

Together but Separated: The Acculturation Experience of Latin American Women in Australia

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Immigrants to a new land face significant acculturation issues. Although definitions of acculturation reflect a mutual change, most research and positioning considers this to be, mostly, a one-way process. It is also perceived as a process that seems to have an end point, and is reasonably comparable across all members of a group. In the current research, the position of 13 Latin American immigrant women, with an average of 32 years in Australia, is considered. Data from interviews indicated that acculturation is still an ongoing process for these women, with many barriers imposed. English language proficiency is seen as a key element for them to integrate, but they still face issues of overt and covert discrimination on grounds of accent and skin colour and expectations of assimilation. The challenges of acculturation are compounded for the women as they were often excluded from the original decisions to emigrate, had to establish a new household and life – but did not have the necessary formal and informal social support networks on which to draw.

Although individuals immigrate for diverse reasons and within complex contexts, the decision is often connected to the hope of more satisfactory conditions of life in the new country and a better future for their children. The adaptation processes of immigrants in a distant culture represent a complex readjustment of taken-for-granted values, ideals, and ways of behaving and expressing thoughts and emotions.

When individuals seek to adjust to a different culture, acculturation takes place. Acculturation is a phenomenon experienced not only by immigrants, but also by the receiving society, who is affected by new members from other socio-cultural backgrounds. Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) indicated that acculturation was the “phenomena which results from when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149).

John W. Berry, who explained immigrants’ adjustment as the result of a relatively free-choice strategy (Berry, 1980, 1990, 1997), developed one of the most cited models of acculturation. Berry (1990)

identified four possible acculturation outcomes: integration (when immigrants decide to balance and incorporate parts of the broader culture while maintaining their ethnic culture and identity), assimilation (when immigrants do not maintain their ethnic background and adopt the receiving society’s values and culture), separation (when immigrants place great value on their own ethnic background and try to avoid interaction with mainstreamers), or marginalisation (when immigrants do not have any interest in interacting with the broader society). According to Berry, acculturation is observed as the result of the selection of a specific strategy by the immigrants.

Although Berry (1990) suggested that most immigrants are relatively free to select an adjustment strategy, the acculturation process is a phenomenon where intra and intergroup relations take place, and where immigrants and the host society attitudes meet and relate. The dominant society’s expectations of immigrants’ acculturation greatly impact on the final outcomes and the place immigrants have in the host country. According to Sonn and Fisher (2005), acculturation is not the outcome of a unidirectional process, rather a bi-directional social exchange where immigrants and host

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

A key phenomenon leading to a positive adaptation among immigrants is the ways they balance the cultural maintenance and the contact interaction with the new society (Berry, 2005; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Phinney, 2002). However, the integration outcome only takes place when minority groups adopt some values of the receiving community, while the dominant group accepts institutional and cultural changes that would reflect the needs of a multicultural society. As Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992) indicated, a multicultural environment needs to establish certain conditions to promote integration: an extensive acceptance and freedom to express and maintain cultural diversity; relatively low levels of discrimination and racism, positive attitudes among different ethno cultural groups; and a certain level of identification with the main receiving society.

Immigrants' adjustment outcomes are a direct result of a combination of factors, some of them developed prior to relocation – such as reasons and contexts that lead to immigration, age, educational background, knowledge of the host country's language and gender (Berry, 1997) or while the acculturation takes place – such as intergroup relationships (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) where immigrants and host members' attitudes and expectations over acculturation influence each other (Horenczyk, 1997; Leong, 2008; Nesdale, 2002).

Gender and its Impact on Acculturation

While general patterns related to international immigration and acculturation outcomes have been studied, little work has focussed on the gendered nature of the immigrant experience. According to some

researchers (e.g., Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997), gender compounds the immigration and acculturation outcomes, as immigrant women often experience greater hardships than immigrant men.

As the academic interest in female immigration emerged in the United States during the 1970s (Pedraza, 1991; Sinke, 2006), researchers were able to identify that women, especially from minority groups, often experienced discrimination and a complex combination of challenges, struggles and responsibilities while adjusting to a new country (Dion & Dion, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Staab, 2004; Sullivan, 1984; Toro-Morn, 1995). This often has negative impacts on their lives, especially in the case of immigrant mothers, who without family support or new established social networks in the new country had to combine an overloaded routine of outside work, domestic duties and childcare (Fernández Kelly, 2005; Raijman & Semyonov, 1997).

The complex phenomenon involved in the adjustment of immigrant women needs to be investigated further – especially as the experiences of immigrant women to Australia is little evident in the extant literature. Although there is some academic data analysing the acculturation process of Latin Americans in Australia (Amézquita, Amézquita, & Vittorino, 1995; Botzenhart, 2006; Lopez, Haigh, & Burney, 2004) and the subsequent identity changes of their children (Vittorino, 2003; Zevallos, 2003, 2004), research related to Latin women's acculturation experiences is scarce (Moraes-Gorecki, 1991) and mostly published within community centres as brief reports (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, 1985; D'Mello, 1982; Stone, Morales, & Cortes, 1996).

Latin American Immigration to Australia

From the late 1960s onwards, Australian officials were sent to South America to develop immigration programs in order to increase the Australian population. The major Latin American immigration wave occurred during the

1970s and 1980s. After that period, the number of Latin immigrants stabilised, a change related to the end of dictatorships in most affected countries and more favourable economic conditions. The Latin immigration in Australia can be divided in three major periods of time, occurring during the late 1960s, and then during the 1970s and the 1980s. Most Latin American immigrants related two main causes to leave their countries: economic hardships and political persecution (Botzenhart, 2006).

The understanding of the complex – and often conflictive – factors involved in Latin American women's adaptation to Australian labour and socio-cultural contexts seems necessary in order to pinpoint when, how and why immigrant women experienced challenges and conflicts, the opportunities they had to resolve them and what could be suggested to facilitate a better acculturation outcome of immigrant women in Australia. This research, therefore, aimed to explore how Latin American women experienced immigration and acculturation processes; the impact of these on their personal and professional lives; and the perceived acculturation outcomes for them.

Method

Participants

This paper presents findings from interviews with 13 South American immigrants in Melbourne (between the ages of 45 – 75 years) who moved to Australia in the late 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's. At the time of the research, these women had been living in Australia for an average of 32 years. All participants are natives of Spanish-speaking countries in South America (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay). Participants were recruited through a number of social agencies and through responses from Spanish language radio interviews. Participants had to have come to Australia as adults, and had lived in Australia for at least 20 years.

Instruments and Procedure

Qualitative data in the form of personal

narratives and responses to questions were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was developed within a phenomenological perspective, expecting to derive interpretations and not general facts or universal laws. This approach facilitates the intersection of personal biographies, specific historical context and broader cultural and social values (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Willig, 2001). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative methodology developed by Jonathan Smith specifically for psychological research. This methodology takes an idiographic approach and – in contrast to nomothetic studies – seeks to understand contingent, specific and subjective phenomena. IPA assists the researcher to understand how and why individuals experience certain phenomena, being able to derive main themes and sub themes related to the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Much of the previous literature on immigration and acculturation provides an understanding of the impact of separate variables. From this research it was possible to identify the compounded effects of low levels of English knowledge, restricted work and educational opportunities, limited social and family support in Australia, unaffordable childcare services, and economic constraints on the ongoing acculturation processes of the participants.

Language, Education and Labour Challenges

Women with low levels of education and limited communicational skills in English were consigned to work at factories or cleaning services. The high concentration of immigrant women in semi-skilled or unskilled positions in Australia was identified by many authors (Alcorso, 1991, 1995; Amézquita et al., 1995; Cox, Jobson, & Martin, 1976; Pettman, 1992; Stone et al., 1996). Similarly, this study found that immigrant women often deal with harsh

psychological and physical consequences of these work settings. Within this scenario, individuals rarely feel rewarded and work long hours under unpleasant, stressful and, sometimes, unhealthy conditions. This outcome negatively impacted on women's psychological wellbeing, often leading to feelings of sadness, helplessness, frustration and stress. Apart from working under difficult conditions, these women were also expected to run the households and look after the children, following traditional gender roles:

My first job was as a cleaner, there I cried the biggest tears of my life. Later I started working at the factories and that was another storm to pass through. I would sit to work at the factory, and I wouldn't be able to even look at my side! (...) You work like an animal until you reach home completely exhausted! On top of that, I had my own family, so I would go home and kept on working... (Mara²)

Overcharged with responsibilities, the only available time they had to pursue any educational training was after work. The restricted access to low fees childcare services, combined with no established family or social support networks in Australia worked as a trap for the immigrant women who were willing to upgrade their professional and educational skills:

I felt particularly frustrated because the years passed and I couldn't finish my education. Here I had the barrier of the kids! Because I didn't have anyone who could take care of them! Now, I am 53 years old and I'm trying to take some courses, but you find that the language barrier is still there. That you are still missing something in English... (Mara)

Similar barriers to achieving personal and

labour outcomes by immigrant women in Sydney were identified by Cox et al. (1976) who concluded that childcare represented the major problem working immigrant women face in Australia. Work, education and language outcomes were often related to their domestic reality and the available resources to assist them with childcare. According to Cox et al., Australian government policies overlooked the needs of working women by not fully considering the difficulties and traumas of immigrating to a new country with no family or social support resources, balancing paid work with domestic responsibilities.

Although most of the women saw English language facility as a key to integration in Australia, their capacity to pursue language education was directly connected to the availability of free classes and childcare services. During the 1970s, free language programs were offered during the first two years after arrival. This was not very helpful to most participants, who often did not recognise the availability, or who had other priorities during the first couple of years in Australia. Looking for permanent and affordable accommodation, finding job offers, schools for their children, and taking care of domestic and childcare duties represented common priorities for most of them. When they felt more adjusted to their new reality, and were able to attend English classes, frequently the first two years had already passed and the classes were no longer free. Apart from that ineffective timing, the lack of low fee childcare services was identified as another negative factor compounding the language learning process. Most participants, as new immigrants, had neither relatives nor an established social support networks to rely on and ask for assistance from. Consequently, even if they were motivated and willing to pursue further language and professional training, they often did not have many opportunities to do so.

As D'Mello (1982) indicated, many immigrant women who worked in factories, cleaning services or hospitality could not afford

to pay regular childcare fees. Apart from receiving low wages, they also had to face the high costs and consequences of the international relocation. Moreover, immigrant families often added to their expenses some kind of financial help to relatives who remained in their country of origin. According to the author, even in the cases when immigrants can afford to pay low childcare fees, most kindergartens and day care services in Victoria do not give working parents – especially those who work in factories – the opportunity to match their working hours to the opening and closing times of the centres.

As a result of women's limited English, they remained in manufacturing and cleaning jobs for many years, often experiencing low levels of self-satisfaction, feeling helpless and isolated:

I used to cry, cry and cry. I cried so much because I didn't know the language and I didn't have any relatives. I couldn't communicate here. My life was work at the factory – what my mum always feared us to do - and home, nothing else. I couldn't understand the TV, I couldn't read, it was very difficult to learn it. With time, I overcame the language problems by studying everyday by myself, or with my kids, using the dictionary all the time. But it was hard...(Stella)

I worked at the factory for 28 years. I stayed there because it was good that I could go back home quickly to be with the kids. I couldn't take any English classes because I had to go back home and take care of the kids, my husband used to work many more hours than me and I couldn't leave them alone all day. I started taking some classes close to home and I used to take the kids along

with me. The problem is that the kids were already tired after 7 hours of school, feeling hungry, and ...it didn't work. The lack of family support also affected me in the sense that I didn't have time to study English, so that's why I stayed at the factory. Whatever English I learnt I did it listening to people at the factories, a very bad spoken English, a language spoken by immigrants...talking like Tarzan! (Rita).

Social Challenges

According to Vega, Kolody and Valle (1987), the satisfactory adjustment of immigrants is also related to their capacity to resolve interpersonal stressors associated with breaking-up social networks in the homeland and replacing them in the new country. The relevance of immigrants' social resources and the relationship with mental health outcomes was the research focus of many authors (e.g., Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Lin & Ensel, 1989; Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; Thoits, 1982; Vega et al., 1987) while others have investigated the impact of specific ethnic support from immigrants' own community (e.g., Lopez et al., 2004; Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Noh & Avison, 1996; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999). As participants were not able to fully express thoughts and feelings in English, they tended to socialise with co-nationals, or other Spanish-speaking individuals in Australia. As a result, they were cut-off from interacting informally with members of the host society. Some women described the impact of limited language skills on their social life:

I don't feel integrated in Australia because I don't have friends. I have some English-speaking friends, but very few, we can't talk and have a conversation. I don't know how to express myself as I haven't

studied English...I've been living in this house for 3 years and I don't exchange anything else than "good morning" and "bye bye" with the neighbours. My friends are only Spanish-speaking people and Latinos (Lucia)

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

Although other participants improved their skills in English and reached efficient communication levels, they constantly reported not feeling part of the broader society, not having close relationships with Anglo-Australians and facing different types of discrimination and segregation. According to Leslie (1992), it would be naïve to simply suggest immigrants to establish stronger social networks with individuals from the host society if the mainstream culture is not genuinely open to immigrants and their cultural heritage. The limited identification with Australian culture and the restricted friendship with members from the broader society was a common phenomenon among the Latin American women who participated in this study:

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

Arabs, Argentineans with Argentineans... because Australia doesn't deliver something strong (Isabel)

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

One always has that thing of being the "wog"... Even if you speak the language, even if you are a citizen (...) you are always treated as you are not from here (Dora)

The lack of close relationships between Latin American and members from the broader community was exacerbated by discrimination episodes frequently related to immigrants' English skills or, most frequently, accent:

Discrimination? The accent might be. I felt it when I applied for a position at a phone company. They said that my accent was too strong (she laughs). That was discrimination! I said that my accent could be strong, but that I was speaking in perfect English with them! Afterwards I said "no... it can't be possible"...these are moments that make you realise that "no...I can't be one of them" (Laura)

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

If you apply to any job and you don't speak 100% or you do it with

an accent, you are lower than the rest. Discrimination is in everything you do. Then, you feel upset, helpless...I wonder why I can't do anything else...why I can't (Mara)

Conflictive experiences due to participants' accent were frequently reported as a continuous struggle. Language and accent-related discrimination have been analysed by various authors (Alcorso, 1989; Colic-Peisker, 2002; Stein, 1984) working with non-English-speaking immigrants in Australia. As Colic-Peisker indicated, language had been a major setback for many immigrants. Although communication skills were not an entry requirement during the 1960's and 1970's in Australia, the low levels of English knowledge once in the host country represented a severe integration barrier. As the author indicated, high levels of communicative English might not be indispensable for unskilled or low paid jobs, but without good language mastery immigrants remained alienated and unable to feel "at home".

Colic-Peisker (2002) also indicated that immigrants in Australia are recognised and "ranked" as members of diverse ethnic groups according to their own ethnic language and accent in English. Ethnic languages and accents are often interpreted as a mark of immigrants' social and labour status. In most cases, immigrants with non-Australian native English accents are still observed as "cultural insiders" while non-native English speakers (carrying any level of foreign accent) are considered as "cultural outsiders". Native English language is considered, then, as a relatively hidden, but strong core value for anyone to fully belong to the Australian nation. This phenomenon was also pinpointed by Callan and Gallois (1987), indicating the rejection of foreign-accented speech by Anglo-Australian listeners, opposed to the positive reception to educated British accents. The authors observed that most immigrant groups experienced some level of pressure to perform

or imitate the English accent of the broader community in order to feel completely integrated to Australia.

The gender factor aggravated the challenges of the acculturation process. Although women's place in society have experienced a major change since the 1970s with their large incorporation to the labour market, advanced birth control methods, and the influence of feminist values, Latin American women are still under the influence of traditional family values (Amézquita et al., 1995; Iebra Aizpurúa, Jablonski, & Féres-Carneiro, 2007). This was common among participants:

Although I call myself a feminist, I still do 3 or 5 times more things at home than my husband to maintain all the things that I want, my independence, and at the end I maintain everything! Women are absolutely overcharged of duties. I see myself as a fighter, as the head of the family, that's why I've tried to overcome the difficulties. I believe that if the woman breaks down, all the rest breaks down. Sometimes I say "I am a weak-strong person". Always fighting for our kids, for our families, with the fact of being an immigrant... (Elsa)

As a woman in Uruguay you are in charge of all the domestic duties, and if you decide to work outside home...then, patience! You still have to do everything the same way! That is your role, that is your function! But women here still work a lot. I think that women here are overcharged of duties, I see it in my family (Iris)

These factors pushed women to a difficult reality, juggling between outside paid work, domestic and childcare duties. Although women have gained many rights and social spaces in

today's world, their daily routines have become more complex, demanding and often conflictive (Darvishpour, 1999; Rajiman & Semyonov, 1997). The maintenance of traditional gender values within Latin American immigrant families have then compounded the challenges encountered in Australia due to the accumulation of duties without any kind of support from family, friends or childcare services.

The Compounding Effects of the Acculturation Challenges on Women's Lives

As a result of the conditions and experiences encountered while adjusting to Australia, participants experienced limited degrees of integration to the broader Australian community. Frequently, feelings of homesickness and perceived social distance between host and immigrants' values and culture, limited skills in English and discrimination episodes worked as influential factors impacting on the acculturation outcome. Apart from that, the combination of low levels of education, lack of childcare services, and limited family and social support deeply impacted on immigrants' availability to learn the host country's language, a key factor towards integration:

I don't feel integrated 100%. You really have to spend time with English-speaking people, be integrated. But I feel there is always a barrier, maybe because I didn't work in anything professional. It's like you feel limited, you can enjoy the Australian day but you know you were not born here, and my kids, although they were born here, they don't feel it either (Laura)

My own adaptation was very difficult, because you have the language barrier, and also the fact that I couldn't finish with my education. That was really difficult to me. On the other side, it's the adaptation process to

another culture. I found Australians and their culture much colder than us, that kind of coldness that you don't know how to brake into. Now it's different. Although I don't feel integrated I feel 100% adapted (Mara).

Despite adjusting to Australian life, most women were feeling socially separated from the broader community, regardless their level of English, labour outcomes or motivation to integrate. The feeling that Australian mentality does not absorb and integrate immigrants' background and life stories as part of the national picture was a frequent comment. Many indicated that, although they worked towards their own integration process, they often did not feel accepted as equal members of the Australian society:

My adaptation happened with tears of blood. Because they don't accept you, even if you speak the language and you are a citizen. It was hard (Dora)

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

Until today I say that I am adapted and not. Slowly we started getting into the society, slowly...slowly. I do all that is necessary here and go everywhere. But I don't stop thinking about my things in Argentina, my friends, the music, the barbecues and all our food, ...our things... I'm here and I cry! I'm there and I cry!...it's something that you can't get out

of your mind... (Alma)

Conclusions

Immigration and acculturation are certainly challenging transitions in life. However, these experiences do not necessarily need to translate into conflictive and traumatic issues. Negative acculturation outcomes take place if immigrants do not possess the skills and opportunities to overcome the relocation and acculturation challenges, and if the receiving society is not prepared to support and integrate minority members into its social, educational, labour and political environments. The main findings of this research indicate that many of the issues and conflicts encountered by this group of 13 Latin American immigrant women, after an average of 32 years in Australia, remained unresolved and emotionally challenging.

Findings showed not only that acculturation represented a continuous process for immigrants – not just an outcome – but also that it should be better understood as a two (rather than one) dimensional process rather than just one. According to Ward (1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993), Berry's acculturation model should be distinguished into two separate domains: psychological (individuals' levels of mental health, psychological wellbeing and personal satisfaction in the new country) and socio-cultural adaptation (connected to a social learning framework, refers to the acquisition of adequate social skills and behaviours to successfully adapt to daily routines in the new environment). Ward (1996, 1997) made the distinction between acculturation processes and the different strategies immigrants follow is not clear in most research on acculturation and needs further investigation. This research's participants presented low levels of both, socio-cultural and psychological adaptation.

Due to the specific challenges encountered in Australia and their

compounding effects, many factors necessary for a positive integration remained unresolved for these women. Limited language knowledge skills, lack of social and family support, and restricted childcare services often translated into a handicap for women's integration to Australia. As a result, many women not only remained trapped within unskilled or semi-skilled services, interacting mainly with other immigrants in similar conditions, but also did not have the resources to deal with the emotional consequences of those conflictive issues. As a consequence of not being able to integrate into other labour and socio-cultural environments, participants suffered restricted levels of personal satisfaction with their lives as members of a new society. The Latin American women interviewed in this study learnt to adjust themselves to life conditions in Australia, but the limitations experienced while exchanging with the broader community remained mostly unsettled. Alma's narrative: "*I'm here and I cry, I'm there and I cry...it's something that you can't get out of your mind*" is a way to exemplify this phenomenon. To most of them, acculturation represented a process and a difficult emotional transition that continues to confront them. Thirty-two years later, participants still felt that being an immigrant woman in Australia was a never-ending experience, mostly associated with its demands and the unavailable resources to find a positive psychological and practical resolution. As Laura described, the idea of moving to Australia was part of an adventure, but one for which she paid a high personal and emotional price. The experience "*still goes on*", as she explained while breaking into tears.

Another finding is directly connected to the legacy of the White Australia policy and the assimilation ideals and its impact on the expectations held by members of the mainstream society towards immigrants. Although Australia has officially embraced the ideology of multiculturalism, seeking the integration of immigrants from all ethnic backgrounds, participants experience a different

reality. After more than three decades in Australia, many women still felt like outsiders, not treated as locals by the broader community. Questions from host members regarding language skills, accent, skin colour, ethnic background or their reasons to immigrate worked as constant reminders that they were different and not considered members of the Australian community. In spite of Australia's multicultural discourse, the official goal to integrate immigrants is daily translated to an expectation of assimilation. Informally, being Australian is still associated to the white Anglo-Saxon identity (Colic-Peisker, 2002, 2005; Zevallos, 2003, 2004).

Accepting and following assimilation in Australia would signify on immigrants' giving up their own ethnic identity and the connections to Latin American values and ways of behaving. Living in a community that expects minority members to assimilate and give up their sense of self could lead to high levels of personal conflicts. As many participants experienced and acknowledged, to successfully integrate to a new country immigrants need to efficiently speak the dominant language and to possess the necessary labour and social skills to become a contributing member of the society. However, this research showed that those factors are not enough to be considered locals in Australia. For that to take place, immigrants need to reduce as much as possible their ethnic differences, looking, talking and behaving as close as possible to members of the mainstream. The contradiction between an official political discourse supporting integration and the daily reality immigrants faced – pushed to assimilate – reinforced the cultural distances between Australian values and immigrants' sense of identity.

The lack of connections with the Australian community – due to perceived cultural distances or discrimination episodes – also reflected on a constant melancholy, loss and frustration for not being able to be accepted and feel “at home” after spending

most part of their lives in Australia. According to Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999), psychological adaptation is necessary to cope with several types of stress encountered in inter-cultural interactions. It is strongly predicted by effective sources of social support. The lack of family support in the new country or restricted relationships with members of the mainstream community had a negative impact on participants' wellbeing, as Elsa described:

“It's always a continuous fight, you have to be on top of everything, because you don't have any other kind of support. Here, you don't have a grandmother or an auntie or anyone to share all that involves kids, work...marriage. It's a bit “too much” just for one self!”

Acculturation proved to be a difficult process to most participants, as summarised by Lucia:

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

As a result, women remained socially isolated from the mainstream society. Being different was perceived as a negative phenomenon by both dominant and minority groups and translated, over time, into social separation and the reinforcement of a sense of rejection. These issues remained unresolved to most participants, who although recognised the benefits of immigration to Australia, were not able to feel accepted and feel at home after more than three decades.

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Note

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