happening here, you need it, otherwise you lose so much... That's why I believe language is the key to integration. If you can't speak it, you have your hands tied up. There is so many people saying "I can't" ...is not that "they can't learn it" is that "they don't want to".*

Julia's case is unique among the rest of the working immigrants who arrived with low levels or no knowledge of English and worked in manual/trade jobs. The significant difference in her case was the decision to work as a hairdresser from her own residence, being self-employed and able to organize her own time to work, take care of the family and pursue self education in English.

*I tried to study and learn English by myself, all that I could. I started by learning all the basic words of my profession, and when I knew everything, I decided to start working from home. Seeing all the results of my work, you feel so much strength, so much will to do things! I didn't have major problems because I was working like this. That's why I did it, so I could take the kids to school, work my hours at home, and go and pick them up. I was able to take care of them, I never left them alone.*

*But I know when you have to work outside home, with a timetable, everything it's more difficult.*

#### **8.1.1.4 Struggling with English and social separation: children's assistance in the adaptation process and language gaps**

Participants who arrived to Australia with basic English knowledge highlighted the important role their children played once they learned the language at school. Although at a very young age, these children worked as translators for their mothers in several adult environments, such as banks, hospitals, and schools. Children's English knowledge served as a bridging communicator with the Australian reality, and thus, provided some significant assistance in women's adaptation to everyday life (DIEA, 1985; Santos, 2006). Some participants explained how this occurred in their lives:

*It took 4-5 months for my daughters to learn the language. After that period, they could write it. That was a great help, that after 6 months of being here they could understand, and anything that would come up, they would be our interpreters*  
*(Lucia)*

*We learnt to overcome the difficulties. If there is someone I have to thank for this is my daughter, the eldest one [she gets emotional talking about her daughter]. She was the interpreter, who came with me to the doctor, the one who would do*

*anything, the one who did everything with us! Thanks to her we stayed here...she was the most excited about everything in Australia (Mara)*

*Thank God that the eldest one learnt English so quickly. It was fabulous. So he became my interpreter. Poor little boy. I used to go to the bank and he would translate for me, but all bank stuff, it was difficult for him, poor little thing! He was only 7 years old! (Rita)*

As participants described, as soon as their children acquired some level of English knowledge, they started helping in many aspects of their daily lives as interpreters, translators, financial consultants, teachers, mediators or in many other parent-like duties. This phenomenon is common to many family groups arriving to a new country with basic or no knowledge of the host country's language (Acoach & Webb, 2004; De Ment, Buriel, & Villanueva, 2005; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch & Alva-Torre, 2002). Within this context, children undertook very relevant activities to assist their parents and relatives in the settlement process, becoming important actors of their adaptation in the new country.

Although language brokering could place high levels of pressure and stress on children due to the responsibility attached to these activities at such an early age (Buriel, Love, & De Ment, 2006), some authors have indicated feelings of empowerment, authority and independence associated to this service provided to the family (Arbona & Power, 2003; Field, Lang, Yando, & Bendell, 1995; Love & Buriel, 2007). Within the adaptation process

to a new country, immigrants and their children greatly strengthen their bond and emotional connection.

While the assistance provided by immigrants' children can be perceived as helpful and positive, it can also be seen as a factor that perpetuated an indirect contact with Australian social networks and organizations, maintaining female immigrants in an underpowered and relatively isolated position due to their communicative skills problems. Although the phenomenon of language brokering has been widely investigated (De Ment et al., 2005; McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Morales & Hanson, 2005; Tse, 1995; Weisskirch & Alva-Torre, 2002), its impact on parents' – and particularly, on women's – acculturation process remains under-investigated.

If necessary social support resources were successfully organized by the immigration services, providing a more efficient assistance with free or low cost childcare and language classes at times and periods matching immigrants' needs and priorities, the potential pressure and stress put on children's brokering responsibilities would not be necessary. If these conditions were met, female immigrants would probably had fairer opportunities to learn the host country's language and would had not depended on their children to communicate with members of the broader community.

#### **8.1.1.5 Immigrants' emotional impact of the language barrier**

Participants reported conflictive experiences affecting their mental health, frequently related to low levels of English knowledge, the limited work opportunities they had access to, and the treatment received by colleagues at work:

*My first job was as a cleaner. In that job I cried the biggest tears of my life. Because everyone knows how to clean, but the fact of not being able to talk to the rest of the people at work or even the emptiness they created not talking to me...it was terrible. They were also immigrants, maybe they didn't know how to talk either... Some Greek women working there couldn't speak properly either, but they would be swearing at me all the time. And I couldn't understand, I couldn't realize what they were saying. So I became an automatic machine, I would go there, do what I had to do and leave (Mara).*

Most frequently, not being able to adequately communicate in English represented a major impediment to many women who had to do unskilled or semi skilled jobs in order to help with the family's financial needs. Within these cases, most individuals developed low levels of psychological wellbeing. As observed by Cox et al. (1976), factory work placements for most recently arrived female immigrants were uncomfortable, unhealthy and unpleasant environments with inappropriate work systems and conditions, with a strong presence of racism and gender inequalities. It is expected that this labour context will have serious negative impacts on women's psychological health.

Dora, who worked for many years in manufacturing and cleaning positions, described the feelings derived from her limited communication skills in English:

*I used to cry, cry and cry. I cried so much because I didn't know the language and I didn't have any relatives. I couldn't communicate here. My life was work and home,*

*nothing else, but I couldn't understand the TV, I couldn't read, it was very difficult to learn it. With time, I overcame the language problems by studying everyday by myself, or with my kids, using the dictionary all the time. Now I read everything in English.*

Similarly, Rita, and Mara explained the emotions that language limitations would provoke them, often related to vulnerability and resentment:

*At the beginning, people making fun of my accent or my bad English would affect me a lot. But later on I told myself that I couldn't cry for everything. So with my bad English I tried to answer to this kind of people. It's a feeling of helplessness, to some people it's easier to learn English, but it was hard to me, I only did primary school and the first year of High School (Rita)*

*If you go to a place looking for a job and if you don't speak English 100% or if you speak it with an accent, you are, then, lower than the rest. That discrimination is everywhere. You feel anger, helplessness...why can't I do something? Why I don't have an option? I can't or it doesn't happen! (Mara)*

According to Laura, a Chilean immigrant working at a Hispanic community centre, the major problem that Latin American women face in Australia is directly related to language knowledge. As she indicated, for those who have the chance to pursue further educational degrees in Australia, this obstacle is often successfully eliminated. However,

Laura believes that for those women who had to immediately work in, for example, manufacturing sectors and take care of their families at the same time, language remained a constant problem.

### **8.1.2 Discrimination experiences**

Most participants experienced some kind of discrimination as Latin American women in Australia. Episodes related to racism and discrimination were linked to women's language knowledge, accent, gender status, ethnic background and/or skin colour. The personal impact and resolution of these events directly depended on personal characteristics and availability of social support in the host country. However, most immigrants referred to it as an emotionally difficult period, due to the restricted English mastery and the restricted sources of social support in Australia.

Over years, females expanded their social and labour networks, became more confident in their skills and/or found more efficient ways to deal with these negative experiences. However, most of them experienced directly or indirectly the subjective consequences of the "white Australian ideal".

#### **8.1.2.1 Language, accent and discrimination**

The language factor was related to another emerging theme of these conversations, the various discrimination experiences immigrant women faced in Australia. As all

participants described, first years in Australia were particularly difficult and emotionally stressful:

*The first two years were very difficult to me, because everything was completely different. I would go out in the street and wouldn't be able to talk because of the lack of English, obviously... back in 1979 if you would speak with a different accent, it's like you wouldn't fit in the environment (Iris)*

When Isabel – a university professor with a broad experience teaching at different female schools – had her first opportunity as a school teacher in a western suburb in Melbourne, she faced discrimination related to her accent:

*I felt discrimination in different schools. Once a teacher from Queensland arrived at the school and she complained about my accent. I had been working there for many years. The director asked me what was my opinion about it, and I said that “she must have never had contact with immigrants before! If so, how will she understand the students who were all immigrants?” At the end of the year, she was sent to another school. (Isabel)*

As described above, conflictive experiences due to the participants' accent was frequently reported as one of their permanent struggles. Language skills and accent-related discrimination have been analysed by many authors (e.g., Alcorso, 1989; Colic-Peisker, 2002; Stein, 1984) working with non-English-speaking (NESB) immigrants in Australia.

As Colic-Peisker indicated, language has been a major setback for many immigrants of NESB. Although communication skills were not an entry requirement during the 1960's and 1970's in Australia, the low levels of English knowledge once in the host country represented a severe barrier for integration. As the author indicated, high levels of communicative English might not be indispensable for unskilled or semi skilled jobs, but without a good language mastery immigrants remained alienated and unable to feel "at home".

Colic-Peisker (2002) also indicated that immigrants in Australia are recognized and "ranked" as members of different ethnic groups according to their own ethnic language and accent in English. Ethnic languages and accents are often interpreted as a mark of immigrants' social and labour status in Australia. In most cases, immigrants with non-Australian native English accents are still observed as "cultural insiders" while non-native English speakers (carrying any level of foreign accent) are considered as "cultural outsiders". Native English language is considered, then, as a relatively hidden but strong core value for anyone to fully belong to the Australian nation.

This phenomenon was also summarized by survey results presented by Callan and Gallois (1987) indicating the presence of some level of rejection of foreign-accented speech by Anglo-Australian listeners, opposed to the positive reception to educated British accents. Consequently, the authors understood that most immigrant groups would experience some level of pressure to perform or imitate the English accent of the broader community in order to feel completely integrated.

Very often, as expressed by Latin participants of the current research, women felt that their accent was a symbol of otherness, a constant social reminder that they were

culturally different from the broader society. This phenomenon, which will be further discussed, had a strong effect on immigrants' emotional capacity to feel integrated and fully identified with Australia.

However, language-related discrimination experiences originated not only from the dominant Anglo-Saxon society but also from members of other immigrant groups, as some women reported:

*I felt discrimination at work because of my English, they would make fun of me. But those who used to do it more were mainly immigrants, not that Australians didn't do it, but mainly immigrants. I would go for groceries and the Italian or Greek attendant would make fun of my bad English or my accent (Rita)*

In relation to the group of women who arrived with higher educational levels or pursued education in Australia, language remained as a relatively uncomfortable factor of everyday life. Although all women in this group reached satisfactory levels of English mastery, to some, the presence of an accent represented a relatively conflictive factor and a constant reminder that they do not completely "fit" into the broader society.

*At my workplace, everywhere, you always feel some kind of hidden racism. If you have an accent picking up the phone, they assume that you are the cleaner (Elsa).*

*Discrimination? The accent might be. I felt it when I applied for a position at a phone company. They said that my accent was too strong [she laughs]. That was*

*discrimination! I said that my accent could be strong, but that I was speaking in English with them! Afterwards I said “no...it can't be possible”...these are moments that make you realize that “no...you can't be one more of them” (Laura)*

There were other voices that mirrored a different reality related to discrimination experiences encountered as immigrants in Australia. Although Julia acknowledged that other immigrants faced some kind of discrimination, she did not report any occurrence of this type during her time in Australia. As previously introduced, Julia decided to learn by herself all the specific English words of her profession, and managed to interact successfully with clients and members of the dominant society. Assimilation was the strategy followed to build her place within the Australian society. She did not stress in maintaining any cultural traditions from her country of origin and fully embraced the Australian way of life. As a result, she did not encounter discrimination experiences:

*I didn't find any difficulties. People have been very nice to me, always trying to help me. Many people came here and faced many problems, but they didn't do anything to integrate. I integrated straight away. I thought “my kids are going to be raised here, I have to provide them a future, and I have to work in order to help them, so I will have to integrate to achieve that, I won't isolate myself. If I continue with my mind thinking about Argentina, I won't be neither here nor there. So I said “Argentina it's over”, now this is my country, the one that is feeding me now. Since then I started living in a different way. I tried to learn English as much as I could, first I learnt all the specific vocabulary of my profession and then I improved it by*

*communicating with my clients, most of them Australians. I am very thankful to this country. Many say that “people here are very racist, they don’t like us”. But on the contrary, they have opened their arms to me, I received help in many ways.*

### **8.1.2.2 Gender and labour discrimination**

Many participants encountered conflictive experiences related to their gender status and the cultural values and roles attached to the female gender. Within this context, it was possible to observe many factors working against immigrant’s educational and labour progress, and their complete integration to the broader society.

Unequal social and labour conditions for immigrant women have been the research interest of many academics (Akhavan, Bildt, & Wamala, 2007; Ho, 2006; Morokvasic, 1983, 1984; Pedraza, 1991; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997), who have indicated that female immigrants not only do not encounter the same opportunities of growth as immigrant men but also present a more disadvantageous position if compared to native/local women. There are many factors attached to this phenomenon. From one side, domestic tasks and motherhood are considered to attach many limitations to the kind of work immigrant women can perform especially if they do not have family or social support to share childcare in the new country (Alcorso, 1991, 1995a; Pettman, 1992).

Apart from that, as has been pointed out by Raijman and Semyonov (1997), immigrant women are not as successful as men in rejoining the labour force, they frequently experience a greater loss of occupational status and, especially for those

individuals immigrating from less developed countries, they tend to find more labour disadvantages than other immigrants coming from highly industrialized places.

Overall, immigrant women face several types of gender-related discrimination (connected to traditional female values), great loss of occupational status and even the constrained validity of their overseas qualifications in the host country (Alcorso, 1989). Considering this context for immigrant women, those who intend to work in predominately male-oriented careers have to struggle with a harder reality.

Esther, an Argentinean engineer, experienced first hand these issues studying and working in a predominately male environment in Australia. Esther was the only woman among her group of university students, during all her university years. In order to graduate, all students needed a workplace internship. All male students easily found work placement while, in her case, it took her several months to be able to negotiate a position within a company. Esther described how gender discrimination has always intersected her work experience:

*I've been working at the same company for 25 years, but it took me two years to get a job there. When I was studying at university, among the initial 100 students, I was the only woman. Most of the guys had a job offer during the first 6 months, but not me. Well...I always knew that I had three things against me: the fact of being a woman, of being an immigrant and of being a bit dark (skin).*

And she goes further describing female's place in Australian society:

*And yes...there is still an unequal position for women in society. For example, only few months ago I was promoted to a higher position, after being in the same position for 14 years, ok? I know, from some colleagues, that the only reason for that was that I am a woman. My bosses never said that into my face, but they are all men as well. Only recently there are more women working in technical positions. You know, it's like "the glass ceiling". It's something that stops you, you don't see it but it stops you. And you can't grab it and say "yes, this is discrimination" because they wrap it in another way, then it's more difficult to prove it and change it. Then you have to try to find a way to fight it so you can contribute to the community and so people around you can have a positive attitude and be able to break these barriers! (Esther)*

Iris, a Uruguayan university professor, described her own experience of gender-related discrimination and indicated how some work environments highly value formal education (which often more men than women can pursue due to more available conditions to work and study), not taking into consideration females' work experience.

*I believe I faced many barriers because I am an immigrant woman here. I am convinced of that, unfortunately. I felt it at different times looking for job, they hired men, younger and Australians. Obviously, they had a PhD, all right, but I have 15 years of experience teaching those issues, that seems not to be important at all for them, isn't it? It's important to have that little piece of paper, the experience*

*doesn't count much. Apart from that, yes...I felt discrimination at the university level from some professors*

Akhavan, Bildt and Wamala (2007), as a result of their study with Swedish and immigrant women and their work-related health factors in Sweden, indicated that female immigrants experience ethnic and gender discrimination in the workplaces considerably more often than their native colleagues. Apart from the presence of job segregation related to gender and ethnicity, immigrant women also encounter difficulties in gaining access to information regarding the work system, report not having many opportunities to upgrade their skills and discuss work conditions and wages with their managers. The authors also pointed out that ethnic discrimination, in combination with gender and ethnicity, had a strong impact on work-related health, leading to several levels of stress and depression among immigrant females.

The impact of discrimination experiences on immigrants' psychological wellbeing is closely related, as some authors have indicated (Kosic, 2006; Liebkind, 2006; Noh et al., 1999; Ward & Leong, 2006), to individual characteristics of the personality, sources of social support, and levels of ethnic identity. The connection between individuals' psychological wellbeing and sources of ethnic support will be further discussed when participants describe their social lives in Australia. However, it is worth mentioning that most participants found high level of emotional support on other Hispanic or Latin American friends when they encountered discrimination in Australia.

To some other women, discrimination episodes did not have a strong determining impact on their lives. Women's self-confidence and self-esteem were basic components to deal with discrimination:

*Discrimination? I didn't let it happen. I used to be very firm on that. No one tramples on me. But yes... it's terrible, society still discriminates foreign people. I also suffered it as a mother because they would discriminate or make fun of my kids at school. But there are some marvellous Australians as well, I've met great Australian people. Some others not that good, but I never let them drag me down*  
(Dora)

As mentioned, high levels of self-esteem, confidence and a positive sense of ethnic identity helped immigrant women to overcome discrimination episodes:

*One always has that thing of being the "wog"<sup>2</sup>. Even if you speak the language, even if you are a citizen. How many times I must have had fights at work because of that. I used to say: "I can speak 3 languages, how many do you know?" first of all,*

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<sup>2</sup> According to Peters (2004), the word "wog" "makes a pariah of anyone it's applied to. Wog seems to have begun as British army slang for an Arab, explained ironically as an acronym for "Western Oriental gentlemen". It quickly became a derogatory word for any non-white person. But chauvinism being what it is, wog is also a pejorative term for "foreigner" in general, as noted in the Oxford Dictionary (1989) and the Australian Macquarie Dictionary (1997). It becomes Anglo-centric in comments such as "incomprehensible wogs", and phrases such as wog languages, indifferently associated with immigrants and tourists. Though wog can be used affirmatively by immigrants themselves, it's an inflammatory word on the lips of anyone else. Part of its offensiveness is that it lumps all immigrants and foreigners together with no attention to their individual backgrounds or identity" (p. 581).

*wash your mouth, because I might be a wog, but you can never call me “bloody wog”, never! (Dora)*

*Experiences of racism? No, just that people used to write on our walls and call us “wogs” and those things. But I also believe it has to do with each one’s attitude. My attitude is that “I don’t know English, but I know things other people don’t” so I never felt intimidated, I think that it helps. My kids had more experiences like that at school, of fighting with other kids. But I don’t think there is bad people in Australia, and well...discrimination...ignorant people discriminate because they don’t know (Lucia)*

*I never considered myself inferior to anyone, on the contrary, superior. Although I arrived with no English, I came with my own language, isn’t it? And as soon as I was able to speak a bit of English, I felt a bit superior to the rest, because they would tell me “well, Julia, you can almost speak two languages, and we can’t”. And I heard that many times. I also understood a bit of Italian. So by understanding another language, it makes you feel...like in another level, and I have confirmed that with my own experience (Julia)*

### **8.1.2.3 Gender, ethnicity, colour and racism: Discrimination within the immigration policies**

The late effects of the White Australian Policy and a male-oriented immigration plan could be observed in the experience of this group of women who immigrated – mostly – during the 1970's. Participants who were already married before coming to Australia were considered as dependants of their husbands to any immigration purposes (Pettman, 1992). Many women reported not being asked at any stage of the immigration process for proof of education or work experience. All married women immigrated mainly because their husbands had previously a work contract in Australia. As no educational background, work experience or English knowledge was asked from most female immigrants during that period, opportunities to work in similar positions to the ones left behind in the home countries were limited (Stein, 1984). Consequently, participants did not benefit from political integrative measures that would incorporate their educational or work-experience background in a contributing way to the Australian society.

Elsa explained her initial experience in Australia:

*During the first 15 years I think, we didn't have a voice [as women]. If we wanted to ask for a loan, or anything else, we couldn't do it by ourselves. To my husband it was more difficult to learn English, until today he doesn't speak much, but I was ignored although I knew a bit of English and I was the one planning everything. We would go to interviews, and they would only look at him. That was the continuous attitude. When I came to Australia, no one ever asked me about my background, I*

*never really thought that I could contribute in the way I have, but no one asked me if I could. I didn't bring any documents or diplomas because I wasn't asked at all.*

Lucia directly experienced the late effects of the White Australian Policy at the end of the 1970's when she decided to move out of Argentina. Still during that time, many immigration programs in Latin America were giving priority to individuals born in Europe or with a direct European descendent (Botzenhart, 2006). Although the Australian Government passed the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975, the white immigrant remained an administrative ideal longer after that date. Lucia demonstrated this with an episode at the immigration department in Argentina:

*The Embassy asked us to take the kids for them to see. And you know, they were all blond! So we didn't have any problem, because at that time, it had to be the White Australia, they would not accept people of colour! They looked for the English prototype, it was in the documents, not a hidden issue at all! It was like that, they wanted white people! And my kids, they were white like little rabbits! So everything went well.*

In this group of Latin American women, many of them had a direct European background (mother or father born in Europe) and most of them fit into the ideal white immigrant stereotype of the 1960's and 1970's. As a result, being white was a factor that helped some immigrants to better adapt, or to avoid conflicts, once in Australia, as Elsa described:

*I think that we were a bit lucky when we just arrived here because, first of all, we were young. Second, we were white, so you go unnoticed. We were still a minority here, not like Latinos in USA. That's why I think we were lucky, because if you don't have that kind of problems at the beginning, all the rest doesn't look problematic.*

## **8.2 Cultural and social life: The relevance of maintaining values and traditions**

The maintenance of Latin American traditions, festivities, values and language proved to be of extreme importance for most participants. This phenomenon seems to be a way to reaffirm cultural identities, providing an active sense of belonging while trying to adapt to a new cultural environment. As previously mentioned, immigration can be one of the most stressful experiences individuals undergo. By maintaining values, traditions and language, immigrants try to counter effect feelings of loss and of being rootless.

Networks of social ethnic support, in most cases, promoted higher levels of psychological wellbeing, self-esteem and a positive ethnic identity. At the same time, the transmission of Latin American values to a second generation born in Australia seemed of particular relevance to most women. Thanks to this process, first generation of immigrants feel that the essence of their culture had not been lost and that their children would eventually remain in contact with relatives, values and traditions from Latin America.

### 8.2.1 Maintaining the Spanish language

Language appeared to be the most salient value that all participants sought to maintain within their families in Australia. Not only the strong connection to the Spanish language is due to the fact that most participants were raised in Latin America and, thus, established a direct and strong identification with the language, but also because of the limited language mastery that many of them reached in English. Other research findings with Latin Americans in Australia outlined the relevance immigrants place into the maintenance of the Spanish Language within their families (Vittorino, 2003; Zevallos, 2004). According to Zevallos, language is considered a way to ensure that individuals' ethnic identity is preserved and that culture and traditions are transmitted to immigrants' children in Australia. The maintenance of a Latin American identity is, then, closely related to the transmission of the native language to the immigrant's children (Arriagada, 2005; Martín, 1999), and this phenomenon appeared to be a salient factor among all participants:

*I insisted on my son studying Spanish. And we didn't have any problems, on the contrary, he says that "he is made in Argentina, born in Australia". He feels very Argentinean, he speaks Spanish very well (Betina)*

*I always tried to maintain in my family, with my kids, mainly the Spanish language. Not only so they could one day communicate with their Argentinean and Uruguayan families but also as a way to obtain more points at the university if they do a second language. My kids now consider themselves Latinos though they were born here.*

*Both speak the language. Spanish has always been something very important to me  
(Esther)*

In few cases, some women were against the use of English within their households, as it was perceived as a potential threat to their Latin American identity and a feeling of loss of their ethnic culture:

*At home, we have always spoken in Spanish. I never allowed them to speak in English. It was to maintain the culture, which was really difficult with the two oldest ones [born in Chile] with the youngest ones I didn't have a problem (Mara)*

*Within my family, we always spoke Spanish. Thanks God that the kids didn't speak in English at home, because I didn't want them to! Is not because we came here that we are going to lose our language! Don't you think? (Rita)*

To individuals who reached an efficient level of English in Australia, the presence of an accent perpetuated the distance between Australians and this group of immigrants, often reminded that, although they have spent most part of their lives in Australia, they were not considered “locals” by the broader society. As a result, the return to Spanish within the households or among social networks seemed to serve as a refuge where feelings of difference were diminished and where loyalty to ethnic values was promoted.

### 8.2.2 Maintenance of traditional food, music and dance

Food and music appeared to be the second most mentioned aspects maintained from participants' Latin American roots. The transmission of – as they explained – the “love” for Latin American food and the way it is enjoyed as a social gathering was a salient part of immigrants' lives in Australia:

*The most beautiful thing to me is a big table, having my people eating at home. I want to maintain and transmit to my kids that relationship, those things that I think are “our things”...If I don't have the joy of cooking, of making a barbecue [barbecues are a salient aspect of Argentinean social traditions] why would I want to stay here? If that's the most basic thing for my family/friends... how will I compensate the lack of that?(Elsa)*

*I still cook our food, my kids and grand kids always ask me for that, our traditional food (Rita)*

Maintenance of Latin American food appeared to be the most emphasized ethnic emblem of Zevallos' (2003) research with Latin Americans in Australia. The preparation and sharing of ethnic food represented a central phenomenon of great cultural and emotional value to Latin American immigrant families.

Apart from cooking and sharing Latin American food, immigrants valued the fact that their children participated in traditional dance schools in Australia in order to maintain

a strong ethnic reference within their families. Alma, an Argentinean housewife, mentioned that sending her youngest daughter to folkloric dance classes was of extreme relevance to her:

*Both my daughters studied, the eldest one did a little bit more than the youngest one, who did many things but at the end did nothing! But at least she took folkloric dance classes, which meant a lot to me! To us, it was the most beautiful thing!*

Esther, mother of two, has actively participated within the Latin American community in Melbourne, being a strong influence for her two children, who also took part in many Latin American groups:

*My kids consider themselves Latinos though they were born here. Both speak the language, something that has always been very important to me. Music as well. When they were younger, they were very involved with dancing clubs, Spanish schools, they were always representing something Latin.*

Betina, who has also worked for many years at immigration and community centres, referred to her son as an active member of traditional dance schools:

*We created a dance group within the Spanish school where I was working. Kids there used to learn Argentinean and Chilean dances, and my son used to dance there as well. When my grandmother came to stay with us, she brought him some*

*traditional instruments as well... Later on, he stopped going there because the teacher left, but all that he learnt at school, he putted it into practice and maintained it. I always believed that we needed to show to our youth and our own kids where we stand and what are our own roots...what happened before coming here.*

Regarding the most important festivities celebrated by this group of Latin American immigrants, occasions like Christmas and New Year were the most referred. These special events represented opportunities to continue with ethnic traditions, bringing together children – especially daughters – and mothers in the kitchen for the preparation of recipes from their countries of origin.

Participants celebrated these dates with the reunion of the nuclear family and other Latin American close friends who had also immigrated. On this aspect, many participants revealed the significance of the co-national friends met in Australia and how they became part of their families. Some participants stressed the relevance of celebrating these dates as a way to stay together and support each other in a foreign country:

*We maintain the tradition of Christmas and New Year, because if you don't have your family around you on those dates...it's very difficult, that's the only way to stay here, how are you going to stay by yourself? (Lucia)*

*At Christmas and New Year I like baking a bread with my daughter, and having "mate" [traditional Argentinean drink] while cooking, although I don't like mate*

*too much...What I want is to maintain and transmit those things that I think are “our things”, that relationship to things and with people, having “my people” around the table eating at home (Elsa)*

As Vasta (1993) indicated, the importance of the maintenance of food, dance and festivities can also be understood as a way of resistance against dominant Australian culture and institutions. The continuance of Latin American traditions serves as a connection with a sense of personal, family and cultural history, a sense of attachment and reference that, as many immigrants feel, Australia cannot provide them. Consequently, the emphasis on traditions such as language, food, music and festivities are a manifestation of immigrants' identities. This phenomenon also contributes to the safe construction of group boundaries (Tajfel, 1978), and works as a relief to many immigrants who are perceived as “outsiders” by the Australian community.

Research developed by Chavira and Phinney (1991) with Hispanic adolescents in the USA showed that individuals with higher levels of ethnic identity – which involves being very committed to one's racial/ethnic background, learning about one's cultural heritage, being proud of it and maintaining it by relating to the ethnic community and by perpetuating cultural symbols such as food, music and other traditions – presented higher levels of self-esteem and dealt better with discrimination by discussing it and disproving racist stereotypes. As it will be next presented, sources of ethnic social support have the potential to provide an emotional buffer against immigrants' experiences of discrimination and stress related to the acculturation process.

### **8.2.3 Sources of social support**

According to many authors, one of the major sources of psychological and emotional support for Latin Americans resides within their own families (Amézquita et al., 1995; Cortes, 1995; Hovey, 2000; Miranda & Matheny, 2000). For most immigrants, the decision to move entails leaving behind this important reference of social and emotional support. In Australia, many participants without any close relative strengthened their connection with their own children and often made strong ties with other immigrants from similar cultural backgrounds.

Social networking with other immigrants is closely related – apart from a cultural connection – to participants' restricted communicational skills in the host country's language. Within these cases, immigrants sought for individuals under similar circumstances or with a common ethnic background in the host country. As Kim (1987) outlined, this type of social networking often facilitates the adaptation process of recently arrived immigrants by communicating in the same language and understanding the specific needs of that initial period. However, according to the author, a full adaptation would only take place if immigrants interacted equally with the host environment.

However, the fact of not being able to fully express thoughts and feelings in English forced many participants to relate even more with co-nationals or other Spanish-speaking individuals in Australia. Some of them described the impact of limited language skills on their social life:

*I don't feel integrated in Australia because I don't have friends. I have some English-speaking friends, but very few, we can't talk and have a conversation. I don't know how to express myself as I haven't studied English...I've been living in this house for 3 years and I don't exchange anything else than "good morning" and "bye bye" with the neighbours. My friends are only Spanish-speaking people and Latinos (Lucia)*

*When I arrived I made many Spanish-speaking friends, as I couldn't speak English. After many years I told my husband how I used to suffer, I used to cry every time I would receive letters from my parents. You come to this country and you don't feel loved because you feel so lonely! (Rita)*

*At the beginning, I started reconciling with the idea of being here through the friendship that I made with other South Americans, because friendship with Australians was very restricted because of the language. The first Australian friends I had were people considered here as "gigs". They are not people who would discriminate other people because of their colour or from place of origin. That was something that always attracted me to them. Although I had problems with some Australians, these were people who would give me hope that one day I could communicate and be part of the Australian community (Esther).*

For some women with good levels of English, the decision to reinforce social networks with other Latin American immigrants was directly related to their need to share

common values from their home countries. Socializing with other immigrants promoted feelings of empathy and mutual understanding of experiences closely related to the acculturation process:

*The group of friends that we have has been absolutely essential to resist all the difficulties. They are all Latin Americans, Argentineans. We share the same interests, we are pretty similar. Women in the group are there for each other all the time (Elsa)*

*Most of my friends are Argentineans. We also meet with other English-speaking friends, very good people. We don't have any problem with that, but I feel that I like "our things". Generally, when these English-speaking people come home, I don't invite anyone else. But when we are with "our people", we are like 3 or 4 couples and we talk "our things" and we "do our things. We have always been like that, together in good and bad times. To me, my family is the one that is here, these friends (Alma)*

According to Vega, Kolody and Valle (1987), satisfactory adjustment of immigrants is directly related to their capacity to resolve interpersonal stressors associated with breaking-up of social networks in the home land and replacing them in the new country. The relevance of immigrants' social resources and its relationship with mental health outcomes was the research focus of many authors (e.g., Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Lin & Ensel, 1989; Lin et al., 1999; Thoits, 1982; Vega et al., 1987) while other academics investigated

the impact of the specific social support resulted from immigrants' ethnic community (e.g., Lopez et al., 2004; Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Noh & Avison, 1996; Noh et al., 1999).

Research developed by Noh and Avison (1996) with a large sample of Korean immigrants in Toronto, Canada, indicated that not all sources of social support are equally effective and that specific ethnic support had a direct impact on immigrants' depressive symptomatology. According to this research, general social support from the mainstream society had almost no impact on this process. Supporting Thoits' (1986) hypothesis of the relevance of socio-cultural similarity – an empathic understanding of stressful situations more likely to occur when there is socio-cultural or situational similarity among individuals – the authors highlighted the importance of complementarity between the needs and values of both parties involved in the social interaction. As a result, new immigrants tended to feel more affinity with other immigrants as they were perceived to experience similar life situations. Co-nationals or immigrants with similar cultural values are expected to better understand the nature of newly arrived individuals in the host country. The findings of this research also indicated that while immigrants are struggling with the adjustment process and experience some level of discrimination from the broader society, they tend to perceive assistance from non-ethnic individuals as inadequate and even controlling. Overall, Noh and Avison (1996) found that effective psychological and social resources directly reduced levels of distress, inhibiting the occurrence of further stressors or reducing distressful consequences.

In spite of the benefits of receiving support from other immigrants, this phenomenon could also entail some possible negative outcomes. Some authors believe that the more self-contained immigrants are within their own ethnic group, the less they will

seek to establish deeper contact with the receiving society (Leslie, 1992; Syrotuik & D'Arcy, 1984). Although newly arrived individuals could receive a very positive assistance from other immigrants and this might work as a protective buffer against social stressors, this can also promote immigrants' insulation and isolation. Within this type of ethnic connection, immigrants' only source of knowledge and assistance remains within their own ethnic boundaries, isolating them from socially exchanging with the mainstream community. However, establishing bonds and connections with locals is a two-way movement, not only depending on individuals' willingness to integrate but also on the cultural values and attitudes of the receiving society towards immigrants (Callan, 1983; Nesdale, 2002; Ward & Masgoret, 2008).

The limited identification with Australian culture and the restricted friendship with members from the broader society was a common phenomenon among Latin American women:

*I would say that the case of Latin immigrants mixing only with Latinos it's even justifiable. Here the culture doesn't open to you with strength and doesn't open its arms to the point you can say "this person it's a true friend of mine!" Australians are very simple people, but they don't offer you that kind of friendship, so what remains is that Arabs will get together with Arabs, Argentineans with Argentineans... because Australia doesn't deliver something strong (Isabel)*

*More than anything, my family has been very important to me, but also I have 2 or 3 good friends – also immigrants – with whom I share problems and we support each*

*other. I can't tell you why there isn't a big friendship with Australians; they are people we know but we rarely meet, they are the parents of our kids' friends. We get along well but don't invite each other to our homes. We meet casually or we have a coffee talk, that's all (Iris)*

*My husband used to mix with people easily, but with me it's different. I used to say: "if they don't talk to me, why should I do it?" You feel the difference, and apart from that, Australians are very cold. Now that I'm old, I don't care any more, I'm tired now (Dora)*

*Most of my friends are South Americans. We've met Australians when we've travelled, many people are very friendly, specially the elder ones, but maybe that things of "where do you come from?" ...always makes a difference (Laura)*

*We maintain the tradition of Christmas and New Year, when we get all the family together. But for example, the other day it was the Australian day, and to us...it sounds like any other day! I don't know what it could be done for us to be more involved, more integrated... (Lucia)*

Carmen, an Argentinean who migrated 41 years ago, had a vast work experience with immigration issues at several Government and community settings. In her opinion, the Australian mentality does not absorb immigrants' backgrounds and experiences:

*The last intimate contact never happens, you always remain wanting for more...  
So... those immigrants' marvellous stories, so shocking, so meaningful, they are not  
a part of the national mentality. They are often lost...*

Participants continuously reported not feeling part of the broader society, most of them not having closer relationships with Australians and still facing different types of discrimination and segregation. As Leslie (1992) indicated, it would be naïve to simply suggest that immigrants should establish stronger social networks with the host society if the broader culture is not genuinely receptive of immigrants and their cultural heritage.

Not only is the mainstream social receptivity essential for immigrants' integration, but also labour and educational policies should recognize and value immigrants' previous background. If a combination of factors takes place – such as immigrants' struggle with cultural and language differences, limited family support in the host country, low recognition of previous educational or labour experiences, and unrewarding and low paid jobs – individuals would tend to seek support from other immigrants in similar circumstances.

Nevertheless, relationships with other immigrants in Australia were not always free of conflicts. Many participants indicated unsatisfactory episodes within their own ethnic communities: politic or economic discrimination from co-nationals decreased individuals' capacity to find social support from same-ethnic individuals in Australia.

*My social network is constituted mainly by Latinos, mainly Brazilians, due to my partner. Within my own community, Chileans, you get to find many people who*

*have forgotten their roots. People who arrived here with four bags and today only live caring about material things or what they have or not. I don't think that's good. You can progress financially but because of that you don't have to forget what you are and where you came from (Mara)*

*In Argentina friends don't care much about what you have or what you are. Here [Argentine] friends are always looking at what you earn or what you do. Maybe it's me that I was so unlucky to find only people like this. But here you can't trust them, it happens even with other Latinos. In particular of your own nationality, it sounds bad but it's like that. For example, we didn't get to know about many things because of the lack of English. Due to the lack of information and lack of help from the rest of the Argentineans, we received the Government's support for our kids four years later, and we didn't have the financial support when we bought our first house either. The other Argentineans knew about it, but they didn't let us know. Selfishness? Maybe I'm wrong, but we never got any help from Latinos (Rita)*

This phenomenon strengthened the isolating life of some Latin American women, who could not relate to Australians due to their limitations in English.

*At the beginning, as my husband used to see me so lonely because I couldn't communicate with any of our neighbours or his colleagues' wives – although I used to go everywhere with the dictionary! - , he started taking me to the Argentinean club. We would go and they will only be showing off how much money they spend*

*on things, you would arrive there and they would look at you from top-down and they would do the same to my kids. So we stopped going there, they were just gossiping or playing cards. I don't like that. So it was difficult to maintain friendships with Latinos, and apart from that, the distances in Melbourne are too big and everyone works, that doesn't help (Rita)*

Contradictory, Rita was selected for this research through a Hispanic community centre where she participated. Many females of this study were active members of Hispanic community clubs where they get to meet with other immigrants. This seemed to be a healthy activity in the lives of housewives, widows and individuals at a late adulthood. As reported, low levels of socialising characterized immigrants' every day routines. Thus, community centres represented a positive social networking source, where immigrants not only meet to discuss issues in their own language but also to plan diverse activities and receive English and computer classes.

### **8.3 Gender and private life**

In this section participants describe their experiences as women in Australia, and how the fact of being an immigrant and a member of an ethnic minority inter-played with their gender status. Women explain as well their family lives and the relevance of their husbands and children in their own acculturation process. The impact of the immigration and acculturation process within participants' family rhythm is also presented. Finally,

immigrants analyse the influence of traditional gender roles and the transition – often expected but not always achieved – to more equal values and roles within the household.

### **8.3.1 Being a woman in Australia**

Although immigration to Australia resulted in a sum of challenges and a learning process that many participants were still undergoing, most of them agreed that Australian life provided them with more opportunities to become financially independent. More favourable structural and financial conditions offered a new sense of stability and increased feelings of satisfaction, freedom and self-confidence:

*It must be hard to have feminist values in Argentina because women are subject to other things, like the lack of work and not being able to achieve their financial independence. The Government doesn't support you financially if you separate from your husband, all those things are more difficult in Argentina. Here the horizons expand a little bit, you feel like travelling, you feel like doing many more things than what you can't actually do in a country with scarce resources (Elsa)*

*Here, there is no problem with lack of work. Women can get separated or divorced, they can leave the man and go on by themselves. But not over there! Women are still very dependent on men... (Isabel)*

Financial stability helped women achieve their independence, to achieve personal goals and to experience higher levels of wellbeing and self-motivation. According to Darvishpour (2002), who investigated immigrant families and their acculturation experiences in Sweden, women from more traditional societies tend to increase their power resources after moving to Sweden. Broader educational and employment opportunities, state subsidies and support, more liberal legislation and a better social status for women in general provided female immigrants a chance to become increasingly independent. As a result of women's higher education levels and stronger labour participation, their power resources within the family tend to increase. Similar findings were pinpointed by other authors investigating female Latin American immigration and the subsequent transformations women experience after entering the labour force in the new country (Burton, 2004; Jones-Correa, 1998; Pedraza, 1991).

In spite of the domestic conflicts that might result from this process, financially independent women were more willing to challenge conflictive and unequal partnerships, as it was Rita's example:

*I think that women now are more rebellious. There are still, of course, some who follow that male machismo and don't know how to protect themselves, they are in the same situation as I was with that machismo that says "if you are not with me, you won't do or won't be anything in life". Now I feel satisfied because I did something that my ex-husband thought I wasn't able to do. And I achieved it. Financially I am very good and feel proud of myself, for all that I've done. It helped me to get separated from him, because he used to do, how to say it?...a*

*“brainwash”, that if I wasn’t with him, everything would collapse. And I discovered myself. We got separated and I bought his half of the house, I paid it with my own work. I am proud of myself, I know what I want and what I can do. And everything is related to economic circumstances*

Many participants agreed on the fact that Australia provided a stronger ground for feminist values, facilitating, as they mentioned, a “more liberated woman” and the achievement of a more equal position in society:

*At least here in Australia they admit that domestic violence exists, and women in general have some kind of participation, there are statistics about them and their problems. I don’t know how much it’s done in practice, but at least they admit those issues. Australia it’s a bit more advanced related to open discussions, studies and research on gender issues. I think that Argentina remains at a more academic level, not really at a labour level. Back there, the word feminist is still associated with being lesbian. There is some kind of fight but not yet at the family and religious levels, also because men are very comfortable in that situation (Elsa)*

*I see that women have always had more rights here than in Argentina. And they progress every time more. My daughters, for example, they have their own lives and they work because they want to. Some time ago, the eldest one didn’t want to have kids because she was working. In general, I think that they [politicians] are trying to make a more egalitarian Australia, they are fighting for that (Alma)*

As women participate in the labour force and have their own salary, they feel empowered to renegotiate unequal gender roles within their families. However, this is not a task free of conflicts. Some authors have indicated (e.g., Darvishpour, 1999, 2002; Dion & Dion, 2001; Jones-Correa, 1998; Rajjman & Semyonov, 1997) that women's ideological changes and labour achievements do not necessarily result in a similar ideological change from their partners' side. According to these authors, psychological stress, separation and divorce are common phenomena among immigrant families from more traditional countries where females entered the paid labour force after immigration. This issue will be further discussed in the next sections.

### **8.3.2 Family life in Australia**

Immigrants' narratives showed a strong personal adherence to Latin American values and traditions, which had a deep impact – for those who migrated being single – on the decision of whom to marry in Australia. Participants who came to Australia already married did it with a partner from the same country. Women who married after immigrating felt closer to Latin American or Spanish-speaking men. Even more, most of them did not imagine themselves sharing their intimate lives with someone from a different cultural background. Only one participant divorced her Latin American partner and remarried an Anglo-Saxon.

Although in many cases they acknowledge a bigger male participation within the family life, it is still possible to observe the influence of traditional gender values affecting

the division of domestic and childcare duties. As a result, most participants described their daily routines as overcharged and stressful. Motherhood was a significant part of women's lives. Without the support of any close relatives to share childcare or provide emotional support, females struggled trying to work outside and inside their homes and being present mothers for their children. Despite all these factors, one of the major reasons to continue juggling so many responsibilities as immigrant women was the prospect to provide a better structural and financial future for their children.

#### **8.3.2.1 Marriage**

As previously mentioned, most participants were married to Latin Americans at the time of the research. Most of them immigrated with their husbands, who shared the same nationality and social background. The remaining women met their husbands in Australia, not necessarily of the same nationality, but all of them Latin Americans or Spanish-speakers. A common factor among most women who married in Australia was the need to share their lives with a Spanish-speaking or Latin American partner. Iris explained her personal experience:

*I came to Australia when I was 18, and 3 years later I got married to a Uruguayan. I always imagined myself with a Uruguayan or someone similar to me. I think that never...back at that time and even today...I couldn't be with anyone else. My whole background comes from somewhere else, with other values, another culture, and to me all that is very important. At that time it was very difficult to find another*

*person. I had some local friends, but I couldn't see myself with a partner who wouldn't be from the same ...I wouldn't say nationality, but at least South American (Iris)*

Laura described a considerable cultural distance perceived between the Latin American and the Australian way of behaving and expressing emotions:

*I think that when I came I did it with one idea and then you change with what you find here, you change your mind [she laughs]. When you come, you think "I'm going to Australia, I will certainly find an Australian partner". And then...you meet Australians...but it's like you don't fit much. You don't fit with your ideas, with your way of behaving, with the language, it's like you feel more comfortable with people of your own nationality (Laura)*

According to some authors (Litcher, Brown, Qian, & Carmalt, 2007; Qian, 1997, 2004; Qian & Cobas, 2004), immigrants tend to marry within their own ethnic community – or within communities sharing similar economic, cultural and language heritage – when they have not reached an advanced level of economic and social integration with the broader society. When immigrants have low levels of education and limited English knowledge, possibilities to socially exchange with members of the host society are scarce. Mixed marriages are a sign that intimate and sincere relationships between individuals of different ethnic groups have successfully taken place and that not only them but also the broader society sees it as acceptable. Thus, interethnic marriages result from social and

economic integration. When immigrants encounter limited opportunities to exchange with the host society due to cultural and language distances, and when their labour outcome is segregated to low paid, unskilled or semi-skilled positions, they remain constantly trapped in an isolated social cycle. It is expected that most Latin American women in similar conditions felt closer to co-nationals or other Spanish-speaking partners in Australia.

Many participants referred to the immigration and acculturation experience as a process that strengthened the partnership with their husbands. Especially for those women who immigrated already married, the experience of being overseas without any other close relatives promoted a closer bond between husband and wife:

*With us, I think that the result was positive, we got to know each other more, and as we had to deal with all this immigration process, we became better partners (Elsa)*

*We have always been very good partners, always. Although I always say “I was brought here”, not happily because I didn’t really want to come, we have always been just us...we had a very good marriage, he used to listen to me a lot each time I would cry, he was very supportive. Not now that he complains when I cry! [she laughs] After so many years of being married! (Alma)*

*My husband helped me so much to adapt to Australia, so much...We are good partners in everything, we also share hobbies, we are both crazy about our community work at the radio. He gives me his shoulder and support me in anything I do, we have always been excellent partners, married for 32 years... (Betina)*

As described by Isabel, Australian life had also facilitated a closer relationship with her partner and helped disentangle some traditional functions based in “Latin machismo” within Chilean families:

*Here we've been much closer, with our kids and everything. I think that the immigration was a good thing for the family life. My husband has participated much more in our family than a traditional Chilean man. Look, in Latin America, men are leaders, they feel they can go back home whenever they feel like. So many of them have a second hidden woman. Here it's not like that, here is from work to home. It's like they don't have anywhere to go! There is nothing to do here! [she laughs] Well, they can play sports... We have always played sports and do other things, so we have always stayed together. We have been a close family, so I find that immigration was good in that sense (Isabel)*

### **8.3.2.2 Motherhood and Family life**

Most participants faced several challenges as immigrant women without any kind of family support in Australia. This situation forced them to manage most responsibilities from motherhood, work and acculturation to a new country by themselves, strengthening the relationship not only with their husbands, but most especially, with their children. Although most participants mentioned that the partnership with their husbands grew considerably as a result of the immigration experience, the bond with their children was one

of the most significant aspects stressed in their stories. Not only immigrants' children provided a new source of satisfaction, but also represented one of the major reasons to stay in Australia and continue facing all the adaptation difficulties. One of the participants described her self-perception as an immigrant mother and a woman in Australia:

*I think I am a fighter, that I have lot of pride and also that I am the head of the family, that's why I've tried to overcome the difficulties. I believe that if the woman breaks down, all the rest breaks down. Sometimes I say "I am a weak-strong person". Always fighting for our kids, for our families, with the fact of being an immigrant... (Elsa)*

In many cases, the acknowledgement of broader educational and financial opportunities for the immigrants' children in Australia was a major reason to face all challenges and remain in this country. As indicated by Pettman (1992), although many female immigrants in Australia often feel loss and nostalgia for what and who was left behind, experiencing exhaustion and even sometimes exploitation at work, the hope for a better future for their children remains as the ultimate worthwhile reason to continue with their immigration journey.

*I overcame many difficulties because of my eldest daughter. She was my main incentive to stay here, because of her education. She was always progressing at school. When she got into university, she was only 16 years old and she had one of the best marks of the area! So, life was built around my daughter. She was our*

*support here, she used to say “mum, I like it here, I want to stay”. So we stayed*

*(Mara)*

*I am convinced that we had more opportunities in Australia than what we would have had in Argentina. My kids wouldn't be doing as good there as they do here.*

*They are both doing so well. They already own their own house. My son, for example, he has his own house and also 3 or 4 apartments. And that you can't do in*

*Argentina! (Julia)*

As previously mentioned, the lack of family support in Australia greatly impacted on women's lives, leading to feelings of stress and helplessness due to the overwhelming sum of responsibilities outside and inside home:

*It's always a continuous fight, you have to be on top of everything, because you don't have any other kind of support. Here, you don't have a grandmother or an auntie or anyone to share all that involves kids, work...marriage. It's a bit “too much” just for one self! If my kids could just go to their grandmother's house one day because...let's say... “Mum was stressed with so much work and she didn't want to cook”. But no! Here there is nothing like that. I can't allow that to myself! I have to calm down and it's over! I have to tell myself “Now I have to be there, available for my kids”... because life is like that! (Elsa)*

*Immigration had a huge impact on us. Now I see that before I couldn't do things, I wouldn't be satisfied or fulfilled. I was a mother, but I had to keep so many things to myself, so many things to put up to. Regardless if I felt bad at work, I couldn't reach home in a bad mood! Because I had to go on! For my children! So I had to keep to myself all those feelings of anger and helplessness! I had to look for ways to release that anger! Maybe by meeting with a friend and telling her all these things in order to put it all out! In my case, too many things collided and made my husband and I get divorced. It's just that we accumulated so many things! (Mara)*

*In my case, my support came from my kids, but there are so many things you can't tell a kid...but they helped me a lot to go on, due to the love I have for them and the love they feel for me. But it was very difficult. I had to send the kids to do different activities to compensate the absence of their parents. It's very hard for parents when they are in a country by themselves...with no family at all. I had to do everything by myself. When the kids were sick, I wasn't always able to take care of them. So I had to leave them alone at home and call them from work to check how they were doing. Not even a neighbour to help me checking on them once in a while. It was very hard. As a working mother you lose many things, good and bad things (Rita)*

As described above, the lack of family support in Australia was one of the most stressful and conflictive factors faced by most participants of the research. This phenomenon impacted on immigrants' lives in several ways. Feelings of loss,

disconnection and geographical distance greatly affected women's psychological wellbeing. Apart from this, the lack of relatives in Australia interfered in females' chances to have more time to learn the language, pursue further levels of education and improve their work opportunities.

Mara, a Chilean mother of 4 children, was a housekeeper after working in factories and cleaning agencies. All along her narrative, feelings of vulnerability were often present:

*I feel particularly frustrated because the years passed and I couldn't finish with my education. Look, I'm the only one among my brothers who doesn't have a profession. In Chile, I would have been able to work or study even having the kids. Here I had to face the barrier of the kids! Because I didn't have anyone who could take care of them! Now I am 53 years old and I'm trying to take some courses, but you find that the language barrier is still there, that you are still missing something in English. So now I do things with the (Latin) community to have fun, to get to meet each other and help. After the factories I worked as a cleaner, but now I don't work any more.*

What Mara experienced was a common limitation faced by many other women. Studies and surveys developed in Australia (Alcorso, 1989, 1995a; Cox et al., 1976) indicated that childcare was the major single problem working immigrant women had to face in the new country, having a negative impact on their own acculturation process and in their capacity to fully develop their skills.

Although Iris migrated with her parents and had an extensive family support in Australia, she frequently felt overcharged of responsibilities trying to balance traditional family duties and external paid work:

*My rhythm of life was really killing for many years trying to combine my work at the university with my two baby boys, that's why I moved closer to the university. But I had to fight like crazy anyway as, after moving, my parents were living far and I had to manage by myself with everything...as I could. Everything has been done running all the time, from here to there. When my second son started school, I said "no more, I can't go on like this!" I was tired. I worked full time for 10 years, and decided to go part time or casual since 1994.*

Some authors (Dion & Dion, 2001; Noh et al., 1992; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997) outlined this phenomenon, observing that most immigrant women who join the paid labour force often present higher levels of stress and depression than their male counterparts, mainly due to the accumulation of duties, the unequal gender responsibilities at home and the limited family or social resources to assist with childcare. Apart from that, the relevance of being a present mother while their children were growing up was a common fact stressed by most participants:

*I managed working and taking care of my 5 kids, I kept my shop open for 23 years. And I closed it because the rent was too high and we couldn't go on paying, otherwise I would have gone on. But at the same time, I would spend the whole day*

*with my kids. In the mornings, I would take the youngest one with me at work. Then I would go back home after work and the rest of the kids would come back from school. So I used to stay with them doing their homework, being with them. They achieved all the things they did thanks to the fact that they were not alone at home*  
*(Lucia)*

*I didn't face too many problems because I was working from home, that's why I did it, in fact. In that way, I would take the kids to school, I would work my hours and when it was time to pick them up, I would go. I was able to take care of them, I never left them alone. Being a present mother, everything changes. When you have to work in a specific timeline somewhere else, then everything is more difficult*  
*(Julia)*

*My husband always had a very good salary. Why will I go to work leaving the kids alone? I always took care of them, always, I never left them alone* *(Alma)*

In spite of all the pragmatic and ideological changes entailed with the immigration process, the traditional ideal of being a present mother remained unquestionable to most immigrants. The pressure to fulfil this “superwoman ideal” (Dion & Dion, 2001), someone who is in charge of domestic tasks, outside paid work, children upbringing, and also has to deal with her own adaptation process, certainly attaches potential psychological and physical costs.

### 8.3.2.3 A step behind: Renegotiating gender roles at home

Although many participants saw female's reality in Australia as more "independent" and "liberal", gender differences were still present in many aspects of their lives, overcharging them with duties. Most women described their routines as exhausting and sometimes emotional distressing, mainly due to the accumulation of outside work and domestic responsibilities:

*As a woman in Uruguay you are in charge of all the domestic duties, and if you decide to work outside home...then, patience! You still have to do everything the same way! That is your role, that is your function! But women here still work a lot. I think that women here are overcharged of duties, I see it in my family. For example, my father never took care of the domestic things, only does it when my mother gets sick. But well...it has been a whole life with another set of mind, other values...  
(Iris)*

*Although I call myself a feminist, I still do 3 or 5 times more things at home than my husband to maintain all the things that I want, my independence, and at the end I maintain everything! Women are still overcharged of duties. Absolutely overcharged. In Argentina, women must experience this and even more, because imagine not having your financial independence...At least here, women have a bigger participation (Elsa)*

Elsa continued describing how Australian rhythm of life affected the household division of duties and how Latin men, from her perspective, maintained and incorporated values that seemed most convenient for them:

*The division of domestic duties is pretty well shared, but almost every duty has to be directed...and you can't change that in them! It's a bit a combination of what he [husband] brought from there and what he saw here that suited him perfectly! And that thing that women work and they contribute to the economy like them...also suited them so well! But, anyway...he doesn't have any problems in "helping", but it's just "helping". It's a constant fight!*

As introduced by Elsa's example, most traditional gender values related to the division of household duties were still maintained. Although many individuals changed their opinions and discourse about how domestic and family responsibilities should be divided when both parents work outside home, the practice was significantly incongruent. As indicated by Franco, Sabatini and Crosby (2004), there is a lack of correspondence between gender values and behaviours among many contemporary Latin American immigrant couples. A new role for women in society, presenting higher levels of education and a strong participation in the paid labour force, has not greatly affected men's roles and behaviours (Darvishpour, 2002).

According to participants, most male participation was limited to traditionally male-oriented activities, such as organizing barbecues, cutting the grass, or fixing things at home. Activities related to cleaning, daily cooking, raising the children, driving them to school or

even taking care of them when sick were, in most cases, female tasks. It was possible to observe how traditional male and female roles persisted within the private life: whenever men participated in any domestic task, they did it in order to “help” women in their responsibilities:

*Men always have a tendency of being “machista”, at least in my case! There is a bit of change nowadays, in the sense that he realizes that I need help. But “machismo” is always there, with the idea that men are superior. I don’t know, maybe life has to be like that! We’ve been raised that way, where women have to be subjected to men. But if it’s like that, it should be with respect, in an open communication...where no one says “this is like that because I say so” (Laura)*

*I do everything at home, but if there are few things that I can’t, I write them down in a paper and he does it later. He also cooks a lot, that’s why we have a barbecue outside. We share things (Alma)*

Iris, a Uruguayan university lecturer who tried to reconcile childcare, domestic duties and a full time position at a university in Melbourne, described a similar phenomenon:

*With the years passing, my husband “learnt” to change, that means, now he “helps” quite a lot at home. At the beginning, it was very difficult, I had to do everything, everything. He would come back home at 6 pm and relax. Not now, it*

*has been years that he helps me. He comes back from work and clears the table, for example. When I have to teach at night, I leave the food almost ready, and they manage to organize everything, so it's all right. It's much easier when the kids grow up (Iris)*

The negotiation of a more equal division of responsibilities was far from being achieved. As some women explained, traditional roles at home were very difficult to change:

*My husband never did anything, for example, he never gave the feeding bottle to any of our 5 kids! He was always dedicated to his studies, to reading...and after moving, here in Australia, he did the same. All the domestic duties were mine, I also had my mother-in-law living with us for 22 years, so that helped. As I used to sew, I would go out to deliver the clothes and she would stay home taking care of them or feeding them, and that was a great help to me otherwise it would have been impossible! My son was the same, he never did to many things at home. What he would do was cutting the grass, and things like that (Lucia)*

*My husband started changing during his last 5 years of life. He used to say: "you work so much, I never realized all this, did I? Let me at least wash the dishes". Then I would say "you don't have to do it now, now we are only two at home!". He would say that I never told him what to do or push him to do things at home. But well...I had to do it, ...I was at home, and you know...we can. But traditional roles*

*are very difficult to change. Men don't make efforts to do things at home, it's all up to us (Julia)*

In spite of women's achievements in the educational and labour environments, the renegotiation of household and family duties between partners did not fully take place. Consequently, it is no surprise that women struggle with their overwhelming reality as immigrants, workers, mothers and housewives.

#### **8.4 Acculturation outcomes**

A common finding of this research was that most participants did not feel integrated into the Australian community. Some of them experienced various levels of separation-isolation from the mainstream society. In spite of that, few women described their acculturation outcome as personally empowering and constructive.

Among those who experienced limited levels of integration, the main factors directly involved in their acculturation outcome were: feelings of homesickness and lack of family support in the new country; perceived cultural distance between their own and Australian values; limited levels of English knowledge and negative responses from the receiving community (perceived labour and social discrimination related to language skills and accent, ethnic background and gender). Apart from those factors, most immigrants indicated the absence of efficient governmental assistance for recent immigrants. Social services and English classes were not provided at the adequate time/mode for most immigrant women with children. The absence of free of cost childcare services negatively

impacted on women's capacity to improve their labour and social chances to integrate. Participants also referred being reminded by the mainstream society that they were not considered "locals" in Australia, mainly because of their appearance, accent or ethnic traditions. This was negatively felt by many women who have spent most part of their lives in Australia who, in order to "feel at home" in the new country, need to feel accepted as equal members.

The group of immigrant women who experienced positive acculturation outcomes indicated that Australia, as a safe and stable country, provided more educational and work opportunities for themselves and a much better future for their children. Immigrants' personal comparisons of what was left behind and what was achieved in the new country, reflecting on a positive balance between gains and losses, made them feel gratified with the decision to immigrate to Australia. Participants in this group outlined that the independence and financial status achieved as working women in Australia would have not been able to obtain in their home countries. As a result, life in Australia was perceived as an empowering opportunity of self-growth and self-discovery.

#### **8.4.1 Immigrants' self perception of negative acculturation outcomes**

Most participants expressed not feeling integrated to the broader Australian community. This is a complex issue, involving many factors and experienced in several ways. Participants referred to several factors having a negative impact on their own personal acculturation experience. Low educational levels deeply impacted on immigrants' learning process of a second language. Apart from that, as already mentioned, restricted

social resources in Australia and the limited childcare assistance affected women's availability to learn a new language. As a result, restricted English skills isolated women in various levels and greatly impacted on their capacity to integrate to Australian society:

*Integrated? No, because I don't have friends. I have some English-speaking friends, but very few. We can't talk and have a conversation. I don't know how to express myself as I haven't studied English (Lucia)*

*In general, I think that everyone struggles trying to integrate. If you don't know the language, and you don't understand what you are being told, there is a huge barrier (Lucia)*

*Until today I say that I am adapted and not. I don't speak much English, because I worked for a very short period, but one starts getting used to it slowly, always listening to the radio in English, so it starts getting into my head...Slowly we started getting into the society, slowly...slowly. I do all that is necessary here and go everywhere. But I think the main reason I've settled it's because I had my parents here as well. But I don't stop thinking about my things in Argentina, my friends, the music, the barbecues and all our food,...our things... I'm here and I cry! I'm there and I cry!...it's something that you can't get out of your mind... (Alma)*

The women who had a chance to pursue English classes in Australia and reached efficient levels of communication perceived that cultural distance and different ways of

expressing feelings and thoughts between Latin Americans and Anglo-Saxons were relevant factors affecting their integration to the Australian community.

*My adaptation to Australia...hum...at the beginning I didn't like it. I found that people were too serious, there was no joy, you couldn't make any friendship with people because everything was so prepared, so organized! We are not like that! We are more open! It was difficult to adapt, but we were lucky that we took as many English courses as we could and that helped us (Isabel)*

Participants also indicated not feeling completely accepted by the broader society who would be continuously reminding them that they are not considered “locals”, although they have lived more years in Australia than in their home countries. Similar results were indicated by Colic-Peisker (2002) with a group of Croatian immigrants in Western Australia, who have lived most part of their lives in Australia. As some individuals referred, members of the Australian community might not have the purpose to offend immigrants with constant questions regarding ethnic origin, presence of accent and ways of expressing and behaving, but those enquiries are often received by immigrants as a challenge in their right to perceive they truly belong to the Australian society.

Apart from those factors, different ways of socially exchanging made some Latin Americans feel “out of place” and, very often, misunderstood:

*My adaptation happened with tears of blood. Because they don't accept you, even though I learnt to read and speak English. It was hard, I was coming from Buenos*

*Aires, where you had other 15 million people, where you had the neighbour next door and you could talk. You could stand at the door and talk to everyone. Here, you stand at the door and they say “but what is this silly doing at the door?” Here you are always treated as you are not from here. I don’t feel integrated. (Dora)*

*I don’t feel integrated 100%. You really have to spend time with English-speaking people, be integrated. But I feel there is always a barrier, maybe because I didn’t work in anything professional. But my husband spent time with locals, and in spite of that, of working with them and being in the same environment, he doesn’t feel completely like someone from here, a local, though we’ve been living here for so many years. It’s like you feel limited, you can enjoy the Australian day but you know you were not born here, and my kids, although they were born here, they don’t feel it either (Laura)*

#### **8.4.2 Immigrants’ self perception of positive acculturation outcomes**

A small group of women perceived a positive acculturation outcome in Australia. Few of them experienced a personal transformation when they returned to their countries of origin for the first time after immigration. Comparisons between life and opportunities in Australia and Latin America made them value more the horizons opened for them as independent women in Australia.

*My adaptation didn't occur until my trip to Argentina, two years after my arrival in Australia. Back then I made my own comparisons and my own "set up". I went there thinking of investing in something, check things there, compare and buy something there, start a business maybe. But no! After 15 days I wanted to come back running! After my own comparisons, I said: "I don't come back here!" I like going there because it's my country, I love my people, they live differently. But I wouldn't move back, here in Australia I had the chance to develop myself in a way I wasn't able in Argentina. So I came back with three ideas. First, to buy a music system because I brought my husband all his tango music. Second, to buy a car for myself. And third, to buy the house. That one was my decision to establish myself here. I was having a good time in Argentina, but I wanted to come back... (Betina)*

*I think that I wouldn't go back, I don't know how I would be in Argentina. Each time we go and we how the neighbourhood is, exactly how we left it 30 years ago...then I think that I am happy to be in Australia. I think that we made a positive change, yes...I think so (Alma).*

Many researchers (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Olson & Roese, 2002; Pettigrew, 2002; Smith & Walker, 2002) have indicated that individuals' overall satisfaction with life is a subjective measure and strongly depends on relative comparisons. In this way, the concept of "relative deprivation" was formulated in order to describe that satisfaction is not a direct result of concrete characteristics but rather a subjective outcome of relative comparisons. As a result, individuals compare their present circumstances with past

experiences, perceived objective circumstances of other people and personal expectations and ideals. This theoretical construct facilitates the understanding of immigrants' overall satisfaction with life in Australia in spite of having experienced so many acculturation struggles such as work limitations, lack of social support and gender and ethnic discrimination, among others. Individuals' seemingly contradictory perception that the immigration and acculturation outcome was mostly positive reinforces other research results attained by Fozdar and Torezani (2008) with immigrants and refugees in Western Australia. According to the authors, although experiences of discrimination and negative life events are felt as harmful, its impact is perceived in relative terms, as a low price to pay to live in a safe and stable country like Australia. Isabel's own experience reflects these issues:

*I think that it was good for me to come to Australia. It's a quiet country, we came from such a mess in Chile...Over there, we wouldn't have remained quiet with the dictatorship, so we would have had very bad times or maybe we wouldn't have existed any more.*

The concept of "relative gratification" (Pettigrew, 2002) seems useful to explain why immigrants are still satisfied with their lives in spite of experiencing negative events in the host country. According to this concept, individuals compare themselves with those worse off and feel relatively gratified with the results experienced. That is a common finding among women who indicated being satisfied with their lives in Australia, as they compared themselves with the context and people left behind when they decided to

immigrate. Apart from that, the perspective of providing a better future for their children made a great influence in women's perception of personal satisfaction with the immigration outcome.

Motivated to provide a better future for their children, some women indicated that they needed to be mentally and emotionally present in the country where they chose to live and work, accepting and embracing Australian life. In these cases, women decided not to feel divided between what was left behind and their lives in the new country. They acknowledged the positive influences of their own culture and the Australian one, and tried to live harmoniously with the combination of both. These women worked consciously on their own integration process in order to feel active members of the community.

*I got very adapted because I saw that I could give much more to my kids here than I could in my country. All that we would work, it would pay out. That's what made me stay. Many people couldn't put up with all the things here and they left, but the fact that my kids one day would be professionals pushed me to stay. Today they are both accountants and they do very well. Now Australia is my country. I feel that I have adapted slowly to this place, ...I won't say I have intimate friends, but people I know who have opened doors for me (Rita).*

*Now I feel integrated to the Australian community. After 31 years I consider myself truly Australian. When I'm in Argentina, I feel I'm different than the rest, and I'm not Australian because everyone notices that I have an accent although I speak English pretty well. And I will never be completely Argentinean. But it's all right! I*

*live happily, I don't have any problem with that, at least I have enjoyed both cultures, something that most people can't say, they only know one culture. In fact, I feel pity for those who live here and spend all the time going and coming back. At the end, you are neither here nor there, do you understand? It's simply the fact to accept that yes, I was born in Argentina, I love Argentina for what it was during the time I lived there, but I've lived most of my life here, I am 45 years old, I am also used to the Australian system, I couldn't live in Argentina any more (Esther)*

Nevertheless, the feeling that Australian mentality does not absorb and integrate immigrants' background and life stories as part of the broader national community was a frequent referred factor. Many women indicated that although they worked towards their own integration process, they often did not feel accepted as equal members of the Australian society.

*Until today, 30 years later, people still ask me "what do you do? When did you arrive? Why did you come?" It makes you feel that you never belong to this place! Here I feel like they have a second thought when they ask me that, like... "and when do you leave? (Elsa)*

*The national mentality doesn't absorb. The last intimate contact never happens. You always remain wanting for more. So, those marvellous stories immigrants bring with themselves, so meaningful, they are not part of the national picture. They are not! What a waste! They get to know about immigrants' stories when someone*

*writes a book or something like that. Experiences of people or children of people who were in the Holocaust, or similar things, ...they are not part of the national culture. When someone writes a book with those experiences ...they say “ohhh” and they remain open-mouthed! But they had them by their side all their lives and they didn’t know it? (Carmen)*

### **8.4.3 Immigration to Australia and its personal impact**

Most participants described the acculturation process in Australia as difficult and conflictive, something they had to overcome without the help and support of direct relatives or close friends. Sharing daily struggles with families in Latin America was not possible in many cases, as immigrants did not want to worry their close-ones about their wellbeing. As a result, these women had to overcome most difficulties by themselves, in a though revealing process. Participants described their acculturation process as “hard” and “difficult”, often experiencing “sense of loss”, loneliness and sadness.

Frequently, participants reported that the acculturation process was harder than expected, being very complex to balance gains and losses of the decision to move. In some cases, trying to feel integrated was experienced as a never-ending process. As most participants indicated, the cut from direct sources of family support and affection represented one of the major sources of suffering.

*The impact of being an immigrant woman almost all my life hasn’t been very good. I mean, good in a sense, but leaving your own country, your family and friends, that*

*doesn't worth it for what you gain, do you understand? What you leave behind, the spiritual, what you love, people and neighbours who talk to you and want to see you...that kind of support and connection, I love that and you can't have it from here, it's not possible, it's something lost... (Lucia)*

*I wanted to know what was going on at the other side of the world. Maybe I was adventurous. But you have to pay the price for those experiences, you have to overcome things and afloat again. I think that maybe life is like this, a bit harder to some people, a bit less to some other...The idea of coming here was an experience, and it still goes on... [she cries] (Laura)*

At the same time, many women described immigration to Australia as an opportunity for self-growth and self-discovery, empowering women to experience life as independent and contributing members of the community.

*This immigration process...it made me grow so much, it made me feel so much...Sometimes I say...“what a bad luck!” to have to think everything so much to achieve a little! At the same time, I think that if I didn't have to migrate, I would have been one more in the crowd. But here it seems that my fight is 3 times harder for everything I do, here you are by yourself! And on top of that, you are the pillar of everyone around you. It has been interesting, but very hard... (Elsa)*

*Immigration made me grow up a lot, all of a sudden. From day to night. Now the impact of the immigration it's different, now that I am old, sometimes you pass through bad moments, you ask yourself how you are going to do things by yourself. It's more difficult now. But I am very happy and grateful, I thank everyday that I am in Australia (Dora)*

*I think we did a positive change. You suffer when you arrive, but later on you see the results...although it's hard (Alma)*

*I think I discovered myself thanks to Australia. Because there in Argentina I would have been mum and dad's girl, and my husband the chief of the family, you know...Argentinean machismo. My ex husband always tells me "you wouldn't have been able to do all this if we were in Argentina!" But...you know what? We are not! [she laughs] (Rita)*

The possibility of having a stable political and financial life in Australia was one of the main factors some participants expected to find when they decided to immigrate. In a country with significant lower levels of unemployment – if compared with many Latin American countries – many working women experienced feelings of independence and self-satisfaction. The positive outcome of joining the labour market renovated expectations and ideals, allowing women to transform values and the way they approach life.

*After 31 years here, the immigration process has been a great value to me, it has been great that I came here. I think that my contribution to the community has been bigger thanks to the fact that I am here in Australia. Also the attitude that I have always had is “to feel proud of who I am, I am Argentinean, and to feel proud of being part of the Australian community, because I consider myself as much Argentinean as I feel Australian, maybe more Australian due to the amount of years I’ve lived here. I have accepted the way of life here, the systematic structure of doing things. I am proud of being in Australia, but also proud of being Argentinean (Esther)*

*The experience I personally found it fantastic. It makes you value what you never valued in your own country. I lived there and I never valued what I had, you don’t consider that. Over here, you also learn to save money, and what means to earn a dollar in another country. Over there, you live the moment, you have to wait for your monthly salary and live the present. My main difference with my relatives back at home, is that I am looking at the present and the future. In Chile, one doesn’t have the chance to look at the future, because you can’t, because you have a salary that only allows you to go just until the end of the month, future isn’t there (Mara)*

## **8.5 Ideals of returning to Latin America**

Some participants showed contradictory feelings regarding their lives as immigrant women and their feelings of belongingness. Most of them maintained their identification

with Latin American values, traditions and ideals and frequently experience feelings of sadness and loss of the family, friends and cultural life left behind. Although some of them would go back to their countries of origin, they do not want to perpetuate that rootless feeling into their children, who have been raised in Australia and would experience, as a result, some levels of acculturation conflicts in Latin America.

*Going back for good? I don't think so. Because we suffered a lot without our parents here, without any kind of help when we had the kids, so...if we go...my daughters would have the same kind of problems... And about my future... I think that if anything happens to my husband, I don't think I could live here any more, I would feel too much loneliness. It has been a very united marriage, we have lived so many things together...I think that Latin women here have a black future, because after they become widows, Latinas only have loneliness here, life is very solitary (Isabel)*

*Yes...I thought about going back. But it's not easy, my kids won't follow me now, they have grown up... (Laura)*

In other cases, although many women enjoyed maintaining Latin American traditions and visiting their countries of origin, they often felt they would not be able to readapt to the Latin American rhythm of life. These participants pointed out that Australia was their place of reference and that they would not go back. Apart from these factors,

many immigrants referred that Australian life provided them a positive and stable financial life and that it had been a significant reason to remain in Australia.

*We didn't come to Australia to stay for too long, at that time the plan was to come because my sister in law was here and we were already dealing with those threats back at home. But when I went back to Argentina, two years later, I had a big surprise, as a result of my comparisons. 15 days later I wanted to fly away! I said to myself "no, I won't come back here for good!" I like it, I love the people, it's different to the way we live here, but I wouldn't go back to live because in Australia I had the chance to develop myself in a way I wasn't able before (Betina)*

*I feel satisfied and fulfilled after all that I've been through. Thanks God I am doing very well in economic terms, I have my house, I travel all the time. But I always putted so much from my side, I never waited seating, I never misused a minute of my life. I worked a lot, I never gave up. I am 65 and still at my age I go out with friends, we go out for dinner, dancing...I think that if you are not positive in life, you don't achieve anything and I am not scared of trying. After all this, my place is here, I wouldn't go back (Julia)*

The difficult loss of parents and close relatives in Latin America spaced out the connections with immigrants' home countries and other social networks established before moving. As a result, many immigrants focused on their families built in Australia and strengthened their connection to the place where their children and grandchildren live.

*When I went back to Chile, for the first time, after many years of being in Australia, my dad couldn't recognize me any more. Just before travelling, we were talking, planning everything...and when I got there, he just had a stroke and he couldn't even recognize me any more. He died a week later. At that moment is when you feel like sending to hell Australia and everything that you had to face here. Because, I lost time, the time of being with my parents...Now, I have all my family here, I have a granddaughter, I have everything here! My family network is here. I wouldn't go back to Chile...I like going there, but for a visit only (Mara)*

*I am happy to go there for a visit and see them, but unfortunately, you start losing a bit all those feelings...how to explain, it's a pity, but with time you lose all that love and roots. The distance it's so big that you can't tell ... "Oh, I'm so homesick that I will go and visit them" You can't, we are too far! (Julia)*

*If I had to choose again, I would have come to Australia. But at the same time, I lost so many things coming here. Because we were a very small family. The first time I went there, I saw my dad already sick. The second time, he died on the same day I arrived. People said "he was just waiting for you". Two years later, my mum died. And now, my brother is in coma. The distance makes you suffer much more, when you are closer, you prepare yourself better. Not that my brother is leaving, I don't have any more ties in Argentina. And I have all of them here, I have my two sons,*

*and my 4 grandkids. Now they are all that I have, we are a few but a very united little group (Rita)*

## **8.6 Future perspectives**

Participants were asked about personal future plans, expectations and ideals. Although many women mentioned not having the initial idea to stay permanently in Australia, only one of them imagined herself returning to her home country. Being closer to relatives and her original culture still represented a major motivation to Elsa:

*I always thought that when you move, you don't move forever. I would have never imagined coming here forever. Now...what I dream about? About going back. And I imagine my future...in Argentina, I would like to share things with my relatives...moments...*

Most participants referred to personal ideals of travelling around the world, also expecting to enjoy more time with their partners after retiring. Some of them also planned to continue voluntary / community work with immigrant groups in Melbourne. Overall, according to these ladies, their place in the world was clearly Australia and did not mention about returning to their home countries when asked about their future.

*In the future, I don't know, I also want to write a book. In that book many poems related to the dictatorship will emerge, because almost always what comes to*

*surface is what has been kept inside. It has been like a liberation being able to write and say all the things that I couldn't say before. I also want to keep working with the community, at the Chilean Consulate we are permanently building different projects (Isabel)*

*My future...I imagine myself calm...I guess I will be never be quiet, but at the same time I feel like leaving few things (work) and sometimes I feel like doing other new things... (Betina)*

*My future I imagine it most probably with my present partner. Happy because I'm doing the things I like and love, with the people I love and well...with a bit of luck I would also like to have health to be able to enjoy different parts of the world. I want to enjoy my parents the most that I can, because the day they won't be here I will miss them so much [she cries]... (Esther)*

*Hum...my future, I would like to retire in 5 or 8 years, my husband should retire as well, and be more able to travel and learn more languages...have more time for each other, which we didn't have until now, but now that the kids are almost leaving the house...it's different (Iris)*

## **8.7 Summary of the Results and Discussion: Latin American immigrant women and the acculturation challenges in Australia**

As a result of the literature review and the data analysis, it was possible to identify the compounded effects of low levels of English knowledge, limited social and family support in Australia, unaffordable childcare services, and economic constraints on participants' acculturation processes.

Although English classes were organized, free of cost, by many immigration services, they were not organized during a period when immigrants could actually benefit from them. To many immigrant women, the initial two years in a new country represented a complex process in many aspects, when finding appropriate housing, taking care of their children and finding a new job were considered priorities. Adjusting to all these new needs would take few years of immigrants' lives, representing a difficult period to learn English. As many authors (e.g., Chiswick, 1991; Hayfron, 2006; Kossoudji, 1988; McManus et al., 1983) indicated, immigrants' skills in the host country's language have a direct impact on their acculturation outcomes. As observed with these participants, limited skills in English negatively affected their labour opportunities, forcing them to stay at unskilled or semi-skilled low paid jobs. Long hours of work in manufacturing or cleaning environments also decreased their psychological wellbeing, often leading to feelings of sadness, helplessness, frustration, and stress (Alcorso, 1989, 1991).

The restricted free, or low fee, childcare services represented another major challenge for immigrant mothers (Alcorso, 1995a; D'Mello, 1982; Stone et al., 1996). As most recent immigrants in a geographically distant country, these Latin American women

did not have any family or social support networks to help them with domestic and childcare responsibilities. Although most women joined the labour force, like their husbands, family duties were still divided in a traditional way, women taking care of most domestic and childcare responsibilities (Amézquita et al., 1995). The only available time women had to pursue any educational (language or professional) training was after work. Although they were willing to upgrade their skills and to improve their labour and financial life, the lack of services supporting immigrant mothers represented a key limitation.

Most participants also experienced the limited family and social support in Australia. This phenomenon not only had a negative emotional impact but also limited immigrant women in many daily functions. Sources of social and family support are highly esteemed within the Latin American community, who is deeply rooted in family and friendship values (Amézquita et al., 1995; Bathum & Baumann, 2007; Leslie, 1992). The lack of social and family networks in the new country affected the overwhelming reality of participants with language struggles, perceived cultural differences and unsatisfactory labour conditions.

As indicated by other authors (e.g., Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Lin et al., 1999; Thoits, 1986; Vega et al., 1987), the reorganization of immigrants' social life and the building of effective support networks is one of the major challenges individuals face as members of a new country. Most participants expressed feeling several levels of cultural distance with the Australian community. Twelve of thirteen participants were married to Latin Americans and identified other Latin American immigrants as their closest friends. In most cases, individuals from their own ethnic group populated immigrants' closest social network. This outcome reinforced the relevance of the hypothesis of socio-cultural similarity highlighted

by some authors (Lopez et al., 2004; Noh & Avison, 1996; Noh et al., 1999; Thoits, 1986), indicating that complementarity and mutual empathy between needs and values are highly appreciated among immigrants. Among the participants, most tended to feel more affinity within their own ethnic groups, or with other immigrants, as they were perceived to experience similar life situations. This is an ambivalent finding, as many participants also told of discrimination experiences within their own ethnic groups. However, those who felt rejected by co-nationals for politic, economic or social reasons still tended to exchange to other Latin Americans with whom they were able to share values and the experiences associated to the immigration and acculturation process, rather than to Australians. This issue will be further discussed with the final results.

The lack of identification with the mainstream culture and the limited social exchange with its members is also related to experiences of perceived social and labour discrimination, often related to skin colour and ethnic background, language skills or accent. Women described not feeling completely accepted by the Australian community, although they had lived most part of their lives in the new country. Regardless on the effort immigrant women would put into their integration process, frequent questions by members from the mainstream society regarding their ethnic background, and the reasons to immigrate and to remain in Australia were felt as a constant reminder that they were accepted to stay, but were not considered local members of the broader society. This outcome was connected to the white Australian ideal and the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, still impacting on the expectations and subjectivity of mainstreamers. Experiences of discrimination based on language skills, accent, ethnic background or colour were connected to the white Australian ideological past and had a strong impact on the perceived

cultural distances and the way immigrants and mainstreamers related. In fact, the perception of not being accepted as local members of the broader community was a significant finding across various investigations with minority groups in Australia (Colic-Peisker, 2002, 2005; Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Zevallos, 2004) and the way it impacted on Latin women's acculturation processes will be further discussed within the findings' section.

However, discrimination episodes were not restricted to relations with members from the Australian society, but also with other immigrants, including individuals from the same ethnic community. Participants also indicated being discriminated by other immigrants because of their English knowledge, accent or their economic/political background. Experiences of discrimination within their own community represented a major reason why many participants stopped participating in social/community clubs and felt even more isolated from any kind of social support network in Australia.

The gender factor compounded the challenges of the acculturation process. Although women's place in society has undergone a major change since the 1970s, with their large incorporation to the labour market, advanced birth control methods, and the influence of feminist values, Latin American women are still under the influence of traditional family values (Amézquita et al., 1995; Iebra Aizpurúa, Jablonski, & Féres-Carneiro, 2007). This pushes women to an overcharged reality, juggling between paid work, domestic and childcare duties. Although women have gained many rights and social spaces in today's world, their daily routines have become more complex, demanding and often conflictive (Darvishpour, 1999; Rajjman & Semyonov, 1997). As observed in the current research, the maintenance of traditional gender values within Latin American

immigrant families have compounded the challenges encountered in Australia due to the accumulation of duties without any kind of support from family, friends or childcare services.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION**

The focus of the research was to understand how a group of Latin American immigrant women, living in Australia for an average of 31.5 years, experienced the immigration and acculturation processes. Special attention was given to the challenges and difficulties faced while adjusting to Australian life, and how the fact of being a Latin American woman impacted on their acculturation outcomes. The researcher sought to understand participants' experiences and acculturation outcomes in a contextual way, analysing how the attitudes and responses from the Australian community impacted on this group of Latin Americans.

#### **9.1 Research Findings**

Immigration is certainly one of the most challenging transitions an individual can experience. However, the acculturation challenges do not necessarily need to translate into conflictive and traumatic issues. Negative acculturation outcomes would take place if immigrants do not possess the skills and opportunities to overcome those challenges and if the receiving society is not prepared to support and integrate minority members into its social, educational, labour and political environments. The main findings of this research indicated that many of the challenges and conflicts encountered by this group of 13 Latin American immigrant women, after more than three decades in Australia, remained unresolved and emotionally conflictive.

### **9.1.1 Acculturation: A two dimensional process with contradictory strategies**

According to Berry's (1990; 1997) theoretical model, acculturation is an outcome of the immigration process where individuals choose an adjustment strategy that best matches their interests, values and skills. According to Berry, there are four possible acculturation outcomes: marginalisation, separation, assimilation, and – the ideal strategy for both immigrants and the receiving society – integration. The specific acculturation strategy individuals follow directly reflects the ways they deal with the perceived culture distance and the diverse levels of stress that results from intercultural contacts (Berry, 1990; Berry & Annis, 1974).

The current research has shown that acculturation should be considered as a continuous two-dimensional process for immigrants, not just an outcome. Based on Ward's contributions to the concept (Ward, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993), Berry's acculturation model should reinforce the existence of two separate domains: psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Individual levels of mental health, psychological wellbeing and personal satisfaction in the new country characterize the first domain, related to stress and psychopathology issues. Socio-cultural adaptation is connected to a social learning framework, and refers to the acquisition of adequate social skills and behaviours to successfully adapt to daily routines in the new environment. According to Ward (1996; 1997), the distinction between the various acculturation processes and the different strategies immigrants follow needs further investigation.

Supporting Ward's idea that two – theoretically and empirically different – adaptive processes constitute acculturation, participants of the current research followed different

acculturation strategies for their labour, social and personal lives. Regardless of the levels of economic and labour integration, findings indicated that most of participants experienced diverse levels of acculturative stress while adapting to Australia, having a continuous limiting impact on their psychological adjustment (Berry, 2006a, 2006b; Ward, 1996, 1997).

Among participants, two different groups could be distinguished. The first group, comprised women who worked at unskilled or semi-skilled positions, presented restricted socio-cultural and psychological adaptation. Due to the specific challenges encountered in Australia and, their compounding effects, many factors necessary for a complete positive acculturation remained unresolved for these women. Limited language knowledge, lack of social and family support, and restricted childcare services often translated into a handicap for women's social and labour integration to Australia. As a result, they not only remained trapped within factories of cleaning services, exchanging mainly with other immigrants in similar conditions, but also did not have the resources to deal with the emotional consequences of those conflictive issues. Within this context, these women did not have adequate resources to integrate into other labour and socio-cultural environments, but they also carried low personal satisfaction with their lives as members of a new society.

Participants in this group learnt to adjust to life conditions in Australia, but the limitations experienced while exchanging with the broader community remained mostly unsettled. Alma's narrative: *"I'm here and I cry, I'm there and I cry...it's something that you can't get out of your mind"* is a way to exemplify this phenomenon. To most of them, acculturation represented a process and a difficult emotional transition that continuously confronts them from time to time. Thirty-two years later, participants still felt that being an

immigrant woman in Australia was a never-ending experience, mostly associated to its conflictive demands and the unavailable resources to find a positive psychological and practical resolution. As Laura described, the idea of moving to Australia was part of an adventurous experience, paid a high personal and emotional cost. An experience that “*still goes on*”, as she explained while breaking into tears.

Women from diverse educational and labour backgrounds experienced the ongoing challenges of the acculturation process. Participants on the second group, presenting higher educational levels and a more positive labour integration, also experienced some unresolved emotional issues and perceived their own social integration as a continuous daily challenge. Most women in this group also preferred social exchange with other immigrants (mostly Latin Americans), placed a strong emphasis on their ethnic identity, values, language and traditions and expressed not feeling socially integrated to Australia. In spite of reaching successful economic and labour outcomes, the lack of connections with the Australian community – due to perceived cultural distances or discrimination episodes – reflected on a constant melancholy, loss and frustration for not being able to be accepted and feel “*at home*” after spending most part of their lives in Australia.

According to Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999), psychological adaptation is highly relevant to cope with several types of stress encountered in inter-cultural interactions and is strongly predicted by effective sources of social support. As the findings of the current research pointed out, the lack of family support in the new country, or restricted relationships with members of the mainstream community, had a negative impact on women’s wellbeing. The limited social support translated into continuous emotional conflicts and a limitation to women’s realities, as Elsa described: “*It’s always a continuous fight, you have to be on top*

*of everything, because you don't have any other kind of support. Here, you don't have a grandmother or an auntie or anyone to share all that involves kids, work...marriage. It's a bit "too much" just for one self!"* For several reasons, the fact that most participants expressed not being able to make closer connections with Australian society and mainstream values facilitated the maintenance of deeper cultural distances and restricted levels of psychological adjustment to immigrant life.

Therefore, despite the educational, labour or economic outcomes, most participants experienced a limited psychological adaptation that translated into unsettled emotional issues. This can be summarized by Lucia's words:

*The impact of being an immigrant woman almost all my life hasn't been very good. I mean, good in a sense, but leaving your own country, your family and friends, that doesn't worth it for what you gain. What you leave behind, the spiritual, what you love, people and neighbours who talk to you and want to see you, that kind of support and connection. I love that and you can't have it from here, it's not possible, it's something lost.*

### **9.1.2 The impact of the assimilation ideal on immigrants' socio-cultural adjustment**

Another finding of the research is connected to the influence over time of the White Australia policy and the assimilation ideals, affecting the expectations held by members of the mainstream society towards immigrants. Although Australia has embraced the ideal of multiculturalism, seeking the integration of immigrants from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, participants experienced a different reality. After more than three decades in

Australia, many women still felt like outsiders, not treated as local members of the broader community. Questions from host members regarding immigrants' language skills, accent, skin colour, ethnic background or their reasons to immigrate worked as constant reminders that they were different and not considered members of the Australian community.

Although it could be understood as part of Australians' curiosity and interest, participants felt that being asked about their visual and cultural differences was not a positive factor towards integration. In fact, this worked as a reminder that, in order to become a local member, immigrants were expected to, at some stage, "melt" and assimilate Australian values, accent and ways of behaving. This was presented several times in women's narratives, discussing different issues and demonstrated by Elsa's words: "*Until today, 30 years later, people still ask me "what do you do? When did you arrive? Why did you come?" It makes you feel that you never belong to this place! Here I feel like they have a second thought when they ask me that, like "and when do you leave?*" In spite of Australia's multicultural discourse, the official goal to integrate immigrants is daily translated as an expectation of assimilation. In informal ways, being Australian is still associated to the white Anglo-Saxon identity (Colic-Peisker, 2002, 2005; Zevallos, 2003, 2004). As some authors have indicated (e.g., Bourhis et al., 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993, 1994), when cultural distance is perceived as high between immigrants and host societies, and when both parties have different and conflicting attitudes regarding the expected acculturation outcome, socio-cultural adjustment turns to be more problematic.

As well as the participants' low levels of psychological adjustment, most also presented restricted socio-cultural integration. In spite of efficiently accomplishing daily and work routines with even high levels of labour integration, socio-cultural adjustment was

restricted due to cultural distance and perceived discrimination from the broader community. After more than three decades in Australia, participants still did not feel “at home”. The presence of a “glass ceiling”, an invisible barrier limiting immigrant women, translated into several spheres where they tried to integrate. As Dora experienced, in spite of her efforts to be considered a local member of the community, not feeling accepted was a common experience along the years in Australia: *“one always has that thing of being the “wog”... Even if you speak the language, even if you are a citizen (...) you are always treated as you are not from here”* As a result, being culturally different exacerbated social distances between immigrants and mainstreamers, often experienced as a painful phenomenon by many participants who, as Rita expressed, *“come to this country and don’t feel loved, because you feel so lonely”*.

Accepting and following assimilation in Australia would signify immigrants giving up their own ethnic identity and the connections to Latin American values and ways of behaving. To many individuals, language, accent, traditions, food and music – among other factors – are significant parts of who they are in the world, also representing a positive source of self-esteem and ways to socially connect and provide support (Phinney, 1991, 2002). Living in a community that expects minority members to assimilate and give up their sense of self could lead to high levels of personal conflicts. As many participants experienced and acknowledged, to successfully integrate to a new country immigrants need to efficiently speak the dominant language and to possess the necessary labour and social skills to become a contributing member of the society. However, the current research showed that efficient English knowledge, a positive labour integration and almost an entire life in Australia are not enough factors to be considered local members. For that to take

place, immigrants need to reduce as much as possible their ethnic differences, looking, talking and behaving as close as possible to mainstreamers.

The contradiction between an official political discourse supporting integration and the daily reality participants faced, pushed to assimilate, reinforced the cultural distances between Australian values and immigrants' sense of identity. Conflicts were not common among individuals who decided to fully embrace the Australian way of life, leaving behind any kind of ethnic traditions and Latin American social networks, as observed with Julia. From her perspective, Australia was a warm, helpful and welcoming country where she never experienced any kind of difficulties. However, for that outcome to take place, she felt the need to reduce as much as possible emotional and cultural attachments to her ethnic roots.

Immigrants who highly valued their cultural background and who did not want to assimilate – or who did not have the resources to do so – mainly related with members from Latin American or Spanish speaking communities, where they could not only share the language but also values, emotions and experiences. Contrary to Julia, most participants, from all educational and labour backgrounds, perceived the Australian culture as cold, distant and emotionally inexpressive, remaining socially separated from mainstreamers.

### **9.1.3 Living separated from the mainstream society: Latin American sources of support**

Some authors have indicated that sources of ethnic social support could represent helpful sources of emotional comfort, supplying assistance in several ways to minority

acculturating groups (Fisher & Sonn, 1998; Noh & Avison, 1996; Sonn, 2002; Vega et al., 1987). Socially exchanging with other immigrants can provide a unique sense of being “at home” in a distant and new country, where values, attitudes and behaviours are shared and reinforced. However, when immigrants’ only source of social support and connection comes from within their own ethnic boundaries, they can remain isolated from the broader community.

As it was observed, participants’ close relationships were mostly with other immigrants. This phenomenon is directly related to skills in the host country’s language, absolutely necessary to communicate and relate to members of the local community. However, this outcome was also present with women who spoke English efficiently and had positive levels of labour integration. As previously indicated, the fact that all participants preferred to relate to other Latin Americans could have been a reaction to mainstreamers’ expectation of immigrant assimilation. To many individuals, assimilating into the Australian culture, becoming “one more of them,” would represent to progressively leave behind ethnic attachments and personal identification. The perceptions that Australian culture was much colder and distant than the Latin American culture could have also played a significant role limiting socialization.

Various authors (e.g., Ward, 1996; Ward & Masgoret, 2008) correlated high cultural distance between immigrants and the host society’s values with lower levels of integration. High levels of cultural distance are also connected to discrimination – a universal predictor of social difficulty – having a negative impact on immigrants’ acculturation processes (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Zlobina, Basabe, Paez, & Furnham, 2006). Research developed by Nesdale and Mak (2003) with various ethnic

immigrant groups (Hong Kong, Vietnam, Bosnia, Sri Lanka and New Zealand) in Australia showed that perceived cultural distance between immigrants' and the host country's values impacted on their mutual relationships. Consistent with the current research's findings on the influence of the white Australian ideal and mainstreamers' preference over immigrants who are culturally and physically similar, Nesdale and Mak observed that New Zealanders were more accepted by Australians, that they had more social connections with the dominant society and that they presented higher levels of self-esteem than other minority groups.

In fact, cultural distance often motivates immigrants to remain, as Phalet and Hagendoorn (1996) indicated, "psychologically located" within their own ethnic enclaves, not exposing themselves nor their values or expectations to the dominant community. This could lead one to conjecture to which extent Australians were actually rejecting immigrants on the base of their cultural distances and their lack of assimilation, or whether Latin Americans separated from Australians because they were perceived as culturally different. That is, were the immigrants separated and "pushed" to relate to other minority groups, or did they prefer to protect themselves in ethnic bubbles, looking for a permanent 'comfort zone'?

When analysing power resources and the way they impact on immigrants' sources of social support, the dominant community is often seen as the one primarily rejecting or separating minority ethnic groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, when immigrants feel that, in order to be accepted by broader community, they have to give up what it means to be Latin American, they can also react by rejecting the Australian culture (Fisher & Sonn, 1998, 2007). When assimilation remains as a strong ideological tendency, immigrants tend

to either accept it or to feel threatened and respond through separation. This was a common phenomenon among participants, whose social networking was mainly within ethnic boundaries. Socializing with other immigrants can be a source of psychological comfort, but it also entails a serious limitation to social integration.

As a result of a conflictive combination of factors that remained mostly unresolved, most Latin American women who actually wanted to integrate did not achieve it. Instead, they remained socially separated, exchanging mainly with other Spanish speaking, Latin Americans, or with other immigrants in Australia. Possibly as a reaction to discrimination or assimilation expectations from the mainstream society, or as a bi-directional relationship where members from minority and dominant groups react and separate each other on the basis of their differences, participants did not imagine themselves marrying a non-Latin American person and socially related mostly to other immigrants from similar backgrounds. As Iris described *“I always imagined myself with a Uruguayan or someone similar to me. I think I couldn’t be with someone else. My whole background comes from somewhere else, with other values, other culture, and to me all that is very important”*.

To most participants it was extremely important to maintain a Latin American identity, to cultivate it through family and social life with the language, food, music and traditions, and to remain, over the years, different to the Australian culture. In this way, inter-ethnic marriages are not simply a common phenomenon among immigrants who do not master the host country’s language and who have not reached advanced levels of economic, educational and social integration, as some authors have pinpointed (e.g., Litcher et al., 2007; Qian, 1997). Inter-ethnic marriages and inter-ethnic socializing appeared to be factors relevant to maintaining a secure sense self-value, identity and purpose in life. As

observed with participants, high levels of cultural flexibility are necessary to be able to comfortably experience and live in a bicultural way, integrating values from both the original and the host culture. Esther was the only participant who was able to accept and incorporate both cultural traditions, integrating them into their social, labour and private life, and feeling privileged to be able to understand and be part of both worlds.

A country that endorses and applies strategies for social, educational labour and politic integration provides a basis for immigrants to build a secure sense of identity while being bicultural. However, most participants experienced several conflictive challenges due to their resistance to assimilate and “melt” into Australian values, leaving behind their Latin American background. In such a context, being different was perceived as a negative phenomenon by both dominant and minority groups and translated, over time, into social separation and the reinforcement of a sense of rejection. These issues remained unresolved and mostly conflictive to most participants, who although recognized the benefits of immigration to Australia, were not able to feel accepted and feel at home for more than three decades.

#### **9.1.4 Women’s restricted power resources**

The restricted voice many participants had in the decision to immigrate had a profound impact on women’s emotional lives. Many participants stressed on the contexts that pushed them to relocate and how they did not have a strong participation in that choice. When asked about the personal impact of the overall immigration experience, many women started answering by *“I was brought here, and not very happily, I didn’t want to come”*

(Alma), *“I hated my parents for many years for taking me here”* (Esther) or *“when my husband fixed with the idea to come, I didn’t want to...I was happy there, the best years of my life were in Argentina”* (Lucia). Narratives like these showed conflictive emotions connected to women’s relocation and their limited participation in that process. Although they acknowledged the positive aspects of immigration, many were not able to resolve the emotional attachment to that decision taken more than three decades ago, often associated to the difficulties encountered in Australia. In this way, participants’ emotional conflicts related to the limited participation in the decision to immigrate could have compounded the way they experienced other acculturating challenges in Australia.

Connected to women’s power resources and their participation in the immigration process is their decision to remain in Australia and not to go back to their home countries. Although most participants affirmed not wanting to return to their countries and seeing Australia as their place in the world, many showed a strong emotional nostalgia for Latin America and a wish to be closer to the people, values and traditions they identify with. However, when asked if they would go back to their home countries, answers – in most cases – were not a direct expression of their own wishes but, instead, were strongly connected to their children and the possibility to provide them a better future. In some cases, participants openly expressed that they would go back, but as their children would not follow them, they decided to remain in Australia. Once again, most participants restrict their personal choices and decisions. Although staying in Australia was a relatively free choice to most of them, the emotional issues related to a lack of identification with the host country – as a result of factors such as language, cultural, labour and/or social distance –

and the feelings of loss and helplessness remained as conflictive and continuous adaptive issues.

## **9.2 Discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature**

Berry's (1990; 1997) theoretical contribution is valuable in understanding immigrants' acculturation strategies and the factors involved in those processes. However, his original model was restricted by not considering power issues affecting dominant and minority members' interactions and acculturation processes. As indicated by other authors (e.g., Bourhis et al., 1997; Callan, 1983; Horenczyk, 1997; Nesdale, 2002), Berry's initial framework should further emphasize on the responses from the receiving society to understand in a contextual way other forces that impact on immigrants' strategy choices. A stronger focus on the impact of host society's expectations on immigrants' acculturation process was evidenced in more recent contributions (Berry, 2006a, 2006b). Individual's acculturation journeys represent a flexible and multidimensional process, affected by historic, ideological, political and economic factors, among others. In this way, researchers need to continue investigating inter-group and inter-ethnic relations where complex social, political, labour and cultural backgrounds interact and influence each other. Or, as Ward (1996) has indicated, the psychological and the socio-cultural adaptation of immigrants.

In this way, it seems necessary to consider that immigrants' acculturation processes are not the result of a specific strategy chosen within a general acculturation domain, but rather the co-existence of several flexible and continuous strategies within two main domains connected to psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. As observed in the

current research, although some immigrants experienced positive levels of labour integration, they remained socially separated from the mainstream society, interacting mostly with members of other minority groups. Thus, acculturation is not observed as a static result of a strategy selection, but as a constant process that immigrants face in several changing ways during their lifetime.

### **9.3 Limitations of the research**

The limitations of the research are connected to participants' recruitment process – often using snowball methods and/or presenting the research project at community centres. Although most women shared some significant factors (age, length of stay in Australia, Latin American background, language), the group investigated is not representative.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, results cannot be generalized to all Latin American immigrant women in Australia. Experiences and their narratives are related and restricted to immigrants' personal and contextual background and the specific circumstances and resources found in the receiving country. Apart from that, participants' colleagues and/or other members of the host country were not interviewed. Therefore, it is not possible to address and assess directly responses and expectations from the host dominant society.

The presence of only one coder in charge of the data analysis also entails the possibility of potential biases in identifying and interpreting the interview contents and themes.

Of course, the research may have been strengthened further with the inclusion of more participants, reflecting a wider range of backgrounds and experiences. However, analyses of the thematic data showed that saturation was being achieved.

#### **9.4 Contributions and suggestions of the research**

The current research highlighted the fact that if immigrants do not have the adequate support from social services to upgrade their language, educational and labour skills in the host country, many of the acculturation challenges encountered could potentially harm their integration. Immigrant women's acculturation processes are often more complex phenomena, compounded by traditional gender values still attached to women's role within private spheres and to the presence of gender discrimination within labour and social environments.

To help prevent conflicts or resolve some of the acculturation challenges, immigration policies and social services need to be reassessed in order to match immigrants' needs at a more adequate time and place. For this, childcare services need to be organized at low fees or free cost during the first years of immigrants' lives in the new country. This would greatly assist immigrant mothers without any type of family or social support networks to help taking care of their children while they pursue language or professional training. As well as that, language classes free cost should not be restricted to immigrants' first 2 years in Australia, as this initial period in a new country is primarily dedicated to solve other priorities as finding permanent housing, job offers, schools for the children and getting adjusted to completely new rhythm of life.

In order to effectively assist individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, social services should be provided in the immigrants' native language and psychological services should be incorporated to help immigrants deal with the emotional challenges resulted from the acculturation process. Moreover, workshops and group discussions should be organized in order to assess what are the actual needs of immigrant women and how these needs can be met in the most efficient way.

Immigrants' labour integration should be considered a social and political priority. Within a multicultural and integrationist ideology, immigrants' backgrounds and experiences need to be adequately assessed and valued in order to assist them in becoming a contributing part of the host society.

Finally, immigration policies and political discourses should work together on efficient media campaigns to impact on the broader social values and ideals, still influenced by the white ideal legacy and an assimilation tendency. As immigrants have contributed highly to Australia's population, culture and economic growth, they need to be perceived in a non-threatening and should have similar educational, labour and social opportunities than mainstreamers. However, due to perceived cultural distance and prejudice, ethnically different individuals continue to be perceived as outsiders. For that to change, national values, political discourse and media messages should adapt to the needs of an integrative multicultural society. Although ethnic restaurants and festivals are common in, the idea that immigrants' cultural background is a valued addition to the national culture is still a multicultural ideal to be achieved.

## **9.5 Recommendations for future research**

Attitudes and responses from the receiving societies should be investigated in order to better understand immigrants' place, conditions and opportunities in the new country. A positive integration of immigrants not only depends on their skills and willingness to contribute to the new community, but also on the opportunities, values and acculturation ideals held by members of the broader society.

Research in this field could also benefit from validated measures of acculturation, addressing immigrants' coping strategies in dealing with adjustment stressors. Data from these acculturative processes could provide useful insights for future policies and programs designed to support new immigrants. Further research is certainly needed on the challenges and conflicts that contemporary immigrant women face today in Australia.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A: Interview Schedule**

### **Immigration:**

Circumstances and reasons for immigration:

- When did you arrive to Australia?
- Did you come alone or accompanied?
- What made you decide to immigrate? (Personal/social context before coming to Australia)
- Why Australia?
- What were your original settlement plans? Were you planning to stay permanently in Australia?
- Do you ever think about going back to your C.o.O. (country of origin)? Why?

### **Acculturation / Adaptation to Australia:**

#### **(A) General**

- How was your adaptation to Australia?
- What main difficulties or challenges did you face after arriving in Australia? (The good things?)
- Did you ever feel any kind of discrimination or racism?
  - What impact did this have on you?
  - How was this resolved?
- Do you now feel integrated to the Australian society?
- Do you see Australia as a multicultural place?
  - (a) If yes, in which aspects the Australian multiculturalism affects your everyday life?

#### **(b) Language**

- How would you describe your English language skills?
- Did you have any difficulties with Australian English?

- How did your language skills influence in your everyday life, family, social and professional aspects?

- What have you done to improve your language skills? (any specific reason?)

**(c) Work**

- What work did you do in your CoO?
- What was your experience like trying to find a similar level job in Australia?
- What kind of jobs/education did you pursue in Australia?
- Are you satisfied with the outcome of your professional development in Australia?  
Why?

**(d) Leisure**

- What do you do in your free time?
- Do you participate in any Social Association / Club?
- Of which nationality is most part of your friends?
- In what ways are these important to helping your adjustment to living in Australia?
- In what other ways could they assist immigrant women and their daughters adjust?

**(e) Values / Cultural life**

- Please, describe a little bit the cultural context and the values of the place where you grew up.
- What traditions or rituals from your CoO do you maintain here?
- What differences do you find between your CoO's culture and the Australian culture?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of your CoO culture / Australian culture?
- What is your religious background?

What kind of influence does religion have in your everyday life? (Do you practise your religious beliefs? How?)

Do you feel your religious beliefs have helped you in your immigration/adaptation to Australia? How?

## **Gender and Family Issues:**

### **(a) Femininity**

- What is expected from a woman in your CoO? Is there any ideal for femininity?
- Do you think women and men are treated as equals in your CoO?
- In what ways are women in Australia different from women in your CoO?
- Do you think that possibilities related to work, family and education are different in Australia?
- Do you think women and men are treated as equals in the Australian community?
- Do you think there is any ideal of femininity in Australia?

### **(b) Family**

- How many members do you have in your own family?
- Do you have children? Were they born in Australia or in your CoO?
- Do you think that families from your CoO and Australian families follow same pattern of values?
- How do you try to transmit the values and traditions of your CoO to your children?
- Do your children identify themselves with Australian values or L. American?
- To what extent do you think the Australian way of life has changed any of your family values or had any impact in the way the members of your family interact?

### **(c) Marriage / Intimacy**

- Were you married when you decided to come to Australia?

If yes, did your marriage change in any aspect after the immigration? Why?

If married in Australia, did you have any ethnic preferences for your future partner?

- Did you marry someone from your CoO?
- Did you imagine yourself marrying an Australian person?
- What did you expect of married life and what did you find after getting married?
- What are your duties and what are your husband's duties in your family? Do you share responsibilities?
- Did you change your opinion about the roles for women within marriage and family after immigration to Australia?

**Wrap up questions:**

- How did immigration to Australia influenced/affected the person you have become?
- If you had to choose few words, how would you describe the feelings of being an immigrant in Australia?
- How would you summarize your whole immigration experience?
- How do you foresee your future?

→ Do you have anything else you would like to say?

→ Do you have any questions for me?

If you think of anything else that you would like to share, you can contact me anytime at the following contact details.

## **Appendix B: Copy of Form of Disclosure and Informed Consent Form**

### **VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**

#### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

My name is Romina Iebra Aizpurúa, I am a PhD candidate supervised by Associate Professor Adrian Fisher at the School of Psychology, Victoria University.

I am undertaking research that explores the impact of the cultural and ideological transition resulting from the immigration process for Latin American women. This research seeks to identify the main issues that women face with living in a new multicultural environment with different socio-economic opportunities and perspectives. We also intend to work with young women born in Australia whose parents (or mothers) have migrated from Latin America in order to observe possible generational and cultural conflicts.

Your contribution to this study will be through an individual interview at a place of your convenience. You will be asked to identify and discuss your personal experience as a Latin American immigrant and/or as a woman with a Latin American background in Australia. The information obtained from the research will be used to assist in the adjustment and settlement of women immigrants from more traditional cultures living in Australia. This will be achieved by dissemination of the findings as appropriate.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview it will be stopped immediately, if you wish. If you are still upset, there is assistance available from Socio-Psychological Assistance at Celas (Spanish Speakers Association) or Abrisa (Brazilian Association) in Melbourne with whom you can speak.

Results from this research will be available at the end of 2007 through the publication of a thesis, publication in academic journals/magazines, and a short report for participants that will be available from the School of Psychology. If you have any further queries, please contact myself or my supervisor Associate Professor Adrian Fisher.

Thank you for your time and effort

Yours sincerely,

**Romina Iebra Aizpurúa**

PhD Candidate – School of Psychology – Victoria University

Contact/Mobile: xxx

**A/P Adrian Fisher**

School of Psychology – Victoria University

Contact: xxx

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Principal Investigator: A/P Adrian Fisher, ph: 9919 5221; Research Student: Romina Iebra Aizpurúa ph. 0404-901-022 ). If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 (telephone no: (03) 9919 4710).

# VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

## Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research

### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into the transition and adjustment of women from Latin America to Australia. This research seeks to identify the main issues faced living in a multicultural environment with different socio-economic opportunities and perspectives. In order to observe possible intergenerational conflicts, we will also work with young women born in Australia whose parents (or mothers) have migrated from Latin America.

### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
of \_\_\_\_\_

certify that I am at least 18 years old\* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study entitled:

#### ***Through the Women's Eyes:***

#### ***Latin American Women's experience of immigration to Australia***

being conducted at Victoria University by: Associate Professor Adrian Fisher and Ms Romina Iebra Aizpurúa

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by **Romina Iebra Aizpurúa** and that I freely consent to participation involving the use on me of these procedures.

**Procedures:** You will be invited to take part in an individual interview lasting approximately one hour at your convenience. The interview will be audiotaped and

transcribed. Your confidentiality will be preserved and only pseudonyms will be used (when necessary) in transcripts and reports. You will be invited to read the transcript to add to or correct your narrative.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher (Principal Investigator: A/P Adrian Fisher, ph: 9919 5221; Research Student: Romina Iebra Aizpurúa ph. 0404-901-022 ). If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 (telephone no: (03) 9919 4710).

## Appendix C:

Name	Current Age	Country of Origin	Year of arrival / Age at migration	Reason	How they arrived	Marital Status (at the moment of the research)	Partner / Spouse Country of Origin	Number of Children	Education Level (prior and after immigration)	Work Experience in C.o.O. - Current occupation in Australia
1. Elsa	53	Argentina	1976 (31)	Economic	With husband	Married	Argentina	2	Tertiary	Officer at a Gov. agency - Social worker
2. Alma	58	Argentina	1976 (31)	Economic	With husband	Married	Argentina	2	Secondary	Housewife
3. Isabel	59	Chile	1977 (30)	Political	With husband	Married	Chile	2	Tertiary (Chile)	Univ. Professor / School teacher - School teacher (now retired)
4. Betina	54	Argentina	1978 (29)	Political/ Economic	With husband	Married	Argentina	1	Secondary	Officer at a Gov. agency - Hispanic Comm. Centres – Hispanic radio
5. Carmen	59	Argentina	1964 (43)	Family	With parents	Divorced	Argentina	1	Tertiary (Argentina)	Student - Director Immigration/ community centres
6. Dora	62	Argentina	1968 (39)	Economic	Alone – to marry her Argentine fiancé in Australia	Widow / Married	Argentina / Spain	2	Secondary - Hairdresser	Hairdresser - Factory worker (now retired)
7. Esther	45	Argentina	1974 (33)	Economic	With parents	Divorced / Married	Uruguay / England	2	Half of Secondary School / Tertiary (Australia)	Student - Engineer
8. Iris	47	Uruguay	1979 (28)	Economic	With parents and brothers	Married	Uruguay	2	Secondary / Tertiary (Australia)	Student - University professor

<b>9. Laura</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>Chile</b>	1975 (32)	Personal adventure	Alone	Married	Chile	2	Secondary Secretary – nurse	Telecommunications / secretary - Factories (now retired) + Director of a community centre
<b>10. Lucia</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>Spain / Argentina</b>	1979 (28)	Economic	Alone with children – to meet his husband in Aus.	Widow	Spain	5	Basic- Primary	Tailor - Tailor (now retired)
<b>11. Mara</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>Chile</b>	1981 (26)	Education (for her children)	With ex- husband and children	Divorced / Married	Chile / Brazil	3	Secondary	Cleaner / Factories (retired)
<b>12. Julia</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>Argentina</b>	1972 (35)	Economic	With husband and children	Widow	Argentina	2	Basic – Primary	Hairdresser - Hairdresser (now retired)
<b>13. Rita</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>Argentina</b>	1975 (32)	Economic	With husband and children	Divorced	Argentina	2	Basic – Primary	Never worked - Factory worker (now retired)

## Appendix D: Sample Material from the Matrix

### GENDER ISSUES

#### Participants' comments on roles, functions and changes in private (family) and public (work, education) spheres.

Being a woman in Latin America	Being a woman in Australia	Education and Work life	Marriage	Motherhood and Family life
<p>Elsa: The Latin woman, the Argentinean, is a strong woman. Argentinean woman is almost the matriarch and who predominate in many situations.</p> <p>It must be hard to have these feminist values in Argentina because women are subject to other things, like the lack of work and not being able to achieve their financial independence. Government doesn't support you financially if you separate from your husband, all those things are more difficult in Argentina</p> <p>I think that I came with the mentality of having a stable economy, kids, those were our mothers and grandmothers' "goals", of all women...not much more than that.</p>	<p>Elsa: During the first 15 years of being here, I felt that women here in Australia (or at least us) didn't have a voice, I was ignored doing any kind of procedure.</p> <p>Elsa: It's always a continuous fight, you have to be on top of everything, because you don't have any other kind of support, you don't have the grandmother or the auntie or anyone to share all that (kids, work, marriage), it's a bit "too much" just for one self.</p> <p>Elsa: If my kids could go to the grandmother's house, because let's say...today "mum didn't want to cook or because she was crazy with so much work..." but no, I can't allow that to myself! I have to calm down and it's over! Now I have to be there because it's like that...I have to be available for my kids. (same as Geor)</p> <p>Elsa: At least here they admit the domestic violence, women have some kind of participation, and there are statistics about them. I don't know how much is done in practice, but at least they admit those issues. Australia it's a bit more advanced related to open discussions, studies</p>	<p>Elsa: I used to work in Argentina for the Government, for the National Committee of Seeds. I was doing fine.</p> <p>Elsa: I've always been very independent, I've always worked.</p> <p>Elsa: First I worked in education and teaching Spanish (community work). Through the contact with other friends, I found a job related to my training. I had lot of support from my colleagues, otherwise it would have been very difficult.</p> <p>Elsa: We also supported each other in another way. Every time something would happen at work, we would get together and say "no"! because sometimes "Anglo" would behave in a way, and we are so different. It's like together "we don't give up!" We had to fight to keep these jobs (domestic violence center) because there were many changes with the Anglo-Saxon concept of feminism. We came with a different idea of feminism.</p> <p>Elsa: I think that I continue with the fight. It's a permanent struggle (..) if you are an immigrant you can't relax, otherwise you loose space.</p>	<p>Elsa: I think immigration was something positive for us (couple) positive, we got to know each other more, and as we had to deal with all this immigration process, we became better partners.</p> <p>Elsa: I feel that I continue progressing psychologically, but not him...maybe due to work reasons, time and other limitations, he has many more constrains than I have, and we are reaching a point when it turns out to be a bit dangerous. Later on comes retirements and I don't know if we are going to be at the same level.</p>	<p>Elsa: I think that I am fighter, that I have lot of pride and also that I am the head of the family, that's why I tried to overcome the difficulties.</p> <p>Elsa: If the woman brakes down, all the rest brakes down. Sometimes I say " I am a weak strong person". Always fighting for our kids, family, work, with the fact of being an immigrant...</p> <p>Elsa: The division of domestic duties is pretty well shared but almost every duty has to be directed...and you can't change that in them! It's a bit a combination of what he brings from there and what he saw here that suited him perfectly! And that thing that the women</p>

	<p>and research on gender issues. I think that Argentina remains at a more academic level, not really at a labor level. The word feminist is still associated with being a lesbian. There is some kind of fight but not yet at the family and religious levels, also because men are very comfortable in that situation.</p>			<p>work and they contribute to the economy like them, also suited them so well! But well...he doesn't have any problems in "helping", but it's just "helping". It's a constant fight!</p>
<p>Mara: Maybe If I had stayed in Chile it was me who was taking care of everything (at home), in a situation where women remain at a lower level than men,...but those things have changed anyway in South America, it got so much better...</p>	<p>Mara: No, I'm not satisfied with the opportunities I had over here...that's for sure. Now I'm facing another kind of discrimination, the age problem, trying to get a job offer. That's the biggest barrier that I've ever encountered. If they notice an accent, they immediately say "I beg you pardon?". I speak English and I communicate with everyone! I go everywhere, I understand everything, I know it, but the accent it's there...then it's automatic...you face discrimination already on the phone,...it's such a feeling of helplessness!</p> <p>Mara: And the other women I know...they are in a similar situation. Most of them are already retired, but I know so many who couldn't work mainly because of the language.</p> <p>Mara: Well, Australian women ..if they work it's because it's their option, but they have many more opportunities than us. Because if you go to a place and if you don't speak 100% or speak English with accent, you are already at a lower level.</p>	<p>Mara: I never worked in Chile, because my husband used to work. I finished school at year 11, and then I didn't need to work. Here I didn't really have the need to work, but you get involved with the idea of helping and saving money...then you go to work, thinking that saving money will be something easy ...</p> <p>Mara: My first job was as a cleaner. In that job I cried the biggest tears of my life. Because everyone knows how to clean anywhere, but the fact of not being able to talk to the rest of the people at work, the emptiness they created not talking to me...it was terrible. They were immigrants like me, maybe they didn't know how to talk either ... I couldn't understand them, I couldn't realize what they meant or what they were saying. So I became an automatic machine. I would go there, do what I had to do, and would leave.</p> <p>Mara: We were all the time with the idea of going back,...going back, that it was enough...we didn't want any more of that! But we started building life around our daughter ...her studies and her progress. My husband had also very bad times at work. Then I started working at the factories and that was another storm to pass through.</p> <p>Mara: You would sit to work at the factory, and you wouldn't be able to look at your side! This is a silly thing that immigrants do, because Australians would take their 5 min and go for a smoke, ...and you don't do it because of the language...or because of fear! Scared of what? I wonder? You don't go because the other thing you want to do it's to please the people, then you work like an animal until you reach home completely exhausted! And on top of that, I had my</p>	<p>Mara: Oh yes...we share things at home! He always loved doing things at home, he likes cooking, most part of the time I do it because I am at home, that's the difference. Good thing is that my partner now appreciates what I do, if he had to pay someone else to do it will be so much money!</p>	<p>Mara: And I had to keep to myself of all those feelings of anger and helplessness! I had to look for ways to release that anger! Maybe meeting with a friend and telling her all these things in order to put it out! In my case, too many things collided and made my husband and I get divorced! It's just that we accumulated so many things!</p> <p>Mara: Immigration had a huge impact on us. Now I see that before I couldn't do things, I wouldn't feel satisfied or fulfilled. I was a mother, but I had to keep to myself so many things, so many things to put up. Regardless if I felt bad at work, I couldn't reach home in a bad mood! Because I had to go on! My kids now</p>

		<p>own family, I would reach home and kept on working... The worse thing is that if I ever told my parents, they would not be able to believe it, because over there...I always had everything, and then I came to Australia to suffer what I never did before! So I couldn't tell anyone... ..</p> <p>Mara: I felt particularly frustrated because the years passed by and I couldn't finish with my education. Look, I'm the only one among my brothers who doesn't have a profession. In Chile I would have been able to work or study even having the kids. Here I had to face the barrier of the kids! Because I didn't have anyone who could take care of them! Now I am 53 years old and I'm trying to do take some courses...but you find that the barrier of the language is still there... that you are still missing something in English ...</p> <p>Mara: Now we do things with the community to have fun, to get to meet each other and help. After the factories I worked doing cleaning, but now I don't work any more.</p>	<p>complain that with my 4<sup>th</sup> son I took the time to go to his school meetings, to do things I didn't do with the others. All this was because I was already feeling with a level of English enough to talk and let it go all that shyness. Because I probably knew how to speak the language, but I was worried what the others would think or whether they would laugh at me. What made me suffer the most is that I couldn't go out for groceries, for shopping, being such an active and social woman as I am!</p> <p>Mara: My kids tell me "mum, we don't know what it means to have a grandmother or a grandfather". The eldest one remembers a little bit from Chile, but the youngest now that she's a mum ...tells me "look, my daughter won't pass through what I had to, without a grandmother, so you better not forget that you have to visit us or call us every two – three days!"</p>
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## ACCULTURATION ISSUES

### Participants' comments on the adaptation process to Australia.

Conflicts, Challenges & Discrimination	Acculturation Process in Australia	Maintenance, Transmission & acquisition of cultural values & traditions
<p>Elsa: I think that we had a bit of luck, because we were young and white, you go unnoticed. We are still a minority here.</p> <p>Elsa: When you have to open yourself, explain from where you come from, how and when, then the problems start.</p> <p>Elsa: (Discrimination) All the time, in my work place. Everywhere you feel some kind of hidden racism. If you have an accent, (picking up the phone) they assume that you are the cleaner or one of the clients.</p> <p>Elsa: It has two consequences (discrimination): one positive, that you want to surpass yourself, learning, studying, doing things. The other, of course, is that it annoys you.</p> <p>Elsa: Economic immigrants are more ambitious, when it is your choice it's like you are mentally better.</p> <p>Elsa: If I don't make the difference, we go! why would I be here! It's too much what you sacrifice! Not having the family, not being able to talk, the need to do 20 km to see a friend! It's too much!</p>	<p>Elsa: Being pregnant, I suffered in the sense that that the immigration exceeded me as a pregnant woman.</p> <p>Elsa: Until today, 30 years later, people still ask me "what do you do"? when did you arrive? Why did you come? You never, never belong to this place!</p> <p>Elsa: It's like they have a second thought: "when do you leave?"</p> <p>Elsa: At this stage, retirement will come, and I don't know if we are going to be at the same level (with my husband). I didn't notice this before. Because our kids have left, so I think that what I didn't suffer at the beginning of the immigration I will suffer it now, I'm feeling it, now, almost at the end of the process.</p> <p>Elsa: I will need a major change of something, I don't know ...maybe moving ...don't know, I'll need to do things (after retirement) to keep me going. Now I lack a bit of stimulus, and I'm scared because I kind of started missing all my things, that culture. My friends over there they are already retired and have started other things, and I don't know if I'll have that opportunity here.</p>	<p>Elsa: The most beautiful thing to me is a big table, having my people eating at home.</p> <p>Elsa: If I don't have the joy of cooking, make a barbecue, why would I want to stay here if that is the most basic of my family/friends... How will I compensate that?</p> <p>Elsa: At New Year and Xmas I like baking a bread with my daughter, cooking and "mate". I want to transmit and maintain that relationship, those things that I think are "our things" (family meetings around the table).</p>
<p>Mara: The first year it was a terrible sacrifice to me. The first difficulty that I had was when I had to enroll the kids at the school, not knowing the language. The good thing is that I learned it in a year time. But of course, I spent about \$200 with my phone bill! Due to my ignorance! Because I used to pick the phone and call back home so easily as it was around the corner. And also the</p>	<p>Mara: My own adaptation was very difficult. Because you find the language barrier, and also with the fact that I couldn't finish with my education. That was really difficult to me. On the other side, it's the adaptation process to the culture itself. The main difference was that I found Australian culture colder, they are much colder, that kind of coldness that you don't know how to brake into. Now it's different, I am 100% adapted. The whole picture changed within 5 years. When my son started going to</p>	<p>Mara: Look, I have always transmitted them our culture (to her kids), and I have always made them understand what a sacrifice it is to live in South America. I always tell my kids "you don't appreciate what you have in here, the value of things", specially to the youngest one.</p> <p>Mara: At home, we have always spoken Spanish, I never allowed them to speak English. It was to maintain the</p>

<p>struggle of arriving at my sister in law's place, someone who never had kids...Then the problems started also within the family, we needed to get out of there ...</p> <p>Mara: In fact, our relatives here didn't give us the help that we needed.</p> <p>Mara: So...we learn to overcome the difficulties. If there is someone I have to thank for that is to my daughter, the eldest one. She was the interpreter, who came with me to the doctor, the one who would do everything (she gets emotional), the one who did everything with us! Thanks to her we stayed here...she was the most excited with everything.</p> <p>Mara: We came to stay for 5 years, that's what we thought. But we got involved in our kids' education. My daughter, the eldest one, she had a private teacher for a month and in that time she started speaking the language. That was the biggest incentive for us to stay here.</p> <p>Mara: During the first 5 years I also struggled with the fact that people wouldn't help me, or they would treat me bad or misunderstand me, immigrant people like me but who would forget that they lived similar things like me, people who wouldn't give you a hand...</p> <p>Mara: No, I don't think that I lived many experiences of discrimination., I never felt it. I even felt more discrimination from our own people than with locals, immigrants who would discriminate you for any reason. It was hard for me. My mum now says "do you remember that you wanted to come back during the first years"?</p> <p>Mara: If you get into a place, and if you don't speak English 100% or if you speak it with an accent, you are then lower than the rest. That discrimination is everywhere. You feel anger, helplessness... why can't I do something? Why I don't have an option? I can't! or it doesn't happen!</p>	<p>school, then I had the chance to study English and to get a job.</p> <p>Mara: In Chile we normally give lot of support to our kids to do their homework, but I couldn't do it! Because of the lack of English! So, it was such an impotence, helplessness, it was frustrating! At the beginning, this helplessness made me close myself within my 4 walls. During the first 5-6 years, my network was the closest friends that we had and my home! There was nothing else! Then, it's obvious that I couldn't see what was on the outside world, I couldn't realize what was there.</p> <p>Mara: If anyone asked if I would go back to the other side (Chile), I wouldn't go! What I really liked in Australia was the safety that I found while walking in the streets, that's the only thing that I liked about Australia at the beginning, there was nothing else that I liked. It took me 5 years to realize that I didn't have a chance, that I wouldn't take the decision to turn round. It was a categorical change!</p> <p>Mara: (integrated?) I think that yes... I am. I go everywhere, I try to talk as much as I can, and I talk the best I can!</p>	<p>culture, which was really difficult with the two oldest ones, with the youngest ones I didn't have a problem.</p>
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