

Acculturation stress and academic performance among foreign-born Armenian youth in the
United States and Canada: an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

Acculturation stress and academic performance among foreign-born Armenian youth in the United States and Canada: an exploratory study
Sarine Karilian-Konyalian

The purpose of this research is to better understand the acculturation process and academic performance as experienced by a small group of foreign-born Armenian youth in Montreal, as a case study of immigrant youth in relation to their experiences of acculturative stress and its manifestations - psychologically, linguistically, socially and on the level of academic performance, as they tell their stories.

The process of acculturation and the role played by the school, peers and parents was examined through an exploratory study interviewing 4 graduates from French language public schools in Montreal and 4 graduates of an Armenian community high school in Montreal. Participants were between ages 18 to 31. The findings of acculturation studies on foreign-born Armenian students in the U.S.A. were used to set a foundation and as a guideline for conducting similar research among foreign-born Armenian youth in Montreal. The narratives illustrate the process of acculturation of these eight Armenian foreign-born youth who completed their high school in Montreal as they recount their experiences of the role of schooling and family in this process.

Results show that there is no apparent negative effect on academic performance that stems from acculturation stress experienced by the eight participants in this study. Language was one area of major initial difficulty. All participants exhibited areas of acculturation stress which were manifested in different ways. The acculturative strategy adopted by each participant was that of integration and was not influenced by the degree of ethnic identity, the country of origin nor the type of schooling in Montreal. Gender did not play a major role in influencing acculturation stress. Students are satisfied that they did well academically although they all experienced the effect of cultural differences and initially some degree of linguistic incompetence. The study has implications for teachers, school counsellors and school administrators.

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Ultimately, my deepest gratitude goes to my Lord Jesus without whom I can do nothing but through whom I can do all things.

DEDICATION

To my grandfather.

I would like to dedicate this work to Mr. Krikor Konyalian, the first person who taught me how to pray, how to memorize scripture and trust God; a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, whose stories of many months of intense suffering in the barren desert reveal the merciful, protective hand of God.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Immigrating from one country to another, individuals can go through many changes. These changes include adapting to a new community, getting used to a new city or town, finding and adapting to new employment and eventually feeling a sense of belonging. Whatever the reason for the move, immigrants must eventually feel part of their newly found community in order to effectively participate and function as citizens. Many of the changes that individuals experience upon immigration may include various kinds of stress.

Immigrant youth experience additional stress as they must adapt to a new school environment, new teachers, friends, possibly a new language, traditions, mentality as well as acceptable and unacceptable behavioural patterns. These additional hurdles that must be overcome by foreign-born youth in a host culture often result in stress that manifests itself in different ways affecting different areas of a youth's life (see definitions of concepts in Appendix A).

Socialization is the continuous process by which individuals internalize information, behaviour patterns and approved values of their particular social or ethnic group; when the socialization is internalized, it becomes the individual's culture to the extent that it encompasses all learning experiences whether in informal or formal situations. During one's lifetime, members of one society may find themselves in a situation where they must adopt new 'appropriate' behaviours and 'approved' values from another culture. Individuals that experience this need to adapt to a new culture may need to meet certain 'demands' of the culture they have become a part of. Acculturation refers to the process which involves the learning of

new social culture and enables individuals who have previously been socialized in one particular group to become an 'accepted' member of another (Westby-Gibson, 1965). Acculturation stress is defined as the "cumulative stress experienced by the immigrant during the acculturation process. The immigrant needs to make the adjustment and adapt to all the possible changes pertaining to the differences between the host culture and the culture of origin." (Tahmassian, 2003, p.60). A lower level of academic performance is one important potential manifestation of acculturation stress that will be explored.

Research Question

The objective of this study, the main research question, is to gain a better understanding of the acculturation process and how it affects academic performance as experienced and recounted by a small group of immigrant Armenian youth in Montreal. The purpose is to understand whether immigrant youth, now young adults of ages 21 to 31 remember any experience of acculturative stress and its manifestations - psychologically, linguistically, socially and on the level of their academic performance while in high school. In this exploratory study, I propose to examine this question through interviews with foreign-born Armenian students who have graduated from both non-Armenian high schools and an Armenian community high school in Montreal.

Much research exists on acculturation stress in relation to adaptation methods, health issues and self-esteem. The literature discusses the topic of acculturation stress in general in the lives of immigrants from various ethnic backgrounds. Different aspects of the acculturative process include the psychological effects it may have on an individual (anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, withdrawal, aggression), as well as linguistic difficulties that proceed along

with issues of personal and ethnic identity. Other features are the effects that family and peers may have on the immigrant youth's acculturation. Once these issues are reviewed in the general context, they will be examined in the research done among foreign-born Armenian youth in the United States. Other aspects of the study touch on topics of how schools respond to the acculturation stress experienced by foreign-born youth. The findings of the research performed in the United States among Armenians will then be used as a reference for the study of Armenians in Montreal.

The following section presents a narrative of my own experiences as an example of the acculturative struggles of a foreign-born Armenian youth now living in Montreal.

Personal Experience

The journey towards hyphenation

My personal experience of growing up and moving to Montreal tells a story that entails the journey of enculturation, acculturation, resistance to acculturate, acculturation stress and the founding of an ethnic identity outside the borders of my homeland yet within the very core of my ancestral inheritance.

I am an Armenian. For most Armenians living in the Diaspora, the word *Armenian* is usually attached to another word by means of a hyphen, through which it becomes complete, identified or classified as a certain *kind* of Armenian. For example, American-Armenian, Canadian-Armenian, or Lebanese-Armenian. My parents are considered Lebanese-Armenians since they were born and brought up in Lebanon, as members of the Armenian diasporic community in Lebanon. I however was born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a country not classified as part of the typical Armenian diaspora where Armenians flock and are found in large

communities. Although my family lived away from both the Armenian homeland and the typical diaspora, I still identified myself as Armenian, *simply* Armenian. The only additional classification I could give myself was that of a third-generation survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Growing up, whenever I was asked who I was or where I came from, I really did not know where to start. I was born and brought up in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, had a Lebanese passport, had never lived in Lebanon, attended a British International school, on my way to immigrate to Canada, yet I was Armenian. Not so easy to explain.

Living outside of what is considered part of the typical Armenian diaspora, my family developed over the years a sense of “armenianness”, the degree of which was decided by my parents based on the culture and heritage they had received from their parents in Lebanon. Although, as children, my sister and I attended an English speaking international school in Riyadh, we were taught to speak Armenian at home. My mother also taught us how to read and write in Armenian, alongside teaching us our heritage, history and even the geography of our homeland. Recurrent visits to family in Lebanon was our source of exposure to ‘real’ diasporan Armenian culture, which encompassed typical family gatherings, Armenian jokes, food, church and language.

At the age of 16, we first immigrated to Montreal, Canada, where, not only was I exposed to my diasporan fellow Armenians but also to a new host culture to which to adapt. With our immigration to Montreal came the need to adapt to a different degree of “armenianness” that I was used to as I was now faced with two different arenas of adaptation; thus was born in me the simultaneous development of enculturation and acculturation in its true sense. At church, or with immediate relatives I experienced the pressure of needing to speak Armenian without an accent, thus demonstrating a ‘oneness’ or ‘in-group’ impression for both myself and my fellow

Armenian comrades. Similar pressures or stresses existed for the acquisition of the French language that we had to learn at school. Moreover, the burden of needing to meet the demands of the host culture with peers at school also prevailed and manifested in terms of fashion, mentality and behaviour. As a result, the comforting environment of “armenianness” in which I was nurtured was now being transformed into a sense of “in-betweenness”, where I wanted to feel like I belonged somewhere but somehow felt like an ‘outsider’ to both my Montreal Armenian diaspora and to the Canadian host culture in Montreal, Quebec. I was thus faced with the necessity of making a decision of how I was going to integrate.

The year following our move to Canada, we moved again, this time to the Middle East for personal family reasons. Thus, after that one year of living in Montreal, we moved to Lebanon, where we resided for six years before our final move to Canada (the present). In Lebanon, I was able to nourish my notion of “armenianness” - that began in Riyadh and was built upon in Montreal - to a higher level thus permitting the roots of my heritage to be more grounded in my Armenian identity due to exposure to other Armenians, family members and Armenian church.

Living in Lebanon and being surrounded by an Arab community generated in me the need to adhere more closely to my “armenianness”, resisting much integration into the Arab Lebanese host culture since I lacked knowledge of both the culture and the Arabic language. Furthermore, my unwillingness to leave Montreal fuelled a resistance to acculturate into the host Lebanese culture; I therefore adhered more closely to the Armenian community.

Six years later, our final move to Montreal coincided with, yet again, acculturative stresses, a degree which, until now had not been experienced. At this point, I was 21 years old. My plans involved continuing my higher education and plunging into the workforce. Being

rusty with my knowledge of French and dilettante with any form of work experience, there was a confidence level I had to attain. To contribute to the stress, my family was not familiar or fluent in the French language and therefore, as a family, we were advised to attend special classes for immigrants, intended at helping us to learn French thus providing for us the necessary tools in order to function as citizens in this city. Going to these French language classes helped us to feel comfortable as we met people who were just like us – going through the same linguistic struggles and difficulty adapting. In a way, these classes helped to ease the stresses of everyday life while adapting in Montreal as they served as a kind of diversion, a solace. In addition, the teachers were very helpful in providing job information and other important information that proved to be useful for everyday life in Montreal.

As a family, we all struggled with unemployment due to the absence of Canadian experience and the lack of fluency in the French language. This was of course a major source of stress. Seeing my father stressed and even worried about how he was going to find work was upsetting and the fact that he could not practice his profession in Quebec was hard to come to terms with; the situation was demobilizing and often times very discouraging – in some way or another, everyone in the family was affected. However, we had immediate family in Montreal, as well as church friends who we had recently met from the Armenian church we had decided to start attending. The small, tightly knit social community that we had was, for us, comforting and served as a catalyst in our adaptation into the host community for both schooling and employment, as it was, for us, a source for a boost of confidence.

Academically speaking, both my sister and I attended university in Montreal. The difficulties that I experienced were on the level of self-esteem where there was an initial subconscious feeling of needing to “prove” myself since I was from another country and had

obtained my credentials from a foreign university. Often times I would avoid class participation because of this very reason; I was not confident that I was 'just like the others'. Not having any friends in the university or any prior knowledge of how courses and exams could be, I was left to 'tough it up' and find out on my own how to manage as a student in a different educational setting. This was indeed stressful.

Over the years, friendships were developed, we felt like we belonged somewhere both as Armenians and as Canadians, and have found our place as citizens in Montreal. Against the odds of having moved country several times, with the passing of time and conscious effort, the sense of belonging was restored. Canada is now the country of which I am considered a citizen. I have come to understand the meaning of the hyphenated ethnic identity. I can now consider myself a Canadian-Armenian as I am dutiful to both cultures.

The journey still continues.

Rationale

Additional experiences while in Montreal, Canada, include the opportunity of working with Armenian youth between the ages of 12-16. I have observed differences between those teenagers who have immigrated to Montreal and those who have lived here for most of their lives or were born in Montreal. The differences I have noted have been behavioural (like withdrawn individuals as well as others with self-esteem issues) as well as linguistic. My observation clearly pointed to a need to explore acculturative stress and academic performance.

Most schools in North America have to deal with integrating immigrant students. Almost every school whether they are ordinary public schools or immersion schools, face issues where the school must be prepared to promote and facilitate adaptation as well as lighten and assuage

the stresses that accompany this process of adjustment in a new community. According to the general literature, academic performance is very much linked with student well being, therefore once we are able to understand the stresses that students face because of the struggles they encounter while adapting to their new school, teachers, friends, language, and community - we will be able to suggest ways to help immigrant students alleviate their stress, and hopefully improve their academic performance, if there is indeed a need in this area.

The following chapter reviews the general literature of acculturation, acculturation stress and acculturation studies conducted in the United States in the light of academic performance. The general literature of acculturation studies among Armenians is also included. All main concepts used in this study are defined in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acculturation

Acculturation can be defined as a change in attitudes, norms, values, and even behaviours experienced by immigrants as a result of their contact with another culture (Kosic et al., 2004). Acculturation is a dynamic process of adaptation to a new setting for life. There are two types of acculturation according to the literature: The Socio-cultural adaptation which comprises the necessary adjustments required to live in a new environment; this includes learning a new language, gaining cultural knowledge and creating new social relationships. The second form of acculturation involves psychological adaptation identified as changes that require the balancing of the mental well-being (Kosic et al., 2004).

In order for acculturation to occur one pre-requisite exists: a contact situation where a minimum of two distinct cultural groups come into a firsthand contact. Acculturation is also characterized as being a bidirectional process of reciprocal nature where both host and immigrant cultures are influenced. It is important to mention that this two-way process is not necessarily egalitarian. One cultural group almost always has more dominance over the other cultural group(s) and it is this aspect of dominance that eventually determines the degree and direction of acculturation strategies adopted by the immigrant (Teske and Neslson, 1974). Furthermore, acculturation is influenced by societal factors that include the nature of the society of origin as well as the nature of the host society; this encompasses the political and economical contexts and demographic factors (Berry, 1987). In short, acculturation refers to a process “whereby the

culture of a society is modified as the result of contact with the culture of one or more societies” (Gillin and Raimy by Teske and Nelson, 1974, p. 351). Individuals faced with a new setting adapt in different ways, the following sections describe the various modes for adapting and the stresses that may result in this process.

Acculturative strategies

In general, there are two perspectives regarding the nature of the acculturative process. The unidimensional perspective, a model first introduced by Gordon (1918) places individuals in a continuum of identities that range from exclusively heritage culture to exclusively mainstream culture. In essence the individuals may start at one end of the succession and gradually move towards the other end during the course of their adaptation in the host country, to eventually reach the exclusively mainstream end. This linear model is founded on an assimilation ideology where entering into the host culture is tied in with or associated with the fading of the ethnic group identity (Gordon, 1918).

Nieto (2002), with a similar ideology of the linear model, describes acculturation using the “either/or” paradigm where negotiating change becomes embedded in difficult choices. Youth attempt to hide their origins when difficulties arise between the home and the school; between the self-culture and the host culture. Youth may tamper with the temptation of rejecting the native culture, however, this choice is accompanied with the fear of rejection from the members of their ethnic group, the fear of being considered a ‘traitor’ or having all support from compatriots relinquished. This struggle may consequently result in not wanting to become a member of the host society yet refusing affiliation to a group, the patterns of which belong to them (Camilleri, 1986). Researchers however argue against this linear perspective of viewing

acculturation as it implies a bias towards the dominant culture by assuming assimilation as the only reasonable mode of acculturation (Tahmassian, 2003).

In John Berry's bidirectional acculturation framework, originally established by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936), individuals must first respond to two underlying questions: (a) how much of their ethnic culture are they willing to hold on to and (b) how much of the host culture are they willing to embrace. The result of these two considerations is the key factor that influences the acculturation strategy. According to Berry et al., (1987), there are four different strategies of acculturation. These include: Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization. Assimilation refers to the desire to fully adopt the host culture while relinquishing the culture of origin. Separation refers to maintaining the culture of origin and refusing to integrate into the host culture. Integration happens when individuals maintain their culture of origin and simultaneously adopt the host culture. Marginalization refers to no interest in maintaining the culture of origin and no interest in adopting the host culture. Integration strategy is the best for psychological well-being, while marginalization is the worst. Assimilation and Separation remain between the other two strategies mentioned above (Berry et al., 1987; Williams and Berry, 1991). Since culture is a powerful shaper of behaviour, the strategy adopted by the individual will direct their behaviour pattern and their eventual mode of adaptation (Berry, 1997). In addition, the type of acculturation strategy adopted will be shaped, to some extent, by where a new immigrant decides to settle. The ethnic and social class of the community where they decide to settle and whether or not they are surrounded by same ethnic peers or are isolated from their own ethnic culture has a strong influence on the acculturation strategy (Gibson, 2001).

Due to increased immigration, many societies have become culturally plural allowing people of differing cultural backgrounds to come together and live together. In most cases, these plural societies allow the growth of cultural groups that are not equal in power, thus are born the terms 'mainstream', 'host culture', 'minority' and 'ethnic group' (Berry, 1997). In Canada, immigrants are not required to relinquish their ethnic culture to adapt the Canadian culture, but rather, Canadian immigration policies would like "newcomers [to] selectively retain some valuable aspects of their ancestral legacy so as to enrich the cultural fabric of [Canadian] society" (Tonks and Paranjpe, 1999, p. 3). Research among Canadian immigrants shows that first generation youth, who had come to Canada after the age of ten prefer the separation or marginalization style of acculturation when compared to Canadian born youth and immigrant youth who immigrated before the age of ten. Immigrants arriving after the age of ten also experience the most acculturation stress (Tonks and Paranjpe, 1999). Next, I explore the possible stresses that may result during the acculturative process as well as the varying degrees of manifestations of these stresses.

Acculturation stress

Acculturation stress is defined as reduced health for individuals experiencing this process. This reduced health can be psychological, somatic, or social. It is important that the stress experienced by the individual is directly linked to the acculturation phenomenon. Acculturation stress is seen more on an individual level where the ethnic group as a whole is experiencing acculturative changes (Berry et al., 1987). Tahmassian defines it as the "cumulative stress experienced by the immigrant during the acculturation process. The

immigrant needs to make the adjustment and adapt to all the possible changes pertaining to the differences between the host culture and the culture of origin.” (2003, p.60). Furnham and Bochner refer to this as culture shock (1986).

Berry (1987) attributes acculturation stress to situational as well as personality factors. It is important to note that different people respond differently to the same situation; some individuals have better coping strategies than others. This ability can be influenced by education, age, gender, cognitive style and prior intercultural experiences. In addition, acculturation sometimes enhances someone’s life changes and mental health; thus acculturation may either result in changes causing stress, or changes that remain benign and can be seen as a source for opportunity. Furthermore, individuals undergoing acculturation may experience change that varies in degree, ranging from very little change to a great deal (Berry et al., 1987).

As a whole, acculturative stress results because of five major changes as discussed by Berry et al., 1987): Physical Changes (new home, higher population density, more pollution), Biological Changes (new nutritional state, diseases, interbreeding), Cultural changes (political, economical, linguistic, religious), New social relationships and finally, Psychological and Behavioural change.

The factors that mediate between the acculturation experience, the stressing agents and acculturation stress, according to Berry et al, fall into five categories. Firstly the nature of the host society as being either pluralistic or of assimilationist ideology. Secondly, the type of acculturating group (immigrant, refugee, sojourns, natives) and whether they are there on a voluntary or involuntary basis. Thirdly, the mode of acculturation, or strategy adopted. Further, the demographic and social characteristics of the individual and finally, the psychological characteristics of the individual (1987). The relationship between the acculturation process, the

stressors and acculturation stress are all presumable rather than fixed or deterministic. There are five main areas of possible acculturative stress that I would like to discuss: psychological stress, self-esteem, personal and ethnic identity, linguistic difficulties, and finally the influence of social relationships. The following sections examine these five main areas of possible acculturative stress.

Psychological Acculturative Stress

The culture changes that immigrants must undergo may result in a psychologically uncomfortable situation (Berry and Annis, 1974). On the level of a community, greater cultural and behaviour disparity between the two distinct cultures may result in increased acculturative stress (Berry and Annis, 1974; Berry, 1997; Sam, 2000). Research suggests that immigrants who change their country and are exposed to a new culture, experience many different manifestations of psychological stress (Liebkind, 1996; Sam, 2000; Phinney and Haas, 2003; Shirikian, 2006). Some of these issues include depression, isolation, withdrawal, anxiety as well as aggression, violence, delinquent behaviour and among others, lowered self-esteem. For immigrant youth, additional pressures of adjusting to a new school, learning a new language alongside establishing into a new social environment accompany other acculturation adjustments (Shirikian, 2006). Moreover, involuntary immigrants are seen to exhibit more psychological problems related to acculturation than voluntary immigrants (Berry et al., 1987).

The strategy adopted by the immigrant is the key influence to the amount of stress experienced. As mentioned earlier, the route of marginalization as the strategy for acculturation is linked with the most psychological distress (Berry, 1990; Castillio et al., 2004). Youth, whose

parents refuse or integrate minimally into the host culture exhibit many more psychological problems than those youth whose parents integrate (Shirikian, 2006).

In a study by Katsiyannis, Zhang, Barrett and Flaska (2004), psychological variables including depression and aggressive acts were investigated. In this particular research many factors coincided with aggression and depression; these include crime and other delinquent behaviour. According to the researchers, ethnic minority membership among other factors implied this recidivism. Contributing factors were seen to be a history of family violence and a lack of parental bonding and affection. In other studies, domestic violence has been implicative in ethnic communities. According to Spindler and Hammond (2006), problems of stress lead to delinquent behaviour where the socialization process is incomplete.

Risks to psychological well-being such as suicidality is seen in ethnic minority youth as an indicator of severe depression. Immigrants usually increase their risk for depression due to several factors. Some of these include loss of family ties because of immigration, language ineptitude, unemployment stress, low finances, lack of social support, disorientation, and unfamiliarity with the new environment (Hovey, 2000). As discussed by Lee (2007), the greater the difference between the host and ethnic cultures may make the overall acculturation process more complicated, where a larger culture shock results in more anger, frustration, anxiety, tension and even attrition. Family support and hope for the future may serve as a “buffer” for depressed immigrant youth (Shirikian, 2006, p.32). Shirikian further suggests that positive or optimistic people exhibiting positive emotions such as hope, joy, interest and contentment are more likely to experience positive outcomes and a better sense of control over their lives, hence a higher self-efficacy and psychological well-being. Along the same lines, Cross (2003) in his speech entitled *Culture as a Resource for Mental Health* quotes Snyder and Lopez in saying,

“optimism leads to confidence, which leads to continuing effort, leads to more problem-centred coping” (p.358). Cross also states that culture is a resource for positive emotions like hope and optimism. In addition, he states that involvement with family events, cultural events, food, art and music are “outward and visible elements of culture[..].support[ing] positive emotions” (2003, p. 358).

Self- esteem

Self-esteem is considered an important aspect of psychological well-being. Phinney et al., state that the “sense of self is an important source for personal strength and positive self-evaluation and contributes to well-being” (2001, p.137). Self-esteem can be considered as a positive emotion. Culture is believed to mould various aspects of the self (Tahmassian, 2000; Shirikian, 2006) and thus has an impact on self-esteem. Factors affecting self-esteem entail: maintaining a balanced relationship with the host society, engaging towards affairs of the ethnic culture, maintaining family ties, language proficiency (host and origin) and social support. In this context, social support may refer to ethnic associations, residential ethnic enclaves and extended family (Williams and Berry, 1991). According to a study by Phinney and Haas (2003) on coping strategies of ethnic minority first generation college students in the United States, social support and self-efficacy increased coping strategies. Therefore when immigrant youth maintain a balanced support system, their self-efficacy and coping ability is boosted, resulting in an assumed increased in self-esteem, presuming lower acculturative stress. Alternately, a major disparity between the home and school cultures have negative effects on self-esteem (Shik and Curyk, 1999).

Personal and Ethnic Identity

Individual identity is defined by Shirikian (2006) as a concept based on prior experiences, whether positive or negative, and is influenced by different factors. Personal identity involves a view of the future and involves how individuals are recognized by others. In other words, “identity is a collection of who we are, who we want to be and who we should be as well as, who we aren’t and who we don’t want to become” (p.2). During the acculturation process across and within changing ethnic boundaries, the “self-constructs” and “value systems” of an immigrant individual identity may be modified (Liebkind, 1996, p. 164). As a result of interactions with members of one’s own ethnic group alongside exposure and interaction with surrounding groups, an “ethno-cultural identity” develops (p.164). When there is a hindrance or a problem with the development of adolescent identity, a state of confusion may result, which in turn affects individual self-esteem and psychological well-being (Sam, 2000).

Ethnic identity is defined as “one’s involvement in cultural groups and practises associated with one’s ethnic group as well as [a] positive attitude towards the group” (Shirikian, 2006, p.14). Ethnic identity is also linked to higher levels of self-esteem (Phinney and Cantu, 1997; Shirikian, 2006). This in turn, as indicated earlier, has a positive result on an individual’s psychological well-being. In the case with immigrant families, parents are usually occupied trying to deal with their own acculturation, with more initial involvement with the culture of origin; youth on the other hand, are usually “struggling to balance two cultural identities” (Shirikian, 2006, p.3). It is important to note that a heavy inclination towards the ethnic identity without identification with the host or mainstream culture may initially seem comforting but may eventually exacerbate psychological well-being. The above mentioned scenario describes the strategy of Separation as the mode of acculturation (Sam, 2000). In addition, members of low

status immigrant groups may display a need to adhere to close in-group relationships which may enhance self-esteem; however when they are required to interact with the mainstream culture, added stress may result, due to lowered self-esteem in the host culture (Phinney, Chavira, and Williamson, 1992).

Ethnic identity is formed through individual attitudes expressed towards one's own culture as well as towards the host culture. Attitudes expressed by parents, same ethnic peers and non-ethnic peers may also have an impact on ethnic identity development. Moreover, ethnic identity is impacted by experiences in school, ethnic language proficiency and produces a sense of belonging (Phinney et al., 2001).

Linguistic issues

When immigrants land on North American soil, they bring with them, the culture pertaining to their ethnic group; included here is their ethnic language. Research demonstrates that ethnic language retention in the United States remains controversial. Although it is fundamental for immigrants in the United States to learn English, ethnic language maintenance is still debated and has often been frowned upon by the dominant culture. In contrast, there is evidence that the usage and knowledge of the ethnic language has a positive effect on the development outcomes for immigrant youth. Preservation of the ethnic language is seen as a cultural resource and provides a direct link to the culture of the parents of immigrant youth (Phinney et al., 2001). Furthermore, "knowledge of ethnic language is significantly less by the third or fourth generation following immigration, yet members of some groups, particularly those of non-European origin, maintain a strong ethnic identity, independent of language usage" (Phinney as cited by Phinney et al., 2001, p.149).

Romero and Roberts (2003), discuss that monolingualism among immigrants contributes to acculturation stress whereas the bilingual youth adapt better to bicultural environments. Likewise, linguistic diversity can be seen as an asset for classrooms and even societies. Contrary to existing negative views of bilingualism, the overall advantages of knowing another language, and the maintenance of the mother tongue acts like a defence against academic failure thus promoting academic success (Bhatnagar, 1980). The attitude of teachers seems to be a key factor towards influencing academic achievement of immigrant students. In other words, if an immigrant student feels accepted as one with a knowledge of their mother tongue and an improving knowledge of the language of the dominant culture, their stress may perhaps be appeased (Nieto, 2002).

Lanca, Alksnis, Roesse and Gardner describe a direct relationship between acculturation and the learning of a new language. They state the two processes to be very much interconnected, where the proficiency of the second language is influenced by the acculturation strategy adopted as well as ethnic identity. In the case where the acculturation process is considered a linear, unidimensional process (where ethnic culture is eventually replaced by the host culture) - upon learning the language of the dominant culture, immigrants consequently lose their ethnic language. This is considered by the authors as *subtractive bilingualism*. Alternately, in the context where acculturation is considered a multidimensional process, integration is considered *additive bilingualism* (where ethnic language is preserved and host language is learned); *subtractive bilingualism* implies assimilation (Lanca et al., 1994). Bhatnagar (1980) discusses a third type of bilingual learning which he calls retractive; this is when the immigrant psychologically rejects the new culture and language of the host society but cannot do so

practically due to the functional needs of the host language. Thus this immigrant will seek out opportunities when he or she can speak the native language.

It is significant to be aware of the differences between host language acquisition for voluntary immigrants and involuntary immigrants. Voluntary immigrants who have willingly emigrated from their country of origin, with the hope of a better future, show an overall willingness to learn the host language because the cultural and linguistic barriers are seen as surmountable and additive to their ethnic culture. Involuntary immigrants, who were possibly forced to leave their country of origin, due to civil war or other hardship, acknowledge their need to learn the host language, but have difficulty in, and resistance to doing so because they interpret this as a subtractive process where their ethnic language and culture is jeopardized by possible replacement by the host language and culture (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). Such conclusions are supported in the study by Bhatnagar (1980) who finds that it is the psychological response individuals make to the learning of a new language that determines their adjustment patterns. In other words, those immigrants that adopt an additive bilingualism where they maintain their mother tongue and learn the language of the host society are the ones that do well in school in addition to better social relationships.

Social Relationships and Influence: Family and Peers

Acculturative stress can be considered a major cause for intergenerational conflict. Some studies show that the family is considered a cultural asset for developing a higher self-esteem and experiencing fewer personal or behavioural problems (Smokowski and Bacallao, 2007). Family and peers do indeed have a direct impact on an individual's personality and ethnic identity development. Research shows that the social support system is the best coping resource,

where help, guidance and emotional support are available (Bledsoe, 2007). Cultural isolation or separation from family members is a major stressing agent as the family is considered to have a protective and supportive function in ethnic communities (Westermeyer, 1987; Beiser, 1988).

Immigrant families in a new society often must accommodate both old and new (of host) values (Sam, 2000). Usually, immigrant parents strongly aspire to hold on to their ethnic identity through maintenance of their ethnic language, values, culture and traditions (Phinney et al., 2001). Parents who believe ethnicity to be of importance usually make sure to have their children participate in activities promoting ethnic identity such as participating in and belonging to ethnic organizations (Alba, 1990).

Typically, the older generation remains more reserved in embracing the new values of the mainstream culture, whereas immigrant youth adapt to these more readily. Both generations experience a struggle with the traditional versus new values, however, usually at different rates. This mismatch may result in intergenerational conflict. Moreover, in families where parents have a Separated or Marginalized acculturation style, family conflict increases. In contrast, families that experience no discrepancy in acculturation styles between parents and youth, display higher self-esteem and less anxiety (Farver et al., 2002). While younger individuals experience fewer problems with family during the acculturative process, adolescents may experience more possible problems because the conflict between family and peers is at its climax during these years. It is during these years of transition into adulthood where developmental issues of identity may arise (Phinney, 1990).

Shirikian (2006) discusses studies done among Latino youth who frequently find themselves living in a “dual cultural environment”. This environment consists of family members adopting different acculturation strategies and belonging to different stages in the

acculturative process. This variance often leads to intergenerational family problems contributing to heightened acculturation stress (p. 21). An interesting study (Tsai et al., 2001; Phinney as cited by Shirikian, 2006) on Asian students in Europe reveals an important perception concerning acculturation in non-European families. For south-East Asian families (the group with which the study was concerned with), the concepts of family and self are indivisible, where multigenerational family members live in a tightly-knit structure; members are expected to be faithful to family and distrust outsiders. When such families immigrate, cultural transitions may be very difficult especially when close relatives and friends are no longer around to provide emotional support. In the new culture, discrepancies may arise between husband and wife, as well as between parents and children, due to possible family hierarchical disruption upon exposure to western ways in which freedom of choice is advocated (Liebkind, 1996; Dixon, 2003). It is common that as Asian immigrants get older, intergenerational conflicts are expected because of possible contrasts with western ideas including family responsibilities, parental authority and independence (Yeh, 2003).

In an individual's social circle, peers are not only important but are also influential. "Social integration with same-ethnic peers is likely to reinforce ethnic identity. Furthermore, if these same ethnic peers speak the ethnic language, in-group social interactions are associated with increased language proficiency, which in turn affects ethnic identity". Interestingly, this effect of same ethnic peer interaction on ethnic identity has been shown to be stronger than the effect of ethnic language on ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 139).

In summary, areas of possible acculturation stress include psychological stressors. Some of these psychological manifestations of stress include depression, isolation, withdrawal, anxiety as well as aggression, violence, delinquent behaviour and among others, lowered self-esteem.

Marginalization is seen to result in increased levels of psychological stress whereas Integration promotes psychological well-being. Also, in the process of personal and ethnic identity development, an individual dealing with acculturative adaptation may experience a struggle in trying to balance their level of involvement in their ethnic culture and the degree of participation in the host culture. In most cases, continued involvement with the ethnic culture has shown to increase levels of self-esteem and thus reduce stress. This process can also be influenced by family and peers, the school as well as the social circle or community the individual lives in; this effort to adjust in the struggle may result in acculturative stress. Intergenerational conflict and family tension may arise as a result of this struggle, yet another possible area of stress. Finally, immigrants having to learn a new language as part of their process of adapting may be an additional pressure to surmount and although learning a new language may be seen by the immigrant as beneficial and necessary, this could be another possible area that may result in acculturative stress. The following sections discuss the Armenian people in the light of acculturation, adapting to North America and acculturation stress, starting with a brief introduction to the background and culture of the Armenian people. I will then discuss various acculturation studies conducted among Armenians in the United States.

The Armenians

History, Culture, Origin and Diaspora

“The sun never sets on the Armenian diaspora” writes Tololyan (2000, p.107). These words reflect the vastness and extent to which the Armenian people have spread over so many continents and countries. At present, the Armenian world population is about 7.5 million with 5 million living in the “new” Diaspora. Of this number, an estimated 2 million live in the United

States and 50,000 live in Canada (Armeniapedia, 2002, para. 19). In Montreal alone, there are an estimated 35,000 Armenians. The turbulent history of the Armenians running away from persecutions, fleeing war zones and economic difficulties, explains the existence of several diasporic communities in countries outside of their homeland. In 1915, the Armenians suffered genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government of the day, and in that process the survivors were forced out of their homeland and consequently fled to countries consisting mostly of the North American region and the Middle East region, creating what is today considered the modern Diaspora.

Most of the immigration to the U.S.A was from the Armenian homeland and took place between the late 1890's and during the beginning of the First World War. During this period, much of the immigration was for the purpose of finding work and ameliorating their economic condition. After the Genocide, immigration to the United States as well as to Canada increased (Shirikian, 2006). In more recent years, towards the latter part of the twentieth century, and mainly due to conflict and war situations in the different countries of the Middle East where Armenian communities had settled, several new waves of Armenian immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine and Israel arrived and settled in the United States and Canada. Attempting to describe the current Armenian diasporic situation would be as Clifford describes "defining a travelling term in changing global conditions" (1994, p. 302). Presently, Armenians are found in approximately 79 countries around the world (Wikipedia, Armenians in the world section).

The Armenian ethnic identity

“With a history that dates back over 2,500 years, the Armenians have had to struggle constantly in order to maintain their traditions, their land and their identity” (ALMA, Historical background section, para.1). Tololyan (2000) mentions how the Armenian diasporic communities have typically formed “heirarchally encapsulated enclaves” that have helped them in their original adjustment; these enclaves continue to this day. “Armenian Quarters” or “Little Armenia” are typically found in many parts of the world including California (p.36). In terms of acculturation strategies, Tololyan describes Armenians to originally integrate into the host societies for the first few generations, sustaining their collective identity. After a few generations, Tololyan explains that Armenians soon realize that maintenance of the cultural identity as brought out from the homeland is virtually impossible and thus “fashion a new one [identity] that has some real or imagined continuity with the earlier identity and that creates boundaries, however porous, between themselves and the host society...” (p.36). With each passing generation, it can be said that an “altered”, “modified” or “adjusted” Armenian identity is formed, the characteristics of which are dependent on many factors including education, degree of ethnic and host language usage, cultural practices, parental influence and degree of same-ethnic peer relationships.

To Armenians, identity is a particularly important concept, since they have experienced centuries of hardship and discrimination. One Armenian teacher in the United States expressed it as such: “We want to keep our identity, we want to keep our language, we want to keep our religion. That is the only thing that has kept us alive for 5,000 years” (Dixon, 2003, p.38). Armenians have been a transient people in foreign societies due to the recurring patterns of oppression and dominance by foreign powers. Due to their faithfulness towards the church and

to their Christian faith, the Armenian nation has endured trials and hardship. Many Armenians accredit the existence of their people to their refusal to fully integrate into host countries (Dixon, 2003). Shirinian (1999) describes the Armenian journey as she writes:

We have been in exile since the flood. To be Armenian is to be in constant movement, dragging long roots behind, constantly looking for home [...] carrying fragments of your home with you, but you are never able to stop, to build a shelter. Your foundations are always elsewhere. And you pick up and start again. In Venice. In Prague. Until [...] (as cited by Yaghejian, 2002, p.24).

According to Kazandjian (2006), the history and experiences of the Armenian people have given them a “tough skin” in terms of choosing acculturation strategies. In the United States, there are neighbourhoods (especially in California), in which an Armenian can function very well without the need to even speak any other language besides Armenian, interacting only with Armenians, an example of Tololyan’s “heirarchally encapsulated enclaves” mentioned above . Therefore, there are regions where non-acculturated individuals exist, individuals who have chosen the Separation strategy of acculturation (Kazandjian, 2006, p.27). Those Armenians that chose to reject integration into the host society may experience problems with psychological well-being (Vartan, 1996; Yaralian, 1999; Shirikian, 2006).

Many diasporan Armenians today believe that speaking the Armenian language is the best measure of identity while others ascribe it to the identification one has with other Armenian people (Shirikian, 2006). Studies among Armenian-American youth conducted by Phinney et al. (2001), show that bilingual children and adolescents identified more closely with the Armenian community than those that were only English speakers. Also, their studies revealed that, among the other immigrant ethnic groups in the research, the Armenian group was the only one which demonstrated a direct link between parental cultural maintenance and ethnic identity. As part of a means to preserve cultural heritage, many immigrant Armenian parents send their

children to Armenian language schools. Therefore, parents have a great deal of influence on their children's ethnic identity. Dixon (2003), although not an Armenian, describes Armenian ethnicity by the following:

[...]being Armenian[...]represents a cultural identity which they share with diasporan Armenians around the world. This cultural identity is built on a common history that all Armenians share. At this level, Armenians share a commitment to each other and to Armenian interests around the world (p.125).

Armenian schools

Many Armenian language schools exist throughout North America, whose main purpose is to preserve ethnic identity (Andreassian, 1990; Mehranian, 2007). An interesting study was conducted by Mehranian (2007), who dealt with issues faced by individuals attending a one-day Armenian School called the Hayots School in the United States. Mehranian credits the Hayots School as being a means to preserve Armenian heritage in the face of the strong opposing waves of Americanization as he states the school to be a means of

restore[ing] abandoned cultural practices of the family, seen in retrospect as authentically Armenian; to preserve cherished memories of Armenia and Armenianness for the legatees of the immigrant generation; to allow the family the option of unfettered economic integration by its motherly nurturance of the children; and to countervail the alleged cultural deficit, due to intermarriage, of the hybridized Armenian family (p.125).

The Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 is an example of how a common historical atrocity can serve as a binding or connecting factor between members of the Armenian nation, no matter where they may be residing around the world. Without having even experienced it personally, many Armenian youth today feel very strongly about the Armenian Genocide. It may even be considered a very central part of the Armenian culture or identity (Yacoubian, 2003; Manjikian, 2005) as youth around the world march in protest against it, sing and listen to songs about it,

read books, hear stories and participate in political organizations devoted to its recognition (Shirikian, 2006). There are indeed many American colleges and universities that offer courses containing information of the Armenian Genocide. In the case of some universities, full courses devoted to the topic of the genocide exist (Pelosky, 2005). It has been observed that, even after many decades, grandchildren of immigrant generations persist to preserve high levels of Armenian identity, ancestral heritage and pride (Shirikian, 2006).

How do Armenians integrate?

Shirikian refers to her interview with Der-Karabetian and Berberian where she discusses their research: Armenian youth who identify themselves as non-White (that is, non-Western), exhibit higher levels of self-esteem. In addition, also cited by Shirikian, Vardanyan compared acculturation styles among Armenian youth from Armenia and that of Armenians of the Diaspora. Armenian youth from the Diaspora, regardless of the country of residence, showed a desire to integrate into the host culture, while Armenian youth in Armenia remained more isolated (2006). In addition, in the acculturation process, the older generation experienced less self-esteem (Vartan, 1996). Yaralian mentions how Armenians who exhibited a higher level of acculturation, namely more readily integrated, were more sociable individuals, able to work with others and enjoyed taking risks. Other intriguing results show how highly acculturated English speaking Armenians showed to be more emotionally stable, when compared to Armenians who only spoke Armenian and were less acculturated. In addition, second and third generation Armenian immigrants exhibited more stress than first generation Armenian immigrants. According to the author, the reason for this is because the latter group usually arrives to the host country with family members while second and third generation immigrants

are struggling between holding on to their ethnic culture while needing to adapt to the host culture, resulting in greater acculturation stress (1999).

Wherever Armenians may be found, their culture has adjusted, incorporating aspects of the host culture (Shirikian, 2006). In the diasporic Armenian communities, the efforts towards Armenian heritage maintenance are shown in the establishment of their community schools, churches, and related social committees as well as their language maintenance and their promotion of ancestral pride. According to Manjikian (2005), diasporan Armenians build community centers that serve as support systems and “microcosms of “armenianness”” (p.9). Moreover, Inejkian, explains that the historical events lived out by the Armenian people have left a scar on their communities, even after immigrating to North America and it is these experiences that have prevented total assimilation because it is their family, their cultural community life and schooling that has given them a “secure grip” on their culture and core identity (Canadian Journal for Traditional Music, 1990, Historical background section, para. 7). Similar research by Bakalian (1989) confirms the influence the family has in nourishing the Armenian ethnic identity.

As a result, the foreign-born Armenian youth in the United States and Canada face the task of growing up, studying, forming new identities and adjusting to the North American culture while simultaneously being the preservers of their ethnic origins, a process Mehranian refers to as the “dual processes of enculturation and acculturation” (2007, p.79). In this process, Armenian students may experience academic difficulties, as shown by research (Der Yeghiayan, 1980).

In Canada, multicultural policies encourage integration, allowing immigrants to feel a sense of belonging in the Canadian society, while fostering the maintenance of the ethnic culture

(Manjikian, 2005). Many Armenians feel comfortable calling Montreal ‘home’ because the Armenian cultural identity as well as the collective memory can be freely expressed. Manjikian states that “the hybridized identities of Armenian-Montrealers do not rule out one another; instead, they co-exist in dialogue, constantly influencing and altering each other” (2005, p. 131).

Armenian community schools in Montreal, Quebec

Two major Armenian community centers exist in Montreal, Quebec. These are the Montreal Armenian Community centre Sourp Hagop and school of the same name and the AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union), which supports the Armen-Quebec School. The Sourp Hagop School has full elementary and high school classes as well as a kindergarten. Both schools use the provincial curriculum in French as required by the Quebec Ministry of Education. Students are taught French and English in addition to the local Quebec and Canadian culture and history. Outside of the provincial curriculum, students are required to learn the Armenian language, culture, history and religion (Manjikian, 2005).

The second major community center is the AGBU whose mission (according to their website) is “promoting the Armenian heritage around the world” accomplished through cultural, humanitarian as well as educational programs. The AGBU holds community centers throughout the Diaspora. In Montreal, the AGBU supports the Armen-Quebec School. Armen-Quebec begins at the kindergarten level until grade 8 and also follows the curriculum required by the Quebec Ministry of Education, where students are taught in both French and English, with supplementary instruction in Armenian language, history, culture and religion (Manjikian, 2005). There is also a third school, Ecole-Notre-Dame de Nareg; an Armenian community school run by Pere Paul Kazandjian and goes up until grade 9 or secondary 3.

In short, the Armenian people have a very rich as well as a turbulent history. The Armenian people, attached to their ethnicity go to much effort to establish and recreate their sense of 'home' and strive to maintain their culture and heritage. Armenian one-day language schools as well as full Armenian community schools exist in North America. Armenians have displayed their tight grip on their culture yet have shown different modes of adapting and integration to the host culture; a process that seems to depend on acculturative stresses experienced, age, circumstance and country of origin.

Acculturation studies among Armenian youth in the United States

For the purpose of laying down a foundation, I would like to summarize various studies among Armenians where issues pertaining to acculturation are addressed; I discuss four different dissertations, written in the United States on Armenian youth and adults. Each dissertation views the effects of acculturation among Armenians from a different angle. I would like to assume that the findings of the various dissertations may be used to form an opinion of the acculturation experience among Armenians, whether at the student level or at the adult level.

1. Sylvia Shirikian (2006). *Acculturation, ethnic orientation and psychological adjustment in Armenian youth.*

Armenian youth in the United States, are faced with acculturations stressors that can lead to psychological stress. Shirikian analyses nine major areas of potential effects resulting from psychological stress that may accompany the acculturative process: Aggressive behaviour, Anxiety/depression, Attention problems, Delinquent behaviour, Identity problems, Social problems, Somatic problems, Thought problems and Withdrawal.

The research was conducted in order to find a correlation between the nine areas of potential stress and 8 different areas that might affect acculturation (7 are mentioned below for the purpose of relevance). These factors affecting acculturation are: Differences in gender, foreign-born versus U.S. born, ethnic orientation, age, youth experiencing discrimination versus those not experiencing any, number of people living in one house and finally, differences between groups feeling anger towards Turkey's denial of the Armenian genocide versus those feeling the need for justice.

Shirikian's research yielded the following interesting results: Psychological stress was found to be higher in boys than girls, where boys revealed delinquent and aggressive behaviour whereas girls internalized their stress in the form of depression, anxiety and isolation. There was no difference in psychological stress between foreign-born and U.S. born individuals. There was no correlation towards ethnic orientation, which, as Shirikian noted is contrary to the literature, where strong ethnic orientation serves as a "protective factor" (p.72). The author related this particular finding to the fact that her study group consisted of participants belonging to one ethnic organization (scouts), where social support was readily available. Furthermore, older youth experienced higher psychological stress than younger immigrants. No difference in psychological stress manifestations was noted among those individuals experiencing discrimination versus those that did not experience any. Interestingly, crowded homes manifested higher levels of psychological stress, especially in areas of aggression, anxiety, depression, identity issues, withdrawal and thought problems. Finally, results comparing youth who expressed anger towards Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide versus youth expressing the need for justice were striking. Youth expressing anger showed increased delinquent behaviour and experienced intergenerational trauma associated with the genocide.

Shirikian's dissertation mainly targets the fields of counselling and psychology. The author calls for more culturally and linguistically competent services, where consideration is made for language, history, traditions, values and beliefs. Shirikian talks about the misdiagnosis of many situations due to the lack of cultural awareness and understanding. A greater respect needs to be demonstrated in services that cater to ethnic groups. Her research is also applicable to schools and community counselling. Teachers need to better understand behavioural differences among culturally different youth. For example, it is important for a teacher to understand the impact of the Genocide on an Armenian student in his/her class.

As a whole, Shirikian concludes that Armenian youth struggle with psychological well-being and adjustment alongside identity issues; their unique challenges need to be understood and treated with respect. Once having understood where these Armenian youth are coming from, it will be easier to assist them in the difficulties faced during acculturation.

Shirikian does not directly address any issues concerning a relationship between acculturation stress and academic performance among Armenian youth. However she constructs a framework for understanding issues faced by Armenian youth. All of her findings may have strong implications towards academic performance.

2. Karin Dixon (2002). *Recently immigrated Armenian students' perspectives of their cross-cultural classroom experiences.*

Dixon's research is a study of student, teacher and parental perceptions of integration, identity and schooling for Armenian youth. Dixon's research contributes greatly to understanding the conditions that improve success among Armenian youth and how to create these situations. Most Armenian students who have immigrated to North America, regardless of

whether they have emigrated from Armenia or from the diaspora, have to face and overcome different challenges based on the disparity between the host culture and that of the country of origin. Some of these challenges include new classroom rules, patterns of interactions and teacher expectations. Other differences between the host culture and the culture left behind are family attachment issues due to emigration; youth may experience increased degrees of stress because they have to leave family behind. Teachers need to be aware of this reality. Other examples of changes in the family include fathers experiencing a decrease in authority, a lack of family communication, since parents cannot always provide their children with support because they themselves are also experiencing the same struggles and are in a state of confusion and exhaustion (Ramsey, 1998). These kinds of changes may impact school experiences of immigrant Armenian students.

Dixon interviewed recently immigrated Armenian students attending a middle school in California (a school whose student body consisted of 20% Armenians); in addition, interviews with parents and teachers were conducted. Dixon studied the following list in relation to how this list differed in the country of origin as compared to the situation in the United States: Curriculum and instruction, Student management (learning methods, punishment, class seating, in-class communication), Students' impression of teachers' knowledge, school design, gender issues, Common immigrant experiences (language difficulty, being teased, confusion with new school experiences, feeling overwhelmed), Fairness and respect, Help for new students, Family and communication issues, Life back home, Effects of emigration (emotional), Pride and loyalty, Family and community influences. Dixon's results were intriguing and revealed insightful knowledge about the experiences of acculturating Armenian youth.

The Armenian family and extended community represents a tightly-knit society in which people take care of one another where they are used to relying on each other rather than on the government. Immigration to the West can often times be on a voluntary basis but also be an involuntary move due to difficult economic situations and hardship (in the case of emigration from Armenia); and in cases from the Middle East where people have fled from persecution and civil war. In either case, immigrant youth lose the social support system that they used to have and are faced with learning a new language. In addition, parents of immigrant youth may be found in a situation where they cannot help their children with homework nor can they participate in school affairs due to language limitations.

In her results, Dixon finds that in the beginning, most Armenian students feel overwhelmed, get lost on campus, and get teased for the way they dress and speak English. Most students struggle with learning English for a few years, however, despite all their difficulties, do well in school.

Armenian students usually desire to find other Armenians (within the student body) for friendship, giving them a sense of stability. Dixon states this to be a natural process among immigrants. In terms of acculturation strategies, limited integration or selective integration is the route taken by most Armenian youth, for example, learning the language and adopting western fashion. Assimilation was never an option for Armenian youth. Pressure from parents and the community encourages limited integration, inspiring Armenian youth to make Armenian friends. “Immigrant students quickly learn that they do not belong and the “us” and “them” are born” (p.122). The positive aspects of Armenian youth “sticking together” allow them to feel more comfortable especially with those who have prior experience with immigration and acculturation, thus providing both academic and social support. Dixon concludes that this “sticking together”

can promote cheating or copying in school in the name of “helping” a fellow Armenian. Moreover, Armenian youth were found to defend one another in arguments, sometimes, regardless of who was in the wrong. Dixon adds that this behaviour can serve to strengthen segregation between Armenian and non Armenian youth. Additionally, when Armenians endorse and engage mainly in same-ethnic relationships, the process of English language acquisition is slower because Armenians usually speak to one another in Armenian.

Dixon’s ultimate purpose was to help teachers understand their Armenian students, urging them to be culturally relevant in their teaching methods and classroom content. Dixon provides, at the end of her dissertation, a workshop curriculum model, promoting multicultural education for teachers to become familiar with their Armenian students.

3. Harmik Tahmassian (2003). *Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, and Self-worth in first-generation Immigrant Armenians*.

Tahmassian explores the relationship between acculturation strategies, acculturation stress and self-worth in first-generation Armenian immigrants living in the United States. The study was done with Armenian adults participants (some who may have been students). Although the intention was not to study the participants in an academic context but rather in a general one, Tahmassian’s study may indeed have applications to effects on academic performance in general. The research conducted by Tahmassian is concerned with two major topics. Firstly in the area of acculturation strategies of Armenians and the stress levels of different modes of acculturation. Secondly, Tahmassian discusses the topic of “perceived intelligence”.

According to Tahmassian, Armenian immigrants adopting integration as their mode of adaptation exhibited lower levels of acculturation stress when compared to those who adopted the strategy of separation. However, those who chose to integrate did not show any difference in stress levels when compared to those who chose to assimilate. This second point, as he discusses, is contrary to the existing literature. Tahmassian contributed these inconsistent results to the acculturating cultures found in the literature. Most of the research was pertaining to Central American ethnic groups.

Those who chose to assimilate showed higher levels of perceived intelligence than those adopting separation. Although Armenian immigrants may experience heightened acculturation stress, in trying to integrate into the American culture alongside trying to preserve their own ethnic culture, it does not necessarily mean that they identify or feel themselves to be less intelligent.

Tahmassian's research is applicable mainly to culturally competent counselling services. As mentioned above, although the study was principally using a group of adults, the findings may be pertinent to the academic field. Tahmassian discussed the notion of 'perceived intelligence' or basically how these individuals see themselves in the light of knowledge and aptitude, which may have a great impact on self-esteem. Applying this to students, the higher the 'perceived intelligence', the better chances of having elevated levels of self-esteem, having positive results towards academic performance.

4. Kelly Ann King (2007). *Journeys to academic literacy: Case studies among Armenian English learners in Southern California*.

In her study, King seeks out to understand the differences and the similarities between academic engagement, home experiences, expectations and social identity of successful and unsuccessful English language learners. King's sample of participants consists of Armenian students attending an English speaking school in Southern California. Successful and unsuccessful students are characterized by their academic success which, in this study was measured using report cards, classroom grades as well as teachers' perceptions. The following findings discuss the differences among the successful and unsuccessful students.

The successful students' classroom grades were consistently higher whereas the unsuccessful students had low grades. Report cards, which were sent out to parents three times a year informed parents of their child's academic performance. Report card of unsuccessful students consisted of comments like "behind in many areas", "lacks confidence", "progress is an area of concern", while successful students tended to have comments such as "tries so hard", "displays a positive attitude towards learning", "has made excellent progress" and "a very conscientious student" (p. 69).

Children of low income families where parents had unskilled occupations showed lower academic achievement when compared with children of parents with semi-skilled or professional occupations. Interestingly, all successful students had mothers with a college degree or some form of college education. Therefore, as King speculates, students that had strong educational role models in their parents were successful in school and also had high expectations for themselves when it came to their desire for a college education. In this study, the influence of the mother had an important role to play in the academic achievement of the child. The reason

for this may be the strong nurturing relationships Armenian mothers have with their children. Furthermore, the mothers of successful students worked at home or had jobs where they were absent from the house only during the same hours of school, thus being available for their children when they came home.

Parental expectations played an important role in encouraging academic performance. Educated mothers were accurate about their child's academic potential. Parents of the unsuccessful students also believed in their children and had aspirations for a good college education. However, the teachers of the unsuccessful students were either conservative or unsure of their evaluation of the futures of these unsuccessful children.

The following results show the impact that peers and siblings have on the academic performance of students. The successful students usually had older siblings in addition to having a more solid English oral fluency. Moreover, the successful students were choosier with their friendships, endorsing friendships with a core group of academically successful friends. The successful students seemed to be very clear in terms of their career objectives, understanding the necessary hard work in order to accomplish their pursuits. In addition, successful students tended to have a more balanced social and academic identity being enthusiastically absorbed in their school work and academic pursuit. On the other hand, the unsuccessful students tended to be either the oldest child or the only child in the family with more limited English oral fluency. The unsuccessful students seemed to be more popular, endorsing friendships with students of all academic levels. All of the unsuccessful students wanted to attend college one day but seemed unsure about their career goals. Furthermore, the academically unsuccessful students appeared to be more motivated by social interaction than in academic commitments. The parents of both groups (successful and unsuccessful students) were equally keen on maintaining the ethnic

language as a priority. It was important for their children to know and speak the Armenian language. Some parents that were not able to enrol their children in Armenian classes hoped that once they attended college, their children would be able to take Armenian language courses as electives.

Differences also existed where afterschool activities were concerned. Students whose parents were able to afford extracurricular activities were highly involved in after school activities, and thus had less free time to watch television. Unsuccessful students were more likely to attend extracurricular activities that were considered free after school activities.

Students' perceptions and actual academic results (as expressed through classroom grades, report cards and teachers' perceptions of actual academic performance) were used as indicators of student academic success and engagement as well as the potential to go to and succeed with a higher education. Unsuccessful students tended to categorize themselves with a much higher academic standing indicating individual confidence but without a precise sense of their actual academic identity. This mismatch between the students' self-assessment and the teacher's assessment demonstrates that the unsuccessful students may not be realizing that they are not meeting their grade level requirements. These standards seem to represent their own expectations and in their eyes these expectations are being met; this may indicate the reason for the lack of the need to strive in school and also for future higher education. This very point may explain their lack of academic progress. The unsuccessful students seem to want to pass as a successful student, wanting to mingle with the other students, unwilling to admit to academic inadequacy.

King discusses the power that teachers have in ascribing students in a category, giving them an academic identity based on their previous academic performance. Therefore, on a

subconscious level, the unsuccessful students might be performing in accordance to the low expectations of their teachers.

The implications of King's research direct teachers to be aware of the context of the unsuccessful child and to assist in areas of additional needs rather than categorizing or stereotyping. King's sample of participants consisted of Armenian students. The conclusions that were drawn did not have direct application to the Armenian ethnic group of students, but rather had implications for general success and failure of students. Areas of family, peer and community influences may be expanded on for more specific areas applicable to the Armenian ethnic group and their unique academic experiences.

Each author has studied a different aspect of the acculturative process. Shirikian (2006) looks mainly at the psychological stressors potentially manifested as depression, anxiety, delinquency, identity problems, attention and social problems, somatic problems, thought problems and withdrawal. Dixon (2002) mainly discusses integration, identity, language and schooling for Armenian youth, as she looks at the context of family and peers. Tahmassian (2003) targets issues of acculturation strategies of Armenians and the stress levels of different modes of acculturation, Tahmassian also discusses what he calls "perceived intelligence", a concept linked with self esteem and confidence. Finally, King (2007) journeys into discussing the difficulties of new immigrant students and focuses on how teachers can assist the students to adapt easily with the least possible acculturative stress, helping students to do well academically.

Acculturative stress and Academic performance

In the United States, about one in every five individuals under the age of 18 is either an immigrant or has parents who are immigrants (Schmid, 2001). This fact in itself reveals a need to study and research issues concerning the education of immigrants. According to Carter (2006), the four social factors that play a role in the academic success of an individual are race, ethnicity, culture and identity. How these factors interplay and influence the academic status of an immigrant student is a complex process.

In contrast to the generally held belief that immigrants need to surrender to the host culture, giving up their roots in order to adapt and succeed in their new community, studies among South American immigrants in the United States have shown that their academic success is due to the fact that they uphold their culture and ethnic origin. Thus their adaptation to their new community is seen as a transformative process rather than being viewed to be replaced by another culture, where neither culture is neglected but rather a mixture is formed. Findings show that those immigrant children that experience a trade-off mentality in their process of acculturation experience the most difficulty in academic performance (Gibson, 1995; Pressman, 2007). Students whose parents adopt the integration style of acculturation, maintaining ethnic pride as well as adapting to the mainstream culture, performed better in school when compared to students whose parents chose to fully assimilate (Shik and Curyk, 1999). Other studies on the influences of the native language in schools confirm that cultural programs in schools in fact promote student motivation and positively affect academic performance. For example, research shows the effectiveness of dual-language programs (instruction in two languages: English and another language spoken in the school community throughout the school years). This approach allows the immigrant students who are learning English to help English speakers to learn a

second language, at the same time the English speakers assist the immigrant students learn English while they acquire the curriculum through English. With the notion that “one of the best ways to learn is to teach”, this collaborative learning approach facilitates the learning of both the English language (for the immigrant children) and the other language for the English speakers, thus proving to be a successful strategy for both parties (Thomas and Collier, 2003, p.62).

Although disputed by previous studies (Masten et al., 2004), there is a direct correlation between stress and acculturation. In a study conducted in the United States and involving Armenian youth, resistance to acculturation showed lower levels of academic success (Tahmassian, 2003). In other words, when immigrants refuse to adapt but rather choose to remain somewhat isolated, this choice in turn affects their success. In this study it affected different areas of success, including academic success. Also, self-esteem is a vital part and important predictor of school achievement (Phinney, Cantu and Kurtz, 1997; Shik and Curyk, 1999). According to Schwartz, Jarvis and Zamboanga (2007), in studies with Hispanic students, acculturative stress affects self-esteem which in turn affects academic performance. Hence, when an immigrant individual identifies with their ethnic group, they appear to increase positive feelings and emotions about themselves, which in turn positively influence the individual’s psychosocial adjustment. This, according to the authors may have a positive impact towards academic performance. Maintenance of the ethnic language is often seen to impede the academic success of other school subjects, however studies show that this is not the case; students are perfectly capable of achieving equal academic success as their non-ethnic peer (Garcia-Vasquez, 1995). Self-efficacy defined as an “individuals’ beliefs about the competence they have to initiate and successfully execute courses of action for specific goals” is very tightly linked to academic success as “high levels of self-efficacy [can] predict successful goal attainment” (Kim

& Omizo, 2006, p. 247). In a study by Carbonaro (1998), intergenerational closure which refers to the direct parental involvement in their child's friends and friends' parents has shown to have positive effects on educational outcomes. This shows the importance of parental involvement in the academic performance of a student. Moreover, academic achievements and attainments of a student's parents are seen to be very dominant predictors of the student's own educational success (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001).

Genetic deficit was one of the earlier explanations of low school achievement of minority students, where students' academic inferiority was something inherited due to their apparent social status. These genetic deficit explanations were modified in the 1960's where "nurture replaced nature". Therefore the learning environment was seen to be an important determining factor towards academic success (Erickson, 1987, p. 335). Research by John Ogbu (1983; 1987) reveals that minority students can do well academically although they may have cultural differences and linguistic incompetence. Ogbu compares general differences between minority groups and recognizes that all these groups face similar obstacles as well as social and academic adjustment problems. For some minority groups, it is only a matter of months until they are more or less performing successfully in school, while other minority groups may struggle for years. Ogbu concludes that it is not the nature of the immigrant minority group but rather "the nature of the history, subordination, and exploitation of the minorities, and the nature of the minorities' own instrumental and expressive responses to their treatment" which distinguishes the more successful from the less successful minorities (1987, p.317).

Voluntary minority groups, who have immigrated willingly, usually adopt strategies that enhance academic performance and uphold social adjustment. In contrast, involuntary immigrants, who have immigrated unwillingly adopt acculturation strategies that promote

psychological stress and discourage positive incentive and motivation towards success – even among bright minority students (Ogbu 1987; Schmid, 2001). In addition, Ogbu (1987) mentions that schools do have a role to play in helping minority students succeed in school, but there is also an effort that must be carried out by the minority group individual to enhance their academic success. Moreover, research suggests that some minority group students do not do well in school while some do. This fact is not accredited to whether they attend a good school or if they attend an ‘inferior’ school. As explained by Ogbu (1992), minority students do not necessarily lack the “cultural capital” of the mainstream culture, nor do they lack the zeal and longing to be successful. Minority students use “educational strategies which encompass the attitudes, plans, and actions minorities use or do not use in their pursuit of formal education” (p. 289). Families in which parents have to work more than one job or work blue color or lowly position jobs do so to make the education of their children possible. If they immigrated from a place where they experienced hardship or persecution, their view of the host society is founded on a positive nature where they have the hope of a brighter more promising future. In such cases, students may feel the sense of obligation to their parents’ sacrifices and are thus motivated to succeed wanting to make their parents’ perseverance and diligence meaningful (Suarez-Orozco, 1987). According to McDermott (197), failure is a very real part of the American school system and that there has been enough explanation of it; he proposes to confront it when he says “it [failure] is available only as a background expectation until we do battle with it; explaining it will only keep it at a distance, making us its slaves” (p. 363).

Ogbu (1982) differentiates among three types of cultural discontinuities related with school underachievement. These include, universal discontinuities (experienced by all children), primary discontinuities (experienced mainly by immigrants and non-western individuals who are

being presented to western schooling) and secondary discontinuities (common mostly among caste like or subordinate minorities within western host nations). Primary cultural discontinuities are the major concern in the context of this paper. Some typical problems found in secondary discontinuities resulting in possible academic inadequacy are curricular discontinuity as well as the lack of home reinforcement. These discontinuities are however expected by both the parents as well as the students and hence the parents send their children to school expecting them to learn the host culture as they see the school as a resource for obtaining the necessary tools to attain rewards in the western status system. According to Cummins (1986), whether a student is empowered or disabled – is successful or fails – is determined by the interactions that are cultivated between the student and the teacher. In line with Ogbu's research, Cummins confirms that student achievement is highly determined by the "power and status relations between minority and majority groups" (p.21). When students are empowered by their teachers they take hold of the ability, the motivation and confidence to bloom academically. How then can students be empowered by their teachers and school systems? Cummins (1986) outlines four major areas or resources that help in student empowerment. These include the incorporation of minority students' culture and language into the school curriculum, community participation which involves minority parents being engaged in their children's education. The pedagogical practices adopted by the teacher are vital; finally the assessment of minority students allows teachers to target areas of difficulty and help them on towards the road of academic success.

In this study I am interested in finding out how these acculturative stressors, affect scholastic achievement and individual academic performance. Thus far, the education of immigrants in the context of academic success is seen as a complex process influenced by race, ethnicity, culture and identity. Ethnic language maintenance as well as host language acquisition

are seen to play a vital role in assuring academic success. In addition, the mode of acculturation, the development of self efficacy as well as the degree of parental and community involvement are all seen as factors that guide and affect immigrant scholastic achievement. Moreover, the reasons for immigration, parental attitudes and attitude towards the host culture are also aspects of the dynamic process of immigrant school adaptation and eventual academic achievement.

Summary of Literature review

Acculturation is a complex and often times challenging process that an immigrant must experience; it is the process whereby two cultures come into contact. During this acculturation process, individuals that are faced with a new setting to life, must adapt. There are four outlined modes by which immigrants might adapt into the host culture; Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization. Accompanying the acculturative process are various possible acculturation stresses that may result from different struggles and be manifested in different ways. Areas of possible acculturation stress include psychological stressors encompassing depression, isolation, withdrawal, anxiety, aggression, delinquent behaviour and lowered self-esteem. Marginalization has shown to result in increased levels of psychological stress whereas Integration supports psychological well-being. In the development of an immigrant's personal and ethnic identity in the host culture, an immigrant individual may be faced with an internal struggle of trying to balance their level of involvement in their ethnic culture and the degree of participation in the host culture. Ethnic culture involvement has shown to increase levels of self-esteem, which in turn may reduce stress. Family, peers, the school and social community of the immigrant play a vital role in influencing and directing the immigrant in their adjustment process. In many cases, this process and struggle may lead to areas of stress. In addition, family

tension, pressure and possible intergenerational conflict may surface as a result of this struggle, another possible area of stress. Moreover, many immigrants experience various linguistic difficulties in the process of adapting. On the one hand they must maintain their mother tongue and on the other hand, they are faced with the need to learn a new language. This may result in possible pressure for a student.

The question of importance is how much the acculturative stressors affect scholastic achievement and affect individual academic performance of the immigrant student. This intricate process of adaptation is influenced by many factors. Some of these factors include race, ethnicity, culture and identity. In addition ethnic language maintenance, host language acquisition, mode of acculturation, the development of self-esteem, involvement of parents, peers, community and teachers are all seen as potential influences of immigrant scholastic achievement.

Moreover, the minority group status is also a determining factor for an immigrant student's academic performance. Although most immigrants face similar social and adjustment problems and difficulties, voluntary immigrants adopt strategies that boost academic performance and sustain social adjustment. In contrast, involuntary immigrants, who have immigrated unwillingly, adopt acculturation strategies that promote psychological stress and discourage positive incentive and motivation towards success. Additionally, major cultural discontinuities between the home and school or between the host society and the ethnic society show to be a potential cause of possible heightened academic difficulties in immigrant students.

The main interest of this paper is the acculturation process, the stresses involved and its possible effect on academic performance. The particular ethnic group of interest this paper focuses on are the Armenian people.

The Armenian people have experienced various hardships as a nation. As well as being attached to their ethnicity and heritage, Armenians strive, with much will and effort to maintain their mother tongue and pass on their traditions and culture to the future generations; aiming to establish and recreate their sense of 'home' as they have lived for generations outside of their homeland. Armenian one-day language schools as well as full-time Armenian community schools exist across North America. Dissertations reviewed on Armenian students living in the USA reveal that they display varying strategies for adapting and exhibit acculturation stress that manifests in different ways. This literature written on the acculturative process among Armenians in the USA serves as a reference for my present study of Armenian immigrants in Montreal. In short, the authors whose work was reviewed in this chapter are Shirikian (2006), Dixon (2002), Tahmassian (2003) and King (2007); each author discusses the acculturative process, its stages and stresses in a different light and focuses on a different theme.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current study is to gather and examine narratives about acculturation stress and academic performance by foreign-born Armenian young adults who have settled and studied in Montreal, Canada.

Participants

The study consisted of 8 participants who belonged to one of two groups. The first group consisted of Armenian men and women who had attended and graduated from an Armenian community school. The second group consisted of Armenian men and women who had attended and graduated from a public school in Montreal. The participants were all within the ages of 18-31. All participants were born in countries outside of Canada and immigrated to Montreal at an age where they were able to feel and experience a culture difference. The age at which the participants had immigrated was between 7-15.

The purpose of having participants who have attended Armenian Community schools and others who have attended public schools is to explore any differences that may exist between the responses of those students attending an Armenian nurturing environment and those who have attended school outside that environment.

In each case, there were two males and two females selected. The purpose of this was to explore the potential differences that may exist between the way men and women cope with the acculturation process given different gender role expectations in the Armenian communities who

have migrated from Middle Eastern countries to Montreal. For the purpose of minimizing other confounding variables, it was important to only recruit participants originating from a Western Armenian background (Middle-East regions like Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey), as opposed to including Eastern Armenians (originating from Armenia and Iran) due to the culture differences.

Recruiting participants was done through contacting people who I already knew or contacting people referred to by friends. All communication was done either in person or by email. For the contacts that I did not know, an email was sent explaining the referral of a common friend or other contact, for the purpose of my research. The research topic was explained briefly after which they were invited to participate in the study through interviews. Confidentiality was explained also. I remained available for participants and potential contacts to email me with any questions or concerns. Living in Montreal and actively participating in an Armenian community church, I initially thought it would be very easy to recruit participants for interviews; however the task was much more laborious than expected. I experienced difficulties since some contacts that were referred to me by friends did not respond; others took their time to reply to my email. I also had difficulty finding participants who were a good fit for my research criteria. For example, some did not fit the age range; others had attended an Armenian community school but did not graduate from one; others had immigrated at an age that I could not consider old enough to experience a culture change. Furthermore, what seemed to be common among some Armenian immigrants was the habit of moving to Canada, then leaving to go back to the country they had initially immigrated from, only to come back to Canada a few years later; this journey of going back and forth seemed to be common and although it would have been interesting to hear their stories, would have added too much variation among

participants and would make the analysis of the results much more difficult. Therefore, much patience and perseverance was required on my part to finalize my participant list. As a whole there were many friends of mine who sincerely wanted to help in finding participants. When I contacted a subject that did not eventually fit the criteria for the research, they in turn helped me by referring other people, friends that they knew, and this happened on a few occasions even though I did not know nor had met the person. I felt the real community aspect of the Armenian people. Many participants were very willing to help out especially when they saw that it was research being done about their own people. This aspect in the journey of searching and finding subjects was encouraging.

Once the list of participants was final, interview times and locations were set at the convenience of the participants.

Research Design

In order to understand and interpret the personal experiences of my participants, my aim was to collect narrative data in the participant's own words. I was equipped for each of my interviews with my outline of questions. My interview guideline incorporated questions that explored the topics that I wanted to dig into (see Appendix C).

My tactic was to obtain approximately, answers to the same questions from each group of participants. However as the interviews progressed, I realized that I needed to be more flexible and treat each interview as unique and special. This realisation helped me to be more attentive and understanding of each participant's experience. It was important for me that participants were completely honest and open so as to allow a precise description of what they had gone through with their move to Montreal. Therefore, I allowed each participant to feel at ease to

express themselves freely. My intention was to make participants feel comfortable enough to talk about their memories and experiences of immigrating, and although this may be tough for some, I tried to maintain a very relaxed interview environment. Initially, I intended for participants to have a copy of the framework of questions to be tackled during the interviews, however after the second interview, I realized that the participants were not following along which indicated to me that they preferred to keep the interview more like a casual conversation rather than a formal interview; this I believe helped them to feel relaxed and more at ease to communicate. It was crucial for me to be prepared for each interview and to be focused during the interview.

Each participant was told in advance, by email, the title and brief explanation of the purpose of the research. They were also told in advance how long the interview may last. This was to ensure that participants came prepared to share without any time constraints. Upon arrival, each participant was asked to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the research. Confidentiality was guaranteed to each participant (see Appendix B).

Interview process

Through my interview schedule, I intended to develop a better understanding of the experiences lived out by the participants. The following list consists of topics I aimed at exploring:

1. The existence of acculturative stress (if any).
2. The manifestations of this acculturative stress (in comparison to the literature)
 - Psychological (depression/anxiety/self-esteem/aggression)
 - Acculturative strategy: Linguistic/ Identity

- Intergenerational Conflict
3. Specific difficulties experienced by participants in academic achievement (if any).
 - Linguistic
 - Specific subjects
 - Issues with teachers
 4. Any efforts made by the students to alleviate the stress (if any).
 5. Any efforts made by school teachers/school counsellors/school administrators to alleviate stress (if any).

The interview questions were semi-structured where both open ended questions and closed ended questions were asked, some in a multiple choice format offering a choice of answers. Complete confidentiality and concealed identity was guaranteed, where each participant chose a pseudonym or interview code name that was used during the interview process as well as for the writing of the narratives. Participants knew at the beginning that they were free to choose not to answer certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (as indicated on the consent form). Each interview was tape-recorded which in turn was transcribed by myself for my further reference and analysis. On average, interviews lasted from 35 to 55 minutes of tape recorded conversation. Most interviews took place at the First Armenian Evangelical Church of Montreal, where a quiet, private room was selected; however some participants were unable to come there so the interview was done at their residence or a coffee shop. No major incidences of disturbance or noise were experienced during any of the interviews, whether at the church, the participant's residence or coffee shop.

During interviews, I remained attentive to what participants were recounting, and on many occasions, I was able to understand what was being said, as I remembered myself in similar scenarios. I realize that eye contact was very important for the participant to feel that what they were recounting served as important and significant information. In order to get a better grasp of the experience of the participant, I often asked for clarification, elaboration, or I would paraphrase their idea in order to make sure the ideas were transmitted correctly. My interview questions served as a guideline, however, supplementary questions that branched from the original framework served to probe further into interpreting and understanding the experiences being relayed by the participants, as well as promoting good conversation. At any point during the interview, if I felt the participant appeared stressed or anxious, I dodged the question, avoiding any elaboration or further probing. There were a few incidences where interviewees seemed very slightly stressed or emotions regarding some cultural issues were stirred up. On the one hand this did indicate to me where they stood concerning the issue being discussed, however, I always aimed at maintaining a relaxed, enjoyable conversation and environment.

Collection of Data

In order to confirm emerging findings, I chose to use the data collection techniques of recorded interviewing, observation and building narratives. Each participant was allotted a folder in which all transcripts of interviews, demographic and other such information, a list of emerging themes, narratives and interview transcripts were kept. This aided in remaining organized and helped in reviewing effectively the existing thematic patterns recounted by participants.

The recorded data was kept on my digital recorder. Since I am the only one who knows the real names of the participants, the list of pseudonyms matching real identities were kept as a file in my computer. Only I had access to these files.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis was done by identifying overlapping themes and issues that participants experienced in their adaptation to the new culture, acculturative stresses experienced and issues experienced in relation to school and academic performance.

Organizing the data, breaking them down and searching for patterns was a laborious task. Important common findings were fished out in accordance with my list of interview schedule goals. The data was then compared to the existing literature to see derived patterns in my particular group of participants. Undertaking the mission to make the findings both understandable to the intended audience as well as applicable for further study was imperative. Perceived conclusions were thought out and recommendations were made for immigrant Armenian students.

Issues and concerns

The task of collecting data was tremendous and many long hours were devoted to the transcription of interviews. It was vital to write each narrative with the intension of being accurate in what the participants meant as they told their stories in comparison to what I understood in the depiction of their experiences. Being meticulous with perceived meaning was important when quoting the participants and when discussing the research findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES

The objective of this research is to obtain a better understanding of the acculturation process and how it relates to academic performance as recounted by a small group of immigrant Armenian youth in Montreal. Furthermore, the aim is to understand how immigrant youth cope in their experience of acculturative stress and its manifestation - psychologically, linguistically, socially and on the level of academic performance.

This chapter contains all the personal narratives based on the interviews conducted with 8 foreign-born Armenian students. Section One consists of Armenian immigrant students who attended Armenian community schools after their immigration to Montreal; Section Two consists of Armenian immigrant students who attended Montreal public schools after their immigration to Montreal.

Section One – Montreal Armenian community school attendees

Rafael
Age 23 from Lebanon

Rafael moved with his family to Montreal Canada from Lebanon at the age of seven. Escaping the tense situation of the nearing end of the civil war in Beirut, Rafael's family sought out a better, safer future in North America. Although excited to move and not knowing what to expect, Rafael was in for quite a few surprises. Facing the harsh winters was not a problem to Rafael as he had some idea of snow; in fact he was quite excited to move country.

Although Rafael had no problems leaving his friends behind since he was still young, he recounts that leaving close family friends and family behind was tough, especially his

grandfather. Upon arrival in Montreal, Rafael describes the endless rows of streetlights towering the roads of Montreal and feeling bewildered, remembering how in Lebanon, they lived many hours and days without electricity. “A waste [of electricity]...” he states.

Rafael’s schooling experiences were of great interest. Coming from an Armenian school in Beirut, he was exposed to the Armenian, French and Arabic languages. The lack of prior exposure to the English language resulted in a few initial difficulties as he states “my English was terrible”. Nonetheless, Rafael was helped out by his English teacher in his first year after which he says he adapted very quickly as he watched this “problem disappear”.

Having attended an Armenian community school in Montreal from grade two until high school graduation, Rafael reminisces his school experiences. To begin with, Rafael did experience some anxiety in school due to the adjustments in his new school environment, and recounts various instances of feeling alone at school during recess. In addition he describes having felt “different from the other students” as he was not able to appreciate hockey which he states “seems to be the key to making friends at a young age here”.

As a whole, Rafael performed very well in school up through to high school and onto college and university. He never seemed to have any problems as he was studious and hardworking. He does tell however of how his grades in the subjects of mathematics and science dropped in secondary 3 and continued like that until he graduated from high school. This did not seem to be a problem to Rafael as he knew where his strengths were and knew what he wanted to study later on. Rafael displayed an aptitude in languages and other non-scientific subjects and he believes that the Armenian community school he attended focused more on science and math, not concentrating on nurturing other non-scientific subjects; something he recognizes could be a cultural trait.

Rafael insists that he never experienced any problems with teachers or homework. If ever he needed help with homework, his parents would be the people from whom he would seek help; at school, teachers were his source of help. Rafael never felt the need to go to his peers for academic assistance or for help with homework.

Rafael believes that attending an Armenian community school has helped in the shaping and maintenance of his ethnic identity. He suggests that his level of 'armenianness' would be diluted if had attended a French school. Having lived in Montreal since the age of seven, Rafael has embraced the acculturation strategy of integration as he considers himself an individual who holds on to his Armenian culture simultaneously having adopted the Canadian culture. Coming from a typical Armenian household, Rafael explains how his parents held on more tightly to traditional ways of thinking whereas he and his siblings cultivated a more "Canadian" value system in which they allowed themselves to adopt some typical western thoughts and behaviours.

Although Rafael did mention that he liked the school he went to, he found it to be "too sheltering" as he states that the process of leaving school to go to college seemed to be a big change as he surprisingly realized that "there's other people besides Armenians in this world". For this reason, Rafael thinks that he would send his children to an Armenian community school until 6th grade after which he would want them to attend a French school. He doesn't want his children to experience the same "shock" and isolation he experienced. He also worries that if his kids had more of an inclination towards languages and non-scientific subjects, they could have problems in an Armenian community school. In all, Rafael believes that moving from his Armenian community school to college was more of a "culture shock" to him than his move from Lebanon to Canada.

When Rafael and his peers reached college, the character and nature of the high school they attended were manifested. One interesting example was upon entrance to college. While Rafael displayed fluency in the English language (something he worked hard to achieve from a young age), he comments on how his friends that graduated with him and went to college had “terrible” English and French, and as a result had to take remedial French classes as they did not pass the French language test. This, Rafael found disappointing and attributed this fact to his friends “not car[ing]” about language – an attitude he believes was fostered in the school he attended.

According to his experiences, Rafael believes that in general, teachers do exhibit an understanding of immigrant students, but also commented on the subject of study to be an important determining factor for teachers’ interest in culture. Some fields of study require teachers to be more knowledgeable of individual cultures. In the case of Armenian students, Rafael believes that teachers should be aware of their recent history, diaspora, genocide and religion. As a whole, he believes that teachers can help the adjustment process for immigrants by spending more time with students on an individual basis after class targeting possible areas of difficulty. He is confident that academic performance can be enhanced in areas of difficulty by improving teacher-parent communication beyond the typical biennial school meetings. Moreover, he believes that sometimes immigrant students need a brief explanation of various cultural differences. Also, Rafael encourages immigrant students to adopt a reciprocal attitude and make an effort to know about the Quebec culture, the language divide, maybe even try to appreciate hockey, in addition to not “shun[ning] one of the official languages at the expense of another” since both English and French are necessary and important, not only in school but for later in life.

Salpi
Age 24 from Lebanon

Leaving the insecure and fearful war situation in Lebanon was not easy for Salpi's family. Although they experienced various hardships of schools closing, sleeping in corridors in order to be safe from the bombs, hearing shattered glass and feeling the walls shake, Salpi's family fled to Cyprus for a year after which they immigrated to Montreal; besides the grandparents, they were the last of the relatives to leave, however, they never wanted to leave for good, Salpi's family would surely return. Therefore, excited at age 7, Salpi moved to Canada where she started attending a local Armenian community school starting from grade 1.

Salpi's experiences at her new school did not start off too smoothly. Faced with the "spoiled", "rude", "cold" "snobs" that formed the social click at school, Salpi was not at all impressed, felt like an outsider and did not feel like she fit in and therefore felt isolated. In addition, Salpi only knew Armenian, a little English which she had recently learned in Cyprus but "didn't understand a word of French". As a whole, Salpi found the school curriculum rather heavy with the three languages among other subjects. Regardless of the linguistic difficulties and heavy school program that Salpi faced, she did rather well in school. She found her teachers helpful and understanding of her situation as "the school was somewhat prepared, because a lot of people came at that time". Moreover, Salpi is grateful to her mother who helped her with her homework and even asked her teachers for extra work that she could help Salpi with at home. As a result, Salpi did well in school for most subjects and claims that "people who were born here [...] they didn't have more than me, I mean, sometimes I used to help them or we would be at the same level...". Academically, Salpi adjusted well; once she had grasped the French and English languages, she was able to integrate socially.

Indeed, Salpi did experience a struggle with self-esteem in school with the process of adjusting to her peers to accomplish the feeling that she fit in; however, because Salpi's parents were so attached to their home country and because of their partial resistance to integrate, Salpi's own degree of integration was affected, as the temporary, transit feeling caused stress and made her feel different. She quotes:

we were like, ok we can't really buy a house and maybe we're gonna go back, we can't really do this, we can't really do that, so it's like ok, so I was, you know, kind of, didn't have the same things as my, as my friends or...

Salpi remembers times of feeling down, depressed or anxious because of her move to Canada as she felt like she could never really integrate properly; in addition Salpi did not have her immediate family close by. Not being able to fit in, not being able to integrate properly left Salpi asking "who am I, where do I belong?"

I was never completely integrated here, so it's like where do I belong? I don't belong in Lebanon, I'm not close to the Arabic culture, I'm not close to the Canadian culture, I'm not like the Armenian here, they, who were born here, who've had their families for 20 years, for 40 years here, you know...

Other areas of stress that Salpi experienced was in the mentality clash she had with her parents. She found her parents strict as they did not allow her to go to parties and other places like her other friends. "It's like, my parents had a lot of anxiety, fear, and they transmitted that to me, but I didn't see that in my friends, like for them, normal you know".

Salpi claims that the base of her ethnic identity is Armenian; however it was with her entry to college that Salpi had to make a choice to become more integrated into the Quebec culture as she felt that she had been "completely cut off" from the host culture. Now Salpi considers herself as someone who has held on to her Armenian heritage and has adapted and integrated into the Canadian, Quebecois culture. Undeniably, Salpi felt a culture shock when she

went from school to college. She felt that her school was “isolated”, “in a bubble” and for this reason partly wishes she had attended a French or English school because she feels that if she had done that, she would have felt more accepted and confident in the Quebecois culture. Due to the fact of her attending an Armenian community school, Salpi felt that there was an element of lack in the social aspect of her life and because of her ignorance of Quebecois culture but on the other hand has

got so much from, you know that Armenian school, that it's, it's hard, I mean, I have good friends now, it's like my family and I have learned so much about Armenians that... I don't know if I would trade it.

Had her parents been more willing to integrate, Salpi believes that the process of adapting and integrating would have been easier. Academically speaking, Salpi would have felt more comfortable with less of a load at school for Armenian and believes that students should invest in focusing on learning French and English well, as she considers this to be the key to success in school, life in Quebec, for higher education and in the workforce. In addition, Salpi deems it beneficial for individuals to be actively involved in their community, knowing what is going on in the society they are living as a citizen as well as participating, bringing their contributions.

as an Armenian, like you have something to contribute too, and as a citizen you need, you have to contribute something to your city, you're not just gonna contribute to your own culture, to your own church, to your own school, to your own community, you can just come out and bring something to this society too, you're living in it.

Teachers on the other hand need “to get that interest [...] or love started for their language and culture” by instigating in students a motivation that the city they are living in and the language they are learning are beautiful, this she believes will help the integration process. In addition, teachers, Salpi believes need to know that Armenians are motivated, hard working individuals, very attached to their culture, in need of respect and love; being open minded. Salpi

recounts of some unpleasant memories of teachers showing a disrespectful attitude towards her because she had a different culture. The behaviour she found “shocking”. Salpi is confident that when showing interest and acceptance will spur students towards a motivation to learn the host culture and language, making the process of integration a smoother journey.

Mitch
Age 28 from Lebanon

It was during the time of the Lebanese civil war that Mitch and his family immigrated to Montreal, Canada. Mitch was 11 and depicts with his vivid memory that he was indeed excited to move country. Although friends and family were left behind, other relatives awaited their arrival in Montreal. Mitch’s family wanted a “new”, “peaceful” life, as they had endured quite some hardship in Lebanon with scarce water and electricity and “even the lack of bread”, thus for Mitch, changing school and changing friends was indeed seen in a more trivial light.

In Lebanon, Mitch attended an Armenian school and upon his arrival he continued his schooling in an Armenian community school in Montreal from Secondary 1 until the end of high school. Already having a good knowledge of Armenian and French, Mitch described himself as “better” than the peers in his class in most subjects and would often be the guy to copy homework from. Therefore, academically, Mitch was doing fine. His only initial problem spot was his knowledge of the English language as he did not know much English before coming to Canada. However, Mitch had a good English teacher who proved to be understanding and helpful. Slowly, with the help of the TV and reading books, his English improved; however it did not seem good enough because when Mitch went to College, he was obliged to take special English classes. According to Mitch, language was never seen by him as a priority in his early

years at school in Montreal, because his interests were more in history and geography. In addition his school encouraged the science and mathematics fields. This had its toll later on when Mitch started college. He states that he had to “read up on” English language related fields in order to “catch up with [his] Canadian, non-Armenian colleagues”.

Mitch would often ask his father for help in science and mathematics; his mother would help him in geography, history and French. English was a subject where Mitch has to work hard on his own but also get help from his older sister. Being one of the smart kids in his class, he would rarely require the help of peers and as a whole did well academically. The only academic area that displayed potential need for improvement was in secondary 3, 4 and 5, when his grades for mathematics and science dropped as he struggled in the enriched classes of these subjects.

Mitch does not recount many positive memories with peers in the Armenian community school he attended. He had difficulty fitting in the one “click” that existed in the school’s social circle, and found the whole process of trying to fit in as “stressful” as he sought feeling normal and a part of his new school. Mitch remembers being teased because he was from a Middle Eastern country as well as being made fun of for his accent when he spoke English. Interestingly enough, although he had a common language and heritage with his Armenian peers at school, he felt that there was a definite difference in culture between himself and his peers; his peers being first or second generation Canadian Armenians who seemed to have acquired an air of almost denying their roots and considering themselves “Anglo-Saxon” Canadians. In addition, Mitch was interested in geography and history and his love for such subjects manifested in his good grades. This fact he adds “also did not help me [...] be like the other kids, ‘cause I was different on that level, because a lot of [...]Armenian kids here, even though they go to Armenian school make fun of Armenian culture, they make fun of Armenian history[...]‘cause it’s not cool.”

Looking back at all these lived experiences, Mitch considers his move to Montreal as “sacrificing something very special” but yet still considers himself an Armenian who has integrated into the Canadian society, in confirming that it “ was not very easy to do” as he recalls often feeling down and anxious. Mitch does remember recognizing a ‘mentality clash’ with his parents, but mentions that usually both sides of the situation have their strengths and importance and require the maturity of the individual as to how to conduct one’s life and which point of older traditional culture to hold on to as well as which aspects of host culture to acquire. However this struggle does exist as he notices differences between himself and his Canadian or Quebecois peers; Mitch still lives at home with his parents, his friends don’t.

For Mitch, the experience of attending an Armenian community school and juggling with this internal struggle of identity was hard. On the one hand, Mitch never really desired to be considered or consider himself completely Canadian, yet on the other hand being Armenian presented for him what he called a “burden” as he wished he had attended a French or English school instead. Mitch believes that living in a country such as Canada, it would have been better for him to have attended a French or English school. He declares how “great” it felt to leave his Armenian community school after which he felt more free and secure, not being vulnerable to the teasing he was used to. Mitch reckons that, had he attended a non-Armenian school, he would have better relationships with non-Armenians, being more socially and emotionally prepared for living in Canadian society and although he appreciates the education he received at his school, he would have wanted to spend more of his time in school focusing his energies on subjects he enjoyed. Had he attended a French or English school, Mitch feels that he would not have been behind in the field he loves most- Fine Arts; his Canadian colleagues in the field

started being cultivated in the field at a much younger age, something Mitch lacked but caught up with and continues to do so now.

Mitch never really experienced any major problems with teachers. He does believe teachers should have a basic knowledge of the culture of their students and points out that the ethnicity of the teacher also influences the degree of cultural relevance the teacher may have. Mitch advises teachers teaching Armenian immigrants that more times than not, an Armenian student will always work hard and try their best and says “you probably don’t have anything to worry about, [...] they will perform.” Mitch also cautions teachers that it can be hard to “get to know” Armenians.

Mitch tells Armenian immigrants “not to be a ghetto Armenian, try to umm, learn your neighbour’s lifestyle as soon as possible, try to be kind and then talk to them as soon as possible” and believes that by doing so doors of both academic and social success will open.

Although Mitch had to make adjustments upon leaving his Armenian community school to go to college and face the real world, as a whole, moving country was much harder and stressful.

Sarah
Age 21 from Lebanon

At the age of 15, Sarah along with her family moved from Beirut, Lebanon to Montreal. Leaving family and friends behind was hard but as a whole, Sarah was excited for the future that lay ahead for her and her four siblings. Instability was characteristic of the Middle East at the

time Sarah's family moved and as a whole, life was expensive; education was almost a luxury – Canada seems to provide a wider horizon with more opportunities.

Going from an Armenian school in Lebanon, Sarah started to attend a local Armenian community school in Montreal starting at secondary 3. Sarah arrived with a prior knowledge of Armenian, French and Arabic and was considered fluent in all three languages; she recounts:

...when I first moved here...I found, let's say the studies...I found it easy, I don't know why... there [Lebanon] I was more like prepared, or, it's like stuff that we just learned, we had learned there 2 years ago. We learned it...It was new, so I was surprised because the education I found it very easy.

Academically, Sarah had no problems. The only area of initial difficulty was in the English language as she was more French educated, however with much effort and hard work, Sarah was able to conquer this area of lack:

Mostly the language...English...I had a problem, but then, once I...made effort, and I got to ...learn it, and...Like obviously like writing essays is not, is not...one of my strengths...I'm ok but...obviously this is why I'm [an] electrical engineer now...[laughs].

In situations of need, Sarah would often get help from her older sister or her parents. Teachers were indeed helpful but Sarah shares that “I was shy...in class, I was always thinking... whatever I'm gonna say, I'm gonna ask to the teacher, it might be wrong, and people might laugh at me...I didn't know like how people would react to the question...”

Sarah found it hard to fit into her new circle of friends at her Armenian community school as she found people to be “different”. She recounts that in the beginning she would come home crying, sometimes even wishing she was back in Lebanon as she felt like an outsider.

“...people they think that if you come from Lebanon let's say or from the Middle East, it's like you're more...old fashioned?...They somehow think you're not educated or...like underestimating you basically, which is sort of like bullying...” Eventually, Sarah found herself fitting in and

adjusting into a new circle of friends, however, to this day, she finds that there is indeed a difference in “mentality” between herself and her Armenian friends here as she finds herself holding on to different values. Sarah finds herself hanging around Armenian friends most of the time and believes herself to be someone who holds onto her Armenian identity. Although she has allowed herself to integrate into the Canadian society, she believes that her context is important for practicing her Armenian or Canadian identity: “I rather like, just be Armenian, you know, not involve Canadian culture to my own habits and stuff, but when you get in the work-life, everything is different, you can’t adapt your Armenian culture, traditions in your work.”

Although she did experience certain difficulties, Sarah explains that the burden of adjusting was easier for her because she had no academic problems and found the school work easy. As a whole Sarah is thankful that she attended an Armenian community school upon arriving to Montreal because she believes that its sheltering effect helped her to adjust with fewer problems: “if I came here straight from Lebanon to a French school [...] that would have been like maybe very hard”. Sarah believes that the Armenian community school that she attended served as a “home” for her allowing her to not forget her Armenian culture and identity.

Sarah’s journey towards adjusting to life in Montreal was rather smooth, but according to her would have been easier if she had more family here. In addition, Sarah believes that language is the key to connecting with people and advises new Armenian immigrants to focus on learning the language “‘cause once you know the language, you’ll find yourself more comfortable in a place.” Moreover Sarah believes that students could be motivated to learn the culture and language of the host society when teachers show interest and convey a certain knowledge of the minority culture:

someone knowing about your culture and giving value to the way you know Armenians do things...I’ll appreciate that...see I’m here, I’m an immigrant, I’m learning about

Canadians and they're willing to learn about my own culture...that will motive me certainly...

Sarah does indeed remember times when her self-esteem was affected and recalls feeling down during her stages of adapting to school and life in Montreal, and although slightly hesitant, Sarah confirms “this is the way it is I guess” as she has accepted Canada as her new home – yes she did experience her share of difficulties but is now “happy” and feels more “stabilized” as she states: “I don’t really think I’m gonna move back to Lebanon or anything ‘cause I’ve got used to the way it is..”.

Section Two – Montreal French language public school attendees

Adam
Age 23 from Syria

At the age of 12, Adam experienced the excitement of moving country as his family decided to leave Syria and immigrate to Canada where most of their relatives already were residing. Adam remembers everything as his family left the politically unstable community they were living to fly over to what he thought was “paradise”. Leaving a society in which he felt as the minority, was somewhat unwelcomed and where he experienced constant cultural and social disparity might have seemed relatively easy for Adam, but indeed school friends were left behind.

As Adam started school in Montreal, he experienced some shocks both within his own culture and within the host society. Coming from an Armenian school in Syria, Adam knew Armenian, Arabic and very little English. In Montreal, he started in 6th grade when he started attending special classes for immigrant students where he learned French; this was a milieu

where Adam felt welcomed and at ease because he was surrounded by other immigrants who were living out similar experiences as him. In these special French classes, Adam was able to learn French in a comfortable environment where everyone was at the same learning stage as him; this made learning the French language easier and more pleasant. The beginning of the journey of learning French however was accompanied with various trials requiring perseverance, which did eventually pay off as Adam now “corrects Quebecers”. Adam’s secret was determination, a trait his parents brought him up to cultivate.

Adam’s parents, afraid that he would lose his Armenian culture and heritage, pushed him to attend Armenian activities. To begin with Adam found it very hard to find his place among Armenians. He felt as if he was looked upon as the “new one” or the “outsider”; he found himself in a circle of people that already knew each other and seemed hesitant to bring him into their circle, as he sensed that his fellow Armenians were “snobbing [him] out”. Unfortunately, Adam sees this same offensive behaviour today as he sees how people still go to measures to keep a distance.

Initially, Adam found it easier to integrate and get along with his Canadian peers. However, even with his Canadian peers, Adam experienced his fair share of upsets as he shares “as a kid especially, being rejected, I think is [...] the worst feeling somebody can have [...] you try your best, all you see is rejection, it’s not easy”. Back in Syria, Adam was used to being friendly and talking to everyone; this new situation in Montreal was awkward and hard for him. Adam remembers feeling “different” in behaviour, culture and values when compared to his Canadian peers; and although Adam has now learned the Canadian or Quebecer way of thinking, he has chosen to stick to the values which he grew up with. Adam’s friends would probably

leave home before getting married; this is not the case with Adam, he has been brought up differently and chooses to maintain this value system.

Adam does not recall having any achievement differences with his Canadian peers; his only difficulty was that of the French language, but once he grasped it, all fell into place.

As an Armenian having grown up in a Montreal, Adam now considers himself someone who has held on to his Armenian heritage yet has simultaneously integrated into the Canadian culture. Adam is now very involved in Armenian activities and he mentions this was a choice that he made. According to Adam, his parents, although relatively traditional, adapted rather well to the whole Canadian system, and he mentions how important age is when moving country; the younger the better. Although Adam may have experienced a certain mentality clash with his parents, he believes that with good judgement you can know what traditions of your culture to keep.

Adams's teachers throughout his academic experience have been quite understanding of the acculturative stressors that may have existed during his process of adaptation. The younger an immigrant comes, the more they can benefit from the one-to-one time teachers make available to students for areas of weakness. Adam believes that teachers, in general need to be aware of the cultures of their students as this can help in understanding the way students might react or behave.

Believing that the Armenian culture is unique, Adam says that people can learn from Armenians while stating that Armenians need to be proud of their culture. Therefore, he encourages Armenians to "always stick to [their] roots"; for the immigrants, to work hard, focusing on weaknesses and to be patient.

For Adam, holding on to his ethnic identity is very important, yet he believes that if he had attended an Armenian community school, his level of cultural pride and identity would have been the same. He doesn't think this to be the case with most Armenians and hence firmly insists that all Armenians attend Armenian community schools.

Jane

Age 30 from Saudi Arabia

Jane and her family moved straight from Saudi Arabia, a country where members of the Armenian community are scarcely found. At the time of immigration, Jane was 13 years old; schooling in Saudi Arabia was limited for the expatriate community and the imminent gulf war initiated their fast move to Canada. Jane did not have a chance to say goodbye to her friends.

Jane's family had visited Montreal and had already been exposed to its warm summers and harsh winters; there were now other aspects of life to adjust to. Living in Saudi Arabia had allowed Jane's family to be open to other cultures thus minimizing the amount of culture shock to almost nil. Jane was now faced with getting used to the Canadian culture as well as adjusting within the Armenian circle. Jane's parents insisted on her Armenian heritage maintenance and encouraged her along with her siblings to attend Armenian events and activities but for some reason she always felt like an outsider. Jane recounts of her experiences of attempting to fit in the Armenian community:

...and we tried, but I just...we just never...fit in, or they all knew each other, and like again, I, even there I felt like an outsider, and it was really, really strange... we'd go to the activities and, you know, people would say hi, how are you, but they would never include you in...their gang or whatever, and talk to you... me and my sister would just stand there...for a year and two....and after that we...told our parents... don't wanna go, it's not fun...

Now that Jane looks back, she believes it was easier to integrate into the Canadian society rather than her ethnic community. Indeed, Jane did experience feeling “different” at the French public school she attended by not dressing the same way as the other kids or not knowing the French language. Although Jane had taken private French lessons in Saudi Arabia, Jane states “ we kind of didn’t realize how...French Montreal was” and in the special French immersion classes Jane attended, she recounts the “awful” beginnings of feeling “completely lost” in her French public school:

I just assumed that everybody spoke English and French, so I thought like I would be able to...tell teachers what I was feeling...the first day of school...I remember it...I went and every teacher, every adult person who would come to me, I was speaking in English, trying to understand where am I supposed to go, [what] am I supposed to do, and they would look at me and not understand English and ask me in French...it was completely awful.

Jane remembers times of feeling down and anxious as she recalls “coming home crying... not wanting to go the next day or...dreading it but going...[anyway]” and remembers seeing other students in her class that had been in the special immersion class for more than one year and there realized that she had to “really get adjusted to this faster or else [she’ll] be here for a while ...” and this motivated Jane :

Somehow I put all the energy into that and said ok...the better I do...the more I can move on, if I don’t do well I’m gonna have to just be here another year...so I put all my energy into that I think...yeah...and just to fit in and not be part of the *acceuil* class, I mean, you know, you’re put in a class with just other immigrants, which is not a bad thing, but it’s known as the *acceuil* class and you realize, hey you’re not taking other subjects, you’re just doing French and it’s...not like high school, it’s just you’re in one class and you’re just doing French all the time.

Jane eventually adjusted to the French language but would often feel “shy” to speak in French. Although Jane did experience difficulties with the acquisition of French, she is thankful that she was “forced” to learn it as she believes that if she went straight to college, she would

never have learned it. The special French immersion classed that Jane attended helped her a lot as she was in an environment with other students going through similar adapting difficulties and remembers the teachers to be “amazing” as they were understanding and were “very attuned to...trying to help”. Despite her struggles with the French language, Jane did well in other subjects. In high school, all her subjects were in French, and although an extra effort was needed in order to achieve good grades, her initial lack in French “didn’t get in the way” for her overall academic success; Jane believes that this is due partly to the fact that she had a good base in mathematics and the sciences from Saudi Arabia.

Although Jane doesn’t have too many Armenian friends and has not attended an Armenian school, she has adopted the acculturative strategy of Integration as she holds on to her culture of origin and has also adapted into the host culture. She does believe however that if she had attended an Armenian school she would have been more Armenian as she compares herself to her youngest sister who did attend an Armenian community school and seems more “visibly Armenian”.

The French language was Jane’s main area of difficulty; she was fluent in English and had learned Armenian at home. No other major acculturative stresses persisted in Jane’s life; she did experience some intergenerational differences where she may have felt different from her friends as she had to “always kind of...report back” to her parents when she went out with friends, or when her father opposed her going to her prom, however nothing that caused stress or tension. Apart from this, Jane states that as a whole, her family needed about 5-6 years to completely adapt, integrate and cease from looking back and saying “what if”. Jane believes her teachers helped her integrate into the culture and society of Montreal but believes it would have been easier for her if she had immigrated at a younger age.

Zander
Age 31 from Turkey

Zander with his parents and four siblings moved to Montreal from Diyarbakir, Turkey at age 9. Although his family lived a relatively good lifestyle in Turkey, and although they spoke Turkish, Zander's family experienced religious persecution as he recalls "living in a Muslim country [...] we would get stoned going to church." Zander's family in pursuit of a better future had to leave some relatives behind, only to reunite with other family they had, already living in Canada; they arrived as refugees in Montreal, excited for what lay ahead. Now that Zander looks back, he has "no regrets", feels "fortunate" to have the experience he has had by living in Canada and is thankful that he now lives in Montreal as he feels that "today Canada is [his] home."

When Zander first came to Montreal, he only knew Turkish and thus had to attend special French classes. He muses over how different his school back in Turkey was "... you had to cut your nails, you had to be all straight, your head [...] and everything, it, it was very disciplined [...] it was very strict and disciplined." Going from a school in Turkey where hitting students was the form of discipline to a class filled with immigrants learning French just like him made Zander feel comfortable. The struggle with language was Zander's biggest difficulty; language gave him confidence, provided the means for social integration with peers, without it he felt "shy", "different", "low", "reject[ed]", lacked confidence and had a low self-esteem. Zander acknowledges that an extra effort was required on his part, and although initially Zander had trouble concentrating in school and was not able to get help from his parents, Zander proudly admits that his source of motivation was his siblings; his motivation continues as he tells of how he still desires to go back to university.

Upon arrival, Zander had no prior knowledge of the Armenian language and started attending special Saturday classes at an Armenian community school. Although Zander's mother tongue is Turkish, speaks Turkish with parents, French with his brother and English with one of his sisters, Zander still believes he holds on to his Armenian culture as he declares "my culture is Armenian [...] even though we spoke Turkish [...] doesn't mean, we didn't speak Armenian, that we were not Armenians". Zander believes he has a well balanced and well integrated identity; he says "I find it very rich now, to have this, this mixture, of having the [...] Turkish culture, the Armenian culture and then coming here and growing up here". Zander feels that this experience allows him to relate to Armenians, Turkish people as well as Canadians and believes he has taken the good parts of each culture. "You know what I like about having the Armenian and the Turkish culture? The good values...[...] The family values...[...] you know, respect about yourself."

Indeed acculturative stressors were exhibited in Zander's life. "The most difficult part is adapting psychologically" he says as he had to adapt to the "language [...] making new friends, adapting [...] changing your lifestyle [...]the fact that [...] you don't speak at all, and you're not confident." All this presented psychological stressors. In addition, Zander watched his older sister live out the struggles of changing country as an older teenager and although Zander himself does not recall experiencing anxiety or depression as a result of their immigration, he did see how acculturation affected his family and seeing that struggle affected him.

As a whole, Zander believes immigrants should learn to concentrate in school in order to get good grades in addition to having an open mind when coming to live in a new society.

Nancy
Age 29 from Lebanon

Nancy's family left Lebanon's to come to Montreal when she was 12 years old. Nancy describes that they left during the time of the Lebanese war and tense economical situation. It was hard for Nancy to leave her friends and family behind but she knew she had family in Canada which was comforting; in fact she states: "I really wanted to leave...I was like ready to leave 'cause I just wanted to get away from the situation there..." Nancy was excited to move as her family immigrated for the sake of a better life.

Nancy states that her biggest difficulty was going to school. In Lebanon, Nancy had attended a private Armenian school where she had learned Armenian, Arabic and English. In Montreal, Nancy was obliged to learn French and so started attending special French classes in a public school. Nancy describes that she felt comfortable in such an environment because of the way she was treated and helped; Nancy did not have the 'outsider' feeling as she was surrounded by other students from other cultures where everyone had a different accent and there was no teasing between students. Nancy then moved on to regular classes where she started secondary 2. This transition was not difficult for Nancy as she mentions how easy it was for her to make friends and was still surrounded with class mates from different cultures. Nancy had no academic problems or difficulties except for the French language. She shares:

Maybe at times I was more shy to maybe speak or maybe I was more, you know conscious about my accent...but I didn't really care...for me...well this is how I speak and you know...I'm still working on it so I didn't let it be in the way of anything...

Education was very important for Nancy and her parents as she considers herself an A student: "that was kind of in me to do my best". High school was "easy" for Nancy as she had a

good base in most subjects from Lebanon. The French language did not stop her from doing well.

I think I had an advantage, as in when in Lebanon, the school system, it's kind of more... not advanced but it was much more strict, so by the time I came here I had already done all the classes, let's say maths and everything...science....my base was really good so I was able to kinda keep up with here...and I found school here very easy...

What was difficult for Nancy was integrating into the Armenian community of Montreal.

Nancy did have Armenian friends from school but never participated in or became involved with the Armenian circle or community as she found the Armenian people in Montreal “different” in their mentality, behaviour as well as culturally and linguistically:

...when I came here I found that the Armenian people here are different than me...they're more Canadian than Armenian so...no they're not like me...because I remember before I came here...that was an issue for me...I was afraid...I used to tell my parents...I want to go to an Armenian school because you know...I don't want to feel like...I can't follow them, I don't speak the language, so I was worried....but then when I saw that I had to go to a French school to learn French...and after that... no I don't want to go to an Armenian school because Armenians here are different...they're not like me...

Despite these apparent difficulties, Nancy claims that she did not really experience a culture shock upon arrival to Montreal. Nancy confirms that “not a single day” did she feel down, anxious or depressed due to her adaptation difficulties in Montreal.

Nancy considers herself “a bit of everything” as she has held on to her Armenian identity and has also adapted into the host society. Although Nancy did not attend an Armenian school in Montreal, she does not think that diluted her ethnic identity in any way, in fact, she does not even wish to have attended an Armenian school now that she looks back. Nancy believes that being exposed to other cultures helps you know who you really are:

what I believe is that...your identity...you kind of explore it even more when we confront other cultures, when you're only with... surrounded by the same people as you, let's say Armenians in this case...you don't question anything, you just have that feeling...you think you're Armenian but what is really being Armenian? So, not questioning is not the

way for me to go...so confronting, or conflict between other cultures and other ideas is that when you start really exploring what it is...who are you and how do you feel really? Is it because just people told you you're Armenian and everybody else around you is Armenian that you feel Armenian?

Nancy shares how she believes to have a very supportive family, had a stable environment during her adaptation process in Montreal and believes that she is “person who adapts quite easily”. Nancy advises new comers to not be insecure about the language and to be involved in the community as she believes, according to her experience, people in Montreal are open minded and encouraging.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The stories of the eight Armenian foreign-born individuals point out to various common themes. Some of these themes are related to their immigration and adaptation to Montreal; other themes relate to various acculturative stresses experienced as told by the individuals, still yet other themes involve schooling and academic success and adjustment. Each interview shed light on a different aspect of the acculturative process; some narratives touch only slightly upon some themes while are weighty in other themes. Each narrative seems to have a central focus which highlights the area of emphasis or the area of greater struggle of the individual. The purpose of analyzing and comparing the individual themes serves to better understand the acculturative process, the acculturative stresses and their link to academic success.

The aim of each interview was to understand the general experiences undergone by each participant, to identify existing acculturative stressors, to explain these stresses and locate any influences of these stresses on the academic performance and overall schooling experience of each participant as told by them. It is important to understand the background of each participant in the attempt to describe each unique experience, taking each account as valuable to this understanding of the acculturation stress and academic performance. After a general overview and comparison of the participants involved, the subsequent sections discuss the thematic findings in two separate subdivisions; the first portion discusses the themes related to acculturation stress, the second portion examines the themes linked with the schooling experiences of the participants and academic performance. Any emerging themes related to

acculturation stresses and academic performance of the individuals interviewed will then be outlined.

Participants

Table 1 (see page 84) shows the overall demographic data of the participants. All participants emigrated from Middle Eastern countries. All participants who attended Armenian community schools in Montreal had come from Lebanon; these participants had already attended some form of Armenian schooling and were thus able to continue in an Armenian community school in Montreal. Participants who attended French language public schools in Montreal were from differing countries; in these countries two participants had attended Armenian schools (Adam and Nancy) while two had not (Jane and Zander). All participants except one (Sarah) had left their country of origin in search for a better life. Most participants had experienced or were vulnerable to persecution due to civil war in the case of those emigrating from Lebanon, from the imminent gulf war in the case of Jane; or from some form of hardship in the case of Zander's family facing religious persecution in Turkey and Adam's family feeling unstable and unwelcomed in Syria.

In all the cases reviewed, the process of acculturation was evident in accordance with the definition given by Kosic et al (2004): Acculturation can be defined as a change in attitudes, norms, values, and even behaviours experienced by immigrants as a result of their contact with another culture. The mode of acculturation of all eight participants according to Berry's (1987) model was that of Integration where individuals maintained their culture of origin and simultaneously adopted the host culture. Although the foundation of each participant's mode of acculturation is Integration, the level of integration differs from participant to participant; some

leaning more towards assimilation while others leaning more towards separation - that is, some were more passionately able to hold on to their ethnicity while others were more inclined to adapt into the Canadian society, their ethnic standing rather neutral. Each individual arrived in Montreal with their own prior experiences, with their own family values and expectations of the host society; why is it that all of the participants (although with differing degrees) embraced the integrative mode of acculturation? To what can we ascribe this to – the pluralistic nature of the Canadian society, to the school system, to parents, peers and other social relationships, to the individual personality, to personal decision or to a mixture of all of the above? Tonks and Paranjpe (1999) describe how Canada, unlike the United states is a country that upholds ethnic culture and encourages immigrants and citizens alike to not surrender to the host society in its entirety, to not resign from their culture of origin and heritage but rather to retain and value their ethnic origin with its culture, language and values. Therefore, the pluralistic nature of the Canadian society helps in promoting integration as the mode of acculturation. Also, Tonks and Paranjpe state that individuals above the age of 10 prefer the separation or marginalization mode of acculturation when compared to Canadian born youth and immigrant youth who immigrated before the age of ten. This was not the case with the sample of Armenian foreign-born youth reviewed; half of the participants were above the age of 10 and had adopted the integration mode of acculturation. In addition, research shows that immigrants arriving after the age of ten also experience the most acculturation stress (Tonks and Paranjpe, 1999); this was not the case with this particular group of foreign-born Armenians. Age did not seem to play a direct role in predicting the degree of acculturation stress; in this study, Jane for example came to Montreal at age 13 and Nancy came at age 12, and both exhibited minimum acculturative stress, on the other hand Salpi immigrated at age 7 and seemed to exhibit the most acculturative stress. Age may

Table 1

Demographic Data of foreign-born Armenian participants

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Age of immigration</i>	<i>Immigrated from</i>	<i>Reason for immigration</i>	<i>Type of schooling</i>	<i>Acculturative strategy</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Highest degree</i>	<i>No. of siblings</i>
<i>Rafael</i>	23	7	Lebanon	War	Armenian	Integration	Single	University	2
<i>Mitch</i>	28	9	Lebanon	War	Armenian	Integration	Single	University	2
<i>Salpi</i>	24	7	Lebanon	War	Armenian	Integration	Single	University	1
<i>Sara</i>	21	14	Lebanon	Better life	Armenian	Integration	Single	College	4
<i>Adam</i>	23	12	Syria	Better life/some persecution	French public	Integration	Single	College	1
<i>Zander</i>	31	9	Turkey	Better life/some persecution	French public	Integration	Single	College	4
<i>Jane</i>	30	13	Saudi Arabia	Better life/gulf war	French public	Integration	Single	College	2
<i>Nancy</i>	29	12	Lebanon	War	French public	Integration	Single	University	1

have a certain role to play, as even the participants mentioned the benefits of immigrating at a younger age. Next, I will take a look at the various acculturative stressors experienced as told by the participants. The themes of acculturative stress are in the areas of: General thematic comparison, degrees of acculturation stress, voluntary vs. involuntary immigration, cultural disparity and culture shock, psychological stress, personal and ethnic identity maintenance and social relationships and influence: family and peers.

Acculturation stressors

General thematic comparison of acculturation stressors

Table 2 (see page 87) illustrates the potential acculturative stressor experienced by and compared among participants. According to the definition given by Tahmassian for acculturation stress as being the “cumulative stress experienced by the immigrant during the acculturation process” (2003, p.60), this sample of foreign-born youth all experienced acculturation stress to some degree. Some individuals experienced the stress more than others.

Except for one (Nancy), all participants, at some stage in their adaptation to Canadian culture, felt anxious, depressed or down; these same participants all experienced stress in areas of self-esteem or self-confidence. In each case the degree of stress differs from very slight to a great deal as expressed by the participants. All participants experienced difficulties with having to learn a new language. In some cases, participants arrived with a prior knowledge of either French or English, or both, or none, but all of them experienced stress of linguistic nature. All except one participant experienced some form of intergenerational struggle, conflict or a difference in mentality. Only three out of the eight participants experienced a struggle with ethnic identity maintenance; two of these attended French public schools. Interestingly enough,

one of the participants who experienced a struggle with the ethnic identity and finding their place in both the ethnic culture and the host culture was from an Armenian community school.

Although all participants experienced an overall pattern of adjustment to the host society, half of the group expressed some form of culture shock or difficulty adjusting culturally. It is interesting how the term 'culture shock' has been expanded by these participants to apply to varying contexts. Of these four participants, three of them expressed a form of culture shock when they graduated from high school (from their Armenian community school) and entered into college; being nurtured in a rather closed Armenian school community, these participants were faced with a new level of adjustment where they had to reach a new level of integration into the host culture. This culture shock was at varying degrees but significant enough to earn a comment. Two of these three experienced a large shock upon entering college and the third did notice a difference between the ethnic nurturing environment of the Armenian community school and college but was not greatly affected because she moved together with her friends from school, thus in a way continued, to some extent, in a semi-sheltered situation. In addition, one participant who had attended a French language public school felt like the social and cultural adjustments required to integrate into the Armenian circle were great enough that he referred to them as a culture shock.

Additional areas of potential stress were pointed out by two different participants. One experienced stress due to her parents' lack of willingness to integrate into the host society. The other experienced stress in watching members of immediate family experience difficulties with adjusting to the new situation.

Table 2.

Potential acculturative stressor experienced by and compared among participants.

	<i>Self-esteem/ self- confidence affected</i>	<i>Ethnic identity maintenance</i>	<i>Linguistic issues</i>	<i>Intergenerational conflict/tension OR mentality clash</i>	<i>Anxiety/ depression/ feeling down</i>	<i>Acculturative strategy of parents/family members</i>	<i>Culture shock</i>
<i>Rafael</i>	√		√	√ slight	√		√ from school to college
<i>Mitch</i>	√		√	√ slight	√		
<i>Salpi</i>	√	√	√	√ stress	√	√ resistance to integrate	√ moving to Canada & going from school to college
<i>Sarah</i>	√		√	√ slight/no stress	√		√ from school to college (slight)
<i>Adam</i>	√	√	√	√ slight/no stress	√		√ moving to Canada & integrating into Armenian community
<i>Zander</i>	√		√		√	√ difficulty of other members	
<i>Jane</i>	√	√	√	√ slight/no stress	√		
<i>Nancy</i>	None	None	√	√ slight	None		None

Degrees of acculturation stress

Acculturation often results in changes that may cause stress. These changes may cause stress, or remain benign and can be seen as a source for opportunity. In many of the given cases, the acculturative process was a means or source for opportunity. In the case of Zander, his family had experienced religious persecution as he recounts being stoned going to church and after living in Canada all these years, when he thinks about Turkey he does not show any hints of regret for their move: “I don’t wanna go back to Turkey to visit, that’s for sure... not even interested one bit...I see it on TV, I read about it, and I’m not interested at all...” Zander is thankful for his move and sees Montreal as the place of his future; without it they “wouldn’t have this knowledge, this opportunity, this lifestyle...” This may have been a basis for less stress in Zander’s life growing up in Montreal as he did not recount any major stresses with areas of personal or ethnic identity maintenance, no intergeneration conflict or family tension and no mention of culture shock although he did recognize the difference between Turkey and Canada. All subjects believed their move to Montreal was for the ultimate purpose of a better life. Sarah, recounts that although happy in Lebanon, one of the reasons they moved was for the sake of her education and the education of her siblings as “university is pretty expensive in Lebanon” thus more opportunity was available for all five children in Canada.

Voluntary vs. Involuntary immigration

The degree of acculturative stress is directly related to whether individuals move country on a voluntary or involuntary basis. According to Berry et al. (1987), involuntary immigrants are seen to exhibit more psychological problems related to acculturation than voluntary immigrants. All participants in this study were voluntary immigrants in a sense and therefore all embraced the

host society easily and accepted Canada as their new home. For most of them, this was not an immediate manifestation. All participants expressed some form of excitement for what lay ahead in Canada, however, many of the participants mentioned times of wanting to go back or questioning their move to Canada:

Salpi: ...they [parents] always dreamed of going back home, they said once the war's gonna be over, we're gonna go back.

Sarah: Yeah, I still sort of wish that [I was back in Lebanon].

Jane: ...it took, I can say...maybe even our whole family about 5-6 years until we totally...stopped kind of looking back and saying, what if, and what if we hadn't, and what if we had gone somewhere else, and what if we went to Toronto instead, and what if...

Later in her interview, Jane mentions the importance of moving on and accepting your new home:

... just try and get used to it...stop you know like, you're here now...like don't forget what you went through but...some people always think, ok ...let's go back..or what if we go back and maybe we'll go back in a year...but if you keep thinking that way, you won't fully accept the fact that you are here and that this your life now and...The quicker you come to that realization the faster you will get accustomed to things...

Other participants were neutral or did not make mention of this issue. Zander, as stated above had no interest in going back to his country of origin. Nancy on the other hand was eager to leave.

Salpi's situation is an example of moving based on a slight involuntary basis as her parents always thought they were going to return to Lebanon once the war was over and they never accepted their new life in Canada. Salpi mentions how this affected her pace of integration as she harboured a "temporary" feeling inside of her. Salpi, although not an involuntary immigrant as defined in the literature, was the one who had the most struggles, regrets,

confirming the literature according to Shirikian (2006) who states that youth, whose parents refuse or integrate minimally into the host culture exhibit many more psychological problems than those youth whose parents integrate.

...my parents had a lot of anxiety, fear, and they transmitted that to me, but I didn't see that in my friends...they used to be scared so much of everything, you know...always felt like they were going back.

Salpi continues in reference to her parents' lack of integration affecting her confidence:

... not having my parents integrate here, not accepting this culture, always being afraid of the, the country, the people, not deciding if they want to stay here, or go back, not having a big family here...
...we can't really buy a house and maybe we're gonna go back, we can't really do this, we can't really do that, so it's like ok... didn't have the same things as my, as my friends or...

Cultural disparity and Culture shock

Furnham and Bochner refer to the acculturation process as culture shock (1986).

According to the findings, there were examples of acculturation without the presence of culture shock – as in the case of both Jane and Nancy; they did not compare their acculturative experiences to a culture shock. The literature also tells us that the greater the cultural and behaviour disparity between the two distinct cultures may result in increased acculturative stress (Berry and Annis, 1974; Berry, 1997; Sam, 2000). All of the participants were from Middle Eastern countries and all talked about a striking difference between the country they emigrated from and Canada, their new home. Therefore in all cases there was a real cultural disparity that needed getting used to. Three slight exceptions were the cases of Jane, Zander and Nancy. Although Jane was from Saudi Arabia, a country very different from Canada, being part of the expatriate community in Saudi Arabia allowed Jane and her family to be exposed to families from western countries as well as from other countries:

...our family's always been quite open to, you know, to new cultures and having grown up in Saudi Arabia, having had friends from all over the world, you know, from the...India, from Far East, from Africa, we're close to a lot of cultures too...

Zander commented on how Montreal was so multicultural and that his school had students of many nationalities and "seeing a Lebanese or another Armenian...you feel like you adapt to yourself and you...feel more comfortable." In the case of Nancy, school was a place of multicultural diversity and this was comforting to her. She recounts that having Armenian friends and Lebanese friends helped her feel welcome and they were very much a part of her social circle. Therefore in this case, the culture of the school was not too different from what Nancy was used to at home or back in Lebanon; hence the absence of culture shock.

Psychological stress

Psychological stress was indeed existent in the acculturative process of all participants. Some subjects experienced it to large degrees and in many areas in their life, while others may have only experienced it in one area and that to only a slight degree. According to the literature, many different manifestations of psychological stress exist and may be experienced by the immigrant individual during the acculturation process (Liebkind, 1996; Sam, 2000; Phinney and Haas, 2003; Shirikian, 2006). Shirikian, in her study with Armenian youth in the United States, identified 9 areas of psychological stress: aggressive behaviour, anxiety/depression, attention problems, delinquent behaviour, identity problems, social problems, somatic problems, thought problems and withdrawal. Many of these same manifestations of psychological stress were evident in the participants in this study as acknowledged by the participants themselves. There were no accounts of any aggression, delinquency, somatic problems or thought problems. Incidences of anxiety (slight), depression (slight), one example of attention problems (Zander

describes how he was not able to concentrate in the beginning), identity and social problems (slight), and one case of withdrawal (Mitch describes feeling alone). In general, the participants did not report any severe cases of psychological stress.

Shirikian identifies psychological stressors to be more common for boys than for girls. This was not the case with the participants' experiences in Montreal; there was no distinguishable difference between boys and girls where psychological stress is concerned. In addition, age played a role in defining the degree of psychological stress for the Shirikian study where the older youth experienced more psychological stress. This is not the case for the participants in this study in Montreal; there was no distinguishable difference with age. In addition, Shirikian mentions that youth who experience discrimination exhibited higher levels of psychological stress. This is noteworthy for the participants in Montreal, Mitch explains his experiences of being teased in his Armenian community school for his accent and his extra knowledge certain school subjects; Mitch was also one of the participants that expressed to have experienced a higher level of psychological stress in the areas of feeling down, anxious or depressed as well as in the area of self-esteem. Also, Salpi was a participant who experienced discrimination from teachers (in college and university); indeed Salpi also expressed increased psychological stress in the areas of Identity maintenance, self-esteem, and in the area of feeling down, anxious or depressed.

Interestingly, Shirikian (2006) describes crowded homes to exhibit higher levels of manifested psychological stress; two participants (Zander and Sarah) had 4 siblings each but based on their stories, none of their stress can be associated to being in a crowded home, nor were they individuals expressing major areas of acculturative stress.

All participants except for Nancy experienced issues with self-esteem. Factors affecting self-esteem entail: maintaining a balanced relationship with the host society, engaging towards affairs of the ethnic culture, maintaining family ties, language proficiency (host and origin) and social support. Here are some examples of the responses the participants gave concerning their psychological adaptation:

- Zander: Self-esteem, exactly. It affects self-esteem. That's the most difficult one.
- Rafael: the first days at recess, like I'd always be alone kind of, you know. So, that always got to me.
- Sarah: Yeah, in the beginning, yeah in my self-esteem, definitely, I, I used to come and cry...
- Adam: ...a kid specially, being rejected, I think is more, it's the worst feeling somebody can have [...] try your best, all you see is rejection, it's not easy.

The literature tells us that “optimism leads to confidence, which leads to continuing effort, leads to more problem-centred coping” (Cross, 2003, p.358). This is a continuous process and decision that each immigrant made in order to adapt. Examples of immigrants persisting and remaining determined despite the odds:

- Jane: *[in reference to adapting and graduating from special French classes]...* have to, really get adjusted to this faster or else I'll be here for like a while [laughs] [...] That was my motivation...
- Adam: *[in reference to what helped him through his difficulties]...* determination. Well, that's how [...] my parents [...] brought me up.

Personal and ethnic identity maintenance

Arriving in the Canadian society as Armenians, each participant had to make some form of adjustment to both the Canadian/Quebec society as well as to the diasporic Armenian society. Out of the eight participants, only three of them expressed struggles associated with the

maintenance or development of either their ethnic Armenian identity within the Canadian society and culture. According to the literature, a heavy inclination towards the ethnic identity without identification with the host or mainstream culture may initially seem comforting but may eventually exacerbate psychological well-being (Berry, 1987). Although all participants were integrated individuals therefore did not experience the above, Salpi expresses her shock coming out of the Armenian community school into college:

Salpi: At the base, it's Armenian, I'm never gonna let go of that...but I had to make a choice when I went to Cegep from high school, I mean, you know, high school to Cegep was extremely....tough, I really felt the cultural shock and I really...realized that, I was completely cut off from Quebecois culture...So it was very like, who am I, where do I belong?...I don't belong...anywhere, I don't fit in anywhere.

Sam (2000) explains that a state of confusion may result when there is a hindrance or a problem with the development of adolescent identity. This fits Salpi's situation. A similar scenario of potential confusion is seen in Jane's response "...for some reason it was harder to fit in to the Armenian community here than it was even in the French public school, and that's what made it very weird for me..." also "I think I would have been more Armenian if I had gone to Armenian school...". Also, although Mitch integrated into the host society, he found it "tough" to do so and shares "I can't remember ever being [...] completely, like Canadian or Quebecois, like, I can't remember that, but I can remember being very very, feeling very burdened by being Armenian because it does mean a lot of things.."

According to Shirikian (2006), it is either the speaking of the Armenian language that is the best measure of identity or it is ascribed to the identification one has with other Armenian people; this idea would be shared among the Canadian Armenians in this study because all parents either sent their children to Armenian schools (Salpi, Rafael, Mitch, Sarah) or

encouraged them to go to Armenian events and Saturday school (Zander, Jane, Adam, Nancy). According to Manjikian (2005), diasporan Armenians build community centers that serve as support systems and “microcosms of “armenianness”” (p.9); this fact is very true for the lives of the 8 Armenian youth interviews. All of them were part of some “microcosm” whether in school, with friends, with family or with social activities.

Parents have a direct role to play in the identity development of the individual (Phinney et al., 2001). It is interesting to see two examples of participants who attended French public schools having parents pushing them to attend and be part of Armenian cultural activities:

Adam: ...they [parents] were afraid we were gonna lose our armenianness [...] if you want and [...] so they pushed us to go get involved in anything Armenian...

Jane: ...one of the main reasons my parents wanted to come to Montreal was because we were so, over there [Saudi Arabia] we were so isolated, there were no Armenian church, well no churches at all, well no Armenian churches, and no Armenian communities, or schools...but when we moved here, my parents...they're like Montreal has a really close-knit Armenian community let's move there and...in the beginning...my parents, I must say, they did put us maybe in one...for one year I went to Armenian Saturday school, to try and get us involved, they put us in...the track and field...and they really tried, and we tried...

This confirms the research by Bakalian (1989) as she verifies the influence the Armenian family has in nourishing the Armenian ethnic identity. Moreover, participants who attended French language public schools, faced what Mehranian calls “dual processes of enculturation and acculturation” (2007, p.79). Most of them had to establish themselves into an Armenian community as well as establish themselves in the host Canadian society. Adam and Jane were both used to a certain degree of “armenianness” from their country of origin, but found themselves needing to re-establish that level of “armenianness” as they adjusted to the Armenian community of Montreal. Dixon notes how the Armenian family and extended community

represent a tightly-knit society in which people take care of one another. All of the participants who attended an Armenian community school recounted how hard it was to fit into the Armenian community of their school and feeling like outsiders; Dixon's description of the Armenian community as portrayed in the United States does seem to compare to the Armenian community in Montreal but at the same time, foreign born youth still seem to struggle to find their place within their ethnic peers. Two out of the four French public school attendees (Adam and Jane) also expressed a difficulty with adjusting within the Armenian circle in Montreal where both felt like outsiders and almost unwelcomed. Adam somehow overcame these struggles and is very much involved in the Armenian community of Montreal; Jane on the other hand says she has few Armenian friends.

Moreover, ethnic identity is also linked to higher levels of self-esteem (Phinney and Cantu, 1997; Shirikian, 2006); this is possibly why Nancy, who attended a French public school still had a stable level of self-esteem and may be due to the fact that she was surrounded by other ethnic and immigrant peers at school.

Nancy had an interesting view on her ethnic identity as she believes that it is in the presence of and exposure to other cultures that someone can truly understand their own ethnic identity.

Social Relationships and Influence: Family and Peers

The literature states that cultural isolation or separation from family members is a major stressing agent as the family is considered to play a protective and supportive function in ethnic communities (Westermeyer, 1987; Beiser, 1988). Although this was not seen as a major problem, it can be applied for the school context where the ethnic school (in this study it is the

Armenian community school) that serves as a protective factor as Sarah considers her Armenian community to be sheltering and like a home for her.

The adaptation and acculturation stresses experienced by family have their affect on the individual as seen in Zander's case "[...]it affects [...] of course, to see my [...] whole family adapting, and it's struggle, you know [...]you see you family going struggle [...] you have this low esteem and you fell like [...]uncomfortable..." Salpi also expresses how the fear and anxiety her parents had were "transmitted" to her.

Peers also have an important role to play in someone's social circle. "Social integration with same-ethnic peers is likely to reinforce ethnic identity" (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 139). Jane attended a non Armenian school and now says that most of her friends are not Armenian, on the other hand, Sarah who attended an Armenian community school has mostly Armenian friends. We see from the degree of integration of these two subjects how indeed peers do influence an individual.

Mitch claims that it "felt great" to leave the Armenian community school as he does not recount positive experiences:

Mitch: ...I guess it's natural for kids to tease people who come from like Middle Eastern countries...it's hard for an Armenian boy to be teased by other Armenians at... "hey what do you do for fun in Lebanon? You throw rocks at each other?" and stuff like that. ... kids make it tough somehow, you know?

Intergenerational conflict was experienced to some degree for all subjects; the girls were dealt with more strictly than the boys.

Until now, we have seen the themes that are found within the subsection of acculturation stress as experienced and told by the participants. The following section describes the schooling experiences in relation to academic performance of the participants. The themes of schooling

experiences and academic performance are in the areas of: Opinion of schooling and perceived benefits of alternative education, linguistic issues, mode of overcoming difficulties, experience with peers and other social relationships, experience with teachers and experiences beyond high school.

Schooling experiences and academic performance

As a whole, participants did well in school and had no major problems. Table 3 (see page 99) compares the school experiences of participants. All participants in the study struggled in the area of language, whether in an Armenian community school or in a French public school.

Opinion of schooling and perceived benefits of alternative education

Most participants had many comments concerning the schooling they had attained and what they would have wished for. Of the four Armenian school attendees, three believed that not attending an Armenian school would have been somewhat beneficial to them. The opinions given were mostly in relation to ethnic identity maintenance and education. All three of these participants were not science oriented students and felt that their school focused too strongly on the mathematics and science fields thus not allowing them to fully bloom in their desired arts subjects as well as in the languages. Rafael mentions how his grades in the mathematics and science subjects started to drop in high school but he was not too worried about that because he knew what he was interested in and where he was headed. He says, "...one of my problems with it [the school] [...] at the high school level, they really, really, really, encourage you to put your energies towards science and math and that's probably a whole cultural thing too." Mitch shares the same opinion:

Table 3. School related acculturated stress as experienced by and compared among participants.

	<i>Schooling</i>	<i>Opinion about schooling</i>	<i>Academic experience</i>	<i>Linguistic area of Difficulty</i>	<i>How overcame difficulty</i>	<i>Experience w/peers</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Perceived benefits of alternative education</i>	<i>Issues beyond high school</i>
<i>Rafael</i>	Armenian (gr2-sec 5)	Neutral. Too isolated.	Overall academic success; same or better than peers	English	Helpful English teacher	Outsider/didn't fit, teased	No problem	Can focus on subjects of interest rather than subjects imposed on by school	Culture shock
<i>Mich</i>	Armenian (sec 1-sec5)	Preferred to have attended French public school	Overall academic success; same or better than peers	English	TV/books	Outsider/didn't fit, teased	No problem	Can focus on subjects of interest rather than subjects imposed on by school	Freeing experience; had to catch up in subjects that didn't focus on in school
<i>Salpi</i>	Armenian (gr1-sec5)	Too sheltered & isolated but appreciates ethnic nurturing environment	Overall academic success; same or better than peers	English & French	Helpful teachers/extra work/parents	Outsider/didn't fit	No problem in high school; xenophobia by teachers in college	Can focus on subjects of interest rather than subjects imposed on by school; more confidence in host society	Culture shock; discrimination by teachers; language inadequacy
<i>Sarah</i>	Armenian (sec3-sec5)	Neutral. Sheltering; appreciates ethnic nurturing	Overall academic success; same or better than peers; same or better than peers	English	Older sister	Outsider/didn't fit	No problem	None	Slight culture shock
<i>Adam</i>	French public	Neutral; believes Armenians should attend Armenian school	Overall academic success	French; English	French immersion class/determination	Outsider feeling with both ethnic and host culture peers; rejected	No problem	Better social relationships/Ethnic culture maintenance	None
<i>Zander</i>	French public	Neutral	Overall academic success	English; French; Armenian	French immersion class/extra effort/help from siblings	None	No problem	None	None
<i>Jane</i>	French public	Neutral; content to have learned French	Overall academic success	French	French immersion class/extra effort/determination	Outsider feeling with both ethnic and host culture peers; didn't fit	No problem	Ethnic culture maintenance	Language inadequacy; started in French and continued in English
<i>Nancy</i>	French public	Neutral; content with schooling	Overall academic success	French	French immersion class/extra effort/determination & hard work	None	No problem	None	None

And in our school...it was pretty much mandatory to take the enriched math, and pure and applied as opposed to maybe take an extra literature class or something and take regular math [...] So, those become difficult after a while, and if you don't really love those subjects, it feels like a chore, right?

He adds:

... when I was still in high school, I wished that I was no longer in an Armenian high school... there's only one main click... in an Armenian school, there's only one click and if you're not part of it... So I never fit in, in that click, so that I totally want, did not want to go to an Armenian school because of that...

Salpi on the other hand shares her mixed feelings:

I got so much from [...] that Armenian school, that it's, it's hard, I mean, I have good friends now, it's like my family and I have learned so much about Armenians that... I don't know if I would trade it. But again I have so much stuff that... A lack, that, I'm like, which one is important, to have that friendship, that family, or to have, to learn that history so well, or to make sure I know my French and my Armenian history and my Armenian friends I can have them at [...] on my own time.

Alternately, Sarah is a more science oriented student and comments:

[*in reference to schooling*]...everybody speaks Armenian, even though you practice a lot of, well, you study all the languages that you need here, you still don't get to talk to people in English or French, and once you go like to a Cegep, it's like everybody's speaking fluent French, fluent English, and you don't know like, what to say, you have to think of every word, you know you always think in Armenian...

[*in reference to ethnic identity*] ...not that I would forget my identity or ...but I would have been more like ...not like stranger to my... like Armenian culture, still I would be forgetting stuff...

Conversely, the general opinion of French language public school attendees was an overall satisfaction with the schooling they received. Apart from Jane, none of the participants believe that their ethnic identity was affected due to the fact they did not attend Armenian community schools. Jane believes that she would be "more Armenian" had she attended an

Armenian community school and compares herself to her younger sister who did attend an Armenian school:

...I see that with my younger sister...she went straight into kindergarten and just to Armenian school...I can see it...her friends, the activities she chooses to attend, she a lot more...I mean, I'm not gonna say a lot more Armenian, but she's more, visibly Armenian...

In addition, Adam who although did not attend an Armenian community school in Montreal believes his Armenian side has not been diluted but does however believe that all Armenians should attend Armenian schools:

the bad thing about this is, these people usually don't even speak Armenian at home [...]their parents won't push them to go to anything Armenian, they're not involved in anything, they don't even know about anything...I know people like that. And they start to slowly lose their Armenian side because they're constantly surrounded by different people than Armenian. So, you can't generalize this thing to say all, just go to public school and you're gonna keep your Armenian side because most people don't have the self determination or don't have the discipline to keep that side...

Both Adam and Salpi believe that with an alternate type of schooling they would have a better place in society; Adam considers that with an education at an Armenian community school, he would have better ethnic social relationships, whereas Salpi thinks she would be a more confident person in the Canadian society if she had attended a Canadian school.

Linguistic issues

The literature tells us that "... members of some groups, particularly those of non-European origin, maintain a strong ethnic identity, independent of language usage" (Phinney as cited by Phinney et al., 2001, p.149). Zander is a strong example of this as his family spoke Turkish yet he still considered himself purely Armenian. In addition the maintenance of the

mother tongue acts as a defence against academic failure thus promoting academic success

(Bhatnagar, 1980). This is the result for all 8 subjects.

All the immigrants were voluntary immigrants who willingly left their country of origin, with the hope of a better future and thus showed an overall willingness to learn the host language because the cultural and linguistic barriers are seen as surmountable and additive to their ethnic culture (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). The following examples show the different linguistic difficulties experienced by some of the participants:

Zander: When you talk, you don't feel comfortable, that makes you...step back that makes you uncomfortable, when you talk....I wasn't more comfortable with people who were very fluent in English or French...talking to them, I would be shy to talk to them...

Mitch: ...my English was very, very weak, so I got made fun of for a lot of things like that, for my accent and my lack of knowledge in words...

Rafael: certainly my English was terrible my first year 'cause, I had studied no English whatsoever in Lebanon, so I really had to work at that a lot, my first year.

Salpi: you can never be like them, you can never speak like them, you can never be like them, you can never let's say deny your Armenian side and, they're not, they're not gonna buy it, they're gonna be happy that you you have taken their culture but they're never gonna accept you 100%, 'cause you're never gonna resemble them 100% [...] I always feel like I have [...] problem with my French, my English, my Armenian [...] None of them is complete.

Sarah *Interviewer:* [...]You never [...] felt at a, at a lack, because [...] you came from outside...
Sarah: Mostly the language...English [...] I had a problem, but then, once I you know, I made effort, and I got to you know, learn it, and...

Adam: ...my first French class where I had to read a book and I'm not exaggerating, every two words I had to go and look in the dictionary. I was crying ...

Interestingly, Dixon (2002) states that, when Armenians endorse same-ethnic relationships, the process of English language acquisition is slower because Armenians usually speak to one

another in Armenian; this is possibly one of the reasons why Rafael's friends had to take special French courses upon entry to college as their French was not up to the standard of the college. In addition, this is possibly why Salpi felt as though she was not competent in her knowledge of any of the languages she had studied in school (French, English, Armenian). Is it possible to say that the presence of the ethnic language in the school curriculum slows or debilitates the level of competency of the French and/or English languages? Although the maintenance of the ethnic language is often seen to impede the academic success of other school subjects, according to the literature, studies among Latino youth in the United States show that this is not the case. Students are perfectly capable of achieving equal academic success as their non-ethnic peer (Garcia-Vasquez, 1995). A similar situation exists among the Armenian community school attendees as all of the participants expressed equal or better academic standing when compared to their peers at school.

Mode of overcoming difficulties

All four French language public school attendees Adam, Jane, Zander and Nancy attended special French classes upon arrival, therefore were assisted by trained teachers to learn French. The only area of difficulty seemed to be the language and they all overcame their difficulties with hard work and determination alongside the support of their teachers. The Armenian school attendees Rafael, Salpi, Mitch and Sarah also confessed that they need to exert extra effort to conquer their linguistic struggles; their sources of help in addition to the help of teachers were found in watching television, reading books, and the help of family members – parents or siblings.

Experience with parents, peers and other social relationships

Of the eight participants, only two did not recount any problems adapting socially or having no issues with peers at school. The remaining six participants, whether from Armenian or non-Armenian schools all experienced the “outsider” feeling when attempting to fit in to their group of friends. It is interesting to note that of these six, four are from Armenian schools and yet still found it difficult to integrate their new circle of Armenian school friends without feeling rejected or teased or feeling somewhat different from the other students.

In addition, two participants experienced a dual acculturation. Both Jane and Adam had to adjust to the Canadian society as well as to the Armenian community; both found the process of integrating into the Armenian community tough:

Adam: ...the biggest shock was the Armenian community. When you come here, you don't know anybody, and these people that have grown up together...So you're trying to get into the group, but you're looked at as the new one , as...Somebody they don't know...

Jane: ...we just never, I don't know why [...] fit in, or they all knew each other, and [...] even there I felt like an outsider, and it was really, really strange and like, we'd go to the activities and, you know, people would say hi, how are you, but they would never include you in, you know, like at that age [...] in their gang or whatever, and talk to you [...]

Dixon (2002) explains that Armenian students usually desire to find other Armenians (within the student body) for friendship, giving them a sense of stability. Nancy mentioned how she had Armenian friends in school as well as friends from other ethnic communities, this helped her to feel comfortable and very much part of her school, giving her the stability needed to rebound from any acculturative stresses she might have otherwise experienced.

King (2007) discusses the importance of strong educational role models for students. In her research, King found that children whose parents were successful in school and also had high

expectations for their children had a positive role to play in inspiring and motivating their children's academic success. It is noteworthy to mention that all the participants in this study had family support and help from parents or siblings; where mentioned, participants had good educational role models or parents who highly esteemed education and academic success.

Experience with teachers

In high school, all participants had no problems with teachers, but rather found them to be helpful and understanding. Those participants who attended French public schools and thus attended French immersion classes felt that the teachers understood the immigrant experiences of acculturation. On the other hand, attendees of an Armenian community school were mostly hesitant to agree that teachers were understanding and referred more to their out of high school experiences with teachers to comment on the overall attitude of acceptance and support of teachers.

Participants were asked what advice they would give a teacher who had Armenian students and shared their opinions of what they thought a teacher should know about the Armenian students. Most participants focused on the fact that teachers should have a general knowledge about Armenian history, culture and the typical Armenian mentality; in addition, teachers should be aware of the fact that most Armenians are hardworking and attached to their culture.

Mitch: ...probably the first thing I would say is Armenians think they are always right...and they often speak in right and wrong type, they use that kind of discourse...as opposed to more of a Canadian or a current, contemporary, western discourse which is more based in the gray area, I think Armenians still don't think that way.

Salpi: They're very motivated, hard workers [...] we are very, very attached to our culture, so don't go there and don't tell us to give up our own identity,

or to give up the, the past, just accept that and show us love, show us interest.

Experiences beyond high school

Salpi was the only one who experienced difficulties with teachers at the college and university level. Salpi claims that some of her teachers were what she referred to as 'xenophobic' and felt they ignored her or did not look at her work and claimed that this behaviour was due to cultural differences "Some teachers I really felt...ignoring me completely or not expecting anything from me, and being quite shocked that I could do this, I could do that, and that I was... maybe one of the best in the class".

Some participants who attended Armenian schools experienced some degree of culture shock once they graduated from high school and went to college. Mitch found his experience of leaving his Armenian community school a freeing experience, but had to fill in some academic gaps in his curriculum as he explains "But afterwards [...] when I got into Cegep level and stuff, to catch up with my Canadian, non-Armenian colleagues, I would definitely need to read up on...authors, and literature..." In addition, two of the participants experienced slight linguistic inadequacy either in the French or the English language. Jane graduated from a French public school, and although she started attending a French language college, she found it too hard and transferred to an English college. Salpi also felt like she had language inadequacy "I feel ashamed to tell them I've been living here for [...] 20 years. And my French is not that perfect..." and "I can't say, oh, I'm comfortable in English, I can speak 100% without making any mistakes..."

Now I would like to discuss both acculturation stress in the light of academic performance as experienced and told by the participants in the study alongside the existing literature on the subject.

Acculturation stress and academic performance

All the respondents in this study had no academic issues or major difficulty. The only difficulty was with that of language and although participants had to acquire a new language, this did not serve as a hurdle but rather a stepping stone towards academic success. The language issue did not as Jane explains “get in the way as much it seems ...” This confirms research by John Ogbu (1983; 1987) which shows that minority students can do well academically although they may have cultural differences and linguistic incompetence. Moreover, Dixon (2002) verifies this further in concluding that in the beginning, most Armenian students feel overwhelmed, get lost on campus, and get teased for the way they dress and speak English but despite these struggles and difficulties, do well in school. This seems to be the case for the eight Armenian foreign-born youth interviewed in Montreal for this study; all experienced difficulties of different types and in differing degrees, yet all of them were successful in school and all of them continued in higher education.

Studies among South American immigrants in the United States have shown that their academic success is due to the fact that they uphold their culture and ethnic origin. Immigrant children that experience a trade-off mentality in their process of acculturation experience the most difficulty in academic performance (Gibson, 1995; Pressman, 2007). All participants classified themselves as individuals that simultaneously held on to their ethnic identity as well as adopting aspects of the host culture; none of them expressed a trade-off mentality and were individuals that upheld their culture, a possible explanation for their academic success.

The acculturation strategy adopted by parents greatly influences the acculturative experiences of the children. Students whose parents adopt the integration style of acculturation, maintaining ethnic pride as well as adapting to the mainstream culture, performed better in

school when compared to students whose parents chose to fully assimilate (Shik and Curyk, 1999). Salpi's parents were the only ones that seemed to have integrated into the host culture at a much slower and almost resistive manner; although Salpi does express this to have affected her, it did not seem to have any effect on her school performance. Also, the voluntary attitude of all the immigrants and the integrative strategy they have adapted in Montreal is a possible explanation of their overall academic success (Ogbu 1987; Schmid, 2001). Although Salpi's family was unwilling to leave Lebanon, and although they always had plans of going back, this did not affect Salpi's academic success.

According to the literature, self-esteem is seen as an essential part and an important predictor of school achievement (Phinney, Cantu and Kurtz, 1997; Shik and Curyk, 1999) and that acculturative stress affects self-esteem which in turn affects academic performance as shown in Latino youth (Schartz, Jarvis and Zamboanga, 2007). It is interesting to note that, although seven out of the 8 foreign-born Armenian participants experienced times of lowered self-esteem or self confidence, this did not hinder their academic success in any way. The possible reason for this is what Schartz, Jarvis and Zamboanga discuss to be identification with their ethnic group as they appear to increase positive feelings and emotions about themselves, which in turn positively influence the individual's psychosocial adjustment. This, according to the authors may have a positive impact towards academic performance.

Four participants attended an Armenian community school, and although they were not able to appreciate the benefits of being with ethnic peers as they recount their complaints and difficulties, the ethnic group identification they were able to grow up in and be nurtured by may have been one of the reasons for their good academic performance and ability to rebound from the possible negative effects of the lack of self-esteem or lack of confidence they talked about in

their interviews. As for those who attended French language public schools, Zander and Jane's main ethnic group identification seems to be that of their family as well as a low level association with ethnic peers. Adam eventually became involved in the Armenian community thus strengthening his ethnic group association. Nancy was exposed to ethnic peers at her French language public school, but was also the only participant who said she did not experience any issues with self-esteem or self confidence.

The following chapter sums up the findings with an attempt at finding possible reasons for the results obtained. The limitations of the study along with its implications and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

CONCLUSION

Despite the odds

John Ogbu's (1983; 1987) research clearly shows that minority students can do well academically although they may have cultural differences and linguistic incompetence. Language incompetence was the one major area of difficulty among the participants interviewed. All participants claimed to have a good base in other subjects which they obtained before coming to Montreal and therefore were able to do well in school despite the struggles they faced.

As noted by Carter (2006), the four social factors that play a role in the academic success of an individual are race, ethnicity, culture and identity. It is clear when reviewing the findings of this research that there are many intertwined factors that play a role in influencing both the acculturative process and the academic performance of an individual immigrant student. It is therefore important to consider all factors when describing the possible reasons for the results obtained for this particular group of foreign-born Armenian youth.

Implications

Both schools and teachers are microcosms of the dominant culture. According to Ramsey, the majority of people belonging to the dominant culture assume that everyone lives or should live like them (cited by Dixon, 2002). Whether teachers are consciously or subconsciously agents of the dominant culture is another story. In fact, research shows that many teachers are aware of the existing mismatch between students' culture and their own (Cabello and Burstein, 1995). Teachers will often instruct using methods in which their own

values and background are incorporated. Most teachers teach in multicultural settings where they are faced daily with the challenges of meeting the needs of culturally diverse students.

Teachers must be able to recognize and understand the pressures and stress involved with acculturating immigrants. Usually, students are able to detect signals of teachers' indifference towards culture. In other words, when teachers show little concern or understanding towards other countries and cultures, an implied message of 'I don't care' is given to the students (Dixon, 2002). According to Banks, teaching becomes effective when teachers develop positive attitudes towards students (especially those students that come from an ethnic group who experiences discrimination and hardship) because "teacher-attitudes and expectations affect student aspirations, performance, self-perception and behaviour" (1968, p. 294). Furthermore, Dixon states that "good teaching includes instruction that is responsive to experiences and cultural perspectives which necessitate a familiarity with students' culture, language and background" (2002, p.39). "At the heart of academic successes, and regardless of the child's ethnicity or historical background, an effective learning environment must be constructed in which the child, especially the minority child, is assisted through meaningful and culturally appropriate relationships[...]" (Trueba, 1988, p. 282). Responsive teaching may not require major change in curricula (in some cases it may), but rather, alterations to daily instruction strategies, in order to establish a connection between the student and the teacher. The lives of immigrant students may already be filled with different forms of acculturation stress, where immigrants are feeling confused, overwhelmed, possibly experiencing various issues at home, difficulty with language or peers; having an established connection with their teachers can craft a world of difference in making school a much less alien place. In essence, classroom experiences are influenced by students' perceptions which ultimately may affect their academic success. Those students that

feel understood have reported increased academic performance (Burstein and Cabello, 1995; Baker, 1999). When students feel that their teachers do not understand them, their culture or their past experiences, their academic performance is affected. In addition, when there is a teacher-student connection, the probability of having high school dropouts decreases (Lys, 2007).

Most schools claim to be neutral when it comes to the ideologies and the academic content they adhere to. Prior to the 1950's, Durkheim in his functionalist theory formulated the beneficial aspect of failure on society as it was a useful process for selection to produce a properly functioning society. The neo-functionalists and the Marxists then theorized education as being wasteful. Sequentially, the Conflictualist approach emerged, the ideology that discusses the scholastic inequalities as being rooted in the nature of the subgroup from which the student is from. This idea was further developed by Gintis and Bowles whose conflictualist focus saw schools as being instruments of ideological and social transmission guided by the norm of the dominating subculture (Camilleri, 1986).

Following this evolution of educational thought was the advent of multicultural education that can be considered a form of school reform where it takes into consideration problematic issues that may be responsible for academic failure. Multicultural education takes into account culture and language alongside the experiences of the immigrant student aiming to empower them and orient them towards a productive, meaningful life in the adoptive culture (Nieto, 2002).

The reason why multicultural education is so important is due to what Bourdieu calls *cultural capital*, where students from dominant groups bring their culture from home to school. This indicates the validity of incorporating into the school program the students' linguistic, cultural and experiential background, seeing them as resources for productive learning, a route

that enriches the host culture while potentially alleviating acculturative stress for the immigrant foreign-born youth (as cited by Nieto, 2002).

Teachers need to be sensitive to the ‘outsider’ effect suffered by foreign-born students and adopt a positive sense towards their cultural identity, ensuring that students are aware of the fact that integrating into a host country does not have to be accompanied by assimilation where sacrificing ethnicity, language or family values are implied (Nieto, 2002). In short, this research confirms the need for teachers to be culturally cognizant as well as being aware of the stresses that foreign-born immigrants face.

Knowing that immigrant youth are faced with many different waves of acculturation stress, the implications of this research go beyond the realm of teachers and are also applicable to school counsellors. It is only partly the responsibility of teachers to alleviate their stress. If schools prioritize student well-being, administrators must persist towards incorporating not only teaching methods that can help the immigrants adapt easily with minimum stress, but also culturally sensitive student counselling services should be available. Unfortunately, in many cases of available evaluation and intervention efforts, stereotyping is nevertheless prevalent as pointed out by Stuart (2004).

When immigrant youth are aware of the availability of student counselling services that aim to assist them in their adjustment needs, they may feel comforted and understood. Indeed, there are some cultures that may look down upon the idea of visiting a counsellor and due to this fact, many immigrant youth may resist or even resent the idea of being counselled. It is important to note that there is indeed a range of acculturation stress that can be considered ‘normal’, however, based on the literature, there are some cases in which the manifestations of

stress necessitate external help and advice. It is important to deliver culturally competent services that consider the students' history, traditions, values and beliefs (Shirikian, 2006).

The practice of school counsellors should also be culturally relevant, culturally sensitive, supportive, as well as providing culturally appropriate interventions for immigrant students. The ultimate goal should be to ease the acculturative stresses experienced by the students and to be available for their adjustment needs, assisting students experiencing academic difficulties. In some schools, multicultural intervention programs and the adoption of counselling strategies exist, especially among immigrant Latino students in the United States (Tonks and Paranjpe, 1999; Nunez and Gary, 2007). Research reports from many studies (Rayle and Myers, 2004; Obiakor and Afolayan, 2007; Mitchell and Bryan, 2007; Bernes and Bardick, 2007) show that school counsellors play an important role in addressing the cultural needs of immigrant students. The professional sensitivity to multicultural approaches has a positive impact on the adjustment process of immigrant youth and helps in building cross-cultural bridges through the use of multicultural counselling strategies (Goh et al., 2007).

Limitations

The findings of this research are based on the interview outcomes and the stories presented from the point of view of the participant and explained as perceived by the researcher. Many times a definite answer was not given during interviews. Certain questions had to be asked a couple or more times in order to understand the answer.

Areas for further study.

The group of foreign born Armenian youth in this study were all educated individuals and had attained their higher education degrees or were still in the process of doing so. It may be interesting to enrich this study by exploring the narratives of students who are indeed experiencing fluctuations in their academic experience.

Two groups of foreign-born Armenian youth were interviewed in this research; one group were those that attended and graduated from Armenian community schools, the other group consisting of those that attended and graduated from French public schools. Other types of educational experiences exist among foreign-born Armenian youth – those who attended English speaking schools as well as those that attended an Armenian community school for part of their school followed by attending a French or English speaking school. These are some suggested areas for future research.

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APPENDIX A – DEFINITION OF TERMS

Academic performance is defined as the ability to succeed in school according to the requirements of the school. It can also be understood to be the result of an ability to understand and to being competent in a specific subject. Also, it can be seen as the pursuit of goals in reference to a standard of performance (Bandura as cited by Wentzel, 1989).

Acculturation is defined as the changes that groups and individuals undergo when they come into contact with another culture (Berry and Williams, 1991).

Acculturation strategy is referred to as the method used by an immigrant to adapt to the mainstream host culture. There are, as discussed by Berry et al., (1987), four acculturation strategies: these include Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization.

Acculturation stress is defined as the “cumulative stress experienced by the immigrant during the acculturation process. The immigrant needs to make the adjustment and adapt to all the possible changes pertaining to the differences between the host culture and the culture of origin.” (Tahmassian,2003,p.60).

Armenian community school refers to Armenian schools managed by the Armenian community in Montreal. These include Ecole Armenienne Sourp Hagop, Ecole Alex Manoogian- d’Armen Québec de l’UGAB and Ecole Notre Dame de Nareg (Catholic community of Montreal).

Armenian foreign-born youth refers to an immigrant individual of Armenian ethnicity who was born outside of the United States and Canada. In this research, these individuals immigrated to Canada at an age where they are old enough to distinguish a difference in culture between the origin and the host cultures and are able to recount difficulties in their experiences of immigration.

Assimilation is an acculturation strategy which is characterized by the relinquishing of one's ethnic culture (or culture of origin) while embracing that of the host culture (Berry et al., 1987).

Canadian public school in this study refers to any public French speaking or English speaking school in Montreal.

Culture shock "occurs where individuals encounter a new and different culture and experience a major disruption of their normal assumptions about social values and behaviour" (Sociologyindex, Culture shock, para. 1).

Diaspora "refers to any people or ethnic population who are forced or induced to leave their traditional homelands, the dispersal of such people, and the ensuing developments of their culture" (Wikipedia online, Diaspora section, para. 1). In addition, diaspora refers to a sense of collectivity, a condition and a process (Brubaker, 2005).

Enculturation refers to the process whereby members of a society acquire its accepted norms, values and customs (Shimahara, 1970).

Ethnic Identity is referred to by Phinney and Cantu (1997) as an involvement in the activities and practises of the ethnic group with a positive attitude and a sense of pride.

Identity or self-concept can be described as a sense of who we are and our relation to other people (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2008, para. 1).

Integration is an acculturation strategy adopted by immigrants who hold on to their ethnic culture while simultaneously embracing the norms and identity of the host culture (Berry et al., 1987). Integration is also referred to by Tahmassian (2003) as *cultural incorporation*.

Language Immersion “is an approach to foreign language instruction in which the usual curricular activities are conducted in a foreign language. This means that the new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction” (Bostwick, bi-lingual.com, What is Immersion? Para. 1). According to Genessee, “at least 50 percent of instruction during a given academic year must be provided through the second language for the program to be regarded as immersion: (Bostwick, bi-lingual.com, What is Immersion?, para. 3).

Marginalization involves no adherence to either ethnic or host culture (Berry et al., 1987).

Mentality: Or “mindset, in decision theory and general systems theory, refers to a set of assumptions, methods or notations held by one or more people or groups of people which is so

established that it creates a powerful incentive within these people or groups to continue to adopt or accept prior behaviours, choices, or tools” (Wikipedia Online, Mindset section, para. 1).

Multicultural Education. A curriculum or method of school instruction that aims at serving all students from various socio-cultural backgrounds. Importance is given towards promoting diversity among ethnic groups where students’ experiences and values are taken into consideration and are respected. Multicultural education that can be considered a form of school reform where it takes into consideration problematic issues that may be responsible for academic failure. Multicultural education takes into account culture and language alongside the experiences of the immigrant student aiming to empower them and orient them towards a productive, meaningful life in the adoptive culture (Nieto, 2002).

Self Esteem is defined by Coopersmith as “the evaluation the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant successful and worthy” (cited by Tahmassian, 2003, p.33).

Separation is an acculturation strategy by which immigrants hold on to their culture of origin and refuse any form of integration into the host culture (Berry et al., 1987).

Western Armenian refers to an individual of Armenian ethnicity who was born in the Middle East region, namely Lebanon, Syria, Egypt or Turkey.

APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

Code name of interviewee: _____

Age: _____

Marital Status: _____

Job Status: _____

Highest Degree Attained: _____

Number of Siblings: _____

Background Questions:

1. How old were you when you arrived in Montreal?
2. What were your experiences during the process of settling in Montreal?
3. Please indicate which of the following statements applies best to you:
 - a) I hold on to my Armenian identity and refuse to be considered or to adopt the Canadian identity and culture.
 - b) I have let go of my Armenian identity and culture and have adopted the Canadian identity and Culture.
 - c) I have simultaneously kept my identity as an Armenian and held on to my culture as well as integrating to adapt to the Canadian culture.
 - d) I am not interested in holding on to my Armenian culture and identity, nor adopting the Canadian culture and identity.
 - e) Other – please elaborate

Questions Related to Acculturation Stress:

4. Do you remember ever feeling depressed/anxious or unhappy because of your difficulties in your new life in Canada? Please elaborate.
5. Did you experience any language related difficulties in school/with peers/at home/ or in other situations, upon your immigration to Canada? (Armenian, English, French, other?)
6. Did you ever experience any difficulties with your parents or immediate family as a result of your attempts to integrate? Please specify. If yes, do these difficulties continue today? If not how did they get resolved?

Questions Related to Schooling (general):

7. What proportion of your schooling did you complete in Montreal?
8. Please describe your schooling (once in Montreal) as one of the following:
 - a) I attended an Armenian community school from grade ___ until the end of High School.
 - b) I attended an Armenian community school up to grade ___ and then switched to a Canadian public school/private school (French speaking) where I studied until the end of High School.
 - c) I attended an Armenian community school up to grade ___ and then switched to a Canadian public/private school (English speaking) where I studied until the end of High School
 - d) I only attended a Canadian public/private school (French speaking) from grade ___ to the end of High School

e) I only attended a Canadian public/private school (English speaking) from grade ___ to the end of High School

9. When you started school in Montreal, did you feel there to be a difference between yourself and the other students in your class? (Please recall any specific experiences which set you apart from your peers?)

a) Behavioural differences

b) Cultural differences

c) Language differences

d) Achievement differences

10. Do you remember every having any social difficulties fitting in with your school peers? (French Canadian, English Canadian, Armenian, Other immigrants?). Any self-esteem issues? If yes, please specify.

Questions Related to Academic Achievement:

11. During your period of adaptation to Canada, was your schoolwork affected in any way compared to your usual performance before coming to Canada?

a) I found it harder to concentrate on schoolwork

b) I became indifferent or unmotivated

c) I worked extra hard to achieve good grades

d) I considered dropping out of school

e) I needed to repeat a grade

f) I performed much better than before migrating to Canada

12. Did you have difficulty doing your homework? Please specify.

13. Which subjects did you find the hardest to cope with? Why?

14. Did you ever have difficulty in understanding what the teacher was saying or how he/she was explaining the lesson due to language difficulties?
15. When you experienced academic difficulty, who did you go to for help? Teachers, Family, Peers? Other?
16. Did you experience any difficulties with your teachers? Please specify.

Concluding Questions:

17. Do you find that teachers understand the difficulties immigrant students experience?
18. Were there any efforts by teachers or the school to make you feel welcome or to alleviate stress if any was present?
19. In general, what would have helped you during your adjustment period? To make it easier and smoother to integrate to the new school and new life in Montreal?
20. What would have made a difference in achieving better academic results than what you attained?
21. What advice would you give teachers who are teaching Armenian students? In Armenian community Schools, in public schools?
22. What advice would you give to a new immigrant Armenian student during their period of adaptation in Montreal? In school, outside of school, after graduation from High School?

Having read the purpose of my thesis and my research question, would you have any other information to share that will help us better understand the acculturation process of new immigrant youth in particular in relation to schooling and academic achievement?

Thank you for your time and the insights shared. Please note that you can contact me if you have any other questions or if you would like to add more information.

You have my coordinates as well as the coordinates of my advisor on your copy of the Informed Consent Form.

Would you like to receive a typed transcript of this interview to check on my good understanding of your responses? If yes, how do you want to receive the transcript?

By e-mail _____

In person _____

By regular mail _____

APPENDIX C – CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form to Participate in a Research for the Preparation of MA Thesis in Educational Studies at Concordia University

Title of the Study: Acculturation stress and academic performance in foreign-born Armenian youth in the United States and Canada: an exploratory study.
MA candidate Ms. Sarine Karilian-Konyalian

A. Study Purpose:

This project is in partial requirement for the completion of my M.A. degree in Educational Studies program at Concordia University. You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled *An Exploratory study on Acculturation stress and academic performance in foreign-born Armenian youth in the United States and Canada*. The purpose of this study is to explore a relationship between acculturation stress and academic performance. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be one of 8 participants in this research. Your participation of the study will take approximately one and a half to 3 hours.

B. Procedure for the study:

If you agree to participate, there will be a period of questioning in an interview manner where I, the researcher will ask you specific questions related to your schooling in Montreal, Canada in the context of any experiences you may have had in relation to your adaptation to Canada. The interview will take place in person, in a face to face manner. The interview will be tape-recorded and will be transcribed for the writing of the M.A. thesis. The tapes and transcribed documents will be destroyed after the M.A defence. Only I and my thesis advisor will have access to these raw data which will be kept under lock and key in a secure place, in my office.

C. Risks and Benefits:

Risks: Some participants may experience some discomfort with regard to some of the questions of the interview schedule as these refer to recounting difficulties in school and stresses experienced in the process of adaptation to Montreal, Canada. You may choose to not answer certain questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Benefits: This study will contribute to the understanding of acculturation stress and its effect on academic performance in foreign-born Armenian youth in Montreal, Canada. This is an exploratory study. It will also assist in the general understanding of acculturation stress of ethnic immigrant communities and the process of their adaptation.

D. Confidentiality and Conditions of Participation:

Confidentiality: Individual responses will remain anonymous through the absence of any names mentioned on tape during the interview, and the use of a pseudonym for the purpose of concealing identity. The tape and transcribed documents will be kept in a secure, locked place in my office and a copy of the transcription will be kept under lock and key in the office of my advisor until the completion of the Master's degree process, after which they will be destroyed.

Conditions of Participation:

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (only the researcher, Ms. Sarine Karilian-Konyalian and her advisor Prof. Arpi Hamalian will know, but will not disclose my identity)
- I understand that data from this study may be published but no names will be used in future publications.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Name (please print) _____
Code name: _____
Signature _____

People to contact:

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 ext. 7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca

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