

**ACCULTURATION DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY  
UNITS FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**

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**This Thesis is presented as the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Philosophy  
Murdoch University  
2006**

**I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution**

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## Abstract

Focus of on-going cross-cultural investigation has throughout the time shown that inadequate language skills paired with absence of knowledge of cultural practices and norms within the receiving society would create a number of *stress behaviors* among immigrants, often manifested as *lowered mental health status- depression, anxiety, confusion; feelings of marginality and alienation; psychosomatic symptoms and identity confusion* (Berry and Annis, 1988; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Kessler, Turner and House, 1988; Shams and Jackson, 1994; Vega et al., 1986; Vinokur, Price and Caplan, 1991; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann and Goldney, 1991). It was further noticed that refugee populations across the world are adapting to the receiving societies in a much slower rate than other migrating groups (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989), and yet due to sensibilities surrounding research of a refugee population, there are still questions surrounding this process. In addition, it appears that the attempts to demystify acculturation and uncover objective underpinnings of it, has further reduced the current concept undermining validity and reliability of the findings. Therefore need for subjective experience and definition of acculturation, as well as reconsideration of complexity of the phenomenon (acculturation) was recognised by this research.

This study was designed to offer a qualitative insight into the acculturative differences within a family unit among refugees from former Yugoslavia. 21 women, recent refugee- arrivals were requested to participate in the open- end interview. In the semi- structured

interview the women were asked to give a detailed account of their personal, their partners' and their children's experiences concerning the emotional, social, economical, occupational and psychological aspects of their and their family- members' acculturation processes. The obtained data was analysed through the means of narrative and Erickson's analytic induction. The results showed that cultural incompatibilities have spread into diverse spheres of living, thus complexity of the acculturation-related problems was acknowledged. The results showed that (1) split families (due to immigration), (2) inability to establish new social ties in the novel environment and (3) decay in professional status were often reported in connection with eroded physical and mental well-being of the participants and their families. The research also looked at cultural diversities, and gender differences, concentrating on concepts of resilience and coping strategies within the acculturative practice. It appears that cognitive restructuring and the ability to "let go" of the previous lives was the best coping mechanism.

# Acculturation Differences in Family Units from Former Yugoslavia

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is the product of the labour-intense work of many individuals and its assembly would not have been possible without the constant support of the staff within the School of Psychology at Murdoch University Western Australia, and the workers of South Metropolitan Resource Centre.

I would also like to thank the staff at Sheffield University, UK and the organizers of the Fourth Conference of the International Society for Critical Health Psychology, where this work was presented.

Last, but not least, due credit goes to all of the brave women from former Yugoslavia, all of the participants without whom this work would not have been possible.



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Historical Attributes of Culture

People's physical travels have been evident throughout history. Even long before national entities and the concept of national boundaries evolved, archaeological evidence suggests that humans have wandered throughout their geographical settings in their search for resources, and dreams of better lives (Mønnesland, 1997). Such movements indicate that different groups of humans have had a history of interacting with one another across millennia.

Although the relative recency of psychology as a discipline might suggest that abstract concepts such as "culture", describing human behaviour and human interaction, have not been a focus of attention for a very long period of time, historic accounts of the very first social formations, so called "old civilizations", or "pre-modern societies" as Bentley (1996) would call them (e.g., Persian society, Egyptian civilization or ancient Greek societies and the Roman empire), suggest that cultural identifications have been operating throughout the history of the human race. Following the same argument, it would be natural to expect that such cultural identifications may be held central to the identity of a group member, who recognizes him- or herself as the affiliate of the culture in question.

This assumption would then permit us to view past wars as evidence of illicit cultural clashes, of course in an extreme form. Indeed, the concept of cultural constructs of the self is nowadays widely acknowledged and much discussed, embodied, for example, in the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious - a repository of ancestral experiences (Corey, 2001) shedding light on cross-cultural influences on human psychosocial development (Saraswathi, 1998).

Such broad views of cultural underpinnings of human behaviour obviously suggest not only that culture becomes a building block of the individual, but also allow the possibility that diverse cultural formations may sometimes be in direct opposition to one another. This thesis will address the issue in the context of recent mass-migration of Yugoslav minorities to Australia, which was a consequence of last decade's political unrest leading up to the 4-year civil war (1991-1995) resulting in the birth of six different nations.

So, what exactly happens when two cultures collide?

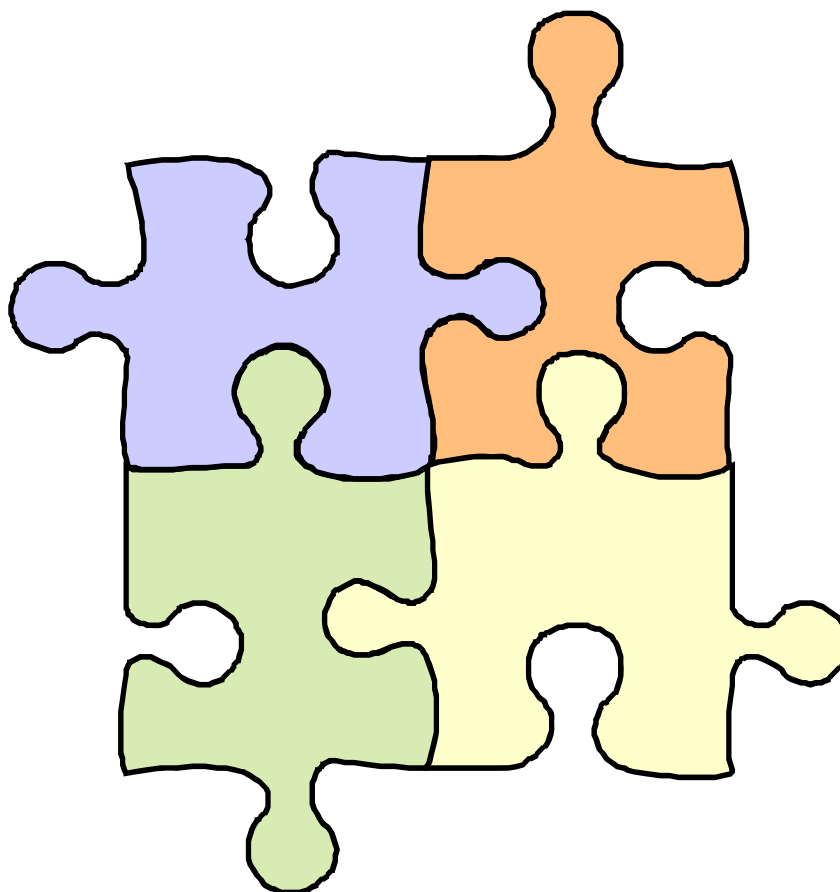
## **1.2 Acculturation**

Although throughout history, migration and permeability of various national boundaries have yielded constant cultural clashes, this phenomenon became a particular issue with the increase of human movement in the post-modern era (Bentley, 1996). The cross-cultural studies inspired by the mass-migration of the post World War II period, which exploded during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, finally emerged strongly in the 70s only to regain their power in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, the studies have missed many questions about cultural influences and changes that occur within a society or a community due to culture clashes. Indeed, in the post-communist era, marked by the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s (Bertocchi & Strozzi, 2004), recent unrest in the Middle East, and ongoing political instability in some African societies (e.g., the civil war in Sudan), scientific investigation of cultural clashes, interactions between migrant and refugee populations and the implications of these has become urgent.

### **1.2.1 Definition of Acculturation**

“Acculturation” is a term used to describe the process of cultural shift that occurs in an individual, as well as within a society as whole, once diverse cultures “collide” (Berry & Annis, 1988). In other words, once introduced to the new culture through the process of immigration, an individual may experience a clash between his or her cultural heritage and the imposed culture of the receiving society. Acculturation, then, is a process of “accustoming” oneself to the new culture, during which one’s own beliefs, values, attitudes and, consequently, behaviors are affected (Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999).

During the process itself, the immigrant is sometimes faced with conflicting beliefs, values and/or attitudes, creating an imbalance between the two cultures: host- and culture of origin. Once an individual is removed from a familiar cultural context and placed into another societal formation, without knowledge of functioning norms and standards, his or her functioning is inevitably going to be adversely affected across the spheres of living in proportion to the size of the gap between cultures. Consequently, an aversive state of “cognitive dissonance” (Festinger, 1957) is created, which motivates the individual to re-establish cognitive equilibrium by reconciling these “incompatible” cultures. This process may be accomplished by relearning the cognitive interpretation of environmental cues. The degree to which cognitive equilibrium is restored may be influenced by individual dispositional traits, as well as situationally bound cues, in which not only migrants’ perceptions and attitudes, but also the sensitivity and outlooks of the hosts on the migrant out-groups interact to produce an acculturation outcome (Birman, 1998). More about acculturation outcomes will be presented in chapter 2.



**Figure 1.1 People in their Cultural Context**

Individuals who are introduced to a new culture may lack skills and normative knowledge to govern their behaviors in the new environment (Matsumoto, 2000). Therefore, they may be poorly equipped to deal with the everyday tasks that the native society – and they themselves prior to immigration - took for granted (Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999). Thus, there is a need to acquire culturally appropriate skills that will enable migrants to perform their duties and various roles within the new society, thus leading up to their “normalisation of life” which will be discussed in more detail, later in subsequent chapters. (Berry, 1974, Berry, 1980a; Berry, 1980b; Berry, 1984; Berry, 1990a; Berry, 1990b; Berry, 1997; Berry, 1999a; Berry, 1999b; Berry, 2000; Berry, 2001; Birman, 1994; Birman, 1998; Ghaffarian, 1998; Greenberg and Greenberg, 1989; Hovey, 2000, Liebkind, 1993; Phinney, 1990; Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999).

## **1.2.2 Models of Acculturation**

### ***1.2.2.1 The Unidimensional Model of Acculturation***

The unidimensional model of acculturation proposes that only two of the above mentioned modes of acculturation are possible: either **assimilation** (regaining strong *national identity* by identifying strongly with the host culture at the expense of one's culture of origin, see Figure 1.1) or **separation** (retaining strong *ethnic identity* by resisting influences of the receiving society (see Figure 1.1), Birman, 1998). As such, this model casts assimilation as the desirable state of acculturation and implies that immigrants should resort to this whenever in doubt about the culturally acceptable response. The unidimensional model of acculturation conceptualises culture in black and white terms – either/or – and the operationalisation of the variables in studies using this model reflect this assumption where one cultural identity precludes the other (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001).

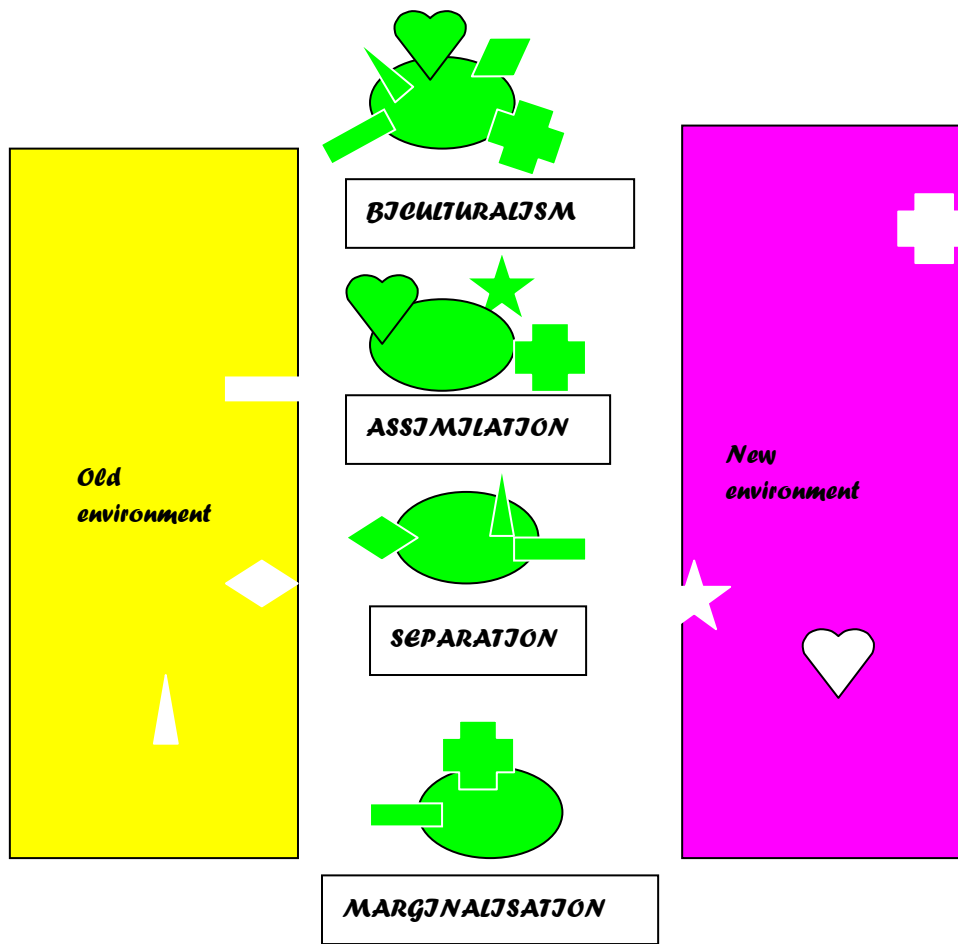


Figure 1.2 Separation and Assimilation in the New Environment

### 1.2.2.2 The Multidimensional Model of Acculturation

Notwithstanding the parsimony of the unidimensional model of acculturation, it was soon revealed as inadequate to deal with complex issues of interaction between national and ethnic identity in the population of immigrants (Birman, 1998; Phinney et al., 2001). Specifically, research showed that the two identities were not mutually exclusive, as unidimensional model proposed (Berry, 1990; Birman, 1998). Developing a strong sense of belonging to both cultures, constructing and seeking social support within, as well as outside, the ethnic community, and identifying with both, appeared not only to be possible but common in diverse migrant communities (Birman, 1998). In addition, huge discrepancies emerged in empirical findings regarding migrants'



wellbeing resulting from acculturative mode (Birman, 1998). Whilst some researchers claimed assimilative practices to yield better overall satisfaction with the new life compared with separatist attitudes (Berry, 1989), others showed opposite to be true (Birman, 1998).

Consequently, the additional two forms of acculturation, biculturalism and marginalisation, were introduced (Berry, 1990). Thus, acculturation outcomes could now be represented as a 2 x 2 matrix: accept/reject ethnic culture x accept/reject host culture. Not surprisingly, biculturalism was promoted as the most positive approach to dealing with mourning over the loss of familiar cues associated with the process of migration and to adjusting quickly and re-establishing a “normal life” (Gold, 1996).

Although the multidimensional model of acculturation resolved some issues of concern and inadequacies of its predecessor, it still was criticised for retaining concepts of separate categories (Birman, 1998). The enthusiasm following the conceptualisation of the 2-dimensional model of the acculturation process, and the assumption that biculturalism was a superior form, was soon followed with new conflicting findings that psychological well-being of migrants was associated with strong separatist acculturation processes (Liebkind, 1996; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1997). Thus, while the two-dimensional model appeared to accommodate acculturative possibilities better than the unidimensional model, the ideal form of acculturation remained uncertain.

### ***1.2.2.3 Contextual Multidimensional Model of Acculturation***

The solution to this problem was to add a *contextual* dimension: cross-categorical move of migrants in their acculturation style, induced by the demands of the particular situation. Being bicultural meant being able to cross from ethnic to national

identity as the situation would require, rather than clinging to both identities at all times (Birman, 1998). The ability of a migrant to “substitute” one cultural identity for the other, would not produce discomfort or cognitive dissonance since both identities are internalised (Birman, 1998).

Yet even this adjusted multidimensional model of acculturation still failed to distinguish empirically between the biculturalism and marginalisation (Birman, 1998), possibly due to the failure to quantify the *strength* of attachment to each of the two cultures. Consequently, conflicting results were still noticeable in the realm of cross-cultural psychology and implications of acculturative practices upon migrants (Berry, 1990; Phinney, 1992).

### ***1.2.2.4 The Interactive Model of Acculturation***

The interactive model of acculturation also accounts for the problem of conflicting results arising from the failure to operationally distinguish between the concepts of biculturalism and marginalisation, by providing a theoretical rationale for them. It proposes that acculturation is directly affected by the degree of difference between the host culture, and culture of origin, the degree and length of contact between the two, personal characteristics of the migrant as well as hosts’ practices in relationship to a particular migrant group (Berry, 2001; Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999). Acculturation is therefore a cumulative “product”, which is a function of both the migrant and the receiving society. These will be considered in turn.

#### ***i.) Migrant factors***

Choice of acculturative practice results in part from migrants’ expectations (cognitive preconceptions of the host society) and normative beliefs, which are culturally influenced (Huesmann & Guera, 1997, as cited in Souweidnane

& Huesmann, 1999). In addition, migrants' motivations and desires to achieve or avoid satisfying contact within the host community and to annihilate or embellish ties with his or her culture of origin vary (Berry, 2001). An extensive body of research has also distinguished personal characteristics of immigrants' directly affecting their acculturative practices and quality of life:

- 1) *Age*, which will be further discussed in subsequent chapters
- 2) *Education*; especially in terms of academic profile of migrating groups and their desired and achieved status, which will further be discussed in chapters 4 and 5
- 3) *Gender* (also discussed in more details in chapters 4 through to 7); with an enormous body of conflicting empirical evidence of relative success in achieving satisfaction, cultural shift and mental well-being (Ghaffarian, 1998; Neto, 2001; Walsh & Horenczvk, 2001)
- 4) *Socioeconomic status*; which again will be addressed in subsequent chapters (in particular chapter 5 and 7).
- 5) *Motivation for migrating*, which may vary from considering economic gains, enjoying new and unknown to having no other motivation for migrating other than fear of persecution if staying in one's country of origin.
- 6) *Expectations*, in regards to new life, the receiving society, encounter opportunities and so on;
- 7) *Personality* directly influencing motivation, thus leading to fearing or feeling enthusiastic about the new and unknown. (Berry, 1998; Torbiorn, 1982).

Factors 5 throughout to 7 will not be directly discussed in this work, as motivation is held constant due to all of the participants arriving as refugees, thus high degree of involuntariness is assumed throughout the process. In addition, factors 6 and 7 are relevant but will not be the focus of the investigation, as they would be affected by this involuntary aspect of immigration. For example, it is reasonable to expect that many would be limiting their expectations to a safer environment than the one left behind, and might be more motivated to disregard personal preferences for novelty or stability due to the overriding concern of safety and absence of persecution.

*ii.) Receiving society factors*

1. *Acceptance* of immigrants and
2. Migrants' *perception* of hosts' acceptance which will be further discussed in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.
3. *Acculturative attitudes* (Berry, 2001) - Acculturative attitudes represent the term devised to connote societal attitudes towards migrants in general and therefore affect migration policies and influence institutionalized bodies dealing with migrants (Berry, 2001);
4. Contemporary *economic state* of the receiving society, which will be further discussed in chapter 5.

In addition, the factors operating within the receiving society also directly and indirectly affect the outcome of acculturation. The abovementioned factors will be

further discussed throughout the subsequent chapters (4-7), but they will not be the main focus of this investigation.

- iii. Cultural Distance:* the degree of difference between the culture of origin and the host culture affecting acculturative processes as mentioned earlier (Nesdale, Rooney and Smith, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992), and will be discussed in more detail in the chapters to follow.

### **1.2.3 Other factors affecting acculturative practices**

There is an array of other factors that directly or indirectly affect the acculturation process. Berry (2001), for example, identified a number of moderating factors:

1. The *length of time in the new country* – a function of time

A number of researchers have identified time as a contributing factor to successful acculturation, which is often associated with migrants' acquisition of culturally appropriate behaviors and skills (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989).

2. *Coping strategies* – a function of culture (to be argued in chapters 4-7)

Diverse and culturally bound coping strategies are used to deal with the new environment and absence of familiar cues and to compensate for low levels of functioning in the unfamiliar and unknown (Yoshihama, 2002).

In addition, Berry (2001) sees three group level variables as also relevant:

1. *The society of origin*

This closely relates to cultural distance mentioned above, by identifying societies that are less or more compatible with each other. It also gives parameters of certain societies against which expectations are plotted. For example, Yugoslav society is highly intolerant of uncertainty, according to Hofstadte (1985), while Australian culture is based on premise of great flexibility and change, thus implying incompatibility on at least this dimension. More about this will follow in subsequent chapters.

### 2. The *political, social and economic* aspects of the migration

These pertain to both migrants and receiving societies, thus depicting motivations and expectations of immigration and directly influencing devising of migration policies.

### 3. *Social support* networks within the new environment

This relates to the infrastructural properties of the receiving society. All of these will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

## **1.2.4 Gender**

It is to be expected that acculturation will adversely affect the population as a whole, leading to a build-up of psychological tension that will affect recent refugee arrivals from former Yugoslavia on a grand scale. However, an extensive body of research indicates that some gender and cohort differences are to be expected also. Much of the literature has concerned itself with assessing the prevalence of “ineffective” acculturation symptomatology in migrant women across cultures. It is often reported, that women acculturate (i.e., assimilate) to a lesser extent than men, due to their role of a care-taker and their nurturing disposition, which restricts them to home duties (Yeo & Kooh, 1998). It is possible, however, that such views are outdated, as they rely on the traditional role division within a migrant family where women are seen as home-makers, thus having not enough time to assume the role of culture- and language-

acquirer, and to develop skills necessary for successful integration into the new society. In addition, this model also assumes that nurturing qualities of women migrants put them at special risk of unsuccessful acculturation, as they (as opposed to their spouses and children) tend to dwell upon the loss of familiar faces from social and extended family circles. Men, on the other hand, are believed to acculturate more quickly and easily, as their role as provider leads them to seek and assume employment in a relatively short period of time, thereby mixing with the hosts and improving their language and cultural skills and knowledge at much faster rate than their partners.

### **1.3 Resilience: Migration as Response to Change Requiring**

#### **Assimilation**

Tied in with the concept of response to change is the notion of resilience. Resilience generally means the capability of a body to recover or reassume its previous shape or form (Collins English Dictionary, 1994). In other words, the concept of reaching cognitive equilibrium suggests reestablishment of previous (pre-migration) levels of functioning. This is achieved by putting to use old or acquiring new coping mechanisms, which act as stress-buffers and facilitate successful acculturation. Resilience and coping strategies will be further discussed in the subsequent chapter.

## **1.4 The Present Study**

### **1.4.1 Aim and Rationale**

#### ***1.4.1.1 Aim***

The present study aims to investigate acculturative differences within family units originating from former Yugoslavia who have arrived in Australia recently through the Humanitarian Programme as a consequence of last decade's political unrest raging in the Balkans. This paper is designed as a comprehensive qualitative investigation of acculturative processes and, as such, will contribute to the accumulating knowledge within the cross-cultural field, identifying compatibilities and incompatibilities between the experiences of this population and previous research within the domain of interest. It will further contribute to the accumulation of knowledge within the field of cross-cultural psychology (Matsumoto, 2000). Previous research has been criticised for overgeneralizing across recipient and dispatching societies, which may actually yield quite different results (Kim, 2003). Consequently, the ecological validity (the extent to which the findings mirror real-world phenomena) of the contemporary findings has been questioned (Birman, Tickett & Buchanan, 2005). The current research attempts to reunite the societal and individual variables influencing acculturation that have been neglected in recent cross-cultural investigations, with the strong consideration of the abovementioned factors pertaining to immigration. In addition, this study once again considers the concepts of adaptation, resilience and identity formation.

#### ***1.4.1.2 Rationale***

The previously mentioned conceptual and empirical shortcomings of the investigation of acculturation in relation to the operationalisation of concepts of acculturation and the dimensionality of the phenomenon, have contributed to further claims of viewing the phenomenon through "cultural lenses". Indeed, Berry (2001)



suggests that due to cultural incompatibilities, narrow, culturally-specific approaches to the phenomenon of acculturation are evident, even in multicultural societies. This claim was supported by further empirical findings (Birman, 1998) who found that institutional help available in multicultural societies promotes and encourages assimilation, rather than biculturalism. This has given rise to a range of problems at the conceptual and methodological levels, and these can flow through to practical and policy levels, resulting in potentially biased and unfair migratory policies.

With this in mind, the current study was designed as a *qualitative investigation* in order to deal with the possibilities of missing important concepts in addressing acculturation due to usage of the researchers' own cultural assumptions to the exclusion of the cultural underpinnings of a specific target group. The present study also views acculturation as having a direct relational influence upon quality of life in the target group (Yugoslav migrants). The research then allows this target group to identify the issues that are most relevant to their quality of life and provides for complex and detailed identification of the nature and magnitude of the problems associated with acculturation, as mentioned above.

In addition, rather than taking the rigid categorization approach to specific acculturative practices, which has yielded such discrepant results within the field of cross-cultural psychology, this study introduces the concept of "*successful acculturation*". The term is intended to describe a subjective measure of acculturation, that is denoted in the concept of satisfaction with the new life as perceived by migrants' themselves. Such an approach would:

- (1) successfully eliminate the problem of dominance of one acculturative mode over another, as successful acculturation would pertain to the subjective sense of

well-being within the receiving society, thus could apply to all four modes of acculturation simultaneously.

- (2) allow the target group to identify their own areas of concern in relation to acculturation, thereby eliminating the problem of the researcher's cultural lenses
- (3) empower researchers with a perspective beyond their own
- (4) allow for complex influences and structures to be identified.

Successful acculturation would therefore be a concept closely related to resilience, as it would require movement from a "less functional" mode of living due to cultural inadequacies to "more functional" living within the new culture once culturally appropriate knowledge is acquired.

This research, therefore, is designed as a comprehensive qualitative study aimed at establishing the constructs of acculturation as it applies to the population of recent refugee arrivals from former Yugoslavia.

### **1.5 Overview of the Chapters to Follow**

Based on the existing models and theories, the present study was contextualised as an investigation of complex human interactions that occur in a cultural context once a migrant is introduced to the new environment. It reflects upon the broad scope of human experiences, as well as cultural influences upon the human behaviour. The present study also deals with the relevant criticism of the existing models as well as the methodological implications and shortcomings identified by more closely examining the participants' perspective on acculturation (see chapter 7).

Extensive investigation of the previous literature within the field has led to identifying certain thematic and contextual frames for the present study. In this study,

## Introduction

five themes are explored as they extend across four identified content areas. The five themes were identified as:

- (1) Acculturation processes – targeting the concept of accepting and/or rejecting, either ethnic or host culture, or both.
- (2) Coping skills and resilience - within the concept of acquiring new skills and functioning within the new society.
- (3) Gender similarities and differences - in relation to the first two factors.
- (4) Life structuring: work and socialization – indicating differences between the two cultures and expectations relating to the receiving society.
- (5) Passive vs active modes of behaviour – and cultural differences in preference for each of these.

These identified themes will be discussed within the context of their influences upon the spheres of living (content areas) presented in subsequent chapters:

- (1) family loss
- (2) family dynamics and socialization processes within the new culture
- (3) employment
- (4) health

The structure of this thesis will be as follows:

### ***Chapter 2: Literature Review***

In the next chapter (Literature Review) more information on the existing work in the field will be presented, developing the theoretical rationale for the present study. The chapter will provide a detailed discussion on acculturation-associated phenomena, representing the complexity of the human experience. It will outline the problems of losing old and acquiring new social structures, problems of microeconomic as well as macroeconomic implications and physical as well as emotional and psychological

health in respect to those problems. Specific cultural contexts in respect to Yugoslav and Australian culture will be discussed.

Additionally, in this chapter, the concepts of resilience and coping strategies will be explored and their potential moderating effects upon the general well-being of the population. Chapter 2 will therefore establish the theoretical framework within which the present study is conducted, introducing themes that will be developed in the following chapters. Additionally, it is a purpose of this paper to present some cultural influences that are believed to act either as a catalyst or hindrance to the prospects of successful acculturation (Hofstede, 1985). In order to allow for the argument to develop in subsequent chapters, a brief discussion of presently used models in respect to immigrants generally, but in particular refugees, will be presented.

### ***Chapter 3: Method***

This chapter will outline the methods used to investigate the issues of acculturation and provide a rationale for the choice of methodology used for collection and analysis of data. In this chapter, the author will also address some of the limitations and strengths of the approach to the questions asked.

The next three chapters will address specific spheres of living within the new society, and provide analysis of data collected.

***Chapter 4: Family and Social Structures*** will address the social aspects of acculturation, specifically relating to the notion of family preservation and the impact of cultural incompatibility on functioning within the Australian society. Cultural influences upon the process of socialization and formulation of expectations within the new society will be also discussed, as well as the acquisition of coping strategies

relating to resilience in respect to the restructuring or preservation of a social network by Yugoslav refugees in Australian society.

**Chapter 5: Employment**, will address the aspects of economic and employment mobility as a consequence of immigration. “Employment mobility” is a term used to denote change in employment status which then can be upward, downward or stable. Current cross-cultural research has been widely criticised for disregarding effects of immigration upon employment mobility and, consequently, upon psychological, emotional and social outcomes, as well as global societal status and health issues associated with it (Bradsberg, Ragan & Nasir, 2002; Jaaso & Rosenzweig, 1995). Furthermore, the complexity of chosen coping strategies will also be discussed in relation to employment outcomes for Yugoslav refugees.

**Chapter 6: Health**. In this chapter, the relationship between the claims of mental and physical health problems pertaining to immigration will be discussed. More consideration will be given to the relationship between depression and grieving in accordance to leaving everything behind as opposed to clinical connotations of the phenomenon.

In the final chapter, **Chapter 7: Conclusions** a final insight into the acculturation realities of the target group will be provided, painting a picture of cultural influences upon human behaviour. It will provide a summary of the findings of the present study, in respect to two major thematic underpinnings of the investigation:

(A) **Resilience and Coping Skills**

This section will deal with retention and acquisition of coping strategies and achieving resilience. The cultural specificities contained in the concept of coping strategies will also be considered. Concluding comments will be made with respect to the contextual scopes identified above, rather than attempting to identify the single

most effective skill, providing insight into the practices leading to “successful acculturation”.

**(B) *Acculturation***

Concluding comments on acculturation will provide a further insight into successful adaptation into the new society. It will be argued that the term “successful” makes most sense when it refers to a subjective sense of contentment with the self and the positioning of self within the Australian society and/or community; not a specific acculturation mode. Furthermore, the term also will not imply finality, but the ongoing process and the personal satisfaction with the same.

Finally in this chapter, methodological issues and practical suggestions arising from the findings, depicting the most commonly identified problems, obstacles and routes to success in the new environment by the refugees themselves, will be discussed.

# **Chapter 2 Literature Review - Reintroducing Resilience and Identity Formation to the Investigation of Acculturative Practice**

In this chapter, the broader theoretical rationale for the present study will be introduced. This chapter will first examine in detail the formation of the cultural self and the issues associated with migration (section 2.1). Cultural influences in building one's identity or persona, have been acknowledged in the scientific community for a long time (Corey, 2001), and they will be strongly stressed here. Next, the concepts of cultural clash due to migratory movements, and its implications for attainment of new economic and social status as well as health, within the new country, will be discussed, forming the basis for the empirical study to follow. The nature of Yugoslav culture will also be introduced here, in order to provide a point of comparison to the receiving society: Australian culture. Finally, the issues of resilience and coping strategies will be examined in detail as they relate to issues of recovery after the initial shock of being introduced to a new culture.

## **2.1 Definition of Culture**

When talking about culture, there are two separate issues that make it difficult to define:

1. Culture is an abstract concept which does not lend itself to objective observation

2. Categorization of individual people as members of a specific culture is problematic, as cultures do not have clear-cut boundaries and need not be mutually exclusive.

According to Matsumoto (2000), often science and the vast majority of the public assume culture and ethnicity to be interchangeable, thereby equating one with the other (Fillion, 2004; Kuperminc, Blatt, Shahar, Henrich & Leadbeater, 2004; Regeser Lopez, & Guarnaccia, 2000). Because of the amount of covariance between the two constructs, which is contained in genetic relatedness and shared ancestry; common historical heritage and homeland, Fillion (2004) suggests this tendency to equate the two is quite reasonable, but certainly unfair as subcultures within a culture are then not acknowledged. Obvious examples are multicultural societies, such as Australian society, where the culture of Chinese-Australians may differ substantially from that of Greek-Australians. In addition to these abstract aspects of a culture, there are also more tangible features such as language, religion etc. that constitute a part of cultural identity apart from ethnic self.

So what is culture? According to Matsumoto (2000) it is a complex set of rules governing human behaviour through the imposed normative and standardized imperatives influencing attitudes, value and belief formation within a particular human formation (i.e., group) devised in order to ease and govern human interaction and behaviour within the given formation. So culture can be thought of as an evolutionary-interactive entity as it evolves over time in a manner that enhances survival prospects of the individual, and influences the interaction between the individual and the environment. Culture also provides a sense of identity to the individual. The concept of identity formation will be further discussed in section 2.1.1.1. Identity.

To further facilitate conceptualization of the meaning of “culture” it is important to stress that culture encompasses the holistic and complex *set of shared thoughts, and*



*meanings influencing people's outlook upon the world and constructing their realities of the same* (Watt & Norton, 2004). Consequently, within the definition of the concept itself it is evident that there is a strong subjective component. Watts and Norton (2004) suggest that measures of a specific culture include language, or other observable artefacts, such as clothes, food etc., yet the very first definition of culture identifies the concept as: "... a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by (wo)man as a member of society." (Tylor, 1871; as cited Leininger, 1978, p. 491). This definition suggests the widespread influence of culture upon the multiple spheres of living.

In addition, it also suggests a strong individualistic interpretation and process of establishing meaning within the shared societal formation. Therefore, it (culture) is a "collective lens" through which perceptions are formed and interpretations of the outside world achieved, thus shared by a large group of people and transmitted through generations by the processes of language acquisition and socialization, ensuring the collective identity of the same group (Andrews & Boyle, 1995; Helman, 2001). Under such a view, culture is clearly important for the dynamic and unperturbed functioning of an individual within the scope of a given collective formation.

So, culture is an important part of social environment. It provides norms and rules for interaction between individuals and their physical environment (e.g., food and shelter). It also provides guidelines for interaction between individuals and their social environment (e.g., laws and social mores). Therefore, the absence of knowledge of cultural practices would lead to diminished capacity of an individual to function within a given society in various roles including those relating to family structures, social circles and in the workplace (Andrews & Boyle, 1995).

Conversely, however, cognitive and affective constructs are culturally specific as they are acquired, to at least some extent, through language and socialization skills and

are highly culturally bound - *Sapir-Whorf theory* (Vaughan & Hogg, 1998). The particular psychological constructs a person possesses will govern compatibility between the person and the physical and social environment. Once the physical and social environment changes the cognitive/affective structures the person possesses may no longer be suitable behavioural guides and the person may encounter difficulties.

Figure 2.1 represents the acquisition process of culturally-specific knowledge across the spheres of functioning within a given society. Once the skills are acquired within the social environment/culture, functioning within that culture becomes easier and more rewarding. Thus, cultural compatibilities between the individual and the environment are achieved. This process usually happens from birth and the individual thus becomes less aware of the changes inflicted upon him or her by the environment itself.

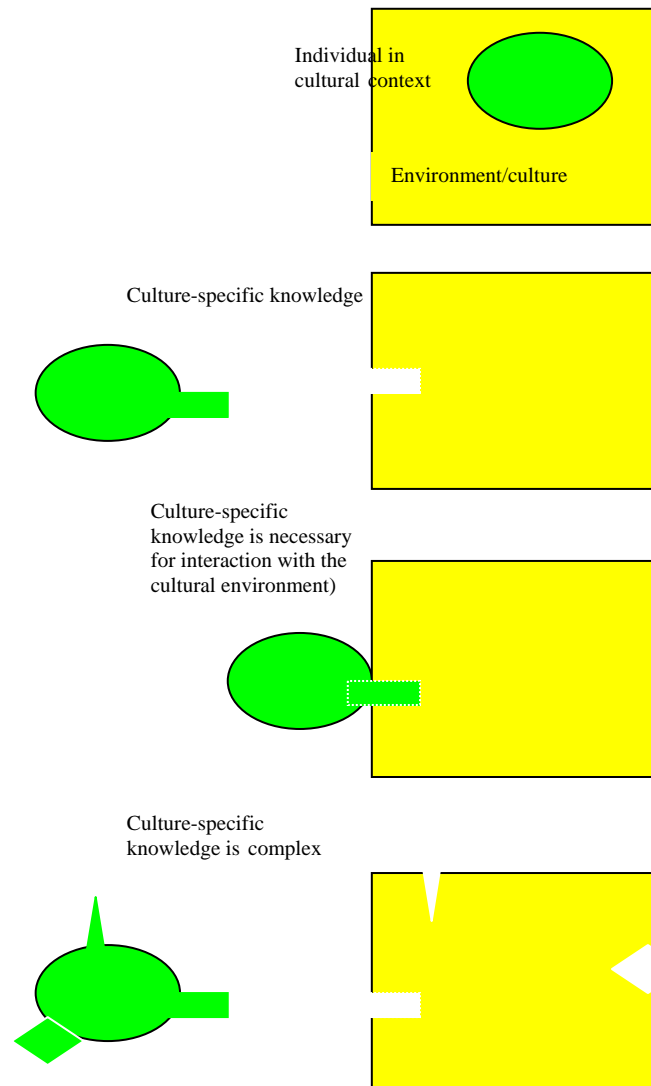


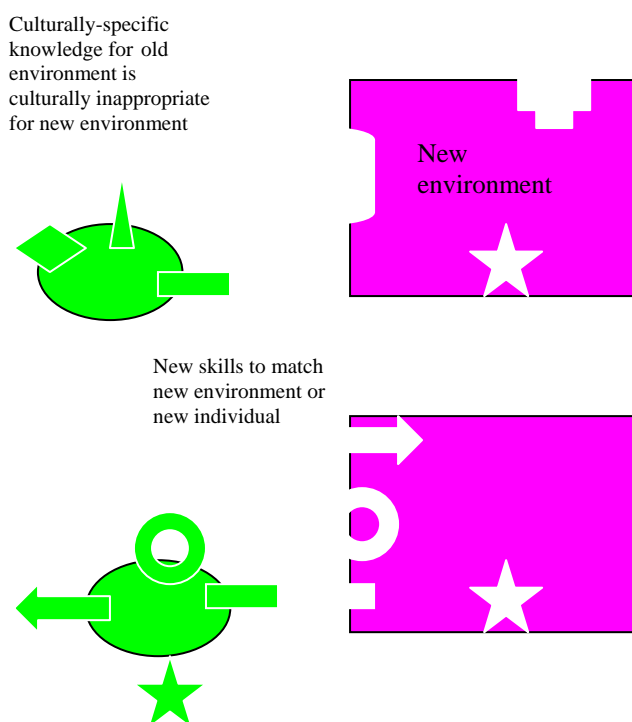
Figure 2.1 A Culture and an Individual: Perfectly Shaped Interlocking Jigsaw Pieces

### 2.1.1 What happens when two cultures meet?

The Figures 2.2 above suggest that a culture and an individual eventually become compatible entities that are capable of interlocking and therefore the “functioning” of an individual occurs in the cultural context and is prompted by culturally-specific knowledge acquired earlier in life. Once removed from that cultural context and placed into another, the existing “wisdom” of the individual may be culturally incompatible

**Theoretical Rationale- Reintroducing the Concepts of Resilience and Identity Formation into Investigation of Acculturative Practices**

with the new environment, thus requiring a process of relearning new truths and wisdoms within that new cultural context: acculturation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, acculturation is a process of “accustoming” oneself to the new culture, during which one’s own beliefs, values, attitudes and consequently behaviors are affected (Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999). (See Figure 2.3)



**Figure 2.2 Shaping Culture and Reshaping an Individual in the New Cultural Context- Acculturation**

The traditional approach to *acculturation* briefly outlined in the introduction, presented cultures as mutually exclusive categories. It represented culture as a definite category, and consequently the existing models of acculturation specified that, based on personal preferences and demands of the situation, acculturative practices will be selected from the four listed in chapter 1 (biculturalism, assimilation, segregation and marginalization).

Even such a flexible and versatile approach has been criticized in respect of lack of measurability. Berry (1999), for example, acknowledged the failure of the existing measures to distinguish between biculturalism and marginalization, as involvement

with the both cultures – one’s own and the new, receiving culture – is noticeable that no guidance has been developed to measure the strength of the involvement. Birman (1998) also stressed poor reliability of the concepts, as measuring them across different situations, settings and cultures yielded a huge diversity of findings, implying that the same individual might be categorised differently in different situations.

The most recent approach to the questions of cultural formations as a result of acculturative practices has shown that change is inevitable in which case so-called cultural hybrids are formed. For example, Irvine and Berry (1988) claim that once an individual is faced with the new and unknown environment, strong motivation to change either his or her internal structures or the environment to achieve a better fit will result in change most probably of both – self and the environment. Thus cultural hybrids emerge. For example, young members of ethnic minorities may choose to eat at McDonalds when with mainstream friends, and yet prefer ethnic restaurants when accompanied by other members of the minority group.

#### ***2.1.1.1 Identity***

Changes inevitably occur within the individual who has been “up-rooted” and then “transplanted” into the new culture. It is plausible that the two cultures (receiving and original) will be perceived as incompatible, but this may lead to the process of integration of the two cultures within an individual. Consequently, it results in the cultural shift that is *reallocation of cultural identity*, resulting in the formation of so-called “cultural hybrids” as Ballinger (2004) suggests.

In addition, as “culture evolves over time influenced by a people’s history, environment, social status, religion, and experience” (HSR, 2003, p. 39) it is only possible to assume that cultural hybrids will be established and identities merged through the process of acculturation mentioned earlier. The hybridization process therefore connotes the sense of individual change as a consequence of exposure to the

culture of the receiving society (Matsumoto, 2000). In support of this argument Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios and Hatziprokopiou (2004) found that in the case of recent refugees from former Yugoslavia and SSSR to the west, a high degree of “economic, political and cultural independence” between the group and the country of origin is relatively rapidly achieved and maintained, thus implying perpetuated propensity for cultural shift.

#### **2.1.1.1.1 National Identity**

National identity refers to people’s feelings of belonging and attachment that surpasses national loyalty and the sense of civic responsibilities towards the institutional rule and political predicaments of the nation (Armstrong, 1996; Ezell, Seeleib-Kaiser, & Tiryakian, 2003). National identity, however, seems to be a phenomenon that is very much capable of metamorphosis. Ezell, Seeleib-Kaiser, and Tiryakian (2003) found that their sample of 544 German students shifted from East or West German nationhood to a unifying “Germanism” in year 1989, or often even beyond to so called “post-national identity: Europeanism formation” (appearing strongly in 2000 with the formation of European Union) (Ballinger, 2004) .

At the same time, cases of disaggregation of nationhood have also been evident in the recent past with extreme cases of “Yugoslav” or “Soviet” nations breaking into smaller neo-national entities. Although there was (and possibly still is) some shared cultural heritage, obviously indigenous cultural cores were preserved throughout the symbiotic period (i.e., Yugoslav era and USSR era) and have re-emerged in the form of “neo-nationalism” that led to the dissipation of these composite countries (Radnitz, 2004). Nationhood is then, according to the “social constructivist” model (Mønnesland, 1997), influenced by political, societal and historical events, and is therefore subject to change at any given time. Armstrong (1996) claims that institutional bodies within a state often use tactics to strengthen or weaken the sense of

national identity among the citizens or even redirect it in a way that suits the current political influences. In the case of the war in former Yugoslavia, the historical independencies or “neo-nationalities” allowed for the past spirits to be woken, initiating the need to re-establish national identity in terms of religious affiliations that were suppressed during the communist era in Yugoslavia, thus giving rise to “religious nationalism” (van der Veer, 1994, as cited in Hayden, 2002).

#### **2.1.1.1.2 Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic, as opposed to national, identity is a concept that operates on a sub-national level. Therefore, it is subjectively characterized as a person’s sense of sharing the same attributes - ethnicity - with in-group members (Phinney, 1996). Ethnicity is, according to Nagel (2002), a concept representing distinctiveness within a nation based on the diversity in language, religious convictions, skin colour, descent, and/or culture. Such a description of ethnicity may, nevertheless, be considered poor in the case of assessing ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia, as these groups share commonalities in all of these determinants except their relative religious affiliations. However, as for national identity, ethnic identity also seems to be susceptible to modifications depending upon the current political trends, and the availability of different ethnic and/or national identities to choose from (Nagel, 2002). Barth (1969, as cited in Nagel, 2002) and Manell (2005) suggest that ethnic identity can form as a result of self-classification caused by the close proximity and feelings of loyalty towards already formed ethnic communities (Kvermmo & Heyerdahl, 2003; Skowron, 2004), or through the process of self-ascription that develops on the grounds of empathic and romanticized feelings towards a specific group. Nagel (2002) also found a paradox where, on the one hand Yugoslav ethnic identification bordered on conflict, emerging from the perception of being treated unfairly by other ethnic groups (Fischler, 2003), but at the same time ethnic groups regarded each other with affability.

### ***2.1.1.2 Culture and Family: Socialization***

According to family system theories, individuals cannot be defined solely as isolated agents within the environment, but rather as a part of functioning unit called family (Skowron, 2004). Within the scope of these theories it is important to recognize the multifunctional relationships operating within families that determine their inner dynamics and boundaries (Parke, 2004). In addition, encompassing ecological theories suggest that inner dynamics of family units provide a basis for the relative placement of a family within a broader social context in relation to extended family, and formal and informal social settings (Dion & Dion, 2001) within which families mix: neighbourhoods and friendship circles, work, school etc. (Parke, 2004).

Although evidence clearly suggests that families are relatively independent units, institutional help available to migrants (i.e., welfare services, educational institutions) across receiving societies, views families as bundles of independent individuals, rather than interconnected units (Whittington, 2004). For example, language barriers in older migrant cohorts are dealt with by providing professional translators, while the bilingual offspring are often prevented from accessing institutions on behalf of their parents or grandparents. This way the language barrier might be removed, but the less obvious culture-barrier might still be present. Secondly, through the use of institutional help (in the form of education), young immigrants are often persuaded to adopt the mainstream value-systems and to abandon their cultural heritage (Steinbach, 2001). Although such practices are neither obvious nor necessarily intentional, they still operate on a more subtle and pervasive level, affecting young children and undermining the power of cultural heritage taken on by older cohorts in the family (Barry, 1988; Lopez & McMillan-Capehart, 2002).



Another issue to be considered is “gendered acculturation”, as vast majority of researchers suggest gender to influence acculturative practices and outcomes. Indeed, Stewart and McDermott (2004) believe that reassessment of various roles in relation to gender as seen through cultural lenses need to be taken into consideration on an individual basis as cultural incompatibilities seem to extend into this scope as well. For example, culture could be even more gendered than individuals, as Hofstede (1987) suggests. The author (Hofstede, 1987) empirically supports the notion of “gendered culture” implying that some cultures are masculine (e.g., Australian - favouring more masculine traits such as quick conflict resolution (war), assertiveness, rationalism and less emotional involvement etc.) while others tend to be feminine in their nature (e.g., Yugoslav – nurturing, resorting to negotiation and being more submissive). Indeed, Markovic and Manderson, (2000), and Evans and Lukic (1998) found that the truism of “men acculturating better due to their roles of providers and early employment outcomes”, is not true for Yugoslav migrants in Australia. In addition, there is a new force of psychologists claiming such views to be old-fashioned and invalid in relation to today’s migrants (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003; Read, 2004; Shen & Takeuchi, 2001; Walsh & Horenczyk, 2001).

Lewis et al. (1984) and Newcomb et al (1981) found that prolonged parental poor SES (socio-economic status) in the new country, and subtle assimilation techniques received through institutions, can adversely affect younger cohorts of new arrivals (poor coping skills, slow academic progress and retainment of lower echelons of the society). While men could mask their inability to deal with the demands of the new environment by turning to antisocial and problematic behaviors and substance abuse, which are often unrecognized as “cries for help” (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Holman, Silver & Waitzkin, 2000; Kessler, Turner and House, 1988; Shams and Jackson, 1994; Vega et al., 1986; Vinokur, Price and Caplan, 1991; Walsh &

Horenczvk, 2001; Waxman, 2001; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann and Goldney, 1991), whereas women suffer due to the loss of their extended family networks.

Thus, it is important to approach the concept of acculturation from the cultural perspective which allows for trans-familial relationships to be viewed as an entity. It further allows for “gendered acculturation” to be considered within the cultural norms of the new-comers and not only the receiving society, as the normative knowledge on which the new-comers operate is still tied with the culture of origin. This is not to say that the migrants do not respect the new culture, but are unaware of the underlying principles of the new society as they do not share the ancestral knowledge.

### ***2.1.1.3 Migration and Economic Myths***

Immigration itself seems often to be associated with a number of myths, among which one commonly assumed is that economic gain is a direct consequence of immigration (Berry & Annis, 1988). Yet it is well documented within the psychological literature that it is often accompanied by decay in professional status, as the theories of human capital report (Berry & Annis, 1988; Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003; De Jong, Chamrathirong & Tran, 2002; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Halkos & Salamouris, 2003). New migrants’ expectations of gaining respectable and prosperous employment opportunities in a new country are often crushed due to their limited communication capabilities (Berry & Annis, 1989), unrecognition of their obtained qualifications (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003), or outdated knowledge. This regression in occupational status and absence of work-role identification, common to immigrants (Deranty, 2001) may further contribute to antisocial stress-related behaviors identified above.

De Jong, Chamrathirong, and Tran (2002) claim that within societies where both partners were employed prior to the migration, reclaiming professional and

occupational status after migration is very important to both, and it is one of the most salient factors predicting the successful (as defined by the migrants) and satisfying outcome of the acculturation process. Furthermore, Berry and Annis (1988) also found that among other things, positive work-role identification of African women in Canada, predicted positive acculturation outcomes. Often degree of acculturation is claimed to be objectively measured by the achieved meaningful and consummate employment of an immigrant and to imply automatically a high degree of acculturation since necessary skills and knowledge within the new culture have been accomplished (Hui, Au & Fock, 2004; Weigers & Sherraden, 2001). These views have, however, been seriously challenged as the findings report that immigrants who achieve desired employment, and are fluent in language and culturally aware of the new environments, may often report less satisfaction with their acculturation than their fellow citizens whose command of the hosts' language is not so good (Ono, 2002). Thus, occupational success may be an important goal in acculturation, but is not the only objective.

#### ***2.1.1.4 Immigration and Mental Health***

There is a wide range of scientific literature looking at relationship between migration and poor health (Grusser, Wolfling, Morsen, Albrecht & Heinz, 2005). Often, however, this link is depicted as a straightforward connection between refugee status, implying exposure to overtly cruel behaviors, and mental illness as a consequence. This, then, undermines the migrant's ability to acculturate within the new environment, and to seek and establish meaningful social connections, accounting for the disadvantaged positioning of refugees in economic survival and labour-market participation in receiving societies (Furnham Petrides, Tsaousis, Pappas, & Garrod, 2005; Halkos & Salamouris, 2003; Holman, Silver & Waitzkin, 2000; Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000; Kung, 2003; Shen & Takeuchi, 2001; Sinnerbrink, Silove, Field, Steel & Manicavasagar, 1997; Vinokurov, Birman, & Trickett, 2000)

However, Busfield (1996) offers an argument challenging the diagnosis of mental illness in migrants. She suggests that there seems to be a trend in the mental health industry to diagnose depression or PTSD, for example, more readily in people of lower SES groups, to which migrants often belong. Indeed, the research has shown that the attained status of refugees in the receiving society often implies severe economic disadvantage for this group across the host countries (Martinez, Lee & Nielsen, 2004). In addition, a strong suggestion of high prevalence of mental disorders within the population itself is often propagated (Fazel & Stein, 2003), construing the illness as triggered by the pre-migration experiences and accounting for poor acculturation outcomes (Chung, 2001).

It is argued here that the feelings of anguish and agony (*demoralization*, as named by McDermott, 2002) commonly experienced by migrants may be a natural and appropriate response to loss and transition, rather than being a pathological condition. Though the symptoms of demoralisation may lead to it being confused with depression, the causes of the two may be quite different (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987; Hill, Bush & Roosa, 2003; Shams and Jackson, 1994; Vega et al., 1986; Waxman, 2001; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann and Goldney, 1991). Demoralization and depression in relationship to migration will be further discussed in the chapter 6.

An extensive literature reveals the problems of acculturative stress and its amplifications upon the heterogeneous group of migrants compared to members of the receiving society. This has been attributed to personality shifts and identity changes demanded by the new culture, absence of pivotal individuals, such as family members who are left behind, and often dramatic changes of roles within the population (Aroian, Norris & Chiang, 2003). Hill, Bush and Roosa (2003) found that SES is a much stronger predictor of mental diagnosis than is ethnicity.

It has been postulated that immigration often poses demands that could be perceived as an extra burden especially upon the immigrant women as they tend to assume the roles of financial contributors to the well-being of the family and find employment and, in addition, retain the traditional roles of performers of household-chores (Aroian, Norris, & Chiang, 2003). On the other hand, the range of behavioural “disorders” often noticeable in the male population (alcohol and substance abuse) – is, despite being listed in the Diagnostic Systematic Manual, not perceived as such in the community, but rather a social predicament (Bhattacharya, 2002). A range of abusive behaviors have only recently begun to be considered as such and to be linked to the onset of demoralization in the male population of immigrants (Nugent & Williams, 2001; Worcester, 2005). It is also noted that communication problems arising from the inadequate knowledge of the language of the dominant culture induces depressive symptoms in migrants as well as the perception of ‘external locus of control’ (absence of personal control over the events) (Berry & Annis, 1988).

Furthermore, physical health seems to be eroded in the population of immigrants (Jaber, Brown, Hammad, Zhu & Herman, 2003), but particularly refugees, to a greater extent than in the general population. This will be explored further in chapter 6.

### **2.1.2 Yugoslav culture**

Here we return to the concept of cultural hybrids used to denote the formation of a multiculturally skilled individual arising from the process of acculturation. The cultural hybrid is an inevitable outcome when the two cultures collide suggests Ballinger (2004). The argument of cultural hybrids in the regards to Yugoslav culture is presented here for two reasons:

1. It helps establish the argument that there is such a formation as Yugoslav culture.

The concept of Yugoslav culture has been deemed non-existent in the recent literature. Since the dissipation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) throughout the civil war in the early 1990s, which led to the formation of six different nations, the Yugoslav culture has been identified as a cumulative cluster of six separate cultural formations that coexisted but were relatively self-contained and diverse (Okey, 2004). However, evidence suggests the existence of a unified superordinate Yugoslav culture (shared language, history, etc.) as a consequence of the existent national entity of SFRJ following the logic of cultural hybrids. Indeed, Markovic and Manderson (2000) in their sample of 118 refugee women from former Yugoslavia found high prevalence of claiming “Yugoslav” culture as the culture of origin rather than establishing “new-nationalities identity”. Mønnensland (1997) reported that Yugoslavia was a unique assembly of over 20 different nationalities implying true ethnic pluralism. In addition, ethnicity and culture were considered loose terms, and quite permeable, thus allowing people to identify with one or the other group as it suited their needs. The concept of separate cultural and ethnic identity was further compromised due to high percentage of interethnic marriages during the communist era (Markovic & Manderson, 2000; Nagel, 2002). In addition, there were no historical records of forced integration of these nationalities/ethnicities or attempt to extinguish their awareness of belonging to other ethnic groups, on a societal level, until the rise in nationalistic ideations during the second World War and the recent war leading to split of Yugoslavia (Dahl, 2000).

Another interesting aspect of Yugoslavia is that it was formed in 1918 when the Slavic entities were united for the first time. Considering their previous independence of each other, it has been argued that Yugoslavia was an attempt to unite diverse cultures, and yet their interdependence through providing support and establishing good connections, constant migrations and involvement throughout history was a reality (Ballinger, 2004). As a matter of fact, historical accounts suggest that forming

Yugoslavia was a practical answer to stopping world powers throughout the centuries annexing different parts and ruling these ethnic groups (Farrar, 2003; Mønnensland, 1997).

2. It will further help investigate the possibility of the emergence of cultural hybrids influenced by Yugoslav cultural heritage and Australian multicultural acceptance.

It is also worth mentioning that pervasive communist ideology during the period from the WWII to the recent civil war, is often associated with a strong sense of gender-equality according to Corrin (2000), often negating any non-physical imbalance of power, skills etc. Wilmoth and Chen (2003) have noted the relatively large number of women from former communist countries being career-oriented and concerned with their employment prospects throughout their lives.

### **2.1.3 Yugoslav and Australian Culture**

There is a noticeable difference between the Yugoslav and Australian culture. The premise of diverse cultures applicable here (Yugoslav and Australian) was based on the investigation of cultural diversities across research areas. For example, Hofstede (1980) has identified four factors that operate on a cultural level (1) Power Distance Index (PDI); (2) Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI); (3) Individualism (IDV); and (4) Masculinity (MAS). In respect to those, Hofstede (1980) found that Australian and Yugoslav culture are diametric opposites. For example, feminine characteristics of the Yugoslav culture predispose the refugee population to be less active and assertive in negotiating their terms, thus putting them in a vulnerable position in the new and more aggressive environment of Australian society. Also low Yugoslav tolerance for uncertainty may prompt these individuals to accept less favorable working conditions, be less open to changing their environment, social and physical, when not happy, from the fear of change. Australians are also more likely to view who holds power within

their environment as susceptible to change, while their Yugoslav counterparts would view it as very rigid and would be less inclined to challenge it, believes Hofstede (1987). Additionally, Yugoslav is a relatively collectivistic society, where the focus on collectivistic gain exceeds individual needs, as opposed to individualistic Australian society. As such, Yugoslav individuals are born and linger within existing social circles, rendering a proactive approach to socialization unnecessary. Australian cultural heritage, on the other hand, demands proactive engagement in the process of building, deconstructing and reconstructing existing and new social circles.

In addition, a related concept that underlines the structure of cultural diversity is the aspect of active vs. passive functioning of an individual within a given context. It is possible that cultures differ in their degree of proactive approach (or absence of the same) to the spheres of living, including socialisation processes discussed further in the subsequent subsection.

#### **2.1.4 Acculturation, Culture Shock and Identity**

Culture shock occurs when the norms and values possessed by an immigrant are perceived to be in direct opposition to those of the receiving society. Conflict then leads to a state of cognitive dissonance, described in chapter 1.

In the process itself, an individual immigrant is faced with sometimes conflicting beliefs, values and/or attitudes creating a mismatch between what behaviour would be consistent with the host-culture and what behaviour would be consistent with his or her culture of origin. The resulting *cognitive dissonance* motivates the individual to re-establish cognitive equilibrium through reconciling these incompatible cultural behaviours and beliefs. Achieving personal reconciliation between the cultures requires cognitive effort and is influenced by one's dispositional traits, as well as situationally-



bound cues, including the sensitivity and outlooks of the hosts towards the migrants (Berry, 1990b).

The attempt to dissolve cognitive dissonance caused by conflicting norms can be achieved then in one of the four ways we have seen in section 1. (Birman, 1998): adapting to (1) one, while disregarding the other (**assimilation**: choosing host culture over the culture of origin, or **separation**: choosing own cultural heritage and disregarding host cultural influences); (2) both (**biculturalism**), or (3) neither (**marginalisation**).

Bruss (2005) believes that acculturation is comprehensively contained within the scope of assimilation, referring to active and equal participation of an individual (immigrant) in the culture of the receiving society (acquiring functional knowledge of norms, values, beliefs governing human behaviour in the new society) and integrating or “fusing” into the political and structural forms of the society. This notion is supported by many (Cavalcanti & Schleef, 2001; Ellinghouse, 2002; Holli, 2002; McQueen, Getz & Bray, 2003; Montreuil, Bourhis & Vanbeselaere, 2004; Rhee, Chang & Rhee, 2003; Steinbach, 2001; Willson, 2004), and yet considered unfair and unjust by others (Brass, 2004; Kim, Laroche & Tomiuk, 2003). It seems to be the compatibility of acculturative preferences between the hosts and immigrants as well as acceptance of the acculturative “outcome” by the receiving society that influences the perceived success of the acculturative process, rather than the mode itself. Therefore, “successful acculturation” in this study is defined as the personal sense of satisfaction with the achieved acculturative outcome rather than a specific acculturative mode itself. The choice of acculturation outcome, however, seems to be dependent on the characteristics of the immigrating group, their perception of being accepted by the hosts and opportunities given by the receiving society, according to Linton (2004).

Identity, seems to be central to the concept of acculturation, as a self-scheme providing a point of reference to one's social and physical environment, providing means and criteria for meaningful interaction with those based on attribution of values (Berry & Annis, 1989). Indeed, the theory of cognitive resonance postulates that the inability to reach the status of harmony between the self and the environmental demands would initiate action on the part of the agent (in this case the migrant) in order to restore the balance by instigating change in oneself in order to accommodate the needs and demands of the environment, or anticipating restructuring the environment in order to accommodate the needs of oneself. Madianou (2005) suggests that in the case of ethnic minorities in multicultural societies, the concept of "common culture" emerges that provides grounds for mutual inclusion of minority groups on a national level (that is with the majority) and at the same time postulates an exclusion principle by providing grounds for distinction between the minority and the population in the country of origin, hence terms such as Australian ethnic groups. For the purposes of this study then, the process of acculturation is termed "successful" once the culture shock is overcome and the process is moving towards achieving a desirable or even acceptable status within the new environment. Such a process, however, implies identity shift as suggested earlier.

Greenberg and Greenberg (1989) suggest that through the process of immigration, identity is seriously undermined, as the point of reference for self (which used to be identification with people left behind) is shaken and therefore no longer applicable in the new environment, and the important aspects or building blocks of one's identity are deconstructed. As the stability of identity itself is compromised, innovative ways of re-establishing it are needed, which can lead to the redevelopment of existing identity or adopting new identities. Therefore, self is not stable and singular but rather complex, as it is composed of multiple identities. This view is supported by Stewart and McDermott

(2004) and Suleiman (2002) and contained in the notion of bicultural identities, is associated with some immigrants who develop a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to both cultures simultaneously: a culture of home and a culture of the receiving society. Consequently, the approach to identity formation taken here does not rule out either Erikson's identity theory: implying a stable and unchangeable aspect of the phenomenon, nor the idea of ever-evolving identity, but it attempts to synthesize the two. As Schwartz and Montgomery (2002) suggest, it is with the emergence of scientific awareness of acculturation that identity transformation appeared as a challenge to Erikson's conceptualizing of the phenomenon, but it is plausible that some aspects of the identity remain rigid and unchangeable, while others are susceptible to change as Greenberg and Greenberg (1987) suggest.

Consequently, it can be argued that assimilation would imply complete transformation of one's previous self, abandoning one's old identity and adopting new values and beliefs to govern interaction with the new environment. Following the same analogy, the separatist would aspire to retain his or her old identity and resist any influence of the new environment, sometimes attempting to change the environment to suit him/herself- e.g. opening a Chinese restaurant. Thus change would be minimal.

#### ***2.1.4.1 How and Why does Identity (Trans)Form?***

Personal identity is defined at least in part, by (1) cultural and (2) national identity, as mentioned previously (Mønnsland, 1997). The theoretical implications of identity formation stand in direct relation to the concept of social categorisation in order to simplify and make sense of the world (Vaughan & Hogg, 1998). Consequently, the set of "rules" as shared properties applicable to a self-inclusive social formation is derived. It further allows for "in-group favouritism" promoting self-esteem and serving the purpose of stressing positive attributes as the property of the particular group to

which the self belongs (in-group) (Hewstone, Islam & Judd, 1993; Liebkind, 1996; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Ono, 2002; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1997). Therefore, identity (more specifically national or ethnic identity) is a social construct that provides a basis for self-identification with a particular group based on the perceived shared positive attributes designated to this social formation, and thus acts as an enhancer of one's self-esteem (Berry, 1994). At the same time, the cognitive construction of the in-group promotes the formation of the less favourably viewed out-group, which by the same rule would be identified on the basis of shared negative attributes and greater homogeneity (lesser degree of variability among the out-group members) within the formation (Hagendoorn & Henke, 1991).

Such a conceptualization, however, seems to be more problematic when the identity formation demands identification with the minority group (Ono, 2002). By definition, minority groups due to their size, are often considered as chronic out-groups, and viewed less favourably. Therefore, it is assumed that in order to deal with the fact of being excluded, members of minority groups within larger societies might tend to shift their identities attempting to minimize the difference between the self and the host and identify strongly with the host-properties of the in-group (Vaughan & Hogg, 1998). This would suggest assimilation strategies of acculturation, and lead to formation of so-called hybrid cultures (biculturalism) (Hagendoorn & Henke, 1991; Hewstone, Islam & Judd, 1993). Paradoxically, Vaughan and Hogg (1998) suggest that the concept of forming acceptable (group) identity becomes very important to the members of minority group, but not necessarily majority. It is formed by:

1. matching self to key defining or "criterion" attributes of the in-group prototype
2. maximising distance between this and out-group prototype

where as a basic category, social group (of choice) is used.

A related concept here would be Campbell's (1958) notion of "*entitativity*". Specifically, Campbell (1958) suggests that people are inclined to form the concept of shared "entitativity" based on their:

1. common fate
2. similarity and
3. proximity – small physically distance to one another

#### ***2.1.4.2 Factors Affecting Acculturative Change***

There are a number of factors identified that affect acculturative processes, and as such they also affect resilience. Souweidnane and Huesmann (1999) identified (1) the difference between the cultures in question, (2) the proposed length of one's residence in the new culture (i.e., long stay associated with more acculturation) and (3) person's age to affect acculturative practices, with younger migrants acculturating at a faster rate. Berry (2001) claims that psychological acculturation is influenced by (1) the extent of contact between the individual (migrant) and others (hosts) (2) the individual's culture maintenance, that is, activities that preserve old culture, as well as (3) the migrant's desires and attitudes towards these two. Such an interactive model of acculturation allows for variations along all of the three dimensions identified and, therefore, it is possible to develop multiple identities and reapply them to suit the demands of the specific situation. It also provides a basis for the concept of "successful acculturation" deviating from the notion of specific acculturation preferences where separatists' attitudes could be regarded as successful, that is adaptive, providing functionality within the new environment is confined to the ethnic enclave; and in addition it offers subjectivity as leverage within the objectified concept of acculturation.

Once an immigrant is exposed to a new culture, any cultural inadequacies in dealing with the new environment become evident. This may become very frustrating

for the newcomers, and demands for transformation of identity may follow, possibly leading to development of stress behaviors (e.g., feeling sensitive and susceptible to overreacting, withdrawing from peer relationships etc.) (Berry & Annis, 1988; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Kessler, Turner and House, 1988; Shams and Jackson, 1994; Vega et al., 1986; Vinokur, Price and Caplan, 1991; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann & Goldney, 1991; Young, 2001). It is assumed that stress has direct consequences for the physical, mental and social health of the new arrivals (Berry & Annis, 1988; Mehta, 1998) (Mckelvey, Mao & Webb, 1993; Souweidnane & Huesmann, 1999).

#### ***2.1.4.3 Refugee Status***

The investigation of the phenomenon is further complicated by the status, with which the group to be investigated, Yugoslavs, is labelled. A refugee is any individual who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside of the country of his/her nationality, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country,” according to United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This particular status is often associated with extreme signs of emotional and psychological damage caused by prolonged exposure to crime and personal inability to resolve the issues. Consequently, a sense of loss of control over events develops, which becomes then internalized and overgeneralized across situations (McDermott, 1996). It is then to be expected that refugees will be viewed as the most maladaptive group of immigrants in general.

In fact, the accounts of work done with refugees within the literature are very meagre and often limited to claiming that poor mental state is reaching endemic proportions (Berry & Annis, 1988; Ward, 1997). Furthermore, there is often a disproportionate cultural and geographical distance between the host society and the

entering refugee group. In addition, the legal status of being a refugee, although designed to provide more support to the newcomers, can unintentionally be damaging as it implies victimization, labelling and assumption of probable psychological damage carried over from pre-migration experiences, thus adversely affecting the chance of returning to “normal life” (Berry & Annis, 1988). Therefore, modern accounts of studies of refugees have drawn attention to unintentional bias within the discipline creating the expectations of the receiving society and seeking the validation of these biases by labelling and treating refugee groups as helpless, overstressed and unable to adapt, often psychologically disturbed, and with poor coping strategies or lack of resilience (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby, 2003). In other words, there seems to be a pervasive tendency in the receiving society to fit refugees into the profile of mentally ill, victimized individuals in need of professional help and with scant ability to acculturate in terms of achieving integration into the mainstream social structures and ensure active participation in the labour market. To what extent these claims are supported by evidence is questionable and, therefore, may allow for misrepresentation and mishandling of refugees. It is certainly possible that such claims could act as self-fulfilling prophecies in which natural bereavement from losing everything, inadequate employment opportunities and absence of and inability to form meaningful and functional social relationships within the cultural context due to a culture or language barrier is misrepresented as mental illness, which further stigmatizes the group in question (Hovey, 2001; Vega et al., 1986).

### **2.1.5 Coping Skills and Resilience in Acculturation**

The connotations of acculturation and cultural influences spreading across the spheres of living (health, socialization and work), as well as the concept of achieving “successful acculturation” inevitably brings us to the discussion of resilience and

coping skills, that are considered to be absolutely essential when addressing acculturative stress in cross-cultural studies. Resilience refers to the ability of individuals to deal with negative events or perceive the events in less negative light, and subsequently recuperate after a crisis (Reber, 1997). Evidently, the concept of resilience itself could directly imply the occurrence of crisis, in which case immigration itself, as it is a process associated with the loss of status, identity, familiar cues and faces and aspects of the environment might be viewed as a crisis, thus demanding resilience to emerge (Levine, 2005). Interestingly, studies have shown that the vast majority of people are able to return to completely normal functioning, regardless of the magnitude of the harmful event, and to deal with the consequences in a productive way (Carballo & Smajkic, 1995). Longitudinal studies conducted on refugee populations seem to support this claim as well (McKelvey, Mao & Webb, 1993).

Interestingly, resilience is associated with positive socialization outcomes and increased social support within and outside of family circles, as the research has shown indicating that social support boosts resilient aspects of an individual (Simich, 2003). Furthermore, the concept of demoralization mentioned above certainly draws on a concept of resilience as Rayner (2004) suggests.

Therefore, the assessment of coping strategies is an important part of the present research as it seems that identification of “appropriate coping mechanisms” would help accomplish “successful acculturation”, thereby minimizing the impacts of the associated events upon psychological well-being, establishing normal social interaction and attaining good prospects of employment for the migrant groups. There is, however, a wide range of coping strategies that can be employed by migrants to help overcome the problems encountered during the initial acculturation processes.

A comprehensive analysis of these suggests that, in general, coping strategies can be classified as (1) appraisal-seeking strategies: mechanisms aiming at cognitive



dealings with the postulated problems; (2) problem-focusing strategies implying behavioural changes and (3) emotion-focusing strategies entailing focusing upon one's emotional response to the problem (Pilowsky, Zybert & Vlahov, 2004).

Two contentions emerge here. Firstly, as coping strategies are deemed to be culturally specific, according to Berry and Annis (1988), their choice, effectiveness and significance can only be viewed and assessed through cultural lenses; therefore claims of relative effectiveness could be of limited validity. Kim (2003) found that emotional coping in response to husbands' excessive alcohol intake among Japanese women immigrants to the USA has been the most effective coping strategy for her sample, although it has been deemed as the most inappropriate coping mechanism by their mainstream counterparts. Kim (2003) concluded that such a choice of coping strategy was culturally appropriate for these women. She further concluded that resorting to more active approach would be more damaging as it would lead to cultural exclusion and judgement of these women within the minority community due to cultural inappropriateness of the action taken.

Secondly, the influence of the culture to which one belongs evidently has huge implications upon the whole process of acculturation drawing attention to the concept of proactivity or lack of it, embodied in the cultural context (Guinn & Vincent, 2002). And then if Parsons Talcot's (1950s) definition (cited in Busfield, 1996) of illness as "one's failure to fulfil one's role" (p.62) or incapacity that prevents satisfactory role performance contained in the notion of involuntariness of the action or rather the absence of the same, is assumed, the possibility of claiming high prevalence of mental illness among the population of immigrants stemming from their different cultural background is raised. Specifically, immigrants would lack culturally-appropriate skills governing day-to-day functioning, thus they would be prevented from fulfilling their roles within new environments.

## 2.2 Resilience

Resilience can also be viewed as an individual's capability to achieve a cognitive, behavioural and emotional shift or reorganization in order to adequately address the demands of the situation and adapt despite the uprising difficulties. Bauman, Adams and Waldo (2001) suggest that, within a lifespan, every individual will encounter numerous novel circumstances, termed crises, which would demand further personal adaptation in order to deal with the stressors. And yet the authors (Bauman, Adams & Waldo, 2001) suggest that many, when facing a crisis, will still maintain their positive well-being throughout the experience and adapt to the life afterwards regardless of the consequences.

At the root of the concept of resilience is the need of human beings to retain their sense of balance and harmony, and to resolve cognitive dissonance by finding an acceptable level of functioning between the inner self and the outer world (Vaughan & Hogg, 1998). Of course there are some individual differences in a person's ability to deal with the critical and turning points in his or her life, which will be discussed later, but there is an even more remarkable phenomenon when it comes to resilience suggest McCloskey and Southwick (1996). The authors (McCloskey & Southwick, 1996) found that more or less universally, children (till the age of 12) in war zones were remarkably resilient towards the animosity and atrocities of the war- experiences, regardless of their severity, as long as the nuclear family of the child remained present and unharmed.

A further issue is that it is not clear whether resilience implies returning to previous levels of functioning or surpassing the former self (Bauman, Adams & Waldo, 2001). Nonetheless, it implies recovery and therefore is considered to be a virtue, reinforcing positive development and assuring not just survival, but also prosperity and success (Bauman, Adams, & Waldo, 2001).

Previous discussion surrounding the concepts of immigration and acculturative processes clearly suggests that immigration per se would have the potential to be a traumatic experience considering that a migrant self cannot fulfil the roles within the new environment due to absence of culturally-specific knowledge. And yet there is no clear presence of crisis involved. However, once the fear of persecution and a need to escape it by immigrating to an unknown country drives the process of immigration, as it is the case with **refugee population**, resilience becomes a central concept to acculturative practice. Once faced with the unknown, people display an enormous variability of reactions that according to Moos and Schaefer (1986, as cited in Bauman, Adams & Waldo, 2001) depend upon the three main factors and their reciprocal interaction, which will be examined in turn.

(a) **Demographic and personal characteristics**

The importance of certain personality traits, such as optimism, for example, and demographic characteristics in strengthening or weakening an individual's ability to deal with crisis has been suggested (McCloskey & Southwick, 1996). Early and GlenMaye (2000) have found that optimism and "positive temperament" are the most commonly encountered characteristics of immigrant children that foster their fast and relatively "painless" transition into the new culture and the new environment.

Bauman, Adams and Waldo (2001) suggest that ethnicity is one of the demographic contributors to resilience in individuals, indicating that certain cultures are better equipped than others to deal adequately with novelty, a finding that authors based on assessing resilience between Native American population and immigrants, finding migrants from western European cultures deal with uncertainty of situation better than other migrant groups or members of native population. Yet this particular concept has been challenged as Balcazar, Peterson and Krull (1997) believe that certain facets of the traditionalism of a culture can be further modified by attained education

and, in the case of immigrants, acculturation levels influencing coping abilities and strategies employed. Authors believed that those who had better education also showed traits of traditionalism to a lesser extent and acculturated at a faster rate. Nonetheless it appears that these personal characteristics of the agent in the process of adaptation influence the choice of tactics, and subsequently behaviors used to cope with the situational demands (Bauman, Adams & Waldo, 2001).

Finally, age is one of the most prominent factors influencing acculturation processes with the vast majority of research implicating younger cohort to be more adaptable to change and to acculturate at a much faster rate (Vinokurov, Birman, & Tricket, 2000).

**(b) Aspects of the crisis or transition**

Bauman, Adams and Waldo (2001) suggest that depending on the intensity of stressors, their persistence and longevity, the outcome in terms of ability to achieve resilience and recreate harmony between self and the outer world will be affected. In other words, severe stressors such as prolonged exposure to violent and criminal behaviors during the war, or being a target of persecution, would negatively impact on the individual's ability to preserve or re-establish psychological and emotional state of well-being (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). This relates to the concept of learned helplessness identified by Seligman. Indeed Bauman, Adams and Waldo (2001) also assert that prolonged exposure to stressors and an inability to resolve the crisis would have a negative impact upon the person's resilient qualities at the time. This will be further explored in chapter 6.

This notion, however, is challenged by McCloskey and Southwick (1996) who believe that even such severe conditions will have minimal impact on the individual if the protective powers of factors such as intact nuclear family, as mentioned above, are preserved. Blair (2000), in his investigation of the prevalence of severe mental

conditions such as major depression and PTSD within the population of 114 Cambodian refugees found that it is rather the *cumulative* power of stressors that creates mental discord and affects that person's well-being. In addition, he found that with time the number of reported stressors fell from 14 in the first year of residing in the USA to 5.2 after 3.5 years spent in the country for his sample.

Blair (2000) also found that the violent death of a close relative was the only single stressor that produced lasting adverse effects on individuals. Consequently, death of a parent, for instance, is a stressor that will leave mental scars and have a negative impact on the resilience of refugee children (McCloskey & Southwick, 1996).

The notion eroded mental health being confounded with the population of refugees, seems to be prevalent in the psychological community, where it is claimed that the refugee population often shows signs of psychological fragility due to their past experiences of prolonged suffering during the war and period of up-rooting (Blair, 2000). As the refugee population is exposed to the worst atrocities of human existence and is unable to end their suffering by personal actions, there is a prevalent belief that they will develop feelings of personal failure and helplessness that will further complicate their resettlement and acculturation processes (Kvernmo & Heyerdahl, 2003). This notion, however, is further challenged in terms of its helpfulness as Berry and Annis (1998) believe it to create a vicious cycle of victimization of the individuals thus being harmful despite the notion of receiving societies to provide assistance and help individuals. Common aspects of immigration, according to McCloskey and Southwick (1996), are financial struggle and poverty, "homelessness, criminal victimization, and family dysfunction" (p. 396).

However, it is reasonable to expect that the aspects of the situation (i.e., crisis) and the characteristics of the migrants may interact. For example, McCloskey and Southwick (1996) found that even when family is intact and stable, the perception of

incompatibility of the two cultures (culture of origin and the host culture) can produce some adverse effects and be an additional strain on immigrants, a notion retained by many (Hofstede, 1984).

**(c) Features of the physical and social environment in the host country**

Roch (2000) found that the social and physical environment have profound effects upon the person's health as they provide support and are the source of either problems or coping resources employed to deal with those problems, respectively. The author found that migrants tend to concentrate around localities accommodating previous waves of immigrants from the country of origin. Consequently, language native to the culture of origin is more often used in such enclaves, thereby adversely affecting acquisition of the new language and consequently compromising employment prospects. In addition, sometimes the availability of institutional help is compromised in these enclaves (Vinokurov, Birman, & Trickett, 2000). While local views on multiculturalism can also influence the rate and outcome of acculturation within a given society as pertaining to the specific era. Here is where coding of cultural appropriateness in relation to the choice of coping strategies, mentioned earlier, applies (e.g., Kim, 2003).

In addition, it was suggested that refugees, are often looked upon as a homogeneous population. As such individual differences and environmental influences, attributing to their acculturation processes are often downplayed or disregarded (Berry & Annis, 1987). Furthermore, based on the concept of resilience, it is possible to expect that the majority of the refugee population will be able to recover, after an initial period of adjustment. This concept of possible recovery, however, bears enormous resemblance to the Kroll's (2003) notion of demoralization: prevalence of depressive symptomatology within the population of refugees that improves with the time. More about demoralization will be presented in chapter 6.

## 2.3 Coping and Coping Skills

Bauman, Adams and Waldo (2001) suggest that once facing a challenging and novel situation every individual will address the challenge by utilizing the following 5-step adaptive tactics. Depending on the strength and direction of these tactics, that person's ability to deal with the situation in a self-facilitating or self-harming manner, is coded:

- 1) *Semantic analysis*: defining the problem and importance of the situational outcome is assessed. For example, an individual refugee, with a strong role identification with the previously occupied position of a medical doctor might perceive the problem of not recognising overseas-obtained qualifications as very disturbing as the concept of self as a medical professional has become central to the identity of that person, thus the problem is regarded as highly important, and the prospect of becoming a taxi-driver instead is assessed as disconcerting and in need of change.
- 2) *Behavioural responsiveness* to the crisis is assumed (which could also be to assume the passive role). The refugee in the example could decide to reattempt medical studies, for example.
- 3) *Assuming and maintaining social networks* in particular with those who could provide assistance. In accordance with needs and events, the refugee could now create new social circles of fellow students and other medical practitioners, who could provide further guidance and assistance.
- 4) *Emotional investment and management are reassessed*. Consequently the "former and future doctor" might decide that the sacrifice of substituting earnings of a taxi-driver for social security payments while studying is not only manageable but necessary to regain the role.

5) *Positive self-concept is preserved or negative created.* Therefore, in the example, positive self-concept of self as a doctor is preserved despite potential financial difficulties.

Once the tactics are developed, coping strategies emerge. Coping skills include a range of affective, behavioural and cognitive skills used to overcome a crisis. Therefore, “coping represents intentional efforts to manage affective arousal in threatening situations or to change the situations” (Frydenberg et al., 2003).

All of the coping strategies can further be recognised as active coping strategies aiming at resolution of the crisis (i.e., problem solving) demanding an operational and proactive approach to the problem presented; passive strategies (e.g., wishful thinking): internally-oriented coping and reflexive techniques often assumed to be ineffective, inappropriate and therefore more damaging (Pilowsky, Zybert & Vlahov, 2004; Rasmussen, Aber & Bhana, 2004) and withdrawal (Frydenberg et. al., 2003). For example, the Yugoslav refugee from the example above could utilise active coping mechanisms and attempt tertiary studies again in order to achieve the desired occupational status. A passive coping strategy might be to choose to dwell upon lost time and status, hoping things might change and his/her qualification will be recognised in the future. Finally, withdrawal can be chosen as a coping strategy. With such a clear distinction in coping strategies, it is easy to understand why the author would classify active coping strategies as more beneficial to “the actor”, that is, our refugee.

Coping mechanisms can further be classified as (Bauman, Adams & Waldo, 2001):

1) *Appraisal-focused coping* – In the initial stage of utilizing coping strategies, individuals are bound to assess and analyse the problem and cognitively define the ways in which the solving will be assumed/ avoided ( tactics: (1) Logical analysis and mental preparation; (2) Cognitive redefinition and (3) Cognitive avoidance and



denial). Appraisal strategies then would be, for example, rationalisation of the problem, or even denial of the severity of the situation. Following the aforementioned example, our refugee favouring appraisal-focused coping might choose to refer to him or herself as “a former doctor” instead of “a taxi-driver”.

- 2) *Problem-focused coping*: After the cognitive approach is established, there is a need to assume a behavioural act in order to deal with the problem ((1) Seeking information and support; (2) Taking action and/or (3) Identifying alternative rewards.) In our example, the refugee may wish to return to the country of origin in order to re-establish his/her role as a medical practitioner.
- 3) *Emotion-focused coping* refers to regulation of the emotive component to subsequent perception of the magnitude of the problem and effectiveness of the chosen approach and it involves: (1) Affective regulation; (2) Emotional discharge and (3) Resigned acceptance. Thus in the above example, our refugee could continue his new-acquired role of the taxi-driver, feeling depressed and bitter, building resentment towards the new country. Indeed, Pratkanis and Turner (1999) suggest that lack of coping strategies (presumably referring to active coping strategies here) always results in frustration build-up, (*frustration-aggression model*). This particular model and its effects will be further addressed in the chapter five.

Indeed, Early and GlenMaye (2000) suggest that good coping skills can be summed up as future-oriented formulations of plans and activities in the new environment. For example, Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) found the concept of “rebuilding life” to be central to ex-Yugoslavian refugees, and provided a relative measure against which the success of acculturation was measured.

### **2.3.1 Culture and Coping**

It is important to stress that coping mechanisms are often culturally influenced, that is the choice of “appropriate” coping strategy seems to be influenced by a set of culturally-specific beliefs and values and based on the previous experiences of functionality of the particular strategy chosen to deal with the crisis (Frydenberg, Lewis, Kennedy, Ardila, Frindte, & Hannoun, 2003). Therefore, it is possible that coping strategies of immigrants might fail to produce desired outcomes as diverse cultural practices in receiving society may demand new coping strategies to be used (Early & GlenMaye, 2000). Indeed, DeBell (2001) suggests that coping skills demand re-education of people to become aware of the realities operating within society that would empower them to define and recognize the way to personally identify success goals and ways to achieve them. DeBell (2001) here insinuates that coping mechanisms are cultural devices for addressing crisis. Due to cultural incompatibilities, once the process of immigration occurs, employed coping strategies may not be effective thus demanding re-education.

Yoshihama (2002) also suggests that a blatant distinction of coping strategies as effective or inoperative is narrow and implies “rightfulness” of the receiving society. It however, disregards situational and cultural contexts in which these crises occur, as some coping strategies are regarded as very facilitating in the host society, might be viewed as wrong, or unacceptable in other cultures. For example, reporting perpetrators (often partners) of domestic violence to authorities among Japanese women (Yoshihama, 2002) or women of Arabian descent (Habiby Browne, Dinnerstein, Neugebauer, & Retter, 2001) is not encouraged in cultural context of people from either identities.

Yoshihama (2002) further criticises the above-specified notion of passivity as pertaining to the concept of coping, suggesting that coping is never passive as it demands assessment of situational demands, screening for the most effective coping

mechanism to be employed and the nature of the stressors. Rummens (2003) also warns that it is common practice to search for a wide range of ethnic, cultural and personal attributes, producing a huge variety of outcomes in terms of coping and acculturation, when it comes to cross-cultural research. Indeed, Yoshihama (2002) claims that ethnic groups in research are often regarded as more homogeneous than the receiving society, thus ignoring the important social constructs such as self-ascribed identity, educational and occupational status, cultural ideations and identifications. There is evidence that people use coping strategies quite flexibly, employing a whole range, varying over time and situations, and this occurs within the cultural context. After all, it might be expected that it is most adaptive to have a wide repertoire of coping strategies to choose from, rather than to assume a rigid stance in approaching diverse problems.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter aimed to provide some insight into the culture, its origins and its influences upon identity creation in people from former Yugoslavia. It sought to identify the key differences between the culture of origin (Yugoslavia) and the culture of the receiving society (Australia). Consequently, as these differences occur on many dimensions and spread across the spheres of formation of social relations within the personal and employment sectors, they will be further discussed in subsequent chapters (chapters 4, 5, and 6) is expected. The accounts presented above also show that the concept of national and ethnic identity are very loose and susceptible to change if the personal and situational demands would indicate that such transformation is necessary (Nagel, 2002). Refer to Figure 2.3 for further clarification.

The second part of this chapter, addressing “successful acculturation”, provides some insight into the processes of human recovery from crisis, and the need to resolve the trauma and return to “normal” (previous) levels of functioning (McCloskey &

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Southwick, 1996). Resilience and coping skills will be further discussed in subsequent chapters, as they give some insight into the process of acculturation in the new environment. The literature review also pinpoints the need to assess the acculturation as a subjective process hence qualitative approach was used to address the issues of acculturation in this research.

## **Chapter 3 Method**

In this chapter, the issues concerning the choice of methodological approach to the investigation of acculturative processes of people from former Yugoslavia will be discussed. It will present the methods of collection of empirical data and analysis, and present the rationale behind the choice of techniques and approaches used. It will firstly provide a rationale for the choice of the qualitative (over quantitative) approach, and address the criticisms of this approach often encountered in the psychological community, moving then on to the practical constraints in this study. The methods of data gathering and analysis used in the study will then be described.

### **3.1 Qualitative Research- Choosing a Method of Investigation**

Acculturation, as noted in the previous chapter, is a complex process that penetrates and impacts many levels of functioning of a new-comer, and infiltrates many spheres of living. In other words, theoretical keystones pinpointing and defining the concept itself, suggest that acculturative practices of immigrating individuals can have an enormous impact upon those individuals' psychological, emotional, and social conceptualizations of self that emerge through the process of interwoven and interrelated effects of socialization as a consequence of starting anew. At the same time, even though the multifaceted aspects of the phenomenon are scientifically acknowledged, and often propagated, the operationalization of the concept of acculturation is inadequate, according to Weigers and Sherraden (2001). These authors (Weigers & Sherraden, 2001) suggest that such complexity often leads researchers to

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capture one and blatantly disregard remaining facets of acculturation, which is not only negligent but actively distorts reality and seriously undermines the reliability and validity of the operationalization of the construct itself.

Furthermore, acculturation is a process that occurs within a given social context, that is a direct consequence of the abrupt and colossal decision to uproot oneself through the process of emigration and the readiness to embrace the new and unknown, at the other end of the journey. As such, the course of acculturation cannot be manipulated, but rather its emerging artefacts investigated (Weigers & Sherraden, 2001). As the present aim is to understand participants' action within their specific social context (immigration) and to understand and explain participants' meanings and interpretations of events rather than to seek universal laws (Doyle & Thomason, 1999; Puchta & Potter, 2002), a qualitative method of investigation was selected. Considering that simplification in operationalization, and therefore scientific presentation, has reduced the concept of acculturation to a single-factorial level, there is a growing need to return to its *emic* qualities, referring to the emotional and subjective experience of bearers of the process rather than to impose the researcher's *etic* theories on observations through restrictive operationalisation.

Qualitative investigations of psychological phenomena have been accused of being susceptible to speculations and subjective interpretations on the part of the researcher, thereby casting doubt on its validity and merit in the scientific world (Clifford, 1986; Sandalowski & Borosso, 2002). As there is a degree of open-endedness in responding to certain questions, the findings in qualitative research are presented as interpretations of the researchers, therefore quite susceptible to bias (Haslam, 1998). Nevertheless, quantitative research is also prone to subjective manipulations albeit at a different level, for example, choice of variables to investigate. In addition, the quantitative approach would deprive us of the richness of the human

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experience pool. Also then, as additional variables and confounds are not taken into account, the theories to be derived from such research may be invalid and incomplete. As the aim of this research is to provide full descriptions of the experience of acculturation as applied to the diverse situations under study (see interview schedule – appendix I), qualitative analysis of data collected was the only appropriate option. In addition, required precautions (e.g., validating interview material with participants) have been put in place to minimize the effects of researchers' subjectivity in this study.

Even though problems of validity and reliability are often associated with this approach, rigorous methods were employed, and the findings were compared to the existing theoretical framework. Validity here refers to measures mirroring their respective theoretical constructs, while reliability implies the possibility of replicating the study with the findings being reproduced as well. Twycross and Shields (2005) suggest that rigor in qualitative studies is achieved by judging the plausibility of findings in connection to theoretical underpinnings. In addition, as the aim of the research was to characterize the particular experiences of a specific group of people at a specific point in history, the usual concerns about stability of results over time and across situations are less important in this context and indeed, qualitative methods help to avoid problems of overgeneralization. Finally, an open-ended approach reduces the risk of missing issues that are important to the individuals concerned.

Thus, the present study is a qualitative investigation for two reasons. Firstly, the complexity of acculturative processes as well as the directional entangledness cannot be tackled adequately with existing objective measures such as assessed mastery of language. Secondly, the vast majority of studies are conducted on specific cultural and ethnic groups and yet findings are overgeneralised across the whole of the population of immigrants, ignoring cultural and personal differences in the population. The methodology seeks to avoid this pitfall.

### 3.2 Participants

Twenty-one women, recent refugee arrivals (1990 - 2000) from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (parts of former Yugoslavia that were involved in the civil war fighting for their independence in the period from 1991- 1995) took part in this study. The women ranged from the age of 24 to 57 years. All but three women were married with two being divorced and one being single. All except two had children.

The study was designed to involve women and obtain their perspective on their partners' and children's acculturation processes and identify areas of problems associated with their family members' acculturation experiences. Women were selected as narrators of their family members' experiences for several reasons. Firstly, the acculturation process is an emotionally-charged one, and the evaluation of emotional states arising from migration and acculturation is expected. Women were expected to be richer sources of information in these areas since men are typically more reluctant to report their feelings of anguish and despair (Barlow & Durand, 1998). Furthermore, it is possible that children might lack vocabulary or be more reluctant to report such changes due to the feelings of guilt, shame, etc. Secondly, from the researchers' point of view, there is a shortage of men and children approaching institutional help in relation to their acculturation-related problems (A. Tuzlukovic, personal communication 3 August, 2003), a trend that seems to be present globally (Rochlen & Hoyer, 2005). Thus, adult female migrants are more readily accessible.



### 3.3 Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Women were recruited through the South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, in Fremantle, Western Australia. They were provided with an introduction to the study by the researcher and asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in their native language to minimize the possibility of misunderstanding and inability of participants to express themselves in English due to their recent arrival. One participant however, expressed a desire to be interviewed in English language which was done.

Four major areas were addressed in the interview:

1. The nature and extent of any psychological, emotional or physical problems experienced by refugee families, (accounted for in chapter 6);
2. Economic prospects and employment opportunity in the new country (discussed in chapter 5);
3. Problems associated with the loss of former social circles and contexts as a consequence of immigration, (discussed further in chapter 4).

Demographic data on the participants and their family members were also obtained in the course of the interview. (See Appendix I)

The women were made aware of the code of confidentiality and the right to revoke their consent at any stage of the study, in order to minimize any possible feelings of unease or discomfort associated with disclosing personal and private information in the interview. Interviews were tape-recorded and lasted for approximately half an hour. Participants were given the opportunity to disclose as much or as little information as they wished, and to decline to answer questions. Four women declined participation in the initial stage of the study, as they expressed their concerns

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about tape-recording the interviews and the possibility of “others” (other than researchers) obtaining the records, even though they were told that they could use a pseudonym when referring to themselves or their other family members. These “fears of persecution” could be a consequence of war-associated experiences; immigration demands specifying that any act of discrimination against other ethnic or national groups can result in cancellation of the visa, or unwillingness to disclose information that could identify the woman and her family members and result in the community obtaining personal information about the family. It could also be that such claims were a convenient way of declining participation based on irrelevant grounds (e.g., not being interested). Except for this, every woman approached was willing to, and did take part in the study, with one woman declining to answer one question, which she judged to be irrelevant to her situation. Consequently, 21 women were interviewed. Participants were interviewed in a familiar setting at the South Metropolitan Resource Centre where they would gather once a week to discuss their concerns and socialise, and without the presence of others in order to minimise contamination of data with outside influences (e.g., social desirability effects) or interruptions.

Participants were given the opportunity to identify personally the major areas of problems and sources of dissatisfaction with their new life, within the identified contextual framework (see Table 3.1 below). They were asked to reflect upon their personal experiences and provide accounts of other family members, in order to identify the core issues in the acculturation process.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Once collected, data were analysed using a combination of narrative and Erickson’s analytic induction. Erickson’s analytic induction process began with the organisation of data, looking for the emerging patterns and reports allowing for

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identification of contextual and thematic scopes of the study. The content areas were identified prior to the process of collecting the data, while themes emerged throughout the process. The identified concepts and emerging themes are summarised in Table 3.1, as well as their points of intersection. These form the basis for the discussion in the following chapters.

**Table 3.1 Matrix of identified content areas across which underlying themes were addressed in the present study.** (Note: Content areas depict further chapter-allocations while themes are discussed in more detail in every chapter where relevant, based on the relationship identified in the matrix.)

<b>themes vs. content areas</b>						
		<i>themes</i>				
		acculturation	coping skills and resilience	gender differences/ similarities	life structure (work/ socialization)	cultural differences: passive/ active stance
<i>contents</i>	socialization	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>definite relationship</b>	small difference	<b>definite relationship</b>	N/A
	health	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>definite difference</b>	weak relationship	N/A
	employment	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>definite relationship</b>	no difference	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>definite relationship</b>
	loss of family members	N/A	<b>definite relationship</b>	<b>weak relationship</b>	N/A	N/A

Whilst “definite relationship” indicates strong connection and, therefore, a need to discuss in more detail, “weak relationship” suggests that the relationship exists but there are some aspects that need further clarification between the identified content and the principal themes and would need more thorough investigation. “N/A” (not

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applicable) suggests that no plausible relationship was detected between the identified content and theme area, and therefore was not addressed in the current work. The strength of the relationship was assessed based on the presence of thematic concepts discussed while addressing specific content-areas. If there was common (50-75%) mentioning of these themes within the content area, the relationship was termed “definite”. If mentioned by 33-50% of participants, the relationship was deemed weak. “No difference” and “N/A” (not applicable) related to no relation between the postulated content and emerging thematic entity. From Table 3.1, it can be seen that the issues of coping skills and resilience underlay the whole scope of the interview, spreading across the identified content areas. Issues of acculturation were the next most pervasive issue, while cultural differences in activity vs passivity emerged only in the area of employment.

The identified conceptual framework as seen in the Table 3.1 was used to structure the rest of the body of this research. The rows of Table 3.1 relate to the content areas discussed in the chapters to follow: socialization and loss of family members in Chapter 4; employment in Chapter 5; Health in Chapter 6. Emergent themes are discussed within these chapters depending on identified relationships within the matrix. This approach enabled the researcher to describe the emerging general pattern in human behaviour. By careful assessment of differences between individual accounts, the findings have also been carefully presented to show the variation in human experience.

## Chapter 4 Social Aspects of Acculturation

In this chapter, the social aspects of acculturation will be assessed in respect to ex-Yugoslav refugees, as the social structures within which an individual resides seem to have the potential to be detrimental or beneficial to well-being in the psychological literature (Carballo & Smajkic, 1995). In order to present this argument and furthermore assess the importance of the social structures influencing people's cognitive and emotional state as it is applicable to this research, the cultural influences upon the processes of socialization will be introduced.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. Firstly, the concept of family loss will be discussed. We will see that cultural incompatibilities may lead to the phenomenon of split families that can damage the well-being of those who migrated, often leading to emergence of depressive symptomatology, feelings of anguish and despair, guilt and shame for leaving others behind. Secondly, the processes of socializing in the new environment will be discussed.

Both issues will be addressed by identifying relevant thematic patterns (refer to Figure 2.1) that are applicable here. For example, the issues concerning socialization processes in Australia are clearly a function of acculturative practices, but have no explicit bearing upon the problems of family loss, whereas socialization and loss of family are both strongly associated with the psychological and emotional well-being of refugees.

## 4.1 Family Units

One of the factors differentiating Yugoslav from Australian culture is observed in the conceptualization of “family”. While in Australian society the term “family” implies nuclear family (set of parents and their underage children), in collectivistic societies, such as the former Yugoslavia, family is regarded as a broader term including other relatives as well (Early & GlenMaye, 2000; Habiby, Browne, Dinnerstein, Jenkins, Neugebauer, & Retter, 2001; Hofstede, 1984). In respect to the former, Yugoslav cultural underpinnings of what constitutes family will provide some more insight. Furthermore, such culturally influenced views on what constitutes a family are very central in forming societal norms, and are still very much practised within cultures (Early & GlenMaye, 2001).

### 4.1.1 The Notion of “Closer” Family

The notion of so-called “*closer family*” refers to the blend of two nuclear families. Thus the “family” is not “downsized”, but rather expands to accept new members into the original nuclear family, who arrive by the act of marriage of the adult children. “Closer family” is a term that people from former Yugoslavia quite commonly use to refer to their multiple nuclear families. Therefore, family ties and the sense of belonging and family cohesiveness are concentrated in retaining the old nuclear family (mother, father and siblings), including grandparents and adding new nuclear families (spouses and children of adult offspring) to the original equation. On the other hand, relatives or the “distant family” term encompasses cousins, uncles and aunts, implying that “closer” and extended family networks cannot be considered as synonyms.

... and I've been living here, in Rockingham with my husband and my daughter. Back in Yugoslavia I have my mother and father, and my sister with her two

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children. That is my "closer" family. My husband has his family over here, in Perth: his parents, a sister and her two children. That is his "closer" family.

[Sara, manager of a tourist bureau, now carer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

**\*Note that names used are actually pseudonyms, used to protect participants' rights to confidentiality.\***

The notion of "closer family" also explains this woman's confusion after being asked to say something more about her family:

About my family here or about my family over there?

And after specifying that she can talk about anybody she regards as family she added:

OK. I will talk about my family in Zenica [a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina]. I have a family in Zenica- my parents, my brothers and sisters.  
[Freda, ...]

Many women, however, (76%) when asked initially about their family referred to their immediate/nuclear family or showed signs of confusion over what kind of information was expected from them, asking for some further clarification of the term. As a matter of fact, only 14% of women identified nuclear family as the concept under investigation and gave accounts of those without seeking any further clarification, while 24% either gave detailed accounts of their "closer families" or asked specifically whether they were expected to talk about one or the other family.

### 4.1.2 Cultural Incompatibilities and Loss of the Family

Women's interpretations of the word "family" obviously show that, for them, the concept of family transcends the concept of nuclearity, and this is embodied in cultural practices of former Yugoslavia. This cultural incompatibility is very likely to be

influenced by collectivistic vs individualistic aspects of culture, as family is considered to be more of an entity than an individual him/herself, in Yugoslav culture.

Evidently, such cultural incompatibilities can lead to the problem of *loss of family* caused by the split of the closer family, during the process of immigration. Australian immigration policy recognises only the nuclear family. Hence, Australian policy does not consider the traditional importance of other family members; and the consequences of splitting families upon the refugees arriving in Australia.

#### ***4.1.2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Having Families: Social and Economic Support***

The concept of collectivism and the importance of “closer family” can be further demonstrated by the reasons identified for immigration by the participants in this study. Most (90%) reported that they chose Australia as a final destination for the reason of having family members in Australia. Having someone close, someone to rely on for help, social support and eventual financial aid, someone to explain the societal inner mechanisms and help cross the culture and language barrier, by providing assistance (both in services and goods) for at least the initial period of acculturation, was one of the main reasons for opting to immigrate to Australia rather than elsewhere.

Within migrating families, too, providing social support for one another emerges as a theme. One woman suggests that her role of support donor was crucial to her sons’ academic achievements:

...as I always was actively involved in the academic lives of my children (teaching them, making sure that all of their homework is done, and that they keep up with the workload at school) I was horrified that me not knowing much about the schooling system in Australia, I wouldn’t be able to help my children, and what would happen to them then. Therefore I had to go through the TAFE, learn about the system, so I could be of assistance to my children. ...My younger son is about to finish the year 12. He wanted to study medicine, and he originally enrolled in the TEE



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participants, but when I was diagnosed with cancer, it became too much for him, and he dropped out of the TEE classes. He needed support, and I couldn't give him that.  
[Diana: head personal assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

All this is expected from a family member, often assumed and not questioned on the part of family members in need; and habitually not refused on the part of those who have come to Australia earlier. In addition, many have offered to be the sponsors for their family members wishing to come to Australia, despite the role-overload, in order to have a family member close by. In fact, in the case of one woman, she and her family moved from one state to another following her husband's family. This is consistent with reports that within collectivistic cultures, families act as extended social support networks counteracting the negative effects of dealing with culture shock (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001; Zayas, Kaplan, Turner, Romano, & Gonzalez-Ramos, 2003). They also provide enormous economic support to each other (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001), ensuring economic survival in the new society (Balcazar, Peterson and Krull, 1997; Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001; Cox, 2003).

Therefore, Tseng (2004) proposes that the problematic nature of splitting families of immigrants and refugees, is a consequence of culturally – influenced westernised notion of family nuclearity. While western societies (e.g., Australia) acknowledge family as a quantitative “cluster” of self-sufficient individuals, collectivistic societies view family as a group of interwoven parts marked by their interconnectedness. Therefore, no component is singled out as self-sufficient, but rather a necessary component for the whole system to function (Balcazar, Peterson & Krull, 1997; Tseng, 2004). The family in Yugoslav culture is, therefore, the smallest functional unit, rather than the individual, and the concepts of togetherness, family closeness and distribution of responsibilities and chores are scattered across the members of the family and

initiated in the way that single members' performances are designed to achieve greater good for the whole family.

#### ***4.1.2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Having Families: Family as a Burden***

The present study also found mixed responses to the issue of family, as some individuals seem to be satisfied with their roles as grandparents and viewed helping their offspring and their young families as a natural and satisfying role. However, others felt guilty for assuming such a passive role, and for being unable to assist their children by providing economic support for their off-spring:

They both [sons who got married] live close to me and we see each other on a regular basis. We are very close and help out each other all the time. ...  
. ... I have grandchildren now and I spend most of my time taking care of them and babysitting. We (husband and her) love it.  
... Well we (members of the "closer" family) are all independent. Every single one of us has his/her own money, but we still prefer to put our money together and decide together on our financial moves.  
[Suzana, worked in kitchen, now mostly unemployed; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

... there was a dramatic change (with us coming to Australia). I and my husband are older, we don't speak English at all, we both have health problems and have stayed with Centrelink all those years, so we have not enough money and the life-expenses are huge, the bills and everything, so we have become entirely dependent upon our children. They work now and they take care of us, which shouldn't have happened, but there's nothing that can be done about it... In our case I believe that the children are the biggest victims of all. We completely depend on them, so everything, bills, and our lifestyles, even our entire lives [hers and her husband's] are a burden that our children had to take upon themselves. There is definitely not enough money to deal with all these expenses, and the children are struggling.

[Keti: cook, now unemployed; Croatia]

Although few cases of role-overload (n=3) were reported, including the testimony above, they were regarded as one's duty towards repaying family members, and were not associated with enormous psychological strain. Alternatively, it is also possible that

others would not like to present their current interdependent relationship and their family members as an additional burden or are unable to identify it as such.

Such findings as these would explain the formation of arguments both for and against the benefits of interdependence, where every person-unit has a role to fulfil to ensure the smooth operation of the family system within the new environment. While it can promote economic survival and strong social support for all individuals within the family unit, it can at the same time impose immense levels of stress upon the same population due to their inability to achieve independence and disintegrate their symbiotic coexistence (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001; Cox, 2003). Tseng (2004) suggests that such practices are often a vicious circle for new immigrants as the individual family members feel obliged to act for the greater good of the whole family, often acting against their own wishes and needs, regardless of their age.

#### ***4.1.2.3 Children and Future-Oriented Coping***

Many mothers in this sample, opted to view the decision to immigrate as positive even if their own needs and expectations had not been met, as they invested a lot of economic and emotional resources in their offspring. Over half (57%) of the women justified their current unsatisfactory drop in occupational or social status with the future opportunities that their children would receive. Of the remainder, the issue did not apply to 19% (one woman did not have any children, and another three did not discuss this matter due to the young age of their children). The remaining six (24%) did not refer to the issue. Here is what one mother said about her children's alleged desires to achieve financial independence and better occupational status in Australia:

Of course it is important for them. It has to happen. I am always advocating the importance of a good education (to my children). Sometimes they (children) can't listen to me anymore, but I want to make sure that they comprehend the importance of school. I want them to become independent, and I want them to find good, dignifying employment one

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day and not to end up with an underpaid job that would have adverse effects on their health one day.  
[Mona, clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Such a system of organization then seems to be a double-edged sword, as on one hand the level of social support fosters children's desires to excel academically (Tseng, 2004) while, according to Foss (1996), it creates an additional pressure on their offspring in terms of performance. Almqvist and Broberg (1999) and Balcazar, Peterson and Krull (1997) relate such strong support for academic performance of the offspring to the parents' aspirations for their children to break the cycle of poverty and succeed in the new country.

The study did not directly address the question of children pursuing their academic lives beyond secondary qualifications, but eight of the women interviewed had children old enough to undertake post-secondary education. Three of them reported that their children had or were working towards a tertiary degree, and additional three did not comment upon their children's or their own desires for those children to resume education. Two women, stated that their children left the educational path for employment, and voiced their dissatisfaction with the course of action chosen, and are putting pressure on them to go back to studying. Here is what one mother said:

They (children) study. At the moment they work, but next year they will go back to studying.

[Maria, travel agent, now labourer; Croatia]

All of the three mothers whose children attended tertiary education, reported a high degree of support for their children. Two of them came from urban settings, had good employment status and were from non-traditional, middle SES (Socioeconomic Status) families prior to the civil war. The three mothers who did not comment upon their children's educational attainment came from rural and semi-rural settings, more traditional families, and had lower educational attainments themselves.

#### ***4.1.2.4 Splitting Families and Gender Differences***

Devastating effects, manifesting as symptoms of depression, distress, preoccupation with thoughts of guilt, shame and worrying for those left behind, were reported by all participants whose family members were left behind. Specifically, 16 women reported a high degree of anxiety due to the fact that they had to leave part of their families behind, reporting feelings of shame and guilt, or worrying for those left behind:

I miss my other children that stayed there... I suppose they (husband and the daughter that lives in Perth) have the same sort of homesickness as I do.

[Ana, small business owner, now mostly unemployed, Bosnia and Herzegovina]

I left everyone behind. I have a brother, father, mother and a sister that I have left behind. My husband misses his family as well. We were always surrounded with our family and friends both in Bosnia and Serbia. It is that social circle that we were part of, which we terribly need and cannot find or replace here. Basically, everything we have is there, and we tried to cut the ties and left them all behind.

...there are times when we feel shallow and lonely, and completely dissatisfied... But I believe it is all because of the people - the people we had there and the people we are surrounded with here in Australia, are so different, as if they were from another world. However, it is what life is all about, I guess.

[Melisa: hairdresser, now cleaner, Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Two women did not mention their family members left behind, and rather concentrated on the positive aspects their living in Australia, while the remaining three had their family members with them. In addition it seems that women, due to their absence of control over the process of immigration in which their family members were left behind, chose to suffer quietly adopting passive rather than active coping strategies. Indeed, only one woman out of 16 mentioned above has attempted to bring her family members for visit in Australia, which proved to be futile.

Out of 21 women interviewed, 33% reported that their husbands were suffering due to the absence of their family members from their everyday lives, as well, while a further 48% specified that their husbands had their family members around, indicating that family ties and the effects of family splitting were similar for men and women. Possibly this is due to the “feminine” aspects of the culture of origin, suggesting that the nurturing and social component of the culture will be of equal importance to both men and women.

Indeed the process of splitting families through the immigration process, as they are considered to be not one, but a bundle of two or more functional family units (Chenoweth & Burdick, 2001) may well have some devastating effects upon those that have immigrated, according to Rhodes, Contreras and Mangeldorf (1994). After all Rhodes, Contreras and Mangeldorf (1994) and Tseng (2004) suggest that the process of losing and splitting families is indeed a universally experienced problem, and desolation would be evident in individuals. In fact, Hauff and Vaglum (as cited in Foss, 1996) found that one of the problems most commonly associated with depression in the population of Vietnamese refugees in Norway was “chronic family separation”.

#### **4.1.3 Interdependence as Social Support or Additional Strain: Coping Strategy?**

In the present study, it seems that social support within family units and family cohesiveness were two of the most desirable and emphasised phenomena among the population of refugees from former Yugoslavia. Indeed, the need for support within the family was directly acknowledged:

... there is no social support (like the one) that I enjoyed while living in Yugoslavia. There is no family to turn to for support, no colleagues or friends that all were a source of incredible support some time ago. ... On the top of that my

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children are almost all grown up, and that means other [potential] problems arise.  
[Pola, accountant, now kitchen hand; Croatia]

In addition, it seems that keeping family together, even during the most uncertain, insecure and atrocious times, has helped these people to deal with problems. For example, three out of 21 women, reported high degree of trauma experienced during the war in term of their husbands being taken away and spending some time in the camps on their own. They all reported that children who were underaged at the time are doing remarkably well in the new country, with no signs of trauma. All three of them however, decided to stay with their children nearby, and wait for their husbands to be released before seeking safety and leaving the war-torn country:

But when we first left Sarajevo we went to Bratunac [small village in BH] and stayed there for a while, since my husband was imprisoned by the Bosnian army, and we were waiting for him to be released, so we could all go to Serbia.

Since they were kids...they grew up here and built their lives in Australia, so they like it here very much. They have everything here.

[Bela: worked in a care centre for mentally retarded individuals, now restaurant owner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Several similar statements were encountered pointing out the importance of preserving coherent and intact families as those women risked their and their children's lives staying in an unsafe environment, waiting for their husbands. In addition, they all reported that their children were doing fine and did not comment on any negative consequences either for themselves, their children, or their husbands by these traumatic experiences. Indeed, Bela further mentions her inability to provide for her young children during these dark hours, but justifies her actions by providing emotional and psychological support to the husband and children by ensuring proximity and contemplating leaving once they were all together. These statements are therefore in accordance with Blair's (2000) notion that regardless of magnitude of the suffering, consequences will be overcome if family ties are preserved.

Indeed, Blair (2000) found that refugees from Cambodia who spent time together with their family during the hard times in refugee camps, hidings and even prisons seem to be better equipped to deal with stressors and less susceptible to developing persistent psychological problems, and in addition deal with acculturative stress more adequately than those where family unity was disrupted, a notion supported by Almqvist and Broberg (1999), McCoskey and Southwick (1997) and Werner and Smith (1982, as cited in Rhodes, Contreras & Mangeldorf, 1994). In fact Balcazar, Peterson and Krull (1997) found that family cohesiveness and support is a facilitating factor in avoiding risky behaviors among pregnant women of Mexican descent in the USA. In other words, it seems that the level of social support provided by other significant family members leaves adults and children empowered to deal with all sorts of stressors, including war, involuntary confinement, poverty, and to become more resilient (Ogloff, 2002) However, due to traumatic pre- and post-migratory experiences, the ability of single family members to provide others with adequate help has been questioned, as they themselves may be in need of intervention, thus not able to accommodate somebody else's needs as well (Hovey & King, 1995; Tseng, 2004).

#### ***4.1.3.1 Does the Concept of Independence Exist in Families within Collectivistic Cultures?***

The concept of independence seems integral to the cultural underpinnings of individualistic societies and often individuals from collectivistic societies are depicted as helpless and unable to function on their own, which is then seen as rooted in their interdependency. However, when the accounts of women refugees are considered in this study, an interesting pattern emerges. In the present study, women were asked to specify whether they tried to approach institutions for formal help when needed. The majority specified that they were able to resolve their problems within the family units with the assistance of their children and other family members, or friends. Out of 21



women, 18 reported that they did not approach the institutions. Here is a typical account:

"... we have no any serious problems really, so we can always solve them by ourselves. We don't need the extra help."

[Bela: worked in a care centre for mentally retarded individuals, now restaurant owner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Early and GlenMaye (2000) indeed suggest that such a rigid notion of interdependence within the family units of immigrants is misplaced and unjust, as they found that independence is still preserved here, but it is applied at the level of family rather than individual. These authors advocate that family in collectivistic cultures is viewed as the smallest self-sufficient unit, whereas in individualistic cultures this position is reserved for an individual, so that a migrating family unit still preserves the qualities, such as a sturdy sense of sovereignty, internal locus of control and self-efficacy. As Early and GlenMaye (2000) suggest, the family is viewed as an assembly of individuals who all have personal strengths, skills and abilities; yet the western concept of family and the more collectivist definition emerging from recent social research, clash here, as the former implies the individualistic construct of the family, and the latter assumes the family unit as a collection of interdependent individuals, to be inevitable, desirable and have protective and healing powers. Early and GlenMaye (2000) suggest that this, termed "life force" or "human power" provides a continuous source of growth, change and adaptability for all family members.

Blair (2000) conversely suggests that, although many immigrants opt to address their needs and problems in an informal way, by relying on their family members for assistance, and avoid asking for assistance from formal organizations, it is because of the numerous cultural and linguistic barriers that they encounter, rather than their need to function independently as a unit. Such practices then put additional pressure on all involved, which is potentially dangerous for their emotional and psychological well-

being (Balcazar, Peterson & Krull, 1997; Tseng, 2004). Despite the disagreement, however, all parties involved argue that more support and positive reinforcement for the newcomers stemming from the social environment should be made available to this subpopulation.

#### **4.1.4 Acculturation and the Family: Marital Strains vs. Harmony**

In the present sample, strains brought on by the immigration process and subsequently identified as a consequence of acculturation, definitely appear to impact on family dynamics as a whole, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, in the present study, only four women openly admitted to the deterioration of their relationship with their spouses, which they attributed to acculturative stress. Interestingly, seven of the participants actively avoided mentioning their partners when responding to questions concerning other family members' acculturation issues in Australia, while three additional women admitted to having problems with their partners off the tape, raising questions about the true prevalence of the problem.

Marital strains and disharmony as a consequence of immigration and, in particular, the association with refugee status has been acknowledged widely within psychology in connection with diverse receiving societies and different arriving cultural groups (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Richman, 1993). Although the prevalence of marriages breakdown within the population of refugees is alarming, almost 40%, (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999), the reasons behind it are not well understood. While Balcazar, Peterson and Krull (1997) believe that cultural incompatibilities and reduction of self to non-self-sufficient functioning account for difficulties, Zayas et. al. (2000) associate the phenomenon with chronicity of low SES to which new migrants are drawn, and their long-lasting occupation of the status that puts additional strains on the family as whole.

Indeed, Almqvist and Broberg (1999) have found that parents feel inadequate in their roles due to cultural incompatibilities that then reflect upon their parenting practices and could leave refugee children emotionally scarred, a claim supported by Zayas et al. (2000). Zivcic (1993) further suggests that children might attempt to deal with their harsh realities on their own in order to shield their parents from further demoralization regarding acculturative stress, or parents might be less vigilant or open to discussing and noticing such problems in their offspring, suggest Almqvist and Broberg (1999). Either way, these authors suggest cultural heritage seems not to influence the rate or prevalence of divorce within this refugee population.

### **1. *Low cohesiveness***

As mentioned previously, four women in this study reported that they and their partners drifted apart emotionally after moving to Australia:

I felt that a long time ago... at the beginning, that my marriage was put under a lot of pressure and that there was not much closeness between us (husband and her), because of us migrating here, and a lot of pressure that such move brings on us because we lived in another culture. And yes, for a few years my marriage was really unsteady, on the rocks, because, for no other reason but our immigration to Australia.

[Katrina, registered nurse, now carer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

In two cases, the marital relationship improved over time, as a consequence of achieving more stable aspects of life in Australia, such as learning the language, finding more suitable employment and forming social circles in the new environment, according to the participants, while one woman reported improvement due to her threatening her husband with divorce. The remaining participant disclosed that the “emotional divorce” between her and her husband was a coping strategy aiming at preserving the family for the sake of children, even though the participant was aware that her action is destructive.

Interestingly, collectivistic cultures, such as Yugoslavian tend to value and emphasize family cohesiveness to an extreme (Balcazar, Peterson, & Krull, 1997; Hovey & King, 1996). While Tseng (2000) suggests that such practice would ensure economic survival of the family as a whole, according to Almqvist and Broberg (1999) and Zayas et al. (2000) quite the opposite seems to be happening due to the additional pressures brought on by acculturation (such as attaining occupational and social status, chronic economic problems, social isolation etc.).

## ***2. Familial and marital conflict and violence***

Strains upon the marital relationship are often depicted in the form of an emerging conflict pattern and sometimes cases of domestic violence. In the present research, there was a great degree of unwillingness to discuss the issue openly, and record it. Three women provided accounts of their husbands becoming physically violent after immigrating to Australia in unrecorded conversation, while five more disclosed having conflicts with their husbands. For example, one woman suggested that conflicts between her and her husband were common during the initial period of disorientation, economic hardship and inability to deal with problems brought on by acculturation (e.g., the language and culture barrier, underemployment):

...Of course the relationship's changed. It was very hard at the beginning. Conflicts and altercations were quite common between me and my husband, and the personal crisis was of enormous proportions... it was to be expected that we were anxious all the time, very tense and edgy and engaged in aggressive verbal altercations almost continuously. It was very hard, but I might add that it has been getting better on a day to day basis... As our standard improves, our quality of life and our relationship improve simultaneously. We fight rarely now and when we do the magnitude and the serious component of our conflict is just feeble as compared with what was going on before.

[Melisa: hairdresser, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

As noted before, Almqvist and Broberg (1999) have reported a high prevalence (close to 40%) of marriages ending in divorce among the population of Iranian refugees in Sweden. Although the authors were unable to establish a relationship between conflict and violence prior to divorce, or the events leading to refugees' decisions to end these unions, Yoshihama (2002) suggests that cultural beliefs and values could influence individuals' willingness to report such incidents in either a formal or an informal way. Habiby Browne, Dinnerstein, Jenkins, Neugebauer, and Retter, (2001) also report that due to feelings of guilt, shame or fear, migrant women are often unwilling to disclose any kind of information that might incriminate their husbands.

### **3. *Low parental support and warmth***

Although Zayas et al. (2000) claims that problems of low parental support and warmth are a common problem encountered by the Mexican immigrant population in USA, there was no indication of this in any of the interviews. One mother did report, however, that due to her physical illness she was not able to meet the needs of her teenage son at the time. It is possible however, since only women (mothers) were interviewed, that a social desirability effect prevented these mothers from admitting whether or not they and their spouses failed to provide the necessary support and warmth to their children. It is also possible that they were not aware of the feelings of their offspring. However, it is also possible that, due to cultural heritage and specific role transition, they indeed succeeded in providing support for each other as Balcazar, Peterson and Krull (1997) specified.

### **4. *Impaired parental psychological functioning***

None of the women believed that their children had been affected negatively in respect to acculturation, suggesting that their offspring acculturated at a much better and faster rate than other members of the family. Even those who reported marital

problems (43%) or impaired psychological functioning (see chapter 6), and those who noticed negative changes in their children did not link it to problems at home, possibly due to a social desirability effect. One mother reported her 12-year-old son to be withdrawn in social settings, but later disclosed that her husband is very physically and emotionally abusive towards her, and that the son has become distant and indifferent to his father. The child also exhibits self-esteem problems, according to his mother, and he is completely socially isolated and seriously bullied on the school grounds (verbally abused and physically beaten). The son also assumed the role of “passive helper” to his mother, and refuses the pocket-money, as he does not want to spend any money on himself and contribute to the economic hardship of his family. This, in turn, prevents him from socializing with peers (e.g., going to the cinema, shopping, beach etc.).

In addition, two women interviewed suggested that the problems within households of refugees are more prevalent than what the reports say, as feelings of shame would prevent the women from reporting them. Here is what one of the participants said as she reported her husbands’ inability to adapt and his drinking problem:

There are so many women that went through the same ordeal, just like me, I saw it with my own eyes. And yet they choose not to talk about it.  
[Mona, clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

## **4.2 Social Circles: Socialization outside the Family and Social**

### **Competence**

#### **4.2.1 Attachment Theory**

During the early stages of life, children form an attachment to their primary caregivers, a relationship upon which all later social relations will be modelled. Thus

the original one will affect the child's ability to form and maintain later relations within a social context (Peterson, 1996). Attachment theories propose that through this initial social bond, children develop a sense of social patterns within the world regarding their roles as social agents and social recipients of the behaviors of others in the environment. They thus develop a sense of self and a set of expectations for others in that social environment. Once these patterns are formed they become internalized and blend into self-schemes, even personalities, that persist throughout life and are resistant to change, according to Rhodes, Contreras and Mangeldorf (1994). In addition these authors argue that children that had developed secure attachment to their primary caregivers early on have the necessary confidence for functioning in social settings later, which would help them find and maintain meaningful relationships with others, and would facilitate learning a broad spectrum of coping strategies to deal with stressors.

Greenberg and Greenberg (1987) equate immigration with (re)birth. If this proposition is assumed then the process of uprooting and adapting to a new, foreign and unknown social environment might be even more painful than initially believed. Specifically, old attachments become invalid, and new ones are still non-existent. Sometimes the old models of forming attachments are erased (or need to be erased), as they become culturally inappropriate, for example, family attachments in collectivistic cultures can be seen to imply dependency, thus being viewed negatively by western societies. Need and pressure to substitute one style of attachment with another as a consequence of immigration, may further contribute to insecurity of "new-comers" (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987).

In the case where the stability of old attachments is assumed, the necessity for new, and more appropriate attachments is negated, which may lead to migrants rejecting any other form of formal or informal relationship with others. As attachment

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is culturally grounded, the old attachment may now be culturally inappropriate, resulting in social isolation within the receiving society. Therefore, the problems of social isolation may be explained through “shifts of personality” (re-birth) or “inability to accept anything other than what is brought in from the old country” (attachment theories), as this woman explains:

Changes that occurred in all of us were just dramatic, overwhelming in both physical, but even more so in a psychological sense. And to be quite honest the changes are neither positive nor trivial. I sometimes believe that they are alarming and give rise to a big concern... I have noticed that I am not my usual self anymore. I used to be cheerful and funny, being always surrounded with people and loving it. Now I prefer to be on my own, and avoid social contacts. I am not happy at all and do not smile or laugh anymore, something I used to do all the time. Then people generally do not like those that are depressed and complain constantly, as everyone is preoccupied with their own problems, no one is willing to be exposed to somebody else's, which could be the reason for our social isolation. Maybe this is how people change as they get older, but as I said the whole personality is trapped inside, broken probably due to all the suffering we had to endure.

[Ada, university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

### 4.2.2 Gender Differences in Socialization: Life Structure

In respect to social aspects of acculturation and the establishment of the new social circles, it seems that the social component of life was very important within the cultural frames of the former Yugoslavian society. The prevalence of reported lack of high-quality, meaningful friendships in the sample was astonishing. Two thirds of the women interviewed reported not having adequate social circles to provide them with support.

The assessment of importance and meaningfulness of friendship-based relationships with other adults did not reveal any gender differences, as many reported



that both they and their partners suffered due to an inability to achieve such relationships in the new environment. However, the core of the problem identified by women was their own suffering due to losing families in the process of resettlement to Australian society, while they reported that their husbands suffered more due to the loss of social structures outside of families. In fact, the vast majority (76%) reported stress-related symptomatology in connection to social problems, identified by one woman as alienation, encountered in Australia, thus suggesting social constructs of the two societies to differ a lot:

My husband did not find himself in this environment at all... There are still people that come over, someone you invite for a coffee and chat, but there is no deep sense of friendship and meaningful relationship with other adults, people that you can depend on. It seems that people here are more inclined to form friendships on superficial grounds, such as some sort of rank, or financial wealth, with no regards for more important and meaningful issues involved in obtaining and maintaining friendships. Consequently, my husband did not find anyone with similar interests and values, someone he could trust and be truly a friend with, and he cannot cope with that sort of loneliness at all.  
[Ada, university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

#### **4.2.3 Social Competence and Coping**

The data in the present study have shown that a vast majority of participants chose to socialise within existing ethnic circles (81%). Almqvist and Broberg (1999) suggest it not only restricted the number of people available to socialise with, but could also be counterproductive as cultural values of the receiving society are then not learned. Success in building social relationships outside the family boundaries has been recognized as one of the best indicators of adaptation to the adoptive society regardless of the person's age (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). Socialization within the wider community acts both as a buffer against stress and an indicator of acculturation within the family as whole and not only the individual (Balcazar, Peterson, & Krull, 1997)

suggesting a level of competency to function within the neighbourhood and society at large (Early & GlenMaye, 2000). Additionally, social relationships are a source of learning and acquiring coping strategies and dominant culture practices that will facilitate immigrants in their pursuit of success in the process of adaptation (Balcazar, Peterson, & Krull, 1997; Frydenberg, Lewis, Kennedy, Ardila, Frindte, & Hannoun, 2003).

In the present study, out of four women who established close social relationships with members of the receiving society, three indeed claimed to feel good about their decision to immigrate and were content with their existing lives, while one reported feeling less satisfied and accepted despite socialising within Australian circles of friends. Indeed, both phenomena have been acknowledged in the literature. While Early and GlenMaye (2000) claim the ability to form meaningful social relationships within the new environment to be a direct outcome of migrants' personal characteristics (i.e., flexibility, malleability, ability to invoke empathy in others and initiate empathic feelings towards self in others, to have good communication skills and a sense of humour; and good problem-solving skills), Hovey and King (1996) believe that unsolicited social support and drawing new immigrants into existing social circles might be perceived as threatening to free choice and thus achieve the opposite effect. In particular, in younger cohorts, who might perceive their traditional beliefs and values that their family tries to preserve, as inadequate, outdated and in direct conflict with the attitudes and standards of the new culture (Bauman, Adams, & Waldo, 2001). Hovey and Magana (2002), speculate that highly acculturated immigrants may have broad social circles and receive support in their multiple social circles, but they are also more apprehensive of microscopic changes within the society that may adversely influence their emotional and psychological well-being, such as the economic situation within the receiving society, or discrimination. In other words, those who are acculturated and

have access to good quality support, are also more susceptible to subtle discrimination practices, as they cannot attribute their low wages, occupational status regression, and feelings of not being accepted by the wider society to either their language or cultural barriers.

In the present study, 15 women (71%) reported that their children adapted rapidly to the new culture, while 19% either did not have any children, or their children were too young for their mothers to notice any dramatic changes. Only two women reported that their children had encountered some problems in the environment with one mother testifying about her son being bullied and another saying that her sons were discouraged from pursuing a tertiary degree by his teachers. He was allegedly told that his command of English language was not sufficient to assume tertiary studies, after 7 years spent in an Australian high school.

Indeed, Bauman, Adams, and Waldo (2001) suggest that the inclination of the younger people to choose assimilation, although perceived by the receiving society as positive action on the part of this group and applauded by the same, can also be the driving wedge in the disruption of family dynamics where the older cohorts feel betrayed, even more isolated, and abandoned, while younger generations might feel overstressed and agitated by the elders' inability and "unwillingness" to follow and bridge the cultural barrier themselves (Hovey & King, 1996; Nicholson & Key, 1999). Unfortunately, this study did not explore cohort differences in acculturative practices.

It would appear, based on the existing evidence and data obtained in this study that although social competence may contribute to the feeling of successful acculturation in refugees, there might be some additional factors contributing to this phenomenon. It is also noteworthy that "successful adaptation" seems to be linked to chronological age, with younger individuals acculturating at seemingly faster and enhanced rates than the older cohorts.

#### 4.2.4 Cultural Attainment vs. Cultural Heritage: Active vs. Passive Culture

In this study, those individuals who reported having established high quality social relationships in the new environment either within Australian society or the ethnic community, also reported better satisfaction and well-being than others. On the other hand, those who perceived the Australian society as more susceptible to, and tolerant of, social isolation/alienation, reported a high prevalence of “helpless victim” symptomatology and became quite passive and reported extremely low satisfaction with their new lives. Yugoslav culture allows quick penetration of social circles without the need for a proactive approach – unlike Australia, as individuals are born into existing social circles in Yugoslavia, and the existing circles are more likely to welcome (swallow) individuals, rather than individuals approaching and/or rearranging circles (as in Australian society).

Factors identified as influencing successful socialization in the host - environment were:

- ***Language as acculturative tactic***: inability to converse in English was identified by many as one of the reasons for their social isolation. As a matter of fact, 24% of women reported that language was or still is a reason for their or their family members’ social isolation within the new society.

- ***Perceived degree of acceptance by hosts***: Three women in the present study reported that during their period of bridging the language barrier they sought improvement in other areas of functioning as it would reciprocally and directly improve prospects for employment, establishing social contact with members of the host society, becoming independent etc. Nonetheless, all three of them also reported that the contact

with the hosts did not improve as a consequence of mastering English literacy skills as they or their partners were not accepted in the society anyhow.

• *Need to belong and re-establish identity*: Identity issues were commonly brought up by participants. Six participants directly identified identity crisis as one of the problems, especially in relation to Australian society, while a weak sense of belonging was noted by another five women, implied through their voiced complaints about the “quality of people available”. Here is a typical response in the group:

I would say it is the relationship that develops among the people. It was particularly hard at the beginning because you don't know English, and you believe that this is the reason for being so isolated and not accepted, but later when your English improves and you feel you are capable of communicating there is still a barrier. As I said before [off the tape] my husband feels that he is not being accepted as an equal member of the society. Even when you speak the language and become an Australian citizen, you are still viewed as a complete foreigner anywhere, and that's what you'll always be [2<sup>nd</sup> class citizen]. Then again maybe if you had more friends with the same ethnic background, it would help you deal with the feelings of exclusion from the society, but firstly it is physically impossible, since there is not that many people from former Yugoslavia around, and secondly you have to assume the Australian way of living to survive, which is basically reduced to the workplace and home and there is no time for socializing other than going out on the weekends. And then it is impossible to do that as well because financially you cannot afford it. Basically your life becomes a vicious cycle “home-job-home”, which is sad.  
[Mela: was employed but avoids specifying previous and current occupation status; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

This response could, however, imply that the culture barrier might still be present. It illustrates also the shortcomings of available objective measures used to determine the degree of acculturation. Two out of four cases reported would be regarded as acculturated-assimilated (as they have mastered the language, achieved academic and employment prospects and have reported a high degree of established social contacts with the hosts, implying bridging of the culture barrier) and yet their subjective sense of

well-being and reports on social acculturation show that these individuals are still faced with problems of acculturation.

It is important, however, to stress that language skills did not affect social participation, but only their perception of being accepted, as ten individuals reported a high degree of satisfaction with their lives despite the fact that three of the women also reported no command of English language and another four identified their English literacy skills as relatively poor. They all, however, reported feelings of being accepted within the new society. Interestingly, all ten of them exhibited signs of weak either ethnic or religious identity, or both. This phenomenon of acculturation having a seemingly positive correlation with the level of acceptance within the new society, or the perception of the same, was also expected considering that Labrianidis et al. (2004) found similar behaviors in former Yugoslav refugees resettled in western European countries. The authors attributed this to their weak attachments to the old country due to the fact that the old country does not exist anymore, arguably speeding up their new identity formation in respect to developing loyalties towards receiving societies.

Interestingly, the remaining 11 women exhibited feelings of not belonging and identity confusion in respect to their ethnic heritage and reported weak ties with their ethnic community, which was identified as the problem of making comparisons with old social circles. Quality of people in the community, quality of friendships and shortage of people, time and resources were reasons identified by this group for poor social interaction within the ethnic community. Those who did have a strong sense of belonging to either or both communities reported having adequate social relationships, feeling more accepted and satisfied with their lives.

The notion of importance and optimism associated with receiving social support has not gone unchallenged in the scientific arena. Salgado de Snyder (1987, as cited in Hovey & King, 1996) and Hovey and Magana (2002) did not find any relationship

between access to social support and lessening negative impact of the acculturative stress upon the Mexican immigrants in the USA but claimed, nonetheless, that quality of social support was crucial to the well-being of immigrants. Yet Krupinski and Burrows (1986, as cited in Almqvist & Broberg, 1999) as well as Shamai (1999) both claimed a high prevalence of social isolation of refugee populations leading to devastating implications for their psychological and emotional well-being. Almqvist and Broberg (1999) associated the phenomenon with the high incidence of hostility and xenophobic attitudes among the host peers (Swedes) as 41% of the interviewed Iranian children (n=39) reported being an object of bullying in the schoolyard. Almqvist and Broberg (1999) concluded that the ability to build good social connections to the host peers facilitated emotional well-being and adjustment to the new life, while absence of social networking meant lowering of self-worth and social maladjustment in Iranian children, a notion which is supported by others (Hovey & Magana, 2002; Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangeldorf, 1994). The authors further suggest that in dark and uncertain times, such as immigration, strong and supportive relationships with other individuals would strengthen personal and interpersonal skills and provide a model relationship upon which the other social relationships will be modelled.

Social research into the alienation of the refugee population in the USA sheds some additional light, as Nicholson and Key (1999) found that initial support groups are formed on the basis of their perceived commonalities that are often embodied in cultural practices and historical heritage, factors that are severely downplayed by the receiving society, contributing to the cultural divide. In addition, Roch (2000) found that loss of social networks, among other factors, had a negative impact upon women's health in general. Specifically, Nicholson and Key (1999) found that for the Cambodian refugee women diagnosed with a mental illness and receiving professional help, the common grounds were traumatic pre-migration experiences and hassles brought on by

acculturation. The women formed relationships with each other where they could help one another with everyday tasks of riding a metro for instance, and compassionately listening to past dreadful experiences by someone who comprehends their horrific magnitude, grief and mourning over the losses of people and culture and sharing of their thoughts, which produced high-quality relations. Meaningful relations seem to be very beneficial for newly-arrived refugees.

In the current study, six women reported assuming meaningful friendships with others in either ethnic or interethnic forms. Regardless of the ethnic/national origins, all six reported high levels of satisfaction with their lives, except one who complained of her health problems. As this person reported that she usually relies on her adult children and their partners to assume the role of supporters, for which she feels guilty, it is possible that her reports about outer circles of social support are not accurate, as it may be socially undesirable to present oneself as socially isolated.

Here is a response from one of those six women receiving social support outside their families. She also reported feeling satisfied with her life, feeling accepted in the community and society as a whole and good quality interfamily relationships:

... and then there is a wide circle of friends that we can count on, if needed. We [friends] very much support each other and provide assistance for each other if needed... We know that we can rely on our friends to help us out...  
[Vera, hairdresser before and hairdresser now; Croatia]

Balcazar, Peterson, and Krull (1997) found that family cohesiveness and support was not sufficient to ensure that immigrants would function well across the aspects of their existence in the new country as they tend to lack culture-specific knowledge of the mechanisms for functioning within the receiving society. In addition, they also found that acculturation and the presence of social ties outside family boundaries coupled with high family assistance and support, facilitated immigrants' well-being, and also



was associated with the person's stability of employment, residence and income, educational attainment and language proficiency. Therefore, developing good social skills to accommodate the needs of a "new-comer" within the host society are depending on culture – incompatibilities and time available to the newcomer to adapt him/herself. With time, the skills become more intact and expand to improve the social component (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999).

### 4.3 Summary

As notions of both collectivism in respect to family and "closer family" are culturally specific and incompatible with the Australian host society, inevitably the process of immigration has led to the *loss of family* for the refugee women. Consequently, devastating effects upon immigrants' well-being are reported by all participants whose family members were left behind, with no noticeable gender differences. As the participants and their family members did not have control over the immigration prospects for their family members left behind, no feasible coping strategies were devised. Consequently, passive grieving and "acceptance" are the most prevalent modes adopted by the entire population, as the active approach proved to be fruitless. That is, actively coping with the loss is unproductive when the locus of control lies beyond one's personal actions. In addition, on occasion it seems that some are trying to suppress the thoughts of old lives in their attempts to deal with the loss. The majority, however, experience feelings of guilt and shame; miss those left behind and opt to provide at least financial support for them, which might have created an additional burden for these refugees. Surprisingly, neither passive nor active mechanisms, but neutral coping strategies were the most soothing techniques, as individuals capable of stabilizing their identity within the new environment (in respect to either Australian or ethnic community) and those who felt accepted by the hosts

actually reported successful acculturation. Individuals who would be regarded as highly acculturated, according to existing objective measures of acculturation (concentrating on language mastery, rate of social interaction with the receiving society etc.), did not report better psychological well-being.

Additionally, 90% of participants reported that they chose Australia as a final destination for the reasons of having family members in Australia (mainly refugees themselves who arrived in Australia a few months or years prior to the arrival of participants and their families). Family members were seen as a source of immense support and valued as such.

The process of romanticizing their old lives has been noted in this sample, and it did affect coping adversely (homesickness). In addition, a high degree of sensitivity was either displayed or reported by some participants, both in respect to the ethnic and Australian community that may have contributed to the degree of social isolation reported. "Social lives were richer in Yugoslavia" is a common report in the study. This belief could have prevented many from seeking meaningful social relationships in the new country, which would account for the degree of social isolation. In addition, personally developed intolerance for the diversity of opinions was identified by one woman as a consequence of bad experiences during the war, and the "pressuring" desire to rebuild and reclaim their lives quickly.

There were a number of individuals claiming that there is no support available from the receiving society in respect to presenting the society dynamics to the "clueless newcomers" that would facilitate the acculturation processes. Although such problems are often more readily reported by older refugees, occasionally they were reported for the younger members of the group as well. The importance of social networks in acculturation also extends to the processes of seeking employment, as we shall see in chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5 Employment Market in Australia and its Effects upon Migrants' Substrata**

In the following chapter, the influences of loss of occupational status and downward SES mobility as a consequence of immigration will be examined. It will provide an insight into the problem and establish the link between reported psychological and emotional difficulties and the economic losses accompanying acculturation. The reasons for such a fall in occupational status and its implications on the well-being of these individuals will be discussed.

The discussion will begin with a brief description of the Australian labour market. This section will then address the myths and realities of relative positioning of immigrants, especially refugees, in their new environment within the framework of Human Capital Theory and the Theory of Dual Markets (DeJong et al., 2005). The problems of acculturative practices and related issues of language and culture barriers, as well as cultural incompatibilities will be revisited as they pertain to possible gender differences in experiences dealing with Australian labour market. Coping strategies and their successfulness will also be discussed, with a focus on cultural differences in passive vs. active approaches. Finally, the link between general well-being (termed "health" in this paper) and employment outcomes will be presented.

### **5.1 The Australian Labour Market**

Recent analysis of employment infrastructure in the Australian labour market has revealed that the unemployment rate has been relatively constant during the past decade (Anh & Miller, 2000). Even though it is assumed that the unemployment rate of under

5% is modest and not quite alarming at this stage, the link between unemployment and rise in antisocial behaviors (Bodman & Maultby, 1996, as cited in Anh & Miller, 2000), and unemployment's direct adverse effects upon human health (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987), are well established. Additionally, Campbell and Brosnan (1999) raise concern over the problematic nature of average reporting of such figures. Specifically, the authors draw the attention to: (1) high variation across the past years and seasons; (2) a huge decline in working conditions and (3) the steady decay of the Australian labour market since the 1980s, including a steady increase in casual employment, decay in working conditions, and increase in numbers of unemployed (and underemployed – employees occupying lower echelons of employment despite having qualifications, knowledge or experience to occupy more responsible and better-earning positions) people.

At the same time, average figures mask the bias of the market participation and its availability for diverse ethnic and cultural groups with figures showing 20% higher unemployment incidence among the male refugee population as compared with the next most disadvantaged group in Australian labour market (Wooden, 1990, as cited in Waxman, 2001). It appears then that while the Aust labour market looks reasonable on the surface, average figures can conceal a hostile environment – which may be particularly hostile to refugees, believes Waxman (2001).

It is worth noting that the unemployment rate in the former Yugoslavia was also very high with 14% of population being unemployed in the year 1985. This figure further rose to 20% in the year 1989, which then culminated in the civil war in 1990 (Mønnensland, 1997). Nonetheless, these figures were quite distorted as 57% of those unemployed were young people and students, who classified themselves as unemployed in order to access other benefits, according to Cucic (1997). It is also

worth mentioning that underemployment was virtually non-existent in the former Yugoslav society (Mønnensland, 1997).

## **5.2 Employment and Acculturation**

### **5.2.1 The Myths and Economic Truths of Immigration**

Employment has been identified as one of the most important aspects of acculturation, as it has been perceived to be a chance for regaining (or establishing anew) social and occupational status, feelings of self-worth and contribution to both society and the welfare of the family (Tseng, 1996). In the present study, the problems of un- and underemployment were frequently encountered across the sample. That is, 71% of the participants reported downward mobility in occupational status (*un- or underemployment*) for themselves. In fact, 62% specified underemployment as a problem and an additional 9.5% reported being unemployed as a consequence of acculturative practices. In respect to their partners' occupational downfall, women reported that 57% experienced this problem. These figures are, however, somewhat affected by the following confounds: two women reported that due to their chronological age they were unemployed prior to immigration as they just finished their education before they left for Australia, and one other reported that she was looking after her young children, but all three disclosed that they planned to assume employment afterwards. The 9.5% cases of unemployment reported above refer only to cases of involuntary underemployment.

The economic underpinnings of acculturation in connection to immigration have recently become more prominent in psychology. Many scientists have acknowledged a severe occupational and economic drop associated with immigration (Berry & Annis,

1988; Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003; De Jong, Chamrathirong & Tran, 2002; Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989). Hum and Simpson (2004) claim that previously, it had been believed that immigration occurred as a consequence of aspiring to economic progress, so immigrants would be motivated to leave everything familiar behind in order to “make their fortune” in the new country, as their native cultures could not accommodate such aspirations. Following the same logic, it was believed that migrants would then be more motivated to establish a good relationship with the hosts, thus aiming for assimilation to take place (Hum & Simpson, 2004). Such a notion is, however, a misrepresentation of true economic adjustment. The cross-sectional methodology employed in these studies masked historic effects depicting the states of mainstream employment market at the given time, believe Hum and Simpson (2004), ignoring the facts that age and time of immigration have a direct influence upon immigrants' economic adjustment. The longitudinal studies revealed that migrants did not achieve their aspired level of employment (in accordance with their qualifications) even after 20 years of living in Canada (Hum & Simpson, 2004).

Berry and Annis (1989) suggest that acculturation regularly puts migrants in a position where their expectations of gaining respectable and prosperous employment opportunities in a new country are crushed due to their limited communication capabilities; non-recognition of obtained qualifications (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003); or outdated knowledge. According to Berry and Annis (1988), it is this regression in occupational status and absence of work role identification that often leads to the development of depressive symptomatology in the population. Furthermore, a number of studies have shown that underemployment can prompt people to behave in more maladaptive ways than unemployment itself (Vinokurov, Birman, & Trickett, 2000). Berry and Annis (1989) reported that the regression in relative SES (socio-economic status as compared to average earnings within the

receiving society, and position in the hierarchical earning scheme within the given society) and perception of lack of opportunity to prosper, especially impacts individuals' psychological well-being and can often lead to the desire to abandon the adoptive society and return home. It is possible here that unemployment implies only absence of economic resources, and one's work role identity may be retained (e.g., one may identify oneself as an unemployed lawyer) while underemployment inevitably suggests drop in occupational status, which then is coupled with regression of identity (e.g., being forced to identify oneself as a cleaner).

### **5.2.2 Human Capital Theory vs. the Theory of Dual Labour Markets**

So why does downward mobility happen? In this research, 10 out of 21 women identified language difficulties either in respect to themselves or their partners to be a reason for their downward occupational mobility, while three others reported this mobility to be due to a cultural barrier in the new environment. Two out of these three women however, suggested the possibility that both language and the culture barrier could be used as an excuse by the receiving society not to employ the members of their ethnic community. According to the participants, such perceptions, may not only have extremely adverse effects upon the well-being of those involved, but could also have implications for the whole family, as in both cases women reported that the person in question was considering returning home:

It gets to the point that he thinks of packing up and leaving. He is extremely disappointed, and he would go back. But then I intervene. I believe that going back to Yugoslavia wouldn't be an answer, as there's no home to go back to. I still manage to persuade him that what matters is how hard you work, and that some day he will be judged on the basis of his merit, not his ethnic background.

[Mela: was employed but avoids specifying previous and current occupation status; Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The claims of disadvantaged ethnic minorities within the labour markets of receiving societies seem to be gaining acceptance in the recent psychological literature as they, at the same time, mirror current neo-economical analyses both in respect to employment and earning opportunities for migrants (Ahn & Miller, 2000). A number of researchers promote the idea that the high unemployment rate (estimated to be up to 40% for South-East Asian refugees to the US in the last two decades) among the immigrants is a mere reflection of the turmoil that is associated with acculturation, and is subject to improvement as a consequence of prolonged periods of residence in the new culture (Berry, 2001; Zeng & Xie, 2004). On the other hand, Ho and Alcorso (2004) claim that realistic comparisons of trends in immigrant labour participation, across the past 3-4 decades, reveal relative stagnation regardless of duration of residency. Consequently, within this group of immigrants, the researchers found a number of commonalities that they used to explain such divisions and segregations within the workforce, and the *Human Capital Theories (HCT)* emerged (Ho & Alcorso, 2004). The HCT propose that, due to the uncommonly high prevalence of what is termed as “deficient human capital”, it is customary for the immigrant populations to occupy lower echelons of the labour market (Campbell & Bronsnan, 1999; Costrell & Loury, 2004; Rowthorn, 2004). Human capital deficiencies include relatively low educational attainment, insufficient language abilities and lack of relevant skills. It is assumed that improvements in these would ensure better employment prospects for the migrants. Consequently, we would expect improvement over the time as more adequate human capital is regained; and yet the reality suggests otherwise (Ahn & Miller, 2000; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Zeng & Xie, 2004).

As a consequence, the alternative *Theory of Dual Labour Markets (DLM)* emerged. It still retains the notion of human capital as a driving force in the battle for better employment, but also postulates that this is often used to discriminate against



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) migrants, allowing for double standards to be applied in the labour market and leading to the legalization of discriminatory behaviors within the area of employment (Ho & Alcorso, 2004). DLM was derived from the empirical evidence that, even when the human capital factors are held constant for the CALD migrants on one hand, and the native population and English speaking migrants on the other, the former group is still more likely to occupy lesser positions (Frances, Kealey & Sangster, 1996), have lower wages when the same position is occupied (Zeng & Xie, 2004) or work in unacceptable working conditions (Ferguson, 2005). Furthermore, the DLM theory proposes that employment opportunities depend upon a much broader spectrum of personal characteristics than mere human capital factors, such as gender, birthplace, marital status, the origin of obtained qualifications etc. (Ahn & Miller, 2000; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Zeng & Xie, 2004). Based on the proposals of DLM, as opposed to HCT, it is expected then, that members of an ethnic minority, especially recent arrivals to the new country, would occupy lower echelons of the Australian labour market due to their human capital deficiencies (Ahn & Miller, 2000; Ho & Alcorso, 2004).

### **5.2.3 Human Capital Effects and Resilience**

Under the HCT, Ahn and Miller (2000) include level of attained formal education, obtained language proficiency and the job-seeking skills, such as good knowledge of resources available for finding employment and information networks. They suggest that the possession of high-quality human capital is absolutely essential to success in obtaining meaningful employment.

### ***5.2.3.1 Educational Attainment - Unrecognition of Qualifications***

One of the common responses of participants to questions on their employment status was to compare current occupational status with the position occupied pre-war and to dwell on Australian authorities not recognizing overseas obtained qualifications.

Thirteen women reported this either in respect to themselves or their partners (or both):

No, I am not satisfied with my work. I work in a lesser position than I used to. I am working as a carer now in a nursing home, and I used to be a nurse. But I'd like to improve this, and I am trying... My husband is very satisfied with his job. He has a good position [he works for Centrelink at the moment]. He has the opportunity and the will to climb the ladder, and he's doing some sort of course to improve his chances. But he's happy with his job, it is a good job, and I think for the first time since we got to Australia, he's really satisfied with this job. But in the beginning we were starting from a zero, and especially because it's another culture, and there is a language barrier.  
(Katrina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, nurse now carer)

Please I want you to report that I believe this country, Australia, has the most educated cleaners in the whole world.

[Diana: head personal assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

Markovic and Manderson (2000) also reported the common problem of unrecognition of many ex- Yugoslavian qualifications in Australian society, which had extremely negative effects not only on the individuals, but their families as well. However, recognition of qualifications seemed to be not enough for some, as this Bosnian woman reports. The recognition of qualifications marked a beginning of the journey with many other obstacles along the way in chasing employment, suggesting that other aspects of human capital, such as knowledge of inner dynamics of the labour market are needed:

My husband couldn't find a job as a bricklayer (despite his qualifications being recognized). He tried but he couldn't get into it... my husband is good in bricklaying. He worked on numerous occasions after he graduated, and he's very good

at it. In Australia he applied for so many bricklaying positions and people would send him to various potential employers, but he never ever received even a courtesy answer for his applications...  
[Freda, a high school graduate from Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

As overseas obtained qualifications for CALD migrants do not reflect a person's English language abilities, there seems to be a great reluctance to rely on these qualifications as indicators of general cognitive abilities or even as indicators of expertise in specific knowledge areas, which is preserved on an institutional level (Hum & Simpson, 2004; Waxman, 2001). Ho and Alcorso (2004) identify this process of not recognizing overseas qualifications, labelled "*transferability gap*", as the driving force behind the fall in the occupational status and also a key factor in ensuring prolonged periods of economic suffering within the population. The authors say that mobility of human capital is reduced to the absolute minimum that results in these people's inability to re-enter the Australian labour market and hope for better prospects once they have an opportunity to participate in it. Zeng and Xie (2004) found in their investigation of employment opportunities for Asian substrata in the USA society that the place of obtained qualifications has an enormous impact not only on an individual's chances of obtaining consummate employment, but also on earnings within the work force, with overseas-obtained qualifications being less desirable and less advantageous to their holders. Consequently, Ho and Alcorso (2004) doubt the reliability of human capital factors, in particular education, as predictors of employment prospects in the case of the Australian market, considering that they found a high percentage of immigrants being employed in occupations in which they do not use their previously acquired skills.

Consequently, the practice of not recognizing qualifications obtained in former Yugoslavia has created a lot of turmoil and personal trauma as current results indicate.

Ahn and Miller (2000), however, offer an alternative explanation claiming that the majority of immigrants originate from Third-World countries and therefore their obtained qualifications are substandard, inadequate and the knowledge may be outdated. This notion however, has not gone unchallenged in the scientific community as Hum and Simpson (2003) established that such claims have no scientific merit as there is no objective measure of quality of schooling, but it is rather assumed or often proclaimed on the basis of how many students there are in the classroom, and not on the quality and quantity of attained knowledge or practice. Hum and Simpson (2003) further claim that such assessments of schooling qualities are also adopted by other countries with high migration inflow, such as Canada and the UK, and are not only used to create immigration policies, but are also rooted in the system, and resistant to change.

### ***5.2.3.2 Re-Education***

Reclaiming personal capital and acquiring social capital through achieving new qualifications and becoming acquainted with the Australian Labour Market was one of the tactics that some refugees employed in order to improve their chances of gaining employment. Five women and four men were reported to have returned to education in order to either regain their professional status or to improve their chances of employment, even though it would still be identified as underemployment when compared with their previous employment record.

Nevertheless, only three women and two men were able to enter the employment market upon obtaining their new qualifications in Australia, which left others with a sense of injustice and unwillingness of Australian society to enable their integration into this stratum, consequently leading to feelings of anguish and despair. Mona's husband, for example, was a high school teacher. She states that her husband did complete two courses of prequalification but due to his language difficulties he did not

find suitable employment, even though he did complete the courses here in English language:

He went through personal agony for about a year (due to his qualifications being not recognized), and it was breaking his spirit so many times. I really believe that the worst hit group were the men that held a good position in their native countries, but came at an older age. To cope with such a drastic regression in occupational status is just too hard. It is natural then to expect that this group would become depressed. I know because I have seen my husband depressed.  
[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Therefore, again, an active approach to problem-solving did not necessarily influence the outcome and result in overcoming this type of difficulty, despite common claims in psychological literature that behaving in a manner similar to the hosts would yield positive outcomes (DeBell, 2001).

The accounts of the present participants further show that the relationship between educational attainment within the receiving society and employment is not linear as some suggest. Specifically, Anh and Miller (2000) report that there is a direct positive relationship between a person's academic achievements and that individual's chance of attaining meaningful and personally satisfying employment, as academic achievement implies language mastery. However, the present study shows that the relationship is much more complicated. In addition, among those who suffered a decline in occupational status there was evidence that some who did not initiate any action to change this nevertheless felt content with their new lives. One apparently productive way of coping was for women or their partners to establish as a point of reference not their pre-migration status, but the transition period characterized by no stable and lasting employment, minimal earnings allowing for mere existence and survival on a day-to-day basis, with no possibility of meeting even the basic needs of a family:

With our arrival in Australia, our lives took an incredible turn. We feel more secure in a social sense predominantly. Through that we became more

spiritually content, peaceful for we did not have to think about the means of survival anymore, and the fears for our children's future simply disappeared. We knew that now we would be able to provide for our children and give them what they need and I am not referring only to materialistic aspects of their lives. Considering that our main concern was to put food on the table for all those years spent as refugees, we are more confident that now we can provide more for our children.  
[Vera: hairdresser; Croatia]

### ***5.2.3.3 Knowledge of Inner Mechanisms of the Labour Market: Social vs. Human Capital***

One of the reasons for failure to enter the employment market even after qualifications are recognized could definitely be absence of knowledge of inner dynamics of the employment market:

The way you enter the job market is completely different: the way you applied for the positions as well, then you have to abandon your previous career path and go for other qualifications, try to find an employment path that gives you the opportunity to obtain both qualifications and employment fast. At my age there is no point in chasing good academic prospects and hoping that it would bring me a rewarding employment. Instead you have to go for the jobs that are available on the market at the moment, and prepare yourself for a huge drop in occupational status. Let me tell you there are no bigger losers than us, immigrants, in this Australia.  
[Sara, manager of a tourist bureau, now carer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

However, she is the only participant that established this link and uncovered the mechanism, but it still did not improve her general outlook on acceptance in the new environment.

In order to successfully seek employment, individuals need to develop marketable qualities in addition to job skills. The nature of these marketable qualities was analysed across cultures by Hofstede (1984), where the author cites an example of assertive selling of one's abilities in the job interview, which is not only expected, but also desired of a potential employee in the USA, while the same behaviour would be

regarded as arrogant and produce an aversive reaction in employers across European countries. Ignorance of the host's culture within organizations, whether intentional or not, could therefore be costly to immigrants, putting them in a disadvantaged position, according to Hofstede (1984). The greater the gap between the organizational culture of origin and the organizational culture of the receiving society, the greater the costs will be upon the migrating person in the new country (Hofstede, 1984). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2003) also found that the greater the cultural and linguistic gap between the ethnic group and the receiving society, the poorer the economical adaptation and the higher the unemployment rate among migrants and also the longer these effects last.

Some participants in the present study (n=5) reported relying on their *social connections*, which were often limited to the ethnic communities to which they belong, to help them achieve employment:

Yes, it was very hard to get a job. But I was lucky. I used to clean a pizza place in Fremantle, and I met a Bosnian woman that worked in the restaurant at the time. She helped me end up with a job - kitchen hand in the same restaurant and later my two eldest sons got jobs in this restaurant, and then my stepson...

[Bela: worked in a care centre for mentally retarded individuals, now restaurant owner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

It is possible, however, that this number (suggesting prevalence of obtaining employment through existing social circles) could be much higher as the means of achieving employment were not explicitly addressed in these interviews. The literature suggests that in respect to human capital factors, immigrants, particularly those who come from underdeveloped, non-English speaking countries are disadvantaged and that there is a need for them to compensate by internalizing some additional behaviors that would help them gain employment (Ho & Alcorso, 2004). Ho and Alcorso (2004) report a number of studies (Portes, 1998; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003) conducted in the

USA that suggest that highly developed **social capital** among immigrants is used to counteract the loss in human capital. In other words, there seems to be a very high degree of solidarity among particular immigrating groups where relatives and friends within the ethnic community help others to realise employment through their connections (Zeng & Xie, 2004). Therefore, the employed members of the ethnic community try to employ other members of the same community in their own organisations (Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Zeng & Xie, 2004). Remennick (2004) also found that unofficial social networking and in-group referrals seem to be the driving mechanisms for initiating employment for professional migrants in the new society world-wide.

Although it may seem that such practices should balance the disadvantages of immigration to employment prospects, a number of studies warn that due to the fact that migrants usually occupy low status jobs, a “ceiling effect” may occur, suggesting that the newly employed are still “served” with the low-paid, low-status jobs with no good career opportunities (Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Zeng & Xie, 2004), which is recognised by the neo-economic arena in the high concentration of particular ethnic groups in declining manufacturing industries across cultures (Campbell & Bronsnan, 1999; Costrell & Loury, 2004; Rowthorn, 2004).

#### ***5.2.3.4 Language Skills***

Language was recognized by many participants as an absolute necessity in order to achieve employment. Two thirds of the participants made direct reference to language abilities in assessing their employment prospects. Indeed, language is one of the most commonly used, objective measures of acculturation (Matsumoto, 2000). However, individuals who have achieved their desired level of proficiency in language seem to be of a different opinion:



My husband doesn't do his work, work he is qualified for and knows how to do (He obtained university degree in Economics in former-Yugoslavia, and then Diploma in accounting at TAFE). It seems that in any (accounting) position he applies for a professor of English language is required. There is a constant "fear" of potential employers that he would not be able to comprehend the instructions in English, as if he could not ask for help if needed. And he does have all the necessary skills in English and expertise to perform the duties required. They just make it so complicated. It is just so, so...  
[Dona, barrister from Croatia, now administrator at UWA]

Indeed, Luke and Carrington (2000) claim that the problems of unemployment and underemployment are not resolved even after Australian qualifications are obtained, language proficiency achieved and experience in the field gained, which in turn demoralizes individuals, and puts additional pressure, economic and emotional, on the struggling families, a claim supported by Ho and Alcorso (2004). It seems that high levels of education and fluency in English language do not count for much when potential employees (migrants) and employers face each other, according to Luke and Carrington (2000). In addition, ES migrants are more likely to attain even higher occupational positions than in their native countries while CALD migrants are often employed in lower echelons of the labour force in both Australia and Canada, if they are employed at all (Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Hum & Simpson, 2004). Reasons behind this trend are very complex, often implying pragmatic fears of employers to rely on CALD migrants, and are closely related to the weak economic prospects in the late 80's and 90's (Costrell & Loury, 2004; Noh, Besier, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999; as cited in Berry, 2001). Rowthorn (2004) further claims that immigrants from underdeveloped countries are not only allowed to immigrate in UK and USA under the assumption that they will find employment in so-called "dirty professions" that the native-born population does not want, but that even then they are seen as a threat to the economic system as they are taking employment opportunities away from the majority of the local population with low SES. Similar attitudes have been noticed in connection with

Canadian and American societies (Borjas, 2003; Palmer, 1996). Therefore, the practice of downgrading foreign professionalism, qualifications and education systems appears to be universal and it is also directly related to the formation of conflict in the workplace worldwide (Remennick, 2004).

In this study, only one woman reported achieving the same employment that she held before immigrating to Australia, and three women reported the same to be true for their husbands. For those who had achieved their desired pre-migration employment it seems that everything else has come into balance as well:

...After only 10 months my husband was offered a job that he was doing for 25 years in Yugoslavia. He was making a lot of money, working for a very good firm, in one word he was a complete person again, and he didn't lack or miss anything.

[Diana: head personal assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

On the other hand, one woman's response to her feelings regarding non-recognition of professional experience and educational attainment achieved overseas show the constraints on migrants' identity resulting from these practices, and her inability to comprehend the rationale behind it:

Well, it is important to do something that makes you happy and satisfied. The logic behind is that when you choose your academic path, you have chosen it because you love it and it makes you happy. If you really enjoy it, and have sufficient skills and knowledge to work within this profession, then it is important for your job to complement your academic achievement. Now, if an individual is doing a job he/she neither enjoys nor is qualified for, for the reason of not wanting that employment, but doing it as a means of survival, then it is a pity, a complete shame to waste that person's potential and happiness, and his/her ability to contribute to this society. For example, if you were a qualified laboratory technician, and had skills and knowledge, and enjoyed working in such an environment it is an absolute waste to deny you a chance to work in it again, simply because others' fear that you wouldn't be able to handle the tasks due to your language skills, considering that the position of laboratory technician does not require absolute proficiency in any language. It is a shame to squander such potential and have such a person

doing cleaning, wasting time especially when everyone can do that (cleaning). There is so much knowledge, skills and potential that Australia could have used, and people want to contribute to this society.

[Dona: barrister from Zagreb, Croatia; now administrator]

As it can be seen, another common problem is choosing unrewarding, low pay underemployment for the benefit of other family members as a short-term fix. Eisenhorn and Logue (2004) have found that negative psychosocial implications of loss of occupational status are visibly reduced in the majority of humanitarian visa entrants in Sweden after their active integration into the native labour force. They also found that work seems to have not only therapeutic properties, but also to facilitate assimilation and to reduce the feelings of “otherness” and social isolation within the host society.

#### **5.2.3.4.1 Language Skills and Family Economic Survival**

Six participants in the current study specified that putting their lives on hold until their language abilities improved, would have devastating effects on the well-being of their family, compromising economic survival of the family as whole. Such self-justification of not learning English, but instead resorting to employment options in lower echelons was not necessarily helpful, as they still felt unhappy and were not convinced that such a move would indeed improve their economic and/or emotional survival in the new environment:

... We were given the opportunity to go to school and learn English, but we were anxious to start rebuilding our lives and we left school earlier. Within a month after we started school we found jobs and stopped going to English classes, and considering our language abilities we are satisfied with our jobs, sort of. Now maybe it was wrong for us to terminate our English classes so early and think of school as being a waste of time. In fact now I do believe that we shouldn't have done it, as we were still young. However, we started working and we do not have bad jobs

either, but we should have tried to improve our language abilities more. But this is where we are now.

[Nela: office worker BH, now labourer in a factory]

### ***5.2.3.5 Birthplace and Employment Prospects***

As mentioned previously, the analysis of the current trend in the employment market in Australia has revealed that immigrants from the non- English speaking countries seem to be the most disadvantaged group in the Australian labour-market, with a relatively high percentage of unemployment (Ahn & Miller, 2000). The current inclination is to explain this trend in terms of the language barrier, inadequate schooling and the imperfect international transferability of the human capital cross-culturally.

In the current study, feelings of being “served” with the jobs that were rejected by hosts were noticed by a few individuals:

We had absolutely nothing and in my opinion 99% of the people that came from Yugoslavia to Australia were forced to work all the sorts of jobs that Australians didn't want to do. Some severely underpaid jobs, from the cleaners and kitchen hands, to bricklayers and pavers, and we came with much more knowledge and education, and we should have done better, but it was like that.  
[Katrina: nurse now carer, Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Campbell and Brosnan (1999) suggest that reported figures of unemployment are carefully devised to hide the magnitude of the problem that the Australian labour market faces, and misrepresent the place of CALD migrants in it. Indeed, Ahn and Miller (2000) suggest that further analysis of the employment market and its availability to CALD migrants, is differently portrayed once some less conventional definitions of employment and unemployment are introduced. They propose further

division to include the categories of (1) visible under-employment; (2) invisible under-employment and (3) discouraged workers.

Visible under-employment is a term used to refer to the workers who work fewer hours than desired. It is a concept that covers areas such as unwilling part-time and casual employment, a common division of labour force nowadays. Campbell and Brosnan (1999) report, for instance that the ratio of casual employment increased from 16.3% to 21.6% of the entire Australian workforce from the year 1990 to 1997, despite the fact that it is the least desirable employment option for potential workers. The incidence of visible under-employment was not reported in the present study.

Invisible under-employment refers to the under-usage of a worker's true potential in the workplace. In the current study, 52 % of participants made an explicit claim and voiced their disapproval of being forced to accept invisible underemployment opportunities. Here is what one woman said after substituting her job of an accountant for cleaning in Australia:

After the employment I had in Yugoslavia, I can't  
be satisfied with what I'm doing here!  
[Mira: bank clerk, now cleaner, Bosnia and  
Herzegovina]

This category implies a high degree of discrepancy between the job demands (low) and the knowledge and/or skills of the employee (high). Flatau, Petridis and Wood (1995, as cited in Ahn & Miller, 2000) claim an incredibly high incidence of "invisible un(der)employment" among CALD Australian immigrants, while Zeng and Xie (2004) found that Asian Americans would have to become overqualified in order to obtain same wages and same positions in American labour market as their Caucasian counterparts.

A consequence of this underemployment is that it often leads to working long hours and yet not having enough money to cover all one's expenses. In fact, 90% of participants claimed that their financial hardship resulting from underemployment had

an impact on their general well-being and quality of life, including personal relationships with others. Ferguson (2005) gives a clear account of the underemployment experience summed into a simple statement: "Imagine working full-time, but nonetheless living in poverty" (p.71).

Another related problem is discouragement of immigrants from seeking employment in the higher echelons of the job market. Here is an account of a woman who initially was encouraged to return to her profession, and after obtaining Australian credentials was discouraged from pursuing employment in the field. In turn, she crossed into underemployed status by doing an unrelated course at TAFE:

When I came to Australia, I went to the Migrant Centre to confirm the level of my knowledge of English language and stayed there for about 2 months. During that period we all had our counsellors who were there to explain to us the employment market, and provide individual counsel to migrants concerning their career path. I was suggested to enrol in tourism at TAFE since my qualifications weren't recognized, which I did. But after I obtained the diploma, the September 11<sup>th</sup> happened, and the unemployment rate in that branch just sky-rocketed. I spent months and months visiting tourist bureaus and asking for employment, but it was useless. Then I met a Czech woman who asked me if I wanted to work in a nursing home. I told her that I do not really have any formal qualifications or the experience in the field, other than that I have worked with visually impaired individuals in my student- days. She suggested that there are some overlapping similarities there and that I should give it a try. So I completed a Certificate III in aged care at TAFE for the purposes of the employment. Now I want to do the Certificate IV in aged care as well, so I have some better career prospects, and this is the "prequalification" that has to happen in order to survive as I said before.

[Sara: manager of a tourist bureau, now carer;  
Bosnia and Herzegovina]

*Discouraged workers* is a concept used to describe the potential employees who are discouraged from further pursuit of employment as they are led to believe that there is no suitable and available employment in accordance with their abilities.

Once the above accounted categories are taken into consideration, the realities of economic integration for immigrants into hosts' labour markets are visibly altered with the unemployment rate in Australia for the year 1995 rising to 48%, (Wooden, 1996, as cited in Ahn & Miller, 2000). Indeed, Campbell and Brosnan (1999) report that recent OECD figures show that simply including the categories of "discouraged workers" and involuntary part-time employees in the unemployment category would result in the boost of unemployment figures from 10.8% to 15.6% for the year 1993. This would then change the reported figures on the international market showing Australia as one of the world's leading countries in labour slack (OECD, 1995, ch.2, pp. 76-78, as cited in Campbell & Brosnan, 1999) with other western countries showing a similar trend. Wooden (1996, as cited in Ahn & Miller, 2000) also found that 17% of the overall Australian workforce could be classified as "visibly underemployed" 28% as "invisibly underemployed" and 10% as "discouraged workers".

### **5.3 Employment Problems and Gender**

The argument concerning cultural, political and economic aspects of old Yugoslav society, presented in chapter 2 suggests that both men and women would view employment as an important aspect of their identity. The findings show that 17 out of 21 women participating in this study and all of their husbands were employed prior to immigration. At present, six of the participants and four of their partners were reported as unemployed. In addition, both men and women found it difficult to accept their status of either being unemployed or underemployed (14 women and 11 men; while 14 of the participants reported dissatisfaction with their current employment. Here is what one woman says about her becoming unemployed after arriving in Australia:

Actually all three (refers to financial independence in respect to three identities:

woman, person and Yugoslav) are very important to me. As a woman and a person I think it was hard for a person like me since I have never been just a housewife and now for that initial period I was just that. In addition having a job is also my chance to socialize, and I didn't have that.  
[Katrina: registered nurse, now carer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Consequently, it seems safe to conclude that previous claims in the scientific literature of traditional gender division of labour among the immigrant community, the *centrality* of the bread-winner role to the male subpopulation and the role of housekeeper and nurturer to female subpopulation (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987; Rowthorn, 2004) do not apply to this sample.

This woman attempts to shed some light on her and her husband's attitudes to the fall in occupational status:

Men are just too afraid to deal with the stresses. Oh, yes they are. Take me for an example. I came to this country with a realistic picture in my head. I knew that no one would give me the job that I had in Yugoslavia. I knew that I was coming to live in someone else's country, among unfamiliar people, and that I had no one, so who would give me a good job? My husband, on the other hand, loves and accepts this country fully, but he couldn't deal with the fact that he would not be given the opportunity to work in accordance to his qualifications and previously occupied position.  
[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

The present findings are consistent with De Jong, Chamratrithrong, and Tran's (2002) claim that within societies where both partners were employed prior to migration, reclaiming professional and occupational status is very important to both, and is one of the most salient factors predicting the outcome of successful and satisfying acculturation process. Furthermore, Berry and Annis (1988) also found that among others, positive work role identification of African women in Canada, predicted positive acculturation outcomes. They also found that for those suffering due to their loss of employment or regression in occupational status, an optimistic comparison to the situation back home and devaluation of money coupled with social support for



problems of money, meaning that financial help is available within social circles (psycho-economic coping) decreases economic strain, therefore depression, compensating for the fall in SES.

### **5.3.1 Perceptions of Gender Inequality in the Australian Labour Market**

A number of recent studies indicated that for previously employed individuals regardless of their gender, occupational status is vital to their personal well-being (De Jong, Chamrathirong, & Tran, 2002). However, the practice of traditionalism in the *Australian* workforce was actually claimed by some participants, who remarked upon gender bias in the Australian market in respect to earnings and labour-division, with men occupying higher echelons of employment. Indeed, for some women from former Yugoslavia, these practices of gender bias in the workplace seem to obtrude, as they find their personal occupational status to be of central importance to their identity. However, the prospects of being unemployed, compared to being devaluated as women in the workplace were even more undesirable.

One woman for instance specified that she has trouble dealing with the financial disadvantages she faces as a woman in the workplace:

The jobs are very underpaid, especially in the factories (both Nela and her husband work in factories). In addition I am very hurt by the fact that men are paid more than women for the same jobs. I as a woman have to deal with a bigger and harder workload than any man that works there, and yet I am paid less than any of them. I would like for someone to come and test our abilities in the workplace, and they could see that what I'm saying is true. I am very much upset with those gender differences in pay that definitely do not reflect upon individuals' abilities to perform. Why are those differences made? There is absolutely no rational excuse for such discrimination.

[Nela: office clerk in BH now employed as a labourer]

One possible explanation stems from feminist accounts of the historical and political influences of their culture of origin. As former Yugoslavia was a communist

country, inequality of gender was completely ignored, in fact erased, and it was common for members of both genders to be in the workforce, which became central to their identity formation (Mønnensland, 1997). In addition, Berry (2001) reports that individuals seeking emigration often have common personality traits such as high work centrality, motivation and goal orientation, as opposed to those that choose to stay within the national boundaries (that are high in family centrality and attachment to familiar cues).

Frances, Kealey and Sangster (1996) believe that patriarchal constituents of the division of labour as well as its implications for subsequent earnings, are more than evident across western societies at large, including the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. The authors (Frances, Kealey & Sangster, 1996) also noted that such segregation of labour is quite persistent and characterized by the devaluation of the women's contribution, which is reflected in absence of female workers across the higher levels of employment and smaller earnings even when skills and productivity are held constant. Frances, Kealey and Sangster (1996) claim that until 1980, women were paid 40% less for the same work than men, while for the past 25 years this gap has been reduced to only 20% lesser payments. In addition to gender-based discriminations, Frances, Kealey and Sangster (1996) found that ethnicity was often used as an additional tool for discrimination in the workforce with Non-Anglo women facing even more obstacles in their employment paths, such as discriminatory employment and constant devaluation of their skills by others in the workplace, a notion supported by Ho and Alcorso's findings (2004). They reported a 20% higher unemployment rate for migrant women as compared with their pre-migration employment status. Although Ho and Alcorso (2004) have no reliable data on the reasons behind such decisions, they acknowledge that one of the problems may lie in the inherent tendency of the Australian labour market to discriminate against women,

as those who are employed earn less than their partners, who in turn, earn less than the native population with figures being 5% less pay for males and 13% for women if they are employed in the upper echelon of the market, and 23% reduction in earnings for migrant men and 54% for their female partners in lower-status jobs (VandenHauven & Wooden, 1999, as cited in Ho & Alcorso, 2004).

Neo-economic theories, addressing the pervasive trends in global economic markets, tend to rationalize such practices of discrimination in the workplace (Rawthorn, 2004) by attributing inequality in employment to the lesser skills or lesser education attainments for women, however, they seem inadequate to explain and defend such practices. Therefore, Frances, Kealey and Sangster (1996) suggest that feminist and neo-Marxist analysis of the current trends in labour markets of developed countries are more capable of encompassing the problem and offering a plausible explanation. Specifically, it is believed that current economic conditions, together with the capitalistic foundations of employment, encourage such practices of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and/or race in the workforce. Even though there are extended reports of "race" (other than Caucasian) being an additional source of discrimination, Waxman (2001) did not find any difference in employment prospects for Bosnian, on one hand, and Iraqi and Afghanistani refugees, on the other, in the Australian labour market. The prospects of employment were low across the ethnic groups (Waxman, 2001).

#### **5.4 Age and Employment Prospects**

Age is another factor commonly referred to as an obstacle to employment. In fact, 71% of women used their or their other family members' age to explain their poor employment outcomes. Here is a comment from one Bosnian woman in her late forties, on importance of getting better jobs in Australia:

Oh it is very important, but as we are older we cannot expect to get those jobs. We are not exactly work material, more like retirement-material really... (Children) they all work, but they are also young and they are trying to provide for their families, so money is always in scarcity... It would be good for them to have better jobs, but...

[Suzana: cook in BH, now unemployed]

In the present study, it seems that some migrants from former Yugoslavia, although suffering because of their occupation loss, are also aware of the constraints that their age and their limited knowledge of the English language put upon their prospects for better employment:

...He wanted to work so badly back then. However, when you're at that age, 45, you're regarded by many as too old to be offered a full-time position. Furthermore, if you're not working full-time you cannot expect the banks to give you any long-term loans, and we wanted to buy a property for ourselves before it's too late. It was a vicious circle, and he wasn't coping with it well.

[Eva: housewife, now labourer; Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Age is accountable as the single most common basis for discrimination in the workforce (Ahn & Miller, 2000). It has been noted that younger Australians have been discriminated against on the grounds of not having enough experience in the workforce, for which they are denied employment opportunities, while the elder subpopulation is denied employment opportunities despite their acquired practical knowledge accumulated throughout their years of experience in the field (Ahn & Miller, 2000). Consequently, it has been argued that studies assessing the relationship between immigration and employment often disregard cohort effects that are largely accountable for the high unemployment and underemployment rates among immigrants (McDonald & Worswick, 1999, as cited in Ahn & Miller, 2000). McDonald and Worswick (1999, as cited in Ahn & Miller, 2000) also believe that migrant employment rates are largely attributable to the age of individuals, suggesting that duration of residence does not

necessarily improve migrants' chances of gainful and continuing employment. However, Hum and Simpson (2004) argue against this claim as, once age, language proficiency, attained education level and obtained qualifications are held constant, native population and ES immigrants will still have much better chances of being employed than their CALD counterparts.

## **5.5 Consequences of Poor Employment Outcomes for Social Life and Health**

Negative implications for social life were also reported as a consequence of economic disadvantage and cultural differences in organization of life, where work hours in Yugoslavia were from 7 am to 3 pm, for example, thus leaving plenty of time for socialising with friends in the evening. Conversely working hours and long-distance travelling to and from the place of work in Australia, do not permit for such luxury, as this woman suggests:

It is one more problem that you have to accept that your professional and occupational status drops once you immigrate to Australia. It is extremely hard to deal with it, and it happened to so many here. Life would be much easier and probably more bearable if people could even hope to end up doing the jobs they once did. I do not like the fact that your qualifications are not recognized and it happened to so many, including us, to end up with some odd, severely underpaid and unqualified jobs, that leave you personally unsatisfied, overworked and tired, and with no time or resources for social life. Once again it is unbelievably hard to deal with such a severe fall in occupational status.

[Mela: was employed but avoids specifying previous and current occupation status; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

In addition, more than half of the participants attributed their feelings of agony, and helplessness, substance abuse and physical illness to problems of underemployment. More on this issue will follow in the next chapter, but it is sufficient to say here, that the link between low SES and mental disorder is well established

(Eaton & Garrison, 1992). Considering that refugee immigration and non-english speaking background implies low SES, it is not surprising that some researchers claim high prevalence of mental, in particular stress-related, disorders (depression, anxiety and alcohol problems) to be, are a direct consequence of perceived discrimination (Eaton & Garrison, 1992). Pernice and Brook (1996) also found a link between unemployment and elevated anxiety and depressive symptomatology among the refugees in New Zealand.

Therefore resilience, returning to one's "normal" (or previous) degree of functioning, is very important in connection with achieving desired employment in the new environment. From this, we might expect that developing human capital factors valued within the receiving (Australian) society, should inevitably improve immigrants' chances of gaining desired employment. Unfortunately, the implications of unemployment or underemployment on the psychological health of immigrants extends to encompass their families as well, as this woman reports her husband's satisfaction with his new job that he also did back in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Yes, my husband is very satisfied with his new job. Now he is. ... With the previous one he was so dissatisfied that if he did not get a chance to change it, we would have gone back (to Yugoslavia) for sure. It was just too hard and demanding. Now he is so happy, considering that it was his life-long dream to work behind the wheel. He just loves driving.

[Tanya: a housewife from Bosnia and Herzegovina, unemployed at the moment]

## 5.6 Future Research and Policies

The problematic nature of establishing legitimacy of claims of discrimination against minorities within the labour force is often further facilitated by inaccurate and incomplete analysis of the market in a specific timeframe, suggest Hum and Simpson

(2003). The authors have shown that better prospects for immigrants were a direct consequence of at-the-time trends in the market. Both Einhorn and Logue (2004) and Hum and Simpson (2004) agree that once the economic aspects of the native society start deteriorating, the first to feel the consequences (i.e., to lose jobs) are immigrants.

With the recognition of therapeutic properties and centrality of work to well-being and the healthy identity of individuals, Sweden has moved towards the program of *active integration* of the immigrants in its labour market (Einhorn & Logue, 2004). Under active integration, Einhorn and Logue (2004) propose the concept of educating migrants, and providing them with the on-job training, in order to be able to assume the work-roles that they have previously occupied in their native countries, and assisting them in gaining employment that can promote their chances of prosperity in the new country. The voices of participants in this research seem to support this idea. The future agenda would be to reinforce laws that would impede the possibility of this vulnerable population being exploited in the workplace, and deal with the barriers to achieving prosperity in the same workplace, on the basis of knowledge and merit.

### **5.6.1 Implications of Downward Occupational Mobility**

As it can be seen from previous accounts of downward occupational mobility, it can have devastating effects on immigrants. Psychological torment and developing depressive symptoms as a consequence of losing quality of life through occupational downfall was evident among this sample as well. In fact, two thirds of women reported feeling miserable, helpless and depressed. It has been noted that those who reported occupational downward mobility as a consequence of immigration in this study also reported adverse effects upon their psychological and emotional well-being, physical health, and family dynamics leading to marital conflict or abuse. Here is what one

woman said about her and her husband's well-being and marital relationship in connection with employment problems they encountered in Australia:

It wasn't until ... we got some jobs that we started feeling better.

[Melisa: hairdresser, now cleaner, Bosnia and Herzegovina]

## 5.7 Summary

Feelings of being trapped, and even negative implications for health manifested through depression and sometimes physical illness as a consequence of stress, were common in this sample. Underemployment was associated with feelings of inadequacy, helplessness and symptoms of depression in both men and women. It had negative implications for social functioning of the individuals and adverse effects on family dynamics. Refugees who either achieved their previous occupational status, or who came to evaluate their success in terms of materialistic gain (e.g., owning a house, car etc.) as a consequence of immigration, reported materialistic gains and feelings of security, problem-free relationships and quality of life and the only identified problem was "insufficient financial funds" (they needed more money).

Refugees who valued their previous occupations highly but suffered occupational downfall judged earnings and materialistic aspects of immigration as less important. They were more disappointed with the lack of acknowledgement of their personal action such as re-education and unwillingness of society to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, abilities and passion for the professions they chose.

These findings are somewhat consistent with Markovic and Manderson's (2000) findings, suggesting that younger female refugees from urban settings and with tertiary degrees concentrated on regaining their former employment status, while less-educated



women tended to opt for quickly obtainable, unqualified and semi-qualified positions in order to improve their immediate financial situation.

Those individuals (both men and women) in this sample who have come to view themselves as successful in Australia, by assessing it through materialistic achievements rather than retaining their social and occupational status, reported no signs of depression, PTSD or somatic problems. However, only a minority was able to do so when dealing with underemployment. Underemployment was a more prevalent problem than unemployment in the population, as recognized within the sample.

## Chapter 6 Health

This chapter is concerned with aspects of psychological and emotional well-being, as well as physical health, in connection with acculturation. In this chapter the issues of physical health and alternative speculations for the evidence of eroded physical health will be discussed before the aspects of mental health associated with the population of immigrants, and in particular refugees, is further explored. It will also examine the shortcomings of existing studies and present some alternative conceptions of mental health issues in this population. In addition, some emerging patterns in the population (both refugees and immigrants as a whole) in terms of the erosion of their physical health will also be discussed.

In this chapter, due attention will also be paid to the discussion of mental disorders, in particular depressive symptoms as they are the most commonly encountered, within the population of immigrants and refugees (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987). The discussion will further attempt to include the context within which the change in mental state has occurred and set the boundaries for understanding it.

Finally, the relationship between health and the social aspects of acculturation, and economic status will be discussed. It will be argued that the complex interaction of circumstances associated with immigration and attaining refugee status may impact on the overall physical and mental fitness in this population.

## 6.1 Physical health

Interestingly, in the present study it was noted that some participants complained about their physical health and associated their somatic problems with the stressors and geographical aspects of the new country. Of these participants, 29% reported a history of medical problems in themselves or their partners that appeared some time after their arrival in Australia:

...my health deteriorated rapidly in Australia... There is nothing that I can't afford, so I shouldn't complain and yet what I value most and what has been a burden or all of this time (6 years), my health I don't have. I feel somewhat burdened since I've been here, in Australia... Certainly it is the change of climate. I used to have headaches in Croatia as well, but they were nothing as compared to what they feel like in Australia, and then there are all the other problems that come on the top of it, but that's how it is. It's all good. As long as my children are feeling well, I am OK.

[Keti: cook, now unemployed; Croatia]

I had been diagnosed with cancer some time back, and thankfully everything went well, ... Only I believe that I got cancer through my stressing.

[Diana: head personal assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

The deterioration of physical health seem to be quite prevalent among the population of immigrants in general according to some researchers (Kramer, Pruffer-Kramer, Stock, Tshiananga, 2004; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Roch, 2000). However, the relationship between physical health and immigration does not seem to be well-defined and clear. The link between poor psychological adjustment and deteriorated physical health has had received a lot of attention and support in the scientific community, but identifying the causal direction and providing plausible explanatory mechanisms seem to be more difficult (Petersen, Maier & Seligman, 1992).

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Many researchers have noticed a connection between refugee status and deterioration of physical health. For example, Nicholson and Kay (1999) have found a high incidence of physical complaints in their sample of Korean refugees. The authors believe this to be a case of cultural disposition for substituting psychological and psychosocial problems with physical health manifestations (somatization). However, this notion does not seem to receive strong support in the scientific community. Although somatization may be common, firstly the practice is culturally - influenced and, therefore, does not necessarily explain the prevalence of the problems across different ethnic communities; secondly, this approach has been criticized for its “outdatedness” when applied to the current situation even within the same cultural group (Kim, 2003); and thirdly, it does not explain the link between poor psychological adjustment and objectively diagnosed physical conditions such as cancer or heart attacks.

Kim (2003) agrees that the prevalence of eroded physical health is high among the population of immigrants, and furthermore that it has psychological implications. Orneistein and Sobel (1987) recognize that both mental well-being and physical health not only influence each other, but can both be affected by factors such as personal stability, and occupied social role. Others agree that the relationship is quite evident yet poorly comprehended in the modern world (Deary, Blenkin, Agius, Endler, Zealley, & Wood, 1996). However, Kim (2003) suggests that due to the pervasiveness of severe acculturative and other stressors in this population, their psychological and emotional well-being is adversely affected, which has direct effects upon biological immunity and, therefore, physical health. The immunosuppressive properties of stress are well documented and established (Kaye, Morton, Bowcutt, & Maupin 2000). Petersen, Maier and Seligman (1992) agree that this is the most plausible explanation, as the increased immunological response (hyperproduction of white blood cells termed

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antibodies fighting antigens) to the antigens (foreign bodies in the organism e.g., viruses) is a consequence of the alarm raised by the CNS (central nervous system) and therefore overload through dealing with chronic psychological stress could affect the immune system adversely (Ornstein & Sobel, 1987). Yet modern neuropsychology claims that, although the relationship is very real and measurable, it is complex and the physiological mechanisms require further clarification.

Finally, the endocrinological and CNS mechanisms associated with depression as well as the immune system, are interwoven to the point that activities associated with one could influence the other via the two systems. Thus, depressive patients might also be expected to experience somatic problems, and vice versa (Kaye, Morton, Bowcutt, & Maupin, 2000).

It is also important to note that acculturative stress can actually impair recovery from a somatic disorder or injury as well (Smart & Smart, 1994). Moreover, Strike and Steptoe (2002) report a link between depression and hematological abnormalities putting the sufferers at the greater risk of developing thrombosis and arteriosclerosis through the process of heightened inflammatory processes in the CNS associated with depression, and both coronary diseases and depression have been linked to environmental and psychological strains.

In addition, indirect but nonetheless influential determinants of health, such as income, SES, employment/working conditions, as well as living conditions in terms of social and physical environments have been recognized by Health Canada (Canadian National Health Organization) as having a tremendous effect upon physical health and health practices in general (Maggi, Hertzman, Kohen, & D'Angiulli, 2004; Roch, 2000). The link between the poverty and eroded physical and mental health has been recognized in European countries as well (Kramer, Prufer-Kramer, Stock, Tshiananga,

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2004). In other words, poor working and living conditions affect physical health adversely, and they are often associated with the low-paid work that many ethnic minorities are forced to undertake. Furthermore Kramer, Pruffer-Kramer, Stock, and Tshiananga (2004) also found that many immigrants fail to take advantage of the health services available, which might be due to the cultural and language barriers (Nicholson & Kay, 1999), avoiding dealing with the health issues until they are severe and no other alternative is possible due to expense (Roch, 2000). In addition, Kramer, Pruffer-Kramer, Stock, and Tshiananga (2004) suggest that such erosion of health could be due to internalizing unproductive coping mechanisms that are prevalent in the western world, such as drinking and smoking, which have adverse effects on the health of immigrants.

## 6.2 Mental Health - Definitions

The current study is concerned with how well refugees cope with emotional and psychological stress as a consequence of acculturation and/or pre-migratory experience. The encountered problems identified in the existing literature, include a range of depressive symptoms and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) (al-Krenawi, Graham & Sehwal, 2004). Nonetheless, most of this chapter will be devoted to the consideration of depression-like symptomatology within the sample, due to this phenomenon being much more often reported than symptoms of PTSD.

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by the “sense of inadequacy, a feeling of despondency, a decrease in activity or reactivity, pessimism, sadness and related symptoms (Reber, 1995, p.197). *Table 6.1.1 DSM-IV Criteria for major Depressive Episode and Major Depressive Disorder*, clearly establishes the parameters for diagnosing the disorder.

**Table 6.1. Nomenclature of Depression (DSM).**

<b>DEPRESSION</b>	
<b>Conditions necessary for diagnostication of depression</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least five of the symptoms need to be present over the period of 2 weeks with either depressive mood or anhedonia being one of those five symptoms.</li> <li>2. The symptoms cause significant distress and disturbance in social, occupational or other aspects of functioning</li> <li>3. The symptoms are not direct consequence of a substance (ie.drug).</li> <li>4. <b>The symptoms are not explained by bereavement. During the grieving period depression-like symptomatology may persist for a significant period of time (more than 2 months).</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. depressed mood</li> <li>2. anhedonia - markedly diminished interest or pleasure in everything.</li> <li>3. changes in appetite accompanied with weight oscillation without dieting.</li> <li>4. insomnia or hypersomnia- disturbance of sleep patterns</li> <li>5. psychomotor agitation or retardation</li> <li>6. fatigue or loss of energy</li> <li>7. feelings of worthlessness 🚩 excessive or inappropriate guilt</li> <li>8. diminished cognitive capacities 🚩 loss of concentration; 🚩 indecisiveness</li> <li>9. suicidal ideation 🚩 attempted suicide</li> </ol>

**Note: Condition 4. allowing for exceptions in case of mourning periods associated with loss, to be exempt from a diagnosis of depression.**

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), on the other hand, is an anxiety disorder that revolves around the concept of revisiting highly traumatic experiences in dreams and recurring thoughts and images, long after the exposure to the trauma is gone, accompanied by hypervigilance, numbness, sense of dissociation of self and the event etc. (Reber, 1995). PTSD is often characterized by the patients’ unwillingness to recall the experiences of trauma and deal with them (Barlow & Durand, 1998).

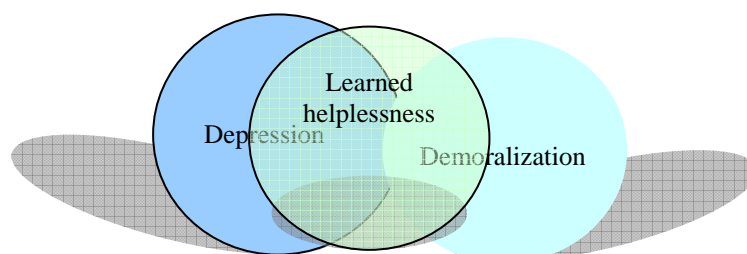
Such etiological compatibilities of human accounts of war-related experiences seem to further fuel the claims of a high prevalence of mental disorders in the population of refugees. Indeed, there seems to be a strong trend within the receiving communities towards recognizing and labeling immigrant populations to fit the paradigm of mental disorders (Kroll, 2003; Young, 2001). For instance, Hobfoll et al. (1991; as cited in Sutker, Uddo, Brailey & Allain, 1993) reports a high prevalence (53%) of “symptoms of depression, anxiety, and anger; physical and somatic complaints; excessive alcohol and drug use; and specific PTSD symptoms” in accordance with the DSM-III manual within the population of Vietnam veterans. The authors attributed this to the experiences of extreme traumatic events and an inability to deal with such high-intensity stress. Subsequently, Almqvist and Broberg (1999) that found the same to be true for the refugee population.

### **6.2.1 Demoralisation**

Demoralization is a concept that Kroll (2003) used to refer to the depressive symptomatology within the migrant population. He specified that the symptoms displayed are often more reminiscent of “*learned helplessness*” brought about by the inability to decipher culture-specific cues in the new, unfamiliar environment, rather than depression as a mental disorder. Demoralization centers around the concept of “learned”; therefore implying that it is quite possible to overcome the condition and move towards more productive outcomes (unlearning helplessness) by shifting explanatory style from pessimistic (global – overgeneralised to all circumstances, internal – attributed to self as a failure, and stable – considered to be unlikely to change) to optimistic (external, unstable and specific) causes for bad events (vice versa is true for good events) (Petersen, Maier & Seligman, 1993). And yet often claims within the scientific community point to depression as the most pervasive problem in the newly arriving ethnic groups (Kim, 2003).



Learned helplessness may play a part in depression AND in demoralization, but there are distinctions to be made between the two (see Figure 6.1). Kroll (2003) believes that as old coping strategies are not functional and new ones are not utilized, an individual may generalize the uncontrollable aspects of an unfortunate outcome leading to pervasive motivational, cognitive and emotional insufficiencies, which fits the paradigm of learned helplessness. However, Petersen, Maier and Seligman (1993) also point out that demoralized individuals display a whole array of anxiety-related symptomatology that seems to act as an action-initiating agent, and act aggressively in their attempts to deal with frustration and find a way out, which is in direct contrast with the clinical accounts of depression. Consequently, contrary to learned helplessness, demoralization involves active but inappropriate or ineffective responding to the problem (Petersen, Maier & Seligman, 1993).



**Figure 6.1 Conceptualisation of Demoralisation**

### ***6.2.1.1 Demoralization and Acculturation***

In this study, 71% of women reported frequent periods of either themselves or their partners experiencing negative mood associated with different aspects of living in the new country. The most frequently identified areas of dissatisfaction were employment opportunities, social isolation within the new society and the loss of family through the process of resettlement. Thus, all of them were confined to the problems of immigration rather than war-related experiences.

There is no shame in what we went through. It is an enormous traumatic experience, a huge shock, and it is to be expected that many would become depressed as a result. Just think about it. In your own country when you move from one city to another you need time to get accustomed to the new environment, although people around you still share the same language and culture with you. Then how would people feel when they move half way around the world, to a country with different customs, traditions, people, language,... everything.

[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Acculturation is a process that requires an enormous personal reorganization of the self in respect to society as the demands and the infrastructure of the social (and physical) environment has changed. As such, it will often lead then to depressive symptomatology (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987). Evidently, the novel social and physical environment has to be adapted to in order to be able to incorporate the self into the broader societal context of the new culture and accept the change fully as this woman explains:

We actually spent 7 years in Germany, and as I said the first 2-3 years were horrifying. However, as we learned the language and improved it a great deal over that period, got really well acquainted with the German customs and traditions, and met people, made friends; we came to view Germany as our home. Consequently we were devastated when we learned, after some 5-6 years that we had to leave the country (as the war finished, refugees lost their status and were required to return to their home - countries). It was an enormous shock for us, and under that pressure and shock it was that we arrived in Australia. Now the same thing happened with the initial period of adjustment and grief over the lost life, but we were expecting it (second time around).

[Ada: university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

So the problem identified here, in this study can be approached as a somewhat ambiguous phenomenon as (1) it acknowledges strong signs of distress across the immigrating populations and more specifically here refugees from former Yugoslavia, but (2) allows for speculations about the origins. More precisely, there is a prevailing

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claim in the scientific community of the high prevalence of mental disorders in this population being linked to experiences of war (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby, 2003; Herlihy, Scragg & Turner, 2002). It is commonly assumed that prevalence of negative life experiences associated with the immediate pre-migration period of ascribed refugee status will inevitably provoke stress-related symptomatology in the population, thus putting them at specific risk of suffering from mental problems (Blair, 2000; Hovey & Magana, 2002).

Interestingly, only one of the present participants identified problems as stemming from the experiences associated with the war, and another speculated that one of the alternative explanations for such changes might be due to the problems encountered through the period of transition, spent in refuge. Here is what she said:

People (refugees from former Yugoslavia) have just become so hypersensitive, that it is unbelievable. It is probably due to all those refugee times, when you had to subject yourself to inhuman conditions - small, unventilated and overcrowded apartments and lack of everything, so that now that we have a possibility to reclaim ownership over our lives and possess material things again, we are not capable of listening to other people's opinions. "No one should care what we are doing and why. It is of our own concern how we want to organize our lives." All this is simply a reflection of all the bad experiences and sufferings people went through in the past 10-12 years, depending on when someone left their home and started the journey.

[Ada: university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

In addition Burkle (2002) believes that in the case of *complex emergency*, a term the author employs to refer to the by-products of political instability such as the civil war in former Yugoslavia, it is often the public health system that is first to be dismantled and to become inadequate to deal with the overwhelming demands on it. Karakashian (1998), on the other hand, found that the negative schemas are formed during exposure to war, but contained within specific events and specific perpetrators

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of crime, genocide etc., resulting in the world in general being viewed still as a compassionate and generous place.

At the same time, many suggest that the psychological stresses due to migration itself are often downplayed, but are nonetheless powerful factors triggering disorder or illness. Aroian, Norris and Chiang (2003) and Blair (2002) suggest that the prevalence and intensity of stressors associated with migration per se are key among ethnic minority groups and that demographic determinants, such as gender, are not successful and reliable predictors of the outcome in terms of mental or physical health. In support of this claim, Zayas, Kaplan, Turner, Romano, and Gonzalez-Ramos (2000) found that the suicide rate among Hispanic youth in the USA is much higher than in their native countries, and that it was much more common among those classified as being of low SES than among middle SES youth.

The argument here is, therefore, that common and natural feelings associated with mourning are often negligently assumed to indicate mental illness in the population, despite there being very little empirical evidence of it. The current findings indeed, could point to such conclusions as many participants believed that the problems were brought on by immigration as a consequence of acculturative stress and splitting the families:

Not much has changed (in her life since she's been living in Australia). I am even better than before. But I do not laugh even smile since being in Australia. [Why?]I do not know.

[As the woman started crying the recording was interrupted. She says that she feels so lonesome and guilty since she could not do anything or even visit her other family members for the past 6 years, since they've arrived in Australia. During that time they had according to her, very hard lives, and they died - her parents and grandmother, aunt and lately her uncle has been very sick. She could not afford to help them or even to go and visit them before it was too late. There is no real support coming from anyone here and she feels emotionally drained and tired.]

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[Bela: worked in a care- centre for mentally retarded individuals, now restaurant owner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

It is possible, however, that stressors are cumulative (Durand & Durand, 1998). If so then the whole sequence of events can add up to a heavy stress load, even if the events in isolation are not particularly bad. Then the war-related experiences followed by immigration could trigger depressive symptoms even if neither could produce such horrific effects on its own. Also, stress can arise from change, even when that change is a happy event (e.g., getting married or having a new baby).

### ***6.2.1.2 Origins of Depression/ Demoralization: Returning to Social and Economic Parameters of Acculturation***

Young (2001) identified three major factors that facilitate the mental and emotional well-being of refugees as well as their acculturation processes. Current research suggests that the absence of those, may account for the feelings of despair and anguish to emerge:

1. *Social support* proved to be a strong buffer in this sample with 76 % of participants in the current study identifying unsatisfactory social life in respect to at least one member of the family as a huge problem, while 90% complained of feelings of anguish and despair due to broken family ties:

I would die unless I find a way to bring them here. I need them around, and right now I feel that my body is here, but my spirit and my soul is there with them all the time. I cannot think of anything else but my family that is left behind.

[Eva: housewife, now laborer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

2. *Self-esteem*: Global self-esteem is based on self-conceived affection towards oneself, and the perceived views that society has of the self (Young, 2001). As such, Young (2001) has found that refugees with positive self-esteem seem to be able to deal with the both microscopic

(i.e., everyday hassles) and macroscopic (i.e., acculturative stress) negative events in a much more effective way than those with low self-esteem, preserving their quality of life and psychological well-being. However, self-esteem was not investigated in this study.

3. *Locus of control*. In the case of the investigation of refugee populations, it is common within the scientific community to assume that refugees had neither impact on nor any control over the process of their immigration, and yet all of the present participants claimed ownership over the decision to immigrate to be either theirs or their partners, or other family members:

When I finally decided that it was time for me and my family to pack up and leave, and because I had a brother living in Belgrade, I borrowed the money and went to him. My plan was to go from one embassy to another and find one country that would let us in,...

[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

The assumption of *victimization of refugees* being internalized and re-applied to various spheres of living in the new culture, thus adversely effecting their chance to prosper, was also contradicted in the present study. Some women reported feeling good about their lives at the present, despite prior bad experiences. Here is what one woman says who previously has reported images of her pre-migratory life coming to haunt her from time to time. Again, she associated most of the troubles with the process of acculturation:

Well I feel relatively good now, but as I said the first period of adaptation was a sheer horror. You have to abandon all of your beliefs, your core, your personal values, your customs and all the previously gained knowledge. Absolutely everything is different, and it is an immense turmoil to abandon your previous self and form another to accommodate the new and so different environment. But it is a burden that a person has to endure for years in order to change.

[Sara, manager of a tourist bureau, now carer; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Even among the most recent refugee arrivals, there are a number of those that ascribe locus of control to themselves when considering recent positive events (Young, 2001). In addition, such a practice seems to improve refugees' psychological and emotional well-being, the chances of quicker and better adaptation and ability to achieve goals in the new environment, suggests Young (2001). Hovey and Magana (2002), however, suggest that failure to attribute responsibility for positive events to themselves could negatively affect refugees' well-being and acculturative practices.

The origins of depression and PTSD are still sought in experiences of war (Herlihy, Scragg & Turner, 2002; Stein, Kataoka, Jaycox, Wong, Fink, Escudero and Zaragoza, 2002). Massey and Capoferro (2004) found no support for this claim assessing pre-migration health records. Moreover, Moore (2002) claims that cultural lenses are used to diagnose mental illness as, due to cultural incompatibilities, it is possible to see some behaviors as hindering functioning within one cultural context (see Table 6.1), while within other cultural contexts it might be observed as "normal" behavior.

Kim (2002) believes social and occupational downward mobility should not be disregarded as a powerful contributor to eroded psychological well-being when the refugee population is assessed. After all, the American Psychiatric Association (2000) suggest that if symptoms of depression are caused by bereavement they should be disregarded for diagnostic purposes for at least 3 months and approached with caution thereafter.

### ***6.2.1.3 Demoralisation and Coping***

Demoralization suggests that coping is a necessity, as mourning loss of the old country will lead to prolonged periods of exhibiting depressive symptomatology. And

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yet, the recovery is imminent, as demoralization implies and the following account specifies:

In some instances our lives did change for the better. Living here is easy, nice. It is a beautiful country. However, for the first year or two it was hard, a real hell. It wasn't until we felt confident enough to actually communicate in English, ... and until we got some jobs, that we started feeling better. We had some serious problems back then, and we were miserable.

... There are some good opportunities that you get in Australia, and sometimes we think of ourselves as being very lucky for living here, since you live comfortably, have a job, a mortgaged house, something we couldn't have achieved in Yugoslavia. ...

[Melisa: hairdresser, now cleaner, Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Demoralization is quite a logical consequence. Greenberg and Greenberg (1989) believe that due to facing the unknown (i.e., a new culture) a set of anxieties develop, and that these anxieties could either be paranoid in their nature or depressive. Greenberg and Greenberg (1989) further suggest that paranoid anxieties develop when migrants perceive that there is a strong environmental demand to become somebody else, while depressive anxieties develop as a consequence of feelings of loss coupled with guilt. As a consequence, a migrant could become paranoid about the cues within the environment, becoming distrustful and fearful of others, interpreting conversations as attacks on his/her persona etc. He/she could also feel depressed, mourning the loss of everything and everyone known within the cultural context that is lost.

As incompatibilities between the self and the environment are perceived and resources for overcoming these problems are not available at the initial stage the anxieties intensify, leading to confusion and self-doubts, feelings of despair and anguish, deep feelings of insecurity, isolation, loneliness, and weakened sense of belonging to an established social group, therefore "depression" (in nonclinical terms – see point above) (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989). Although this phenomenon is recognized as endemic, it does not allow for clear categorization within the DSM



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nomenclature (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989; Kroll, 2004). Indeed, South and Haynie (2004) found similar effects even among the population exposed to interstate mobility, where language and macro-cultural barriers are almost non-existent. Peterson, Maier and Seligman (1993) further warn against the problems of not providing support for demoralized individuals on the account that demoralization will improve given time and the acquisition of cultural knowledge. They believe that, unless it is addressed immediately by service provision, there is a strong possibility of demoralization developing into clinical depression.

Therefore, the psychological distress accompanying immigration may be best recognized as a normal reaction to the sudden loss of different layers of “security blankets” that are removed from a person’s environment, physical as well as social, and other tangible and intangible qualities of their culture of origin, such as people, material property, familiar localities, language, norms and standards of the given society, including customs, geographical, social and political climate, chosen career-prospects and economic/ social milieu, that provide the framework for defining self in the given society (*self-concept*) (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989). Therefore, demoralization is a normal (rather than pathological) reaction to the stresses of immigration, but one that would benefit from some service provision, nonetheless.

*So what happens when self-schemas no longer apply and the self-concept is under threat?* This could have devastating effects upon a person, and as the regularities of the environment, upon which such self-definitions are based, are removed, depressive-like symptomatology could appear:

“I have been financially independent since I was 20 years old, and it was the hardest part in my life when I felt I couldn’t contribute to the financial stability of my family... at home. Especially considering that I have always done it before. I really took it hard and spent 2-3 years crying over this.”

[Keti: cook, now unemployed; Croatia]

Self-concept is defined by Vaughan and Hogg (1998) as organized and self-contained self-schemas (mental representations of the self based on accumulated knowledge about one's abilities, aspirations and personal importance of these attributes). In the process of immigration, the parameters under which self-ascriptions were made become invalid, which threatens the self-concept as a whole, thus resulting in the rise of the feelings of either dejection or agitation (Vaughan & Hogg, 1998). Greenberg and Greenberg (1987) argue that through this process self-schemas are not merely threatened, but often become invalid and require "amputation", which is a painful process, as the actual self is then diminished.

### **6.2.2 Gender Differences in Respect to Demoralisation**

Aroian, Norris and Chiang (2003) report that 83% of studies concerned with gender differences in the adverse effects upon the well-being of immigrants identified women as the group most susceptible to suffering negative effects (see section 2.1.1.2. Culture and Family: Socialization). The problem of assuming traditional gender roles across all immigrant cultures was also discussed (section 2.1.1.2.). It was expected that certain aspects of the culture of origin in the present sample (i.e., collectivistic attitudes, feminine cultural underpinnings and egalitarianism of former communist society) might tend to reduce the difference between genders, but also that gender might influence the manifestation of emotional and psychological symptoms. In respect to the first part of the assertion, the ratio of depressive symptomatology or depression-related problems reported for men and women at any stage since arrival to Australia in this sample was 4:3 (16:12), as mentioned by participants. However, these numbers might not present the reality for this population as three women refused to disclose on record information on their partners' abusiveness and alcohol problems, while another two avoided

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mentioning their husbands in discussion. Unless reminded specifically, these women would provide accounts only for their children when questions targeted family. It is therefore quite possible, as this woman implies, that true accounts were not obtained from some participants:

...and even though some people choose to deny them (negative changes), I am certain that they're lying not only to the world, but to themselves to begin with. ...and I have seen the changes among many.

[Ada: university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

The possibility of women over-reporting their husbands' problems or under-reporting their own is also a possibility, but as Ada mentioned above, underreporting the issue might be the most plausible explanation implying social desirability – the need to leave a favorable impression. Thus, in this study, the prevalence of depressive symptomatology among the refugees from former Yugoslavia was reported to be very high among both men and women, but women often labeled their emotional suffering as such, whereas men externalized their problems, blaming inadequate social circles, society etc. In addition, the most commonly reported problem for women was guilt and suffering associated with split of families due to migration. Different terms were used to describe problems in their partners suggesting that they felt disappointed, were more anxious and prone to resorting to initiating conflict with their spouses and blaming others. In addition, six women reported that their husbands were less capable than other family members of “letting go”, dwelled on their lost lives and were less capable of seeing the positive aspects of their decision to immigrate:

The children are satisfied now, although the life that young people lead in Australia and in former Yugoslavia are totally different. Social life is much richer in Yugoslavia and children have very fulfilled lives in respect to the social scene in that country, while Australia gives them all other opportunities, the social life in Australia is very underdeveloped, so there were some big changes involved. Yet the children adapted to the Australian way of living pretty soon, and they're OK now. My husband on the other hand is not well

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adapted to this way of living. He is not happy. He probably needs some more time. He is still very homesick and is struggling to come to terms that he is not in Yugoslavia anymore.

[Maria: travel agent, now laborer; Croatia]

However, this observation is not universal and the opposite reaction was reported by four other women. The following account of a woman's and her husband's feelings associated with the immigration, identifying that she romanticized the old country and disregarded the changes in the society that were brought on by war:

He (the husband) saw all the qualities that this country and these people had to offer from the beginning, and he didn't have any problems. It is me that always makes things difficult. No he didn't need a holiday (refers to her going back to Yugoslavia on holidays which finally made her accept the truth that Australia is home now, and everything she needs is there). He's smart (laughs). I have to spend some money to realize things.

[Diana: head personal assistant in the Chamber of Commerce in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now unemployed]

### 6.2.3 Problems of Acculturation Associated with Demoralisation

The areas associated with demoralization by participants in the current study were within the scope of acculturative changes as language and cultural barriers, drop in occupational status and economic hardship, social isolation, absence of support from the receiving society and victimization. Indeed Parke, Coltrane, Duffy, Buriel, Dennis, Powers, French and Widaman (2004) have found that economic pressure is linked to the onset of depression in both mothers and fathers, respectively, which further leads to marital conflict and inadequacies in parenting (e.g., hostility towards children). As the economic hardship seems to stand in a strong positive correlation with the process of immigration per se, as mentioned in a previous chapter, depression-like

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symptomatology is to be expected (Kim, 2003). However, Parke et al. (2004) suggest that although the link between economic hardship and economic pressure, on one side, and both maternal and paternal depression on the other, seems to be established across ethnic communities, it is neither simple nor linear, as the point of reference to which one compares one's economic state (as discussed in section 5.2.3.2 Re-education) might be more relevant than objective measures of economic variables. In addition, it seems that parental depression translates into problematic social functioning of the offspring as the quality of parenting may suffer immensely, leaving traces on children's mental and emotional well-being (Hovey & King, 1996; Parke, 2004).

### **6.3 Alcohol abuse**

One of the problems of assessing depression in men and women is contained in the gender-specificity of the formal disorder. Specifically, Busfield (1996) found that anxiety and depression are more readily ascribed to the female population (male: female ratio 1:2 to 1:3); whereas conduct, substance abuse and personality disorders are more noticeable in male population (2:1). Yet these disorders, according to Busfield (1996), may reflect the same underlying depression, although manifestation of problems is gender specific. That is, men and women might be experiencing similar feelings, but they express these differently outwardly. This claim has yet to be validated.

The present study did confirm gender differences in respect to depression. Indeed, women reported suffering quietly, while men dealt with their frustration by resorting to acting out. Four women reported a partner or another male family member resorting to excessive alcohol use due to their inability to deal with social inadequacies brought on by immigration (n=3) and downward occupational mobility (n=1). Here is a typical

account that a woman provided when asked about how she recognized her husband's inability to cope:

I noticed because he was drunk every day. I instantly knew that there was some inner turmoil that he was going through. He would just seek the company of the bottle too often. He was a wreck;

[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

As it can be seen from this account, as in three others, the alcohol problem developed after immigration, implying the inability to cope with the changes brought on by the new environment, which all four women specified as well. As such, alcohol consumption is considered to be a common technique for dealing with psychological stress associated with the workplace in the western countries, with one in five to six workers resorting to this coping strategy, but it often escalates and becomes a problem when occupation is more broadly associated with the loss of personal control and decision-making. Excessive alcohol drinking problems among the population of immigrants might thus represent a parallel phenomenon (Marchand, Demers, Durand & Simard, 2003). The inherent problem in addressing the issue is scientific ignorance. Indeed, Ahuja, Orford and Copello (2003) and Isralowitz (2004) have found alcohol consumption to be lower among some populations of immigrants (e.g., Russians to Israel) in comparison with the receiving society, due to cultural heritage and strong familial support. Indeed, resorting to alcohol as a way of “escaping” the pressures of the newly assumed roles in the population of immigrants, although acknowledged, is often downplayed by both researchers, and receiving societies (Magana 1996).

### **6.3.1 Women's coping with men's alcohol problems**

The problem encountered in this study was that such dramatic changes in the behavior of their partners are considered socially undesirable and could affect the rate of reporting in this study. For instance, one of the participants was divorced from her husband for two years due to the violence in marriage, yet she would not disclose

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information about him unless specifically asked, and then only off the tape. As the women participating in this interview were recruited through the Migrant Metropolitan Resource Centre in Fremantle, most of them lived nearby and knew each other. In the interview they would discuss other women's problems but were not prepared to talk about their own. For ethical reasons, these stories are not reported or taken into account in this study, but they are worth mentioning. The problems of marital discord and domestic violence were discussed in chapter 5, while here the emphasis is on alcohol abuse.

So how did women who reported the problem of excessive drinking of their husbands deal with this problem? Two out of four women reported constant altercations with their husbands in the past, yet learned to ignore their partners' alcohol problems later. These women reported that they were emotionally disconnected and indifferent to their husbands or the marital problems, which were identified by them as coping strategies employed in order to protect the family:

...even though this change is not satisfying (referring to the emotional disconnection from her husband and social isolation) and we truly would like to escape it, I believe that this was the only way to cope so that we could preserve our family. It was for the sake of this family, and especially our children, since we are the adults and we would certainly survive on our own, but the children would have been devastated, that we shifted our personalities (referring to previous quarrels between the two) in such a dramatic way.

[Ada: university student and a small business owner, now deli assistant; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

One woman however, delivered an ultimatum to her husband after realizing that all her pleas, discussions, tolerance in addressing his alcohol-problems were in vain:

Now he's OK. He got used to this life. However, for the first 3 years it was hell. It was so bad that something had to change. And again it was me that initiated that change in a way. For years I watched things getting progressively worse, and it

got to the point where I said to my husband that he'd either let it go (missing the old life and hanging onto the old occupation status) or we would have to go our separate ways. And believe me I am not the only one that had to deal with it. There are so many women that went through the same ordeal, just like me, I saw it with my own eyes. And yet they choose not to talk about it.

[Mona: clerk, now cleaner; Bosnia and Herzegovina]

Ahuja et al. (2003) found that within their sample, the almost unanimous initial response of wives to their husbands' excessive alcohol drinking was "passive resignation" accepting the behavior as a passing coping mechanism, hoping that it would go away with time as enculturation sets in and acculturative stress weakens. However, as the problem persisted and the implications of the excessive drinking took a toll on the family dynamics, women were forced to utilize a more active approach (termed "active resignation" by Ahuja et al., 2003) after detachment from the problem and often their husbands, leading to the threat to leave and take their children away, or asking him to leave (Ahuja et al, 2003). Through the process of moving from passive acceptance of the problem to threatening and demanding family breakup, all the women interviewed by Ahuja et al. (2003) reported going through the phases of indignation, withdrawal of affection, and achieving emotional distance, cessation of communication with the partner, family dynamics disruption often coupled with physical and verbal abuse, financial problems and social isolation.

#### **6.4 The Concept of Passivity / Activity in Demoralization**

Considering on-going debate over active and passive cultural tendencies affecting the choice of coping strategies, as discussed in chapter 2, it appears that both passive and active techniques were employed by the participants in this study in order to deal with the problems brought on by immigration. Interestingly, it seems that neither the passive approach (characteristic of the culture of origin, as discussed in chapter 2) to



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the problems faced, nor active (characteristic of Australian culture) were helpful to the population investigated. Specifically, while passive coping strategies were inadequate in addressing needs and working towards goal realization, active strategies proved to be more damaging in cases where locus of control was indeed external (e.g. Splitting families) or not acknowledged (e.g., Assuming and completing tertiary qualification again in Australia, yet not obtaining adequate employment due to an alleged language-barrier). Indeed, it appears that cognitive redefinition was the most soothing technique.

It is also worth mentioning that individuals who were highly acculturated did not report better psychological well-being, if other resilience factors were absent.

### **6.4.1 Cognitive Redefinition - Neutral Coping:**

#### ***6.4.1.1 Shift in Identity***

The degree of acceptance in Australian society as a whole seems to have a strong association with personal well-being. Those who developed a sense of being equal members of Australian society, regardless of their acculturative practices, reported no depressive or PTSD symptomatology, and greater satisfaction with their lives in Australia, even when the problems of family loss and downward mobility in employment market were evident:

...Now I feel much more satisfied. Now I have friends of all nationalities, even the individuals with English speaking backgrounds. Somehow it became quite easy to live in Australia, and I must say that we maybe even feel like Australians now. We just began to comprehend that this is our country now, and therefore life is much easier, more satisfying. My children speak English perfectly, and they blended so well and so fast. I even think sometimes that they probably don't even feel as being anything other than Australians. When it comes to my husband, I believe that he also feels more secure and satisfied as well. He is happy..  
In the beginning I must say that I was incredibly sad and I felt homesick, maybe even guilt ...

[Vera: hairdresser before and hairdresser now;  
Croatia]

These accounts directly show that identity transition from being an alien to belonging to the receiving, Australian society, was established, suggesting that some individuals were more likely to adopt Australian identity while at the same time weakening their national identity. Nine women reported these feelings in respect to either themselves or another family member, and two who preferred Australian over the Yugoslav society, also stressed their identification with the Yugoslavian rather than the current national formations in the Balkans. Indeed, official claims of separate cultures and languages have emerged, thus demanding further explanation of “culture of origin”:

...To leave my country was incredibly hard for me. I must say that I still consider my country to be former Yugoslavia, which includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia among others...

I wouldn't like to return and live there anymore.

[Nela: office worker BH, now laborer]

Moreover, participants created a *point of reference* to either their pre-war life structure, or to that formed in a transitory country, which was used as a basis of comparison to the Australian society. The more favorable the relative outlook on the new country, the better personal well-being seemed to be. In other words, it appears that individuals who developed the ability to see their progress in the new country were well-adjusted:

Now that I look back and compare where we were at that point and where we are now, I see that we have moved forward so much, and I am so satisfied...To sum it up everything that a normal person would wish for, we have it here.

[Nela: office worker BH, now laborer]

However, only a minority managed to do this. Indeed, Sharlin and Moin (2001) found a very high prevalence of in-group favoritism of migrants toward the members of

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old ethnic/national groups, which was directly related to feelings of insecurity and negativity towards the changes brought about in family life by the process of immigration.

### ***6.4.1.2 Neutral Coping: "Letting Go"***

In addition to selecting a favorable point for reference, the set of expectations formed prior to immigration and their compatibility with realities within the new country affect the person's well-being [in the sample], as well as the readiness to "abandon the old country and start anew". In this study only a few refugees were ready to let go and start afresh, and those that stabilized their identity, reported high-quality personal well-being, had no depressive or PTSD symptomatology, and no other physical or psychological complaints. They also felt accepted in the new country and developed a sense of belonging to Australia.

It seems therefore that pre-migratory expectations and assessments of the one culture's practices against the other's create more fertile grounds for attempting to predict the successfulness of acculturation processes in the present sample. Specifically, the choice of culture against which Australian society is assessed and within which one's relative social positioning is judged, seems to affect personal feelings towards the new environment, well-being and consequently acculturation successfulness.

We often ended up doing the jobs that nobody would want (as refugees in Serbia), and because of it we were very happy when we got the papers to immigrate to Australia. My husband always wanted to go either to Australia or Canada as we heard that these two countries provided very good and healthy environment for immigrants, and for those that did want to work hard, a chance to prosper and have a good life. However, leaving our own country was still very painful, and for me, it still is. I find it hard even to talk about it now. But we are ecstatic to be here.

[Vera: hairdresser before and hairdresser now;  
Croatia]

As the point of reference here, the transitory country was used, and the identity of refugee, associated with economic struggle. Relative to this point, success in Australia is measurable, therefore acculturation is regarded as positive experience. Australian society has given them and their families an opportunity to re-establish their material possessions and return to relatively normal lives. However, only 33% of the women in the current sample used this technique and disregard the pre-war lives, and only 24% of participants reported the same behavior for their partners. These individuals seemed to be better equipped to deal with the problems of acculturation in a productive way, resulting in higher reports of stress and depressive symptomatology as Nguyen, (1998) suggests. Nevertheless, given that this study involved only one interview with each participant, it may be that participants' immediate feelings on that day of the interview influenced their responses, and that these may not necessarily represent a 'typical' day for them.

### **6.5 Summary: Closing the Circle:" Acculturated" in Acculturation**

As noted previously, acculturation has put high demands on refugees from former Yugoslavia, creating a depressing and unconstructive vacuum for both men and women in this study. The postulated language and culture barrier encountered at the beginning further complicated the matter of adaptation to the new country bringing on problems of social isolation and inability to achieve consummate employment, impairing these people's chances of "rebuilding their lives". Consequently, a high prevalence of depressive symptomatology was encountered, but it was argued here that this is a normal human reaction to losing everything, including one's sense of self (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989), rather than clinical depression (Kroll, 2003; Marchand, Demers, Durand & Simard, 2003). As a matter of fact Marchand, et al. (2003) found that 20% of

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the population is diagnosed with depression in western countries, but the percentage rises to 42% in the migrant population, according to Hovey and Magana (2002). In addition, resilient features were evident in the present sample, suggesting that improvement without interventions did occur as a consequence of developing or resorting to specific coping mechanisms.

Those who reported feelings of belonging and/or acceptance in the Australian community shared also one thing in common. Namely, these people had a strongly-developed Yugoslavian identity, and since the country does not exist anymore it is more than possible that their transition to Australian identity was faster and less painful. Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios and Hatziprokopiou's (2004) reached the conclusion that due to the dissipation of the country of origin, there is a trend among current uprooted individuals from the former Yugoslavia and USSR to initiate personal dissociation from the cultural and political life in the remains of their former countries, and re-establish their national sense and loyalties by turning to the receiving societies.

Instances of eroded physical health found in the sample were largely attributed to the stresses associated with the migration by the participants. Strategies used to cope with the somatic problems, however, varied ranging from developing depression as a consequence of physical illness, to accepting good medical attention as a positive aspect of immigration, to shifting the whole attention from stressful life-events to more positive aspects of a new life.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion - Resilience and Coping in Successful Acculturation of Refugee Family Units from Former Yugoslavia**

This study has looked into the broad concept of acculturation as it applies to the recent group of refugee arrivals from former Yugoslavia to Australia. It was designed as a comprehensive qualitative exploration of acculturative practices allowing for the characterization of the phenomenon by the participants themselves. It also allowed participants to identify the major impacts of acculturative stress and host culture influences as they are perceived by the bearers of the process of acculturation.

The final chapter will sum up the complex interactive environment encircling acculturative practices. It will also provide a summary of the major findings within the social, economic, individual, and health-related aspects of acculturation, assessing it from a gendered perspective. It will further deal with some alternative explanations of the findings. Finally, it will identify the implications of the findings and make some suggestions for future research.

### **7.1 The Meaning of Acculturation**

The purpose of this research was not to redefine the concept of acculturation, but to return to its original definition. Berry (1988) defined acculturation as a process of accustoming oneself to a new culture, which is a consequence of complex interaction of cues within the receiving society that unfold across the various spheres of living. Consequently, the current study investigated the concept of acculturation through assessing socialisation practices, economic underpinnings of seeking and reaching

consummate employment and mental and physical well-being as reported by the participants themselves.

### **7.1.1 Incompatibility between Construct and Measures**

The difficulty of addressing the phenomenon of acculturation empirically in modern cross-cultural psychology, is intrinsically related to the attempt to translate the intangibility (abstract aspects) of acculturation into operational measures. The inherent problem then lies in the feasibility of conducting the research, rather than achieving compatibility between the measure employed and the phenomenon in question (acculturation) (Birman, Tickett, & Buchanan, 2005). In other words, due to the fuzziness of the acculturation concept and problems of defining it, it is hard to devise objective measures that would conceptualize the acculturation.

The problem has often been dealt with by ignoring the underlying complexity and simply reducing acculturation to overt behaviors of immigrants. In turn then, the visible signs of culture such as language, clothing and food, are often used as a tool in psychological research to infer people's acculturative preferences (Matsumoto, 2000), but this inference is limited.

Such measures often do not address attitudes, beliefs and values in respect to one or both cultures, which would need to be included, in order to lead to more valid and reliable results in the domain. Additionally, the underlying incompatibilities and related problems spreading throughout the spheres of living in the new environment remain unreported and unidentified, thus limiting our knowledge in the domain.

The design of qualitative, open-ended interviews and narrative analysis of the phenomenon addressed these problems and allowed the participants to identify the

nature of acculturation themselves, thus minimizing the problems of “construct-measure” mismatch and identifying the process as whole and complex.

## **7.2 Findings in the Current Study**

The current research has indeed shown that the acculturative process is multifaceted and needs to be explored as such. In other words, it has been seen that various spheres of living were affected by exposure to the new and unknown environment. The cultural incompatibilities both objective, as according to Hofstede (1980), and subjective, reported by the participants themselves, have spread across the identified content areas (as identified in chapter 3: Methodological Issues) socialization; health; employment and loss of family members. Consequently, the thematic underpinnings of the research were affected as well. The following subsections will deal with the findings in terms of content areas: socialization, employment and health, respectively.

### **7.2.1 Socialisation Processes and Family Loss in Present Study**

The present research has shown that the process of accustoming oneself to the new culture is indeed a complex process filled with turmoil that can also be accompanied with the absence of sense of direction. Our participants mainly identified their problems as stemming from cultural incompatibilities.

In terms of social cultural considerations, discrepant views on what constitutes a family have led to – from the migrants’ point of view - tearing families apart through the process of immigration. In addition, a certain degree of social isolation both in respect to the hosts, but also within the ethnic community was reported by more than



75% of the participants in respect to themselves and/or their partners (but once broken family ties were considered, the percentage rose to over 90% of the participants). The participants attributed this isolation to a different organisation of life within the receiving society. Social aspects of immigration were the most prominent issue of concern identified by the participants, yet this issue's relationship to employment prospects and reported well-being and consequently health demonstrate its complex and widespread influences as postulated in chapter 1. This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail under the heading 7.1.2.4 The Closed Circle.

Feelings of anguish and despair were reported by two thirds of the participants, as well as an inability to deal with the loss of previous social circles and the failure to establish new social connections. Although the accounts show that there was no gender difference in respect to this phenomenon, a participant suggested that women were more likely to suffer due to the effects of splitting families, while men were more concerned with the degree of social isolation they were experiencing. Nevertheless, this study did not allow for such conclusions to be reached. The issue could be considered in future research.

The majority identified the lifestyle and what participants termed the "high-degree tolerance for social alienation" in Australian society as a reason behind their social isolation. However, hypersensitivity of this subpopulation of refugees was also mentioned, suggesting alternatively that social aspects of acculturation could be sabotaged or overemphasized by the subpopulation itself. On the other hand, a few participants identified discriminatory behaviors enforced by the existing policies applied to this population as a major obstacle in social acculturation of themselves and their offspring.

## 7.2.2 Employment Prospects and Participants in the Present Study

Employment is one example where existing policies have created a vicious circle for many, as qualifications obtained overseas are not readily recognized. The diplomas obtained in trades were acknowledged, giving tradesmen and women the chance to economically adjust and reassume their occupational status. However, the individuals with higher academic attainments have suffered immense occupational downfall, and exhibit classic symptomatology of depression in relation to it.

Here, however, the process of grieving is used by the researchers to justify this phenomenon, rather than assume depression per se. With migration, the personal identity of the immigrants comes under attack and becomes invalid in the new environment, therefore leading to problems of adjustment (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987). The cultural self, suddenly becomes non-functional in the new culture, as pre-migration (cultural) rules governing behavior are still not utilized by new-comers. Indeed, Markovic (1996) found that the perception of being a valid and contributing member of the society is very beneficial for the identity of both men and women across former Yugoslav societies, and being deprived of this aspect of self may indeed be very distressing for individuals (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987). Gender differences were not found here, which supports the theories of macroeconomic aspects of modern societies (DeJong et al., 2005), rather than often encountered claims of traditional role-division in immigrant populations encountered in cross-cultural research.

The group of refugees with more educational attainment were also more likely to assume active coping strategies in dealing with those issues, by pursuing English classes, re-enrolling into technical colleges and universities in order to re-obtain their degrees, or choosing alternative career paths, while less educated refugees would opt for the existing employment opportunities that were available, such as factory work and work in the cleaning industries.

The use of active coping strategies has been highly lauded within the contemporary psychological literature, as it is considered to be culturally appropriate in the western world, and would further facilitate the desired outcome for the individual (Balcazar, Peterson, & Krull, 1997). A counterargument, stemming from cross-cultural research embodied in eastern philosophies is that employment of culturally appropriate coping strategies in respect to one's cultural heritage would be more beneficial for the psychological well-being of immigrants (Yoshihama, 2002). The current findings did not clearly support either of these streams, but did however point out at the possible bias in existing objective measures of acculturation, assuming the individual coping strategies are always culture-specific and imply preference for one over the other.

Specifically, due to the active pursuit of re-establishing occupational status, refugees with high educational attainment have acquired knowledge about the cultural underpinnings of Australian society, thus bridged the language and culture barrier. As such, these individuals would be identified as highly acculturated by the standard measures of acculturation. Following the stream of thought established by the definition of the construct, such individuals have obtained an understanding of the new environment, therefore are capable of regaining their equilibrium and re-establishing the harmony between self and the cultural demands of Australian society, and yet they exhibit further signs of psychological maladjustment and report a high degree of dissatisfaction with their current lives. It is also possible, however, that their level of coping is not adequate to help them regain the same levels of functioning as in their country of origin. Thus, active coping might contribute to increasing distress, rather than minimizing it.

These individuals, regardless of their gender, view their occupational roles as crucial to their identities. They believe that employment provides an opportunity to grow and socialize, and feel a valid and equal member of society. It also provides a tool

for addressing helplessness and victimization of refugees and thus has therapeutic properties as well. The participants felt that this is where support from the Australian authorities is not available. The non-recognition of their qualifications leads to absence of employment opportunities for this immigrant group, who find this part of their identity crucial to their well-being. In other words, immigrants do struggle with encountered cultural and language barriers, but once these obstacles are overcome, microscopic problems, such as discrimination of overseas obtained qualifications, become more discernible, a notion supported by (Ahn & Miller, 2004). From this, it is evident that measures such as language are inadequate markers of acculturation.

The importance of occupational status is directly inferred from the accounts of Yugoslavian refugees, and indirectly implied by the reports on eroded psychological well-being and inability to cope. It seems that underemployment has had more injurious impact on individuals than unemployment, as identified by one woman, and yet the degree of underemployment is much higher for the pre-migration white-collar substrata of participants, which is a direct consequence of non-recognition of their overseas obtained qualifications. The refugees who occupied lower economic echelons prior to migration evaluated their decision to immigrate to Australia by assessing the materialistic gain-loss, and viewing employment only as means of achieving this goal. On the other hand, those who were career-oriented individuals prior to their departure from the homeland viewed their occupational aspect of self as more important than monetary reward that follows.

### **7.2.3 Health in the Present Study**

The findings in this study did indeed show eroded health as reported by participants. Under health, subjective accounts of psychological well-being as well as diagnosed mental illness and physical health, were considered. A prevalence of adverse psychological welfare was reported in respect to both men and women. However, most

of the participants attributed this to problems of acculturation, and only two out of twenty-one suggested that pre-migration experiences could have contributed to the problems of eroded psychological well-being, by making them more sensitive and less tolerant of differences of opinions. The most prevalent problem was the emergence of depression-like symptomatology or demoralization with 86% of participants reporting this problem as often encountered by themselves or their partners. 1/8 of the participants reported problems of alcohol abuse in their partners that developed as a consequence of inability to cope with the problems of acculturation.

In addition, some participants (29%) reported eroded physical health as a consequence of problems associated with acculturation. It is possible, according to the existing literature that participants' immune system has failed as a consequence of acculturative stress that has put this group at risk of developing physical problems.

In terms of coping skills and resilience, the careful consideration of use of coping mechanisms, revealed a range of active and passive strategies, however it seems that neither type was markedly more beneficial for participants. Life structuring within the new environment seems not to have left enough room for utilising resources for addressing these issues (to be discussed further in 7.2.4).

#### **7.2.4 The Closed Circle**

Indeed, in this study, complex interactions between the social aspects of acculturation, economic gains and losses and mental well-being seem to be eminent. It seems that social formations also act as buffers against other problems associated with acculturation, providing support, and relying on networking for achieving employment, which then in return affects well-being. Participants also reported a high prevalence of depressive symptomatology associated with occupational downfall and the absence of extended social networks and loss of family. Therefore, it can be concluded that acculturation is a complex process that spreads out across the identified life-spheres

and these are interwoven and, as such, they should be investigated in such a way as to preserve the conceptual power of interactions among aspects.

This is not to say that language barriers did not account for problems associated with acculturation, as the inability to communicate in the social environment and decipher cues were regarded as a reason for social isolation, inability to negotiate need fulfillment and optimize employment prospects, which are detrimental to the concept of self-worth therefore leading to demoralization.

In addition, although gender differences were not readily reported in this sample in respect to socialisation problems, loss of family due to migration and occupational hassles, women claimed to be more able to shift their attention to other, more positive aspects of immigration, often to the prospects for their children's future. Participants reported that both they and their partners, who assessed success through materialistic gains (as opposed to regaining occupational status) associated with immigration, reported better health and personal well-being. Only a minority was able to do so.

Indeed, in respect to cultural differences in approaching challenges, Yugoslav culture is perceived to be more passive and less tolerant of change (Hofstede, 1984). Characteristics of the population, such as hypersensitivity, impatience, irritability, low degree of tolerance for diversity of opinions, anxiety and depressed moods, were noticeable in this study. It could account for weak attachments that people have developed within their social environments. Well-adjusted individuals were actively working on reunion plans (visiting relatives or inviting them to Australia) and considered other positive aspects of acculturation, while dealing with the loss of families. Yet the demoralized majority saw the problem of broken families as one more "miss" associated with their new lives, as even active approaches, which would imply more compatibility with the host culture, were blocked and unsuccessful.

In terms of acceptance, less acculturated individuals perceived themselves as not being accepted, and yet the more acculturated perceived themselves as being selectively discriminated against, as help was not available unless the “stereotype of helpless refugee” applied to them, as one participant suggested. No gender or age differences was noticeable here. Here it is important to stress that as depressive symptomatology and associated cognitive states coupled with behavioral aspects are not extended to all spheres of living, and hence, it should not be regarded as clinical depression, but rather demoralization (normal depression associated with the mourning the loss of country, familiar faces, attained social and occupational status etc) that develops as a consequence of immigration and is noticeable among all migrant groups across the receiving societies (Kroll, 2003).

### **7.3 Identity and Coping**

In the present study, only few participants reported a high degree satisfaction with their identity. Interestingly, when these participants were assessed on their language abilities, and their acculturative practices, the results revealed a high degree of variability. Some would be classified as bicultural, while others preferred cultural separation. This is in direct support of existing psychological literature (Berry, 1998; Birman et al. 1998). Yet what we found in this research is that all of those who “successfully acculturated” had a few things in common. They all were ready to let go, start afresh, and stabilize their identity. They also felt accepted in the new country and developed a sense of belonging to this country.

These individuals reported high-quality personal well-being, had no depressive or PTSD symptomatology, and no other physical or psychological complaints. They made comparisons of the Australian society with either the culture of origin or transitory

country, and the more favorably Australia was viewed, the better reports on personal well-being and health were made.

Optimistic views of the current situation and the ability to perceive progress resulted in the selection of better coping strategies, such as cognitive redefinition, and therefore better personal well-being and health status. Pessimists, on the other hand, regarded goals as unachievable and obstacles as irremovable, regarding their actions as reflecting more realistic attitudes in respect to the new country, but the consequence was passivity and a high degree of inner turmoil.

### **7.3.1 Coping Strategy: Cognitive Redefinition and Re-Established Identity**

The above identified findings again draw attention to the utilization of coping strategies to suit the needs of current refugee arrivals. Obviously, the active approach to problem-solving in respect to rebuilding oneself by aiming at regaining consummate employment, re-establishing social circles and dealing with family loss, has showed to have some serious limitations when applied to this group. In addition, passive acceptance of limbo status has also indicated very poor coping as a high degree of psychological maladjustment was reported. Interestingly, it was the “cognitive-readjustment” coping techniques that were associated with the better outcomes.

The findings suggest that those who were able to readjust cognitively and perceive themselves as a part of the receiving society also reported greater satisfaction with their lives and better psychological and physical health, did not acknowledge social or occupational “hazards” encountered along the way as having lasting effects, and did not internalize them as feelings of helplessness. However, the need to belong and establish identity was often encountered within the sample. It is believed that the cultural underpinnings and political deconstruction of Yugoslavia have acted as catalysts in the process of seeking a new identity for some refugees from former



Yugoslavia, as the old one was seriously undermined by the extinction of that country. When these needs for reconstruction of identity and forming national loyalty are coupled with the perception of being accepted, positive adjustment and consequently successful acculturation was reported. Indeed, Labrianidis, Lyberaki, Tinios and Hatziprokopiou (2004) found that across European receiving societies, immigrants from former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union seemed to be highly motivated to assume the identity of the particular receiving society and minimize the distinction between themselves and the hosts, which the authors attributed to their need to substitute the old identity for the new, as old has become invalid due to the deconstruction of the nation.

### **7.3.2 Victimization**

Dreading refugee status, however, seems to be something the whole sample has in common. Specifically, the attempt to assist the refugee population by providing additional support has contributed to the development of the societal views of Yugoslavs as helpless and victimized individuals (refugees), this group claims. This process is then perceived as disempowering, therefore hindering further “normalization” of their new life. For example, a vast majority of psychological literature implies that the feelings of anguish and despair, but in particular helplessness become internalized during the war, and when coupled with absence of decision making involved in the process of immigration and involuntariness of the movement, problems of adjustment are possible (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1987). Our sample, on the other hand, maintained an active involvement in the decision making, claiming voluntary movement due to perceived gains and expectations, but rejected the societal attempts to impose “helpless refugee” status upon them identifying this as inhumane and damaging.

### **7.3.3 Point of Reference**

Another interesting point noticed in the current research was that culture is used as a point of reference for establishing identity. Namely, a clear distinction between the individuals using the pre-war and during-the-war experiences as the point of reference was noticed, with the former group reporting a high degree of dissatisfaction with their current circumstances, and the latter regarding decision to immigrate as overtly positive and rewarding. Namely, individuals who used their pre-war occupational and societal status as the point of reference, were firm in their aspirations to achieve the same. Once obstacles were encountered these individuals were less able to deal with the stressors thus reported fewer psychological problems and issues with physical health. On the other hand individuals, who used their experiences of losing everything through the war and experiencing hard times, as a point of reference, were able to perceive the move as gainful regardless of the economic and/or social disadvantages they were facing. It seems that the latter group has an ability to view these negative changes as temporary and assess success on a step-by-step basis, while the former deals with the evaluation on an absolute scale, and are incapable of tolerating the invested time component. It is also possible that discriminatory practices are more salient for this group (former) as they constitute the population of individuals with high education degrees and who occupied white-collar jobs (Anh & Miller, 2000).

### **7.3.4 Methodological Issues and Limitations**

Qualitative methodology allowed for investigation of underlying beliefs and attitudes in respect to cultural shift, or absence of it (cultural shift), thus providing detailed accounts of acculturative practices for the sample of Yugoslav refugees entering Australia in the past decade. The use of interviews allowed for individual identification of problematic areas, concentrating on the aspects of acculturation and

employment of coping strategies, problems associated with Australian society and loss of family, employment opportunities in the new country and emotional and psychological well-being of the participants and their family members. Through this qualitative approach, participants were given the opportunity to identify personally the major area of problems and sources of dissatisfaction with the new life, for all members of the family, in order to identify core problems. The work that has been done on refugee populations across cultures and receiving societies is very scarce. It is often assumed that attempts to uncover psychological truths associated with the population might be even further damaging as it could evoke the re-living of appalling events prior to immigration, and consequently re-induce psychological trauma. In this light, this thesis helped to (1) contribute to the body of knowledge about the population in question; (2) offer alternative views to assessing the needs and aspirations of the population; and (3) provide an insight into the importance of consideration of cultural influences and challenge the notion of assuming universality in responding to minority groups and fitting them into the majority paradigm.

However, the study only documented women's perspectives of successfulness of acculturation and identification of major problem areas in respect to theirs, their partners' and their children's acculturative outcomes. This approach was deployed in this study for two reasons. Firstly, immigration per se, but also the process of evolving from refugee status, losing everything and attempting to re-establish oneself within the novel and seemingly incomprehensible environment, is an emotionally charged process, and as women are often more open to the concept of sharing their feelings (Barlow & Durand, 1998), it was believed that women would be more willing to provide detailed accounts of their and their families' responses to the novel situation. In addition, as it has been specified before, immigration itself is a process that is often accompanied by feelings of depression and anguish as a natural mourning response to

those left behind and loss of familiarity. Consequently, while it was believed that both men and women would be susceptible to displaying a range of emotions in response to these problems, the literature suggests that women are more attentive to and open to admitting to such feelings, while men are more likely to attribute the change to something or someone externally, and ascribe it to the environmental demands, refusing to discuss the feelings themselves. Thus it was believed that women might give more insightful accounts of acculturation effects. Furthermore, it was also assumed that children might lack vocabulary or be more reluctant to report such changes due to the feelings of guilt, shame, etc. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the problem was pervasive within the male population of immigrants, but often downplayed and swept under the carpet, as adequate institutional help is often not available, and because men tend to avoid seeking professional help in their dealings with emotional discomfort (Barlow & Durand, 1998). The present approach, however, also limits the findings, as validity and reliability of results in respect to male substrata and children's experiences of acculturative processes could be error-prone. Nonetheless, we believe that such an approach was necessary, as the manifestations of stress-related behaviors in relationship with men often includes changes in overt behavior, manifestations of outward-directed aggression, substance abuse and conduct disorders that are not necessarily recognized as cries for help and reaction to stress, but are often seen as mental health problems (Nugent & Williams, 2001)

### 7.3.5 Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

Present research has shown that the trend of assessing particular acculturative processes as more or less suitable and “better” than others, has failed as it does not take into account the complex interaction of cultural underpinnings of receiving and dispatching societies. Therefore the recommendation would be to look into the concept of “successful acculturation” as this research has only touched upon the issue.

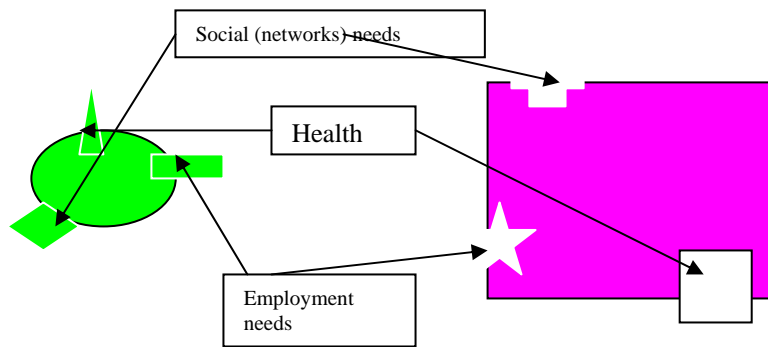


Figure 7.1 Unsuccessful Acculturation

Employment needs, Social needs and Health conditions are satisfied and there is a match between environmental needs and individual migrant's needs, without compromising own beliefs and values.

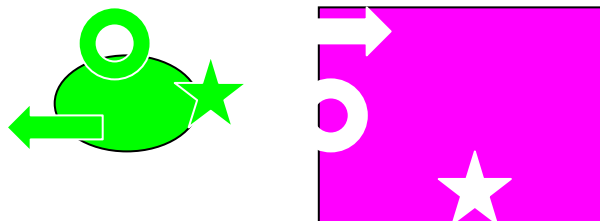


Figure 7.2 Successful acculturation

In addition, this research has stumbled upon the concept of redefining the identity in order to deal with the imminent loss of self through the process of immigration (Greenberg & Greenberg, 1989). This phenomenon would need some further investigation. It seems to be a very powerful tool in coping with the problems of acculturation, therefore further investigation in this field might be very beneficial.

Also, the concept of rebuilding lives and avoiding victimization as it applies to the refugee population, supporting the efforts to break out of the circle of helplessness, and re-establishing basic human dignity by obtaining employment, nurturing extended social networks and bringing families together, might be all the refugee populations need. As this seems to apply to the population of refugees from former Yugoslavia, further research with other cultural groups is needed. Finally, investigating the phenomenon from the male perspective would also be something to investigate further.

In the literature to date, subtle cultural differences and intricacies, although proclaimed by some researchers, are often ignored. More specifically, within the concept of acculturative processes that was the underlying theme throughout this thesis, generalizations alleged through existing theoretical rationales have created a number of assumptions that have served as a foundation for existing immigration policies and created a vicious cycle for many new immigrants. Acculturation is a subjective process and there is a need to gather more factual knowledge about the process rather than to rely on general assumptions. These findings may offer some further insight into the problematic nature of immigration and help devise fair and efficient migratory policies that would be more beneficial for both hosts and new arrivals.

## Appendix I - Indicative Questions and Prompts

- **Could you tell me a little about your family?**  
How many people are there in your household? Who are they? Do you have children? What are their ages?
- **Could you please describe what life was like for you and your family when you lived in Yugoslavia?**  
Where did you live? What work did you/ your husband do? What things did you like to do?
- **Tell me what life is like for you now in Australia.**  
Where are you living? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?
- **What is life like for other members of your family in Australia?**  
What has changed for them since coming to Australia? What do they like about it? What do they dislike about it?
- **Could you tell me more about how you (you and your family members) have been feeling since arriving in Australia?**  
What are your personal feelings associated with life in Australia? (Do you feel important or as nobody; empty or satisfied etc.?) And how would you describe your individual family members in respect to their emotional states? Have they/ you changed as individuals? Has their/ yours interaction with each other and others changed - in what respect? Why?
- **When life is difficult, what sorts of things do you do to cope?**  
How often and in which situations do you/ your family members use COPING SKILLS -negotiation; selective ignoring; optimistic comparison and resignation? Describe your/ your family's social support network. Do you have any communication problems with the others or your family members? Do they? Who is responsible for your current situation and who can either improve or destroy it? Who is the head of the family according to you? And your individual family members?
- **What things do your family members do to cope with difficulties?**
- **How much is financial independence important to you and your family members? Explain.**  
Could you elaborate on what are your/ your family- members' views on becoming self- efficient, independent and the contributor to the society? financial independence? Achieving respectable and gainful employment? How would you classify your current financial situation and are you satisfied with it. How would you/they describe quality of your(s) working lives?
- **How would you/they describe quality of your(s) lives in Australia?**

How would you evaluate your environment? And your individual family members? What about your (family's) views on your family life? Education opportunities and aspirations? Do you/ your family members believe that your human rights are guaranteed in this society?



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