EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF HOST CONFORMITY PRESSURE

Immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure in Finland in relation to
their acculturation processes

Master's Thesis
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Autumn 2012
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| Subject: Intercultural Communication | Type of work: Master's Thesis |
| Time (Month/Year): September 2012 | Number of pages: 103 + 2 appendices |

Abstract:

The present study investigates the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and its possible consequences on acculturation from immigrants' perspective. The research is motivated by the discrepancies between results of previous studies on the topic, the relatively small amount of research about immigration in Finland, and the will to examine adaptation issues from an intercultural communication perspective. The study uses different adaptation theories, notably Berry's (1997) model of acculturative strategies. It also builds on Kim's (2001) definition of host conformity pressure and Emerson's (1968) theory of structural power.

This research aims at examining (1) what immigrants identify as host conformity pressure, (2) the ways it can affect them, and (3) how they may react to it. Underlying these aims is the intention to identify possible factors for immigrants' identification of host conformity pressure.

Five immigrants living in Finland participated in this qualitative study. In depth theme interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed.

Results indicated the existence of host conformity pressure and its absence on both the macro- and micro-levels in 11 different contexts out of which five were related to both phenomena. The participants' perceptions of host conformity pressure revealed two main types of pressures exerted by the host society: (1) to enforce uniformity and (2) to maintain difference. In addition, the participants' testimonies showed two main categories of absence of host conformity pressure: (1) bringing immigrants and hosts together and (2) accepting differences. Results revealed that participants' understanding and stance on the notions of conformity and acculturation were important factors in their perception of host conformity pressure.

The study implies that the experience of host conformity pressure can influence immigrants' acculturation processes especially if it affects their reasons to acculturate. Furthermore, the perceived absence of host conformity pressure can encourage immigrants to develop different acculturation strategies concerning their relationships with hosts and the extent to which they acculturate. This study also suggests that the similarities and differences between immigrants' and host societies' characteristics can affect one's perception of host conformity pressure.

Location: University of Jyväskylä, Department of Communication

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Examining individuals from different cultures coming and living together is at the heart of the Intercultural Communication field. This is also the perspective of the present study which examines the phenomenon of host conformity pressure through immigrants' experiences in Finland. The present study focuses on the nature of the interactions between immigrants and the receiving society they live in. The implications of such interactions are manifold and can therefore be studied from various perspectives depending on the issues that want to be emphasized. Adopting an intercultural communication perspective in this work is a choice made to highlight the importance of everyone's individual and cultural baggage when communicating with others. The present study examines the importance that conflicts or misunderstandings stemming out of intercultural encounters may have on the experience of host conformity pressure. It also aims at identifying the questions raised by the experience of the phenomenon and the implications it may have for immigrants' cultural adaptation and acculturation. The theories used to fulfill these main aims are introduced hereafter before the relevance of the study is discussed and the outline of it presented.

## 1.1 Principal theories of the study: cultural adaptation and host conformity pressure

Two main theoretical areas are particularly important in this study. The first set of theories concern the notion of cultural adaptation and the second one the phenomenon of host conformity pressure.

The terminology of adaptation in intercultural settings is varied and encompasses terms such as *acculturation*, *assimilation*, *adaptation*, and *cultural adaptation*. All of these terms concern the ways individuals living in a new environment deal with cultural differences. In essence, they deal with *change*. Despite these general similarities, these terms can slightly or significantly vary from one another. Gordon (1964) has also explained that the use of these words is not always consistent in literature as *acculturation* and *assimilation* can sometimes describe the same matter or refer to different processes. These two terms are examined in detail throughout the following chapters in order to highlight their differences. At the same time, this enables to justify the reasons for preferring the term acculturation to the one of assimilation in this study. Investigating the shift from an assimilationist to a pluralist paradigm over time is closely related to the evolution of the term *culture*. In the present study, cultures are not regarded as static structures that have a one-way influence over individuals. On the contrary, this study agrees with Bennett's understanding (1993) that defines cultures as moving and evolving notably because of individuals' influences on them. The influence between cultures and people is thus reciprocal. This understanding of the notion of culture is representative of the pluralist paradigm rather than the assimilationist one. In the following sections, theories belonging to both perspectives are introduced and discussed using the most important models in the field. The Melting Pot ideology is exposed as an instance of assimilationist theory that is representative of the stance on immigration in the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Melting Pot ideas are worth mentioning because they well represent the assimilationist views as well as their existence within a certain epoch.

After the 1960s, pluralist views became increasingly common in the field of adaptation and nowadays still constitute the principal school of thoughts. Various models of adaptation exist within the pluralist paradigm. Their principal characteristic is to mention the possibility for immigrants to maintain some

characteristics of their ethnic identity while adapting to the receiving society. The model of acculturation strategies developed by Berry (1997) and the theory of cross-cultural adaptation presented by Kim (2001) are introduced. They both serve as theoretical base for this study that investigates the possible relation between immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure and their acculturation processes. The critical viewpoint of Kramer (2000) on Kim's theory is exposed as well because of the issues it tackles, notably concerning the unpredictability of one's acculturation. This is related to some extent to the notion of selective acculturation that is discussed later on in the light of Valenta's research (2009). The concept of selective acculturation notably emphasizes the variety of acculturation paths that can exist and immigrants' active role in developing them. The notion of acculturation is central to this research, hence the detailed analysis of the literature on this theme. Reviewing previous points of view and theories eventually allows to explain the way the term acculturation is understood for the purpose of this study.

The main aim of this research is to examine immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure and the way they relate it to their acculturation processes. Therefore, the second relevant theoretical area of this research relates to the concept of host conformity pressure. This notion has been presented by Kim (2001) in her theory of cross-cultural adaptation to refer to the pressures exercised by receiving societies on immigrants to conform to their cultural and societal patterns. Outside from intercultural contexts, notions of conformity and conformity pressure have mostly been studied in the field of social psychology where their fundamental characteristics have been presented. Theories related to power and influence are also introduced as they bring complementary elements to the definition of host conformity pressure.

## 1.2   Relevance of the study: content, setting, and perspective

The notion of host conformity pressure has been researched previously but often appeared under different names (Croucher, 2006, 2009; Matthews, 2006; Roccas, Horenczyk & Schwartz, 2000; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). Some of these studies have investigated the relation between immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure and their acculturation processes. Croucher (2006, 2009) found that

pressures to conform tend to reduce immigrants' willingness to acculturate whereas Ruggiero et al., (1996) found that it is likely to increase it. The discrepancies between those results indicate a need to further investigate the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and its possible relation to immigrants' acculturation processes. The present research explores these issues from immigrants' perspectives in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and bridge an existing gap in the literature on the topic.

In addition to the lack of consistency in previous research projects that investigated consequences of host conformity pressure, the present study is relevant because of its geographical setting. The participants selected were all living in Finland, a country that starts being confronted with immigration issues and is regarded as one of the most homogenous in Europe (Heikkilä & Peltonen, 2002). According to the Annual Report on Migration by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior, immigrants represented about 3% of the overall population in 2010. Following the growth of immigrants in Finland, the country enacted a new integration law in 1999. The document explains the immigration policy of the country, its aims regarding newcomers' integration and ways to achieve it. The official immigration policy of the country corresponds to the multiculturalism ideology which supports ethnic diversity and intends to protect minorities' cultural baggage (Verkuyten, 2005). The section 2 of the Act indeed explains that the outcome of integration is:

> "the personal development of immigrants, aimed at participation in working life and society while preserving their own language and culture" (Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers, 1999)

Most studies on immigration are conducted in countries that have a long time tradition of immigration or where foreigners are especially numerous. For this reason, countries such as Canada, France, or Germany regularly appear in migration studies. For the same reason, research that is done in Northern European countries mostly concern Norway and Sweden but hardly ever mention Finland. The small amount of literature on immigration dedicated to Finland even though the country welcomes more and more foreigners encouraged situating the present study there.

The need to increase knowledge about host conformity pressure and the setting of the study in Finland are two relevant motivations for conducting this

research. The perspective used is also an important feature of this study as it belongs to the intercultural communication field. The idea of different cultures coming together is at the core of migration flows. Intercultural communication is therefore central to immigration studies and is especially relevant to this study because of its aim. The present research intends to investigate immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure from their viewpoints in order to discover how this phenomenon may affect them and their acculturation processes. People's experiences in different societies and their cultural knowledge are important factors in their perception of themselves, others, and also in their relations (Laungani, 2007). The intercultural communication perspective therefore enables to ponder on the possible consequences of the interaction between immigrants' and hosts' cultures in the experience of host conformity pressure.

## 1.3   Outline of the study

The present study is divided in five main parts. The two first chapters are dedicated to the literature written on the main theoretical areas used in this study. The main adaptation paradigms are first explored before theories that contribute to the understanding of host conformity pressure are introduced. The literature review enables to highlight a gap in previous research on the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and its possible consequences on immigrants' acculturation.

The aims and research questions used to bridge this gap are presented in chapter 3 in relation to previous theories. They are followed by the methodology and philosophy of sciences regarded as best corresponding to the main aim of this study. Justifications for conducting a qualitative research with aspects of phenomenology are given and compared with possible alternatives to highlight the suitability of these methods. The participants and interviews are described in the same chapter along with the data analysis methods and some important ethical considerations.

Results are exposed in chapter 4 and organized into themes that pave the way to the discussion part (chapter 5) where the main findings are further analyzed. The implications of the main results concerning the understanding of the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and immigrants' acculturation processes are discussed in the final chapter. In addition, the limitations of the study are

examined and suggestions to further investigate this topic offered. Finally, the principal findings of the present study are reviewed in the conclusion in relation to the research questions.

# 2 THEORIES OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Different terms have been used by scholars to characterize immigrants' lives in a new cultural setting. Kim (1989) explains that a*cculturation*, *assimilation*, and *intercultural* or *cross-cultural adaptation* are commonly used. However, they all slightly differ in that they emphasize different aspects of the adaptation process. The words adaptation and acculturation can be used as umbrella expressions that encompass the other terms mentioned beforehand (see Kim, 1989; Berry, 1997). However, some researchers such as Bennett (1993) consider adaptation and acculturation to be remarkably different from assimilation.

The notion of adaption is relevant to this study which examines the relation that immigrants may establish between host conformity pressure and their adaptation. Many differences exist between the terms that refer to adaptation processes. Several differences also exist in the way these terms can be used by researchers. For this reason, the two main paradigms in the field of adaptation – assimilationist and pluralist – are discussed in this chapter as well as the variations that can exist within them. Exploring the different views within the field of adaptation enables to identify the paradigm the present study belongs to, and the theories it mostly relies on.

## 2.1 Assimilationist views

Two main paradigms exist in the field of adaptation studies: assimilationist and pluralist. The main characteristics of the assimilationist paradigm is investigated

thereafter as well as the *Melting Pot* ideology which belongs to it. The critiques addressed to this paradigm are also exposed throughout the following subchapters.

### 2.1.1  Definition of assimilation

Assimilationist views have been held for a long time and can be traced back to the medieval phrase "in Rome do as Romans do". The idea that lies behind this ideology is that it is natural for newcomers to live according to the rules of their new place of residency. Scholars refer to assimilation as the process of discarding one's original cultural identity and fully blending into a new cultural environment (Bennett, 1993; Clément, Gauthier & Noels, 1993; Croucher, 2009; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Kim, 2001; Ruggiero et al., 1996; Yoon, Simpson & Haag, 2010). At the core of the notion are the abandonment of one's ethnic cultural background and the acceptance of social rules from the host society. As Gordon (1964 cited in Kim 2001) explains, these rules encompass several areas of one's life. He for instance lists seven different domains that are to be modified throughout assimilation process: "behavioral, structural, material, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and civic" (Gordon 1964 cited in Kim 2001:23).

The assimilationist paradigm has become obsolete after the 1960s and has been progressively replaced by more pluralistic views (Kim, 2001; Ruggiero et al., 1996; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). Assimilation theories have progressively disappeared and been largely criticized. Glazer (1993) explains that the term assimilation itself is nowadays charged with negative connotations. Alba and Nee (1997) also point out that the concept is disapproved of for being prejudiced and condescending by imposing cultural choices on ethnic minorities.

According to the assimilationist paradigm, the possibility for newcomers to maintain their former cultural identities is an obstacle to becoming actors in the receiving society. Immigrants' success in the host society is thus opposed to them maintaining their former ethnic identity. This suggests that newcomers are forced to dismiss their former cultural baggage in order to adopt a new one because it is necessary to their survival in the new environment (Kim, 2001). The impossibility to preserve one's former identity has been criticized for being opposed to ethnorelativism. In his *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, Bennett (1998) describes the successive steps towards Intercultural competence. The first

stages of his model are referred to as being ethnocentric and the last ones – the closest to intercultural sensitivity – as being ethnorelative. He defines ethnorelativism as the capacity to accept different conceptions of the world and understand that one's point of view is neither the only one nor the best one. Ethnorelativity could be summarized as the acceptance of and respect for cultural differences. Such characteristic is missing from assimilation theories in which the merging of smaller cultural groups into a dominant one is regarded as the best solution for different cultures to live together.

Besides the negative connotation attributed to the necessity or obligation to merge into the culture of the receiving society, assimilation theories have been criticized for viewing cultures as items. Similarly to the evolution of adaptation paradigms over time – from assimilationist to pluralist views – the understanding of the concept of culture has also evolved. Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (2004) explains the shift undergone by the concept of culture as it went from being seen as an overarching static entity that guides people's behaviors, from being regarded as a reciprocal process that influences and is influenced by individuals. Bennett (1993:53) agrees with the latter perspective and describes culture as a "process" in which individuals are involved. From this perspective, cultures are not mutually exclusive but are on the contrary "additive" since people can combine different cultural experiences. It is therefore not necessary to give up one's culture in order to live in a new cultural environment. Bennett (1998) argues that encountering numerous cultures helps to develop one's knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and is an undeniable asset to becoming interculturally sensitive. The last stage in his model of intercultural sensitivity is *integration*, which he regards as the ideal case of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can only be obtained in societies that explicitly encourage newcomers and minorities to maintain their cultural heritage while learning the basic values of the host society. In return, the receiving society accepts to adapt to some extent its structure to the cultural minorities' needs (Berry et al., 2004). The idea of reciprocity is central to multiculturalism and is one reason why it is considered to be the opposite of assimilation. Verkuyten (2005) also explains that the previous one aims at reaching equality through diversity whereas the latter one argues for equality through uniformity.

The idea of a dominant culture is very apparent in assimilationist theories, which implies at the same time the idea of a dominated culture. Newcomers

are not on an equal footing with the host society before they have assimilated (Yoon et al., 2010). The supremacy and power of the receiving society over newcomers is one aspect regarded as a negative feature of assimilationist theories. It goes against the nowadays largely defended idea that all cultures are valuable and that ethnic minorities are equal to the larger cultural group with whom they live (Novak 1973 cited in Kim, 2001).

## 2.1.2   The Melting Pot ideology

The *Melting Pot* ideology is associated with the assimilationist paradigm because of the fundamental ideas they share. The appearance of the expression is traced back by scholars to the writer Israel Zangwill, who wrote a play titled *The Melting Pot* performed for the first time in the United States in 1908. (Gleason, 1964, 1982; Hirschman, 1983; Kim, 2001; Kraus, 1999; Szuberla, 1995). Gleason (1964) points out that the Melting Pot ideology as explained by Zangwill cannot be regarded as a theory on its own because it lacks precision. Nevertheless, the expression describes relevant aspects of the American society in terms of immigration and is therefore worth investigating. Moreover, the phrase has come into general usage – notably because of the success of the play and the real aspects of the American society it encompasses – and is widely used even today (Gordon, 1964; Szuberla, 1995).

The Melting Pot ideology is largely associated with the United States because the country is the scenery of the play and at the heart of the concept. As Gleason (1964) explains, Zangwill's work advocated that immigrants coming to the United States relinquish their original cultural identity in order to form a new nation. This view has been interpreted in various ways at that time and over the following decades because of the vagueness of Zangwill's play itself. Even nowadays, the phrase "Melting Pot" refers to a rather imprecise concept as various meanings are ascribed to the expression.

The expression "Melting Pot" is sometimes referred to as the capacity of the United States to welcome immigrants on its territory and construct itself out of their diversity (Kraus, 1999). The assimilative power of the country is thus regarded as a positive feature that serves the ongoing construction of the American culture. From this perspective, Gleason (1964, 1982) explains that the Melting Pot ideology symbolizes ethnic interaction in the United States. For Hirschman (1983) it

symbolizes the "American dream", that is the possibility for immigrants to be truly involved in the American society by becoming fully part of it. However, shortcomings have also been highlighted including the assimilationist views conveyed in the play. Zangwill indeed wrote about individuals with different ethnicities mixing together in order to create a nationality of a new and superior kind. This particular aspect of the Melting Pot has been criticized for showing uniformity and homogeneity as the best possible results of ethnic interaction. (Gleason, 1964; Kim, 2001; Szuberla, 1995). In this view, the Melting Pot ideology belongs to the assimilationist paradigm and is therefore criticized for similar reasons.

Assimilationist views are often regarded as being too rigid because they do not investigate other options than discarding one's original cultural identity in order to blend into the host society. In contrast, acculturation and other adaptation theories suggest less comprehensive changes for minority groups and also consider various possible outcomes. They are referred to as pluralist theories and are introduced over the next pages.

## 2.2   Pluralist theories

Pluralist and assimilationist theories convey contrasting solutions regarding the way different cultural groups can live together. As explained previously, in assimilationist theories, minority groups are encouraged to identify to the main cultural group and follow its cultural pattern instead of their former ethnic one. On the contrary, pluralist theories tend to accept that minority groups participate in the host society while retaining aspects of their former ethnic identities (Berry et al., 2004).

*Acculturation* is one of the main concepts in pluralist theories that refer to the changes individuals undergo when being in contact with other cultural groups over a certain period of time (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry et al., 2004; Kim, 2001). The definition of acculturation is investigated in more detail throughout the next subchapters. Two prevailing theoretical models in the field of adaptation are notably introduced: the one developed by Berry (1980) and the theory of cross-cultural adaptation proposed by Kim (2001). Finally, Kramer's (2000) strong critique of Kim's (2001) theory is exposed and discussed.

## 2.2.1 Definition of acculturation

When defining the concept of acculturation, most scholars refer to the first official definition given in 1936 (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; Kim, 2001):

> Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern of either or both groups. (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936:149)

However, since that definition, the meaning of the concept of acculturation has undergone some modifications. The expression of *psychological acculturation* has also appeared and become widely used in order to refer to individuals rather than groups phenomena.

At first, the term acculturation was used to depict the changes that one or two cultural groups undergo when being in contact over a certain period of time (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; Kim, 2001). Coined in 1967 by Graves, the term psychological acculturation started to be more commonly used in the 1970s to refer to psychological changes that occur at the individual level when living in culturally plural environments (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry et al., 2004; Kim, 2001). Psychological acculturation has been widely used in the field of cross-cultural psychology that aims at studying the effect of cultural contexts on cognitive processes and human behaviors (Berry et al., 2004). As Berry and Sam (1997) explain, the difference between acculturation and psychological acculturation was partly made because of the discrepancies that can exist between individuals concerning their participation in their own cultural group changes. Another reason concerns the differences between the changes that concern groups and individuals. Berry et al. (2004) for instance note that groups may undergo structural or political changes, whereas individuals may experience identity or value transformations. Despite the differences between the two terms, Kim points out (2001) that the term acculturation is nowadays very often used as a synonym for psychological acculturation. It is for instance the case of the present study which uses the term acculturation even though it focuses on individuals instead of groups.

In his review of the literature researching acculturation, Chirkov (2009) points out several characteristics involved in the process of acculturation. The notions of change, time, contact, and of both a large and a small cultural groups are at the core of the concept. Indeed, as Ward (1996) also asserts, acculturation – that is the changes in one's cultural repertoire – happens over time because of an ongoing contact between cultures or individuals from different cultures. Several factors are considered in acculturation research which concern characteristics of both receiving environments and newcomers' home-societies, as well as immigrants' individual features. Aspects of societies encompass their cultural heterogeneity, official policies and attitudes towards immigrants. Characteristics of individuals include one's personal qualities (language abilities, personality, etc) as well as one's experience of acculturation (length of stay, type of newcomer group, contact with the host society etc). (Ward, 1996). The fact that both the environment and the individuals are considered in acculturation research is interesting for the present research which intends to investigate the relation that immigrants – the individual variable – establish between host conformity pressure – the environmental variable – and their acculturation process.

Acculturation brings changes in one's cultural repertoire and Berry et al. (2004) list three consequences that the phenomenon can have on one's culture. *Cultural loss* is a possible outcome of acculturation as individuals who live in a new environment can dismiss some of their knowledge related to their previous culture. On the contrary, acculturative changes can encourage immigrants to *reaffirm their ethnic cultural heritage*. Finally, Berry et al. (2004) assert that *new cultures* can also arise when different groups are in contact. The range of outcomes from acculturation processes show that neither cultural loss nor cultural homogeneity is the only possible result.

For the purpose of this research, the term acculturation is understood as a process of adaptation that involves some changes in immigrants' cultural repertoires but does not require them to entirely let go of their ethnic identity. As Kim (2001:31) explains, acculturation processes are less comprehensive than assimilation processes because immigrants are only expected to "acquire some (but not all) aspects of the host culture". In this research, acculturation is not regarded as a process that ideally leads to assimilation but as a process with multiple possible outcomes that depend to some extent on newcomers' will. Theories of adaptation that envisage the possibility

for immigrants to choose their acculturation pattern – and for it not to be systematically assimilation – are called pluralist-typological.

## 2.2.2 Cumulative-progressive versus pluralist-typological

Two paradigms exist in adaptation theories. The first one is regarded as *cumulative and progressive* while the second one considers different possible evolutions for immigrants (Kim, 1989). The latter approach is referred to as *pluralistic-typological* and envisages that immigrants follow different adaptation patterns. It for instance includes the idea that newcomers may be willing to reinforce their ethnic identity while adapting. This position is in opposition to the cumulative and progressive view which consists of saying that immigrants always keep on adapting while they are living in a new cultural environment. Interestingly, the pluralistic-typological view is sometimes qualified using the adjective "regressive" – for instance by Kim (1989) – with all the negative connotations that this word contains.

Such lexical choice reminds that the study of adaptation is still very subjective in that is it both linked to researchers' own points of view and the epoch of their works. The assimilationist theories are for instance representative of the school of thoughts from the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, pluralist theorists nowadays tend to be the most researched and valued within the academic field. Even in research, people cannot entirely distance themselves from their time and personal opinions. It is therefore important to be aware of one's own views and of the possible influence of the environment we live in so as to be warned and honest, if not fully impartial. In this study, I agree with the acculturation paradigm rather than the assimilationist one. Within the acculturation theories, I give particular attention to the concept of *selective acculturation* in general and for this research project in particular.

The notion of selective acculturation is similar to the one of *segmented assimilation* which is opposed to regular theories of assimilation that explain the process of adaption as being linear (Valenta, 2009). Building on the concept of selective acculturation, Valenta (2009) investigates immigrants' social adaptation in Norway and highlights the existence of different patterns. Most immigrants from his study prefer to have deep relationships with their ethnic groups and more superficial relationships with the hosts. The findings of Valenta's research (2009) show that

having relationships with hosts, even if they are superficial or weak, are important for immigrants and stand as a symbol of their successful integration in the host society. Valenta's (2009) research supports the idea that there is more in adaptation than the two extreme solutions that are assimilation and withdrawal. Moreover, Valenta (2009) points out that immigrants' selective acculturation is often mistaken as a sign of withdrawal. However, having more friends among their ethnic group or other groups of foreigners rather than among natives is a way for immigrants to "protect their identities, culture and self-respect" while simultaneously integrating into the host society (Valenta, 2009:178).

Similarly to the concept of selective acculturation in general, Valenta's study (2009) stresses the fact that adaption is a dynamic process with more than one possible path for immigrants to follow. Such understanding of the acculturation process is close to the one exposed by Berry (1980, 1997). His model is presented in the following subchapter in relation to the present study.


### 2.2.3 Berry's bi-dimensional model

Berry's (1980, 1997) model of acculturation is maybe the most often referred to in the field of cross-cultural psychology and cross-cultural adaptation. His model is based on two questions that immigrants answer with "yes" or "no". The first question concerns the preservation of one's ethnic identity – "Are cultural identity and customs of value to be retained?" – and the second relates to the relations between the two cultural groups – "Are positive relations with the larger society of value and to be sought?". Out of these two questions, Berry (1997) has defined four types of "acculturation strategies" used by immigrants (see table 1 below). Berry's model (1997) displays four degrees of acculturation: integration (yes-yes), assimilation (no-yes), separation (yes-no), and marginalization (no-no).

Berry's bi-dimensional model (1997) is named after the two variables that are brought together – maintenance of ethnic heritage and adaptation to the receiving society – in order to determine types of acculturation strategies. These two dimensions are shown as being independent since immigrants can give different answers to each of them. Berry's model (1997) also highlights the fact that these two variables are not necessarily mutually exclusive, contrarily to what assimilation theories suggest. As Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind and Vedder (2001) explain,

Berry's model showed the limits of previous theoretical approaches that considered assimilation as the only possible outcome of adaptation.

However, assimilation does not disappear from Berry's model (1997) as it remains one of the four possible choices that immigrants can make in their acculturation strategy. Other alternatives are however presented on an equal footing with the solution of assimilating. Similarly, Kim (2001) points out the importance for scholars to investigate balanced adaptation outcomes and not necessarily choose only between assimilationist and pluralists views. In Kim's opinion (2001), all immigrants who live in a new cultural milieu and are in contact with hosts undergo adaptive changes to some extent, but none become fully assimilated nor stay entirely unchanged. She therefore points out the importance of considering intermediate positions in adaptation processes as well.

TABLE 1: Berry's bi-dimensional model of acculturation

|  |  | Are cultural identities and customs of value to be retained? | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Yes | No |
| Are positive relations with the larger society of value and to be sought? | Yes | Integration | Assimilation |
|  | No | Separation | Marginalization |

Berry's model (1997) suggests that acculturation stems out of individuals' choices and is therefore a matter of conscious decision. The expression of *acculturation strategies* used by Berry (1997) highlights the fact that immigrants are active in choosing their adaptation path. This aspect of Berry's model significantly opposes assimilationist views which assert that changes are imposed by host societies on newcomers. Similarly to Berry (1997), Chirkov (2009) claims that the process of acculturation is active and that it requires an important cognitive work from

individuals. From this perspective, immigrants are aware of both the changes they are or are not willing to undergo and the extent to which they are ready to acculturate. Immigrants are thus actors of their acculturation – at least to some extent – and it is therefore relevant to expect individual deviations from theoretical models. Nevertheless, Berry (1997) points out that immigrants are not always free to pursue the acculturation strategies of their choice because of the pressures exercised by receiving societies. This particular aspect is investigated in the present research which examines the relations immigrants make between what they perceive as host conformity pressure and their acculturation processes. (Berry, 1997:5–13)

### 2.2.4   Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory

In her book *Becoming Intercultural*, Kim (2001) outlines her own conceptualization of cross-cultural adaptation. Her theory relies on communication as she argues that adaptation is a process that can only occur if hosts and newcomers (she refers to them as *strangers*) are in contact with the receiving society (Kim, 2001). The importance of communication also appears in the presence of both macro-level factors that correspond to the environment and micro-level factors that correspond to individuals. Kim's theory (2001) strongly associates individuals to their environment in the process of adaptation. This appears in the five factors that are regarded in her theory as being the most important features of cross-cultural adaptation: *Environment*, *Host Communication Competence*, *Social Communication, Ethnic Communication*, and *Adaptive Potential*.

      First, the Environment is considered to be a relevant aspect in the process of adaptation that deals with both the host society – the way it receives newcomers and the extent to which it pressures them to conform to its cultural patterns – and the strength of ethnic groups. The concept of Host Communication Competence is the second central aspect of Kim's theory and refers to immigrants' capacity to effectively communicate in the host society. This notion includes a large variety of skills that go beyond being linguistically successful. Host communication competence encompasses cognitive skills such as knowing the host language, understanding the host culture and its history of shared memories, and developing a less stereotyped and more accurate vision of the receiving society. Kim (2001) also considers affective skills to be necessary. In her understanding, they include one's

motivation to adapt, ability to be empathic and flexible, and capacity to deal with ambiguity. Finally, host communication competence includes the ability to adjust one's behavior to new cultural patterns, for instance by using non-verbal communication effectively and appropriately. The third component of Kim's model (2001) of cross-cultural adaptation is Social Communication. This aspect encompasses both interpersonal communication – on the micro level – and mass communication through for instance media or public discourse – on the macro level. Ethnic Communication is the fourth significant aspect of Kim's theory (2001) and deals with immigrants' relation to their ethnic group. Kim (2001) describes ethnic communication to be a positive factor in immigrants' adaptation to some extent. However, overtime and depending on the strength of the relation, it is regarded as being potentially counter-productive. Finally, the Adaptive Potential of individuals is also considered by Kim (2001) as a factor which can either facilitate or impede the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

In her theory, Kim (2001:54) also introduces the concept of "*stress-adaptation-growth dynamic*" which she uses to characterize the process of cross-cultural adaptation (see figure 1 below). In her view, adaptation is not a linear process that goes from being a stranger to becoming adapted. On the contrary, she explains adaptation as being a "cyclic" process composed of repetitive ups and downs. According to Kim (2001), when arriving in a new cultural environment, all immigrants undergo some stress that may be the cause of some setbacks in their adaptation process, but in reaction to which they can find adaptive answers and eventually grow. From this perspective, stress is a positive factor that can give strength to newcomers in their adaptation process.  It can thus be considered as a necessary factor to a positive adaptation. (Kim, 2001; Sandel & Liang, 2010).

In Kim's theory, growth happens as a result of two concomitant actions: *deculturation* and acculturation (Kim, 2001:68). That is, immigrants lose some of their original cultural knowledge while simultaneously gaining cultural knowledge from their new cultural environment (Kim, 2001; Sandel & Liang, 2010). This dynamic process between stress and growth, de-learning and learning, is at the core of Kim's cross-cultural adaption theory (2001).

Adaptation
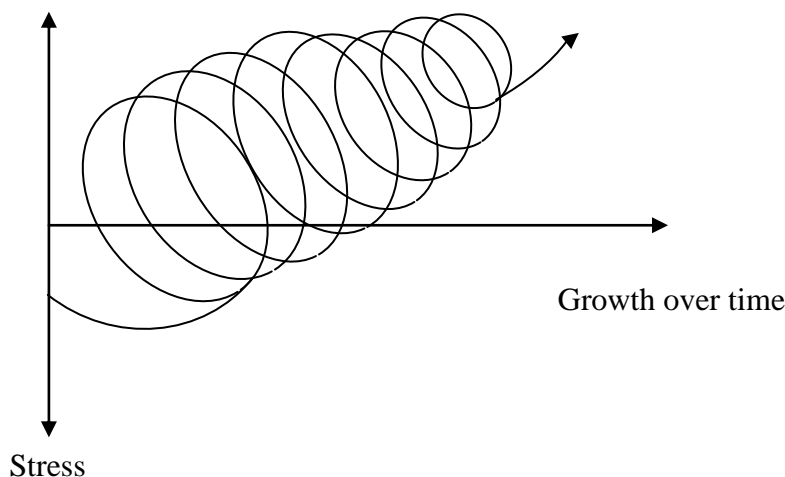


FIGURE 1: Kim's adaptation model and the "stress-adaptation-growth dynamic"

In her theory, Kim (2001:69) regards adaptation as a positive outcome that is "natural and inevitable" as long as hosts and newcomers are in contact. Kim (2001:68) also sees assimilation as "an eventual possible outcome" of her cross-cultural adaptation theory. Despite her will to bridge the gap between assimilationist and pluralist views, some have criticized her theory for being too assimilationist. Kramer (2000, 2003) is one of them and introduces the concept of *cultural fusion* as an alternative.

### 2.2.5  A critique of Kim's theory: Kramer's theory of Cultural Fusion

Kramer (2000) takes a very critical stance towards Kim's theory of cross-cultural adaptation. He strongly criticizes her concept of "*intercultural personhood*" and the predictable outcome of her model that seems to regard adaptation or assimilation as the only wanted and positive result of cultures being brought together. Kramer's criticism (2000) addresses the cumulative-progressive aspect of Kim's theory (2001) as he instead argues in favor of pluralist-typological views.

In a review of the *cultural fusion* concept, Sandel and Liang (2010) point out Kramer's negative interpretation of Kim's (2001) notion of intercultural personhood. In Kramer's view, this concept encourages to jettison and go beyond

cultural identities in order to surmount cultural differences. Kramer (2000) however considers discarding cultural identities as a source of problems rather than a solution. He therefore criticizes the fact that Kim (2001) presents uniformity as the only way to overcome differences and thus inequalities or discriminations (Kramer, 2000). The theory of cultural fusion differs in that it praises plurality within societies and encourages the existence of cultural differences (Sandel & Liang, 2010; Kramer, 2000, 2003). This reminds of the differences mentioned earlier between the assimilationist and multiculturalist paradigms, Kramer's theory being closer to the latter one. Kramer's theory calls for the *fusion* of different cultural patterns within society. In contrast to the Melting Pot ideology that envisages the mixing of various cultures as a way to give rise to a new American national culture, cultural fusion does not have a specific outcome. At the core of Kramer's ideology is the notion of *unpredictability*. That is, the possibility for individuals to follow their own acculturation path that will result in different outcomes. (Kramer, 2000; Rainwater-McClure, Reed & Kramer, 2003; Sandel & Liang, 2010).

Kramer (2000:196) also criticizes cross-cultural adaptation for being a one-way process in which only immigrants are required to learn and adapt whereas the "host culture, never learns anything from the newcomer". In his view, the lack of reciprocity in Kim's cross-cultural adaptation model (2001) creates a hierarchy between immigrants and the host society. In Kramer's (2000) opinion, Kim's theory regards hosts' cultural patterns as superior ones that immigrants should learn from and adapt to in order to become functionally fit. As Sandel and Liang (2010) explain, it is the whole process of deculturation-acculturation that Kramer condemns and considers to be suitable only for robots. In his opinion, growth does not consist of keeping a perfect balance so that when one learns something one has to put behind something else. On the contrary, Kramer (2003:239) regards growth as an "additive and integrative" process by which individuals learn more without having to discard some of their previous knowledge. It is however important to read Kramer's critique of Kim's intercultural personhood concept with prudence. Contrarily to what Kramer (2000) reproaches to Kim (2001:196), she points out several times that "the process of becoming intercultural is not one of having to replace one culture with another".

Even though assimilation is not the most visible and discussed aspect of Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation model she nevertheless regards it as a possible result of her theory. She explains that assimilation is the wanted outcome of

all acculturation processes as it is an "ideal state characterized by the maximum possible convergence of strangers' internal conditions to those of the natives" (Kim, 2001:52). Kramer (2000) criticizes the assimilationist paradigm present in Kim's theory (2001) that considers following hosts' cultural patterns as the only positive outcome for newcomers. He especially regards Kim's theory (2001) as an instance of the modern world that brings cultures together and destroys them at the same time by promoting conformity and uniformity. Sandel and Lian (2010) identify cultural fusion as a theory of acculturation that thus supports the idea of change in cultures – or individuals from different cultures – which have been in contact. Kim's theory (2001) is also criticized by Kramer (2000) for envisaging balance between the receiving society and newcomers as possible only if immigrants adopt the way of life of the host society. On the contrary, his theory considers the balance between both only achievable through mutual influence, mutual change, and the negotiation and acceptance of cultural differences (Sandel & Liang, 2010; Kramer, 2000).

In the last sections, the assimilationist and pluralist paradigms have been examined and their differences pointed out. The main variations within these two schools of thoughts have also been highlighted. This gave the opportunity to see that the same terms – notably the one of acculturation – can take on slightly different meanings depending on researchers. As this study largely relies on the theory of acculturation, it is important that the way it is understood in this study is clearly explained. The term adaptation – or cultural adaptation – also is extensively used in this research as an umbrella term that covers the process of acculturation.

In this study, the understanding of the term acculturation is in many ways similar to Kim's (2001) definition that describes it as a process of adaptation implying cognitive and behavioral changes in newcomers who are in contact with hosts. This study also considers acculturation as a cyclic process, rather than a linear one, where stress can play an important part. However, in contrast to Kim (2001), this research does not regard assimilation as a positive and ideal outcome of acculturation. Rather, it agrees with Kramer's view (2000) that advocates for mutual influence and change between hosts and newcomers. Therefore, acculturation is understood as implying reciprocal changes rather than the replacement of one's original culture by the host culture. Finally, acculturation is understood as being a process of cultural adaptation of different degrees, meaning that each newcomer may acculturate to a different degree with diverse outcomes.

This study investigates immigrants' acculturation process in the light of host conformity pressure. Therefore, two principal theoretical areas are particularly relevant to the research: theories of adaptation and the concept of host conformity pressure. In the previous pages, various adaptation paradigms have been examined. The following chapter investigates the concept of host conformity pressure.

# 3   HOST CONFORMITY PRESSURE

A considerable number of studies have been conducted about conformity pressure. According to Bond and Smith (1996), most of them have been carried out within the field of social psychology in relation to theories of social influence. Conformity pressure studies examine the extent to which individuals within a same culture and society are forced to follow the general rules and norms (Berry, 2004; Mann, 1988). Several definitions of conformity pressure are reviewed in the present chapter and followed by theories of power as the notion appears to be strongly intertwined with the one of conformity pressure and to help comprehend it better. Moving towards an intercultural understanding of conformity pressure, Kim's (2001) concept of *Host Conformity Pressure* is introduced. It refers to conformity pressures exercised by hosts of a receiving society on newcomers with a different cultural background. Results of recently conducted studies about host conformity pressure are examined at the end of this part, which enables to highlight the existence of a research gap.

## 3.1   Conformity Pressure in social psychology studies

The concepts of *conformity* and *conformity pressure* are related to group behavior studies and have notably been researched in the field of social psychology. Bond and Smith (1996) explain that conformity is regarded by scholars as being interrelated to group and social processes. The notions of conformity and conformity pressure also have a great influence on communication processes and have therefore been researched within the field of communication as well (Moscovici, 1976).

In his definition of conformity, Moscovici (1976) identifies two different groups of factors that confront each other: the majority and the minority groups. The first one is associated with the norms established within a given society and environment. The majority is empowered to decide what behaviors, judgments, and opinions are acceptable, and which are not. On the contrary, the minority – which can consist of subgroups or individuals – represents the exception that carries out behaviors, judgments, or opinions deviant from the mainstream. As Moscovici (1976) himself points out, in reality the distinction between majority and minority groups is less sharp than it is in theory. Indeed, individuals' statuses can vary from belonging to the majority group to being deviant, and discrepancies can exist between what people say and the way they act.

Conformity is defined by scholars as the act of incorporating and following the societal patterns of the majority without resistance and in spite of original differences (Berry et al., 2004; Güngör, 2007; Moscovici, 1976). However, Moscovici (1976) makes a distinction between *external conformity* which concerns behaviors or appearance, and *internal conformity* that refers to the approval and incorporation of values. The first one is thus more superficial and less comprehensive than the second one. As explained, the process of conforming is undertaken by the minority group; however, conformity pressure is enforced by the majority group. Mann (1988) and Moscovici (1976) define conformity pressure as the power of a group to influence its members – among whom some can be perceived as deviant – to follow the norms established and, in case of failure, penalize the ones who did not conform.

According to Mann (1988) and Moscovici (1976), the aim of conformity pressure is to ensure success, goal achievement, and survival, but also to guarantee cohesion and provide a reassuring sense of unity. Not following the norms of a majority group, or proposing new norms to this group, can be a source of conflict. Conformity pressure is therefore a way to ease or dismiss tensions that can arouse within a group because of deviant individuals or sub-groups (Moscovici, 1976). Thus, achieving cohesion is a reason for exercising conformity pressure. Achieved cohesion can also be a cause for doing so as the more uniform and unified a majority group is, the more pressure it is likely to put on deviant individuals or subgroups to conform to its own norms. In such context, the majority group is also likely to be reluctant to make compromise or establish dialogue with the minority and will act so

as to preserve its own ways of doing. (Moscovici, 1976). Cartwright and Zander (1968) also list the cohesion of a group as a motivation to enforce conformity pressures. They add to this the importance given by the majority group to the new and different pattern that is brought into attention. That is, how important it is for the group to maintain the old way of doing regarding a particular area that could be changed. Cartwright and Zander (1968) also introduce the concept of *internal power of the group*, which they regard as a consequence of a group's cohesiveness. They define it as the degree of change that a group can encourage among its members. In this case, the internal power of a group thus corresponds to the influence a group has on its members.

As stated earlier, minority groups are the ones undergoing conformity processes. Nevertheless, studies in social psychology have also investigated the influence that minorities can have over majority groups (Mann, 1988; Moscovici, 1976). Moscovici (1976:172) refers to the changes provoked by a minority group in a majority group as "innovation from below". The concept of *minority influence* implies some possible reciprocity in the process of conformity pressure by advocating that through consistent efforts, a minority can also modify the behaviors and opinions of a majority group (Mann, 1988).

Moscovici (1976) has taken the idea of reciprocity further by introducing the concept of *normalization* which refers to the mutual influence between a majority and a minority group. Normalization is based on the ideas of compromise and cooperation in order to prevent either side from dominating or being dominated. According to the concept, neither of the groups pressures the other to conform to its norms. Mutual understanding is then at the heart of this process which aims at putting both groups on an equal footing. Because of its conciliatory nature, the notion of normalization as exposed by Moscovici (1976) strongly differs from the concept of conformity pressure. Indeed, the idea of a trial of strength or conflict appears to be inherent to the theory of conformity pressure. The vocabulary used to define it shows so: "yield", "surrender", "confront", "conflict", "survive", "exert", "punish", "enforce" (Moscovici, 1976; Mann, 1988). The lexical field of conformity pressure theories also hints at the idea of power.

## 3.2   The notion of power in relation to the one of conformity

The notion of *power* has been extensively studied in the field of social sciences and the various definitions highlight the different understandings of the concept that exist.

Cartwright and Zander (1968) identify the main characteristics of power in order to define the concept in contexts of interpersonal relationships. The two researchers establish a parallel between influence and power as they regard the latter one as the ability to influence an individual. Cartwright and Zander (1968) highlight the fact that one's influence over somebody else can be restricted to only certain aspects and not his or her entire personality. According to their definition, one's influence can be limited to one area and in time; power is thus not absolute. Cartwright and Zander (1968) also point out the fact that power in interpersonal relationships is not automatically asymmetric but can come from both sides. Similarly, Oyamot, Fuglestad, and Snyder's (2010) definition of power gives a fairly balanced idea of the notion. They explain it as being both the ability to influence others and the ability to resist undesired influence coming from the outside. This explanation offers a wider understanding of power by pointing out different ways to be empowered. It highlights the fact that minorities can also be powerful when they resist influence from majority groups.

When detailing the way one can influence another, Cartwright and Zander (1968) underline two interrelated characteristics: having qualities valued by somebody else. In this way, their definition is close to the one given by Foa and Foa (1974:135) who explain power as "the amount of a given resource that is available to an individual for eventual giving". They focus on the fact that one is empowered if he or she owns something that can be offered to others. Foa and Foa (1974) reject the definition of power as being the influence of someone over others. They understand this as one of the consequences of power rather than as an explication of the real nature of power.

In the explanation of his theory of *structural power*, Emerson (1968) criticizes former statements made about the concept. He notably regrets to see power being systematically defined as a characteristic inherent to a group or a person. In his understanding, "power is a property of the social relation; it is not an attribute of the actor" (Emerson, 1968:32). The structural power theory refers to social relations,

which Emerson (1968) defines as creating mutual dependence between the actors involved. Building on this, Emerson (1968) explains that one's power is not based on one's characteristics but on others' dependence. That is, nobody is powerful on its own but only in relation to others if they need him or her. Emerson's (1968) affirmation is particularly relevant when it comes to examining host conformity pressure. Kim's (2001) definition of the phenomenon also refers to the idea of dependence as she states that immigrants' dependence on the host society is likely to increase their experiences of conformity pressure. Even though Emerson (1968) asserts that power appears in social relations, he excludes the idea that it is systematically visible in people's interactions.

Nevertheless, Emerson (1968) hints at the importance of communication by explaining power as a product of social relations. A view also shared by Cartwright and Zander (1968:175) who define communication as "the means by which influence is exerted". Festinger and Thibaut's (1951) experiment in small groups validate the hypothesis according to which individuals use communication as a mean to influence deviant members who belong to the same group. They also explain that communication can be used to detach one's group from deviant individuals or even exclude them by ending all types of interactions.

The definitions of power discussed over the last pages provide an additional insight to consider the interrelatedness between power, influence, conformity pressures, and communication. They nevertheless convey two ideas in the understanding of power that are regarded as significant shortcomings in this study. The first idea is that power regularly appears as being a matter of gain and loss. Joseph Nye (2010) offers a different understanding of the concept of power that is especially relevant for societies in general, and intercultural settings in particular. He suggests going beyond the dichotomy between gain and loss, powerful and powerless, and instead seeing power as a "positive sum, where your gain can be my gain" (Nye, 2010). This perspective is particularly interesting when studying relations between host societies and immigrants as it indeed seems that empowering immigrants could empower the whole society. The second idea to be critically addressed concerns the recurrent suggestion that power and influence are consciously enforced. It is nevertheless important to remember that it is far from being always the case, especially, as Kim (2001) explains, when it comes to host conformity pressure.

## 3.3   A cross-cultural perspective on conformity pressure

Several cross-cultural studies have been conducted about conformity pressure in order to compare the meanings assigned to conformity in different countries and to find out whether the level of pressure differs between cultures. Some researchers have claimed that conformity is partly based on cultural characteristics and can vary across historical periods within the same society (Bond & Smith, 1996). Conducting cross-cultural research on the topic is thus a way to demonstrate whether conformity and conformity pressure is culture-bound or a universal phenomenon (Mann, 1988).

Cross-cultural studies on conformity have found that conformity exists across cultures but to a different degree. Some research projects – most of them conducted by Berry – have investigated the relation between the way a society obtains food and its level of expectations regarding conformity. According to the results of these studies, agricultural societies tend to have higher conformity expectations than hunting- and fishing-based societies. (Berry et al., 2004; Bond & Smith, 1996). Another widespread way to compare levels of conformity and conformity pressure between cultures is to consider the value attached by individuals to the notion of group (Bond & Smith, 1996). Such studies – most of them conducted by Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Schwartz – have argued that societies which value collectivism and conservatism typically have a higher level of conformity than societies where autonomy and individualism are valued (Berry et al., 2004; Bond & Smith, 1996). That is, the emphasis that certain societies put on the harmony of the majority group is likely to make individuals who come from those societies to be more inclined to conform. Bond and Smith (1996) suggest the existence of a relation between the general collectivistic view of a society and its people's willingness to conform. To our knowledge however there is not an explicit relation established between collectivistic views of a society and the degree or intensity of conformity pressure exercised.

In their study, Kim and Markus (1999) investigate the differences in the meanings ascribed to "conformity" between East Asian societies and European American ones. At the same time, they do not over generalize their results and assert that cultures cannot be simply reduced to systematically organized systems. Kim and Markus' (1999:786) study suggests that "depending on the cultural context, 'uniqueness' can be 'deviance' and 'conformity' can be 'harmony'". Such statement

is particularly relevant for the study of immigrants' perception of host conformity pressure as the meaning of conformity itself – whether it is negatively or positively connoted – plays a role. Kim and Markus' (1999) study also provides useful results for researchers who investigate the concept of conformity as it highlights people's preconceptions about it. Conformity may be seen as a negative, "undesirable tendency" and uniqueness as a positive feature (Kim and Markus, 1999:786). However such perspectives are not universally shared and it is important to be aware of them so as to not anticipate participants' answers.

The cross-cultural perspective on conformity pressure compares ways of acting across cultures. It also shows the different values attributed to conformity across cultures and the influence it can have on individuals' willingness or tendency to conform. When investigating immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure from an intercultural perspective, it is particularly important to examine the values they attach to the notion of conformity. Individuals' personal and cultural values have an influence on the judgments they make and the decisions they take. For this reason, Samovar, Porter, and Stefani (1998) emphasize the importance of understanding one's and others' values as a way to avoid misinterpretations in intercultural settings. Kim's concept (2001) of host conformity pressure applies to intercultural communication as it examines interactions between individuals who have different cultural backgrounds. It is introduced hereafter.

## 3.4   Kim's definition of Host Conformity Pressure

The concept of *host conformity pressure* has been coined by Kim (2001) in her theory of cross-cultural adaptation. It is one of the three components in relation to strangers' new cultural *environment* – together with *host receptivity* and *ethnic group strength* – that she explains as having an influence on the adaptation process.

Host conformity pressure and host receptivity are interrelated notions. The former one refers to the extent to which a host society welcomes newcomers, while the latter one is the degree to which receiving societies put pressure on newcomers to follow their cultural patterns. (Kim, 2001). Thus, similarly to the definition of conformity in social psychology, two groups of actors are involved: a

majority group – the receiving society – that enforces conformity pressure on a minority group – newcomers.

Host conformity pressure is related to some extent to national policies of the receiving society regarding immigration. Indeed, whether an environment as a whole is assimilationist or pluralist influences behaviors of hosts and their expectations towards newcomers' degree of adaptation (Kim, 2001). Higher levels of host conformity pressure are likely to be found in assimilationist environments where newcomers are expected to discard their ethnic identity so as to adopt the local cultural patterns. On the contrary, lower levels of host conformity pressure are expected to be found in multicultural environments which encourage immigrants to maintain their ethnic identities while respecting the fundamental values of the host society. Despite the relation between immigration national policies and host conformity pressure, the latter one is not explicitly written in the law of a country but rather emerges out of it and is implicitly conveyed in the society. Host conformity pressure can appear in various ways; for instance through public discourse or natives' expectations towards newcomers' learning of the host communication patterns. Kim (2001) also notes that discrepancies exist between urban and rural environments within a same country. Host conformity pressure is likely to be less strong in cities than in smaller areas because of the variety and cosmopolitanism that tend to exist in large urban places. (Kim, 2001). Thus, one could assert that there is a correlation between being accustomed to cultural diversity and exercising less host conformity pressure.

Kim (2001) emphasizes the link between host conformity pressure and communication. The level of proficiency required in the host society language is indeed often a way to evaluate the degree of conformity pressure exercised by the receiving society (Kim, 2001). Partly because of the language issue, Kim (2001) suggests that host conformity pressure is more strongly felt by migrants whose living depends on the receiving society. In contrast, sojourners who come for a short period of time and hardly communicate with hosts are likely to be less affected by conformity pressure. (Kim, 2001). As explained previously, host conformity pressure is both explicitly and implicitly conveyed in the society. Similarly, hosts express it both consciously and unconsciously by showing disapproval, prejudice or discrimination towards newcomers who do not conform to the receiving society conventions. (Kim, 2001).

## 3.5 Host Conformity Pressure in intercultural and cross-cultural research

Other scholars besides Kim have also investigated the phenomenon of host conformity pressure. Nevertheless, the phrase itself has not been so widely used. Different expressions have been employed instead to refer to the same process such as "perceived control" (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997) "pressure to conform" (Matthews, 2006) "external pressure to adapt culturally", "a force to acculturate" (Croucher, 2009, 2006), "pressure to assimilate", and "perceived pressure" (Roccas et al., 2000). Some researchers also refer directly to the possible outcomes of host conformity pressure by using the terms "discrimination" and "expressions of prejudice" (Ruggiero et al., 1996; McLaren, 2003).

Studies have also been conducted from the perspective of the host society in order to investigate the ways host conformity pressure is enforced and can be minimized. McLaren (2003) for instance examines the influence that contacts between hosts and immigrants can have on the reduction of hosts' prejudice. The study shows that several types of relation – such as between co-workers or neighbors – are usually too shallow to effectively enhance understanding between hosts and immigrants. However, friendship relations are likely to positively affect hosts' representations of newcomers and reduce their level of prejudice. McLaren (2003) partly relies on Allport's definition of prejudice who defines it as resulting from stereotypical visions. Thus, deep relationships such as friendship are likely to reduce preconceptions and consequently decrease hosts' level of prejudice. The research also examines the different reasons for prejudice. It refers to "symbolic prejudice" as being hosts' feelings of threat for their culture when living with immigrants who have different visible cultural patterns (McLaren, 2003:916). The research mentions religion in contemporary Europe as being likely to raise symbolic prejudice because of the differences between traditionally catholic European countries that are increasingly becoming secular and Muslim immigrants.

Cultural differences are often regarded as the reason for prejudice towards immigrants. Depending on the views of the society – assimilationist or pluralist ones – the will to level out differences will be more or less important and lead to a certain degree of host conformity pressure. Host conformity pressure aims at encouraging newcomers to follow the cultural patterns of the receiving society.

Some societies and individuals may see uniformity as being the best way to live harmoniously while others will tolerate more diversity. The role of host conformity pressure is clear but its outcomes on individuals can vary depending on immigrants. Croucher's (2006, 2009) and Ruggiero et al.'s (1996) studies have established a correlation between host conformity pressure and immigrants' acculturation processes but without consistent results. These studies are now examined more specifically.

In his study, Croucher (2006) investigates the way two ethnic groups respond to external pressures conveyed by a dominant group to follow its cultural, political, religious, and economic patterns. The minority groups selected by Croucher (2006) are Chinese living in Montreal's Chinatown and Muslims living in France. The choice of the participants is motivated by the important cultural and ethnic differences that exist between the minorities and the native populations.

In his research, Croucher (2006) uses the term *cultural adaptation* and relies on Gudykunst's and Kim's definition (2003). Croucher (2006) uses this term as a synonym for assimilation. He considers cultural adaptation as an acculturation process, meaning that individuals undergo changes that would eventually lead towards assimilation. Even though Croucher (2006) investigates the effect of external pressures to adapt, his study is not based on any definitions of conformity, or conformity pressure. Rather, his study presents theories of language ideology that examine processes leading to language disappearances. Croucher (2006) claims that the nonverbal communication patterns of a specific culture can gradually disappear when the nonverbal communication patterns of another culture are promoted instead.

The results of Croucher's study (2006) show that minority groups who are pressured to follow the societal patterns of a dominant culture are likely to distance themselves from the majority group. Croucher (2006) however points out behavioral differences across generations, the younger ones being more inclined to detach themselves from their ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, Croucher (2006) notes strong discrepancies within younger generations. Attitudes can be totally opposed and either support the abandonment of ethnic culture or the reinforcement of ethnic pride.

Despite the important differences between the two environments where the research was conducted, the results do not show differences in minorities' reactions. Canada and France largely differ in terms of immigration policies. Canada

is recognized as a model of multiculturalism worldwide (Ku, 2011) whereas France has a particular republican model that calls for convergence in cultural practices sometimes referred to as "assimilatory republicanism" (Favell, 1998:9).

In the quantitative research published in 2009, Croucher focuses on the relation between linguistic pressures and cultural adaptation process surveying the Muslim population living in France. The linguistic pressures referred to consist of rules of the host environment – such as governmental laws – that aim at limiting the use of an original language for a minority group.

The results of his study assert that pressures on ethnic linguistic freedom affect the motivation of members of the minority group to acculturate. The results also show other consequences such as growing aversion towards the majority group, reduction of contacts between minority group and hosts, reinforcement of ethnic pride and ties between members of the minority group. Based on Croucher's study (2009) linguistic pressures appear to have clear negative consequences on minorities' willingness to adapt and their perception of the majority group. With this study, Croucher (2009) challenges Kim's (2001) assertion that immigrants are motivated to adapt as the results show that a perceived challenge – pressure on ethnic linguistic freedom – can decrease immigrants' motivation to acculturate.

When discussing the results of his study, Croucher (2009) emphasizes the importance of taking into consideration the context of the research as it was conducted in France in 2006. That is, two years after the Madrid bombing, a year after the London bombing, and two years after France forbade the wearing of religiously connoted clothes in public schools. The succession of these events created a climate of suspicion and prejudices towards the Muslim population that was especially strong in France.

Both of Croucher's studies (2006, 2009) show that pressures to acculturate exercised by host societies on minority groups typically discourage members from the minority from adapting. However, these results differ from the ones found by Ruggiero et al. (1996). Two minority groups living in the United States have been surveyed in this research: Afro-Americans and Hispanic-Americans. The study measures group and personal discriminations in different contexts – at work, in public, at home, and in relation to the police – and also measures the preservation of an ethnic culture in two different settings, at home and within the ethnic community. The aim of the research is to examine the effects of

discriminations enforced by a receiving society on *heritage culture maintenance*. Two hypotheses are formulated regarding this aim: discriminations discourage minorities from maintaining their ethnic culture; discriminations encourage minorities to preserve their ethnic cultural background.

Ruggiero et al. (1996) remind that numerous studies have shown minorities' preferences for retaining ethnic cultural backgrounds to some extent in their adaptation process. Ruggiero et al.'s study (1996) indicates that the more minorities perceive themselves to be discriminated against, the less they are willing to maintain their ethnic cultural heritage, both at home and in the minority group. The study thus shows an existing correlation between discriminations and the decreasing importance given to the maintenance of ethnic culture by minority groups. Consequently, Ruggiero et al. (1996) assume that a receiving society with a low rate of discriminations would encourage minorities to keep their ethnic cultural patterns. Ruggiero et al. (1996) emphasize the fact that results were consistent despite having two different minority groups. The similarity of the results was not predicted by the researchers, who thus speculate that it may indicate the existence of a pattern shared across cultures by different minority groups facing discriminations from hosts.

## 3.6   Identifying the research gap

Some studies have been conducted to investigate the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and its influence on immigrants. Several reasons however justify the relevance of researching host conformity pressure in relation to immigrants' acculturation processes more extensively and in different ways.

The studies conducted by Croucher (2009) and Ruggiero et al. (1996) both used quantitative methods and aimed at showing the existence of a certain consistency in minorities' reactions towards host conformity pressures. However, the discrepancies between their results show that individuals can respond to host conformity pressures in different ways. The results of Phinney et al.'s (2001) study show that official immigration policies and individuals' adaptation processes are not systematically related. They thus assert that local conditions – such as the density of immigrants, one's relation with others, one's quality of life – can have more

influence on one's adaptation than national policies. Since individuals may respond differently to host conformity pressure and local conditions may have various consequences on immigrants' acculturation processes, it is relevant to transfer studies about host conformity pressure to different contexts. Transferability is a characteristic of qualitative studies that stands for the equivalent of generalization in quantitative studies (Patton, 2002; Trochim, 2006). It refers to the possibility of conducting a study in a different context in order to discover whether similar patterns exist or not under different circumstances (Patton, 2002).

Most research projects that concern immigration and host conformity pressure are located in countries that have a long time tradition of immigration or have large groups of immigrants. Canada, the United States, France, and Norway are among the countries that are often used as settings for immigration studies. This research is located in Finland where only few studies on the issue have been conducted. Phinney et al. (2001) point out that immigration in Finland started about twenty years ago and still happen in relatively small proportions, which contrasts with most countries in continental Europe. In the annual report on Migration, the Finnish Ministry of the Interior (2010) stated that immigrants represent about 3% of the overall population.

Immigration is a fairly new topic in Finland and the country is starting to consider itself as a potential land of immigration. As Zick, Wagner, Dick and Petzel (2001) explain, the immigration strategies of a country can only be successful once inhabitants and officials accept to consider their country as a land of immigration. However, in the last years, the issue has mostly been tackled by the populist party of the True Finns (in Finnish "Perussuomalaiset") from a negative perspective. The anti-immigration discourse of the party can be an important factor in individuals' adaptation. Political discourses in general are part of what Kim (2001) referred to as Social Communication in her theory of cross-cultural adaptation. In her research, Matthews (2006) – who investigates the ways and reasons why minorities sometimes minimize discriminations – also explains that pressures to conform are experienced as a threat when they are conveyed by political leaders.

No systematic pattern has been displayed by the few studies that researched a correlation between host conformity pressure and acculturation strategies. The environment where this research is conducted, Finland, has been seldom investigated although the issue of immigration is becoming increasingly

important there. These different facts – the discrepancies of former results and the new setting of the research – highlight the relevance of this study which is conducted from an intercultural perspective.

# 4 METHODS

The aim and research questions of the study are presented in this chapter followed by the methodological choices made to complete this research in the most appropriate and efficient ways. The chapter ends with a description of the data collection and analysis.

## 4.1 Aims and research questions

The main motivation of this study is to examine immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure in order to better comprehend where it shows and the way it affects them and their acculturation processes. This study regards acculturation as anchored in context and aims at investigating the influence of the environment on individuals' adaptation. The study focuses on host conformity pressure as an aspect of the receiving environment. By examining immigrants' experiences, perceptions, and reactions to host conformity pressure, the present study also intends to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon itself.

This research is based on three main research questions that focus on participants' experiences of host conformity pressure. That is, their identification of the phenomenon, their feelings, and reactions towards it. The relation between the experienced phenomenon and the process of acculturation is underlying the last two research questions. Each of the questions stresses a different aspect of the experience of host conformity pressure and gradually moves from concrete contextual issues to more general emotional and behavioral ones. Each of these three research questions

also suggests the intention to discover possible factors in the identification of, and emotional and behavioral reactions to experienced host conformity pressure.

RQ 1:

    1. What do immigrants identify as host conformity pressure?

        1.1. In which contexts does host conformity pressure appear to immigrants (work, public places etc)?

        1.2. What aspects do immigrants explain as being central to their experience of host conformity pressure (language, clothing, behaviors etc)?

Kim and Markus (1999) point out the different connotations of the notion of "conformity" depending on cultures. It is possible that the meaning attached to the concept influences the experience of the phenomenon. For this reason, starting by examining participants' identification of host conformity pressure is a way to avoid studying the phenomenon based on one's pre-conceptions. It moreover corresponds to the phenomenological aspect of this study that focuses on the meanings people give to their experiences.

RQ 2:

    2. What feelings do immigrants attach to their experience of host conformity pressure?

        2.1. How does perceived host conformity pressure make immigrants feel regarding their position in the host society?

        2.2. How does perceived host conformity pressure make immigrants feel towards the hosts?

In his theory of structural power, Emerson (1968) points out that power is not a personal feature but a product of social relations. In his opinion, it is notably the dependence of some people that give power to others. Emerson's definition (1968) highlights the fact that power – similarly to influence and pressure – emerges out of people's relations and interactions. Building on Emerson's (1968) theory, it seems central to investigate people's relationships with, and feelings towards others to explore the phenomenon of host conformity pressure.

RQ 3:

3. How do immigrants react to perceived host conformity pressure?

    3.1. To what extent do immigrants conform to the pressure they perceive to be exercised?

    3.2. What changes can the experience of host conformity pressure bring in immigrants' acculturation strategies?

According to Berry's (1997) model, immigrants are active and aware of the acculturation strategies they choose. However, Berry (1997) points out that the pressures exercised by receiving societies can prevent immigrants from following the acculturation path they favor the most. Experiences of host conformity pressures can lead immigrants' acculturation processes towards *assimilation* (Ruggiero et al.'s, 1996) or contrarily towards *separation* (Croucher, 2006, 2009). This research question investigates such correlation in the case of the immigrants interviewed for this study.

## 4.2 Nature of the study

As stated earlier, this study aims at investigating the way immigrants living in Finland experience host conformity pressure and how it may influence their acculturation process. The aim of the study shows that the research focuses on individuals' experiences and their understanding of these experiences, which corresponds to a phenomenological approach. This type of inquiry is used in qualitative studies that aim at understanding the meaning of experiences from individuals' points of view (Patton, 2002; Smith, 2011; Trochim, 2006). Patton (2002) lists various ways of experiencing a phenomenon such as one's perception, description, feeling, judgment, memories, and understanding of the phenomenon itself. Similarly, he mentions different types of experiences such as emotion, relationship, or culture. At the core of phenomenology is the idea that individuals' experiences of a phenomenon consist of their reality, which relates to the philosophy and aim of the present study.

The importance given to individuals' own perception of their experiences justifies the use of qualitative methods. Contrarily to quantitative studies that aim at

generalizing and finding regular patterns, qualitative research focus on the way things happen in a particular setting and in the view of certain individuals. (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). As explained before, host conformity pressure in relation to one's willingness to adapt has also been researched quantitatively. Both of Croucher's (2009) and Ruggiero et al.'s (1996) studies used this method since their research aimed at providing wide and general findings concluded from the answers given by a large amount of participants (Patton, 2002). Both researchers drew conclusions from their study that represented general patterns and both obtained limited justifications about the answers given by participants. As Patton (2002) explains, quantitative studies homogenize results as they aim for generalization. The present research however relies on qualitative methods because it does not only reach for an answer but aims at understanding the various reasons behind it. Qualitative methods therefore seem better suited for this research as they allow to discover the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences.

In this study, using qualitative methods is also a way to go beyond the understanding of culture as a repertoire of behaviors and a set of ideas that differentiates groups from one another. Signorini, Wiesemes and Murphy (2009) explain that this paradigm is defended by researchers such as Geert Hofstede who defined culture as a fairly static item and studied cultures using national scales. The present research does not belong to this paradigm and on the contrary wants to include the importance of both local factors and individual characteristics in the definition of culture. The use of qualitative methods is a way to avoid generalization and to find more specific and personal justifications for one's behavior and experiences.

Patton (2002) points out that qualitative studies concentrate on the meaning of phenomena and for this reason are mostly used with small samples so as to go as in-depth as possible. The phenomenon researched in this study is host conformity pressure and the aim is to collect individuals' appreciations of and reactions to this phenomena. Following Patton's (2002) statement, this research thus focuses on a fairly small sample of participants. The surveyed population and the reasons for sampling is described in the following subchapter.

## 4.3  Participants

Participants were chosen according to three main criteria:
- The time spent in Finland at the time of the interview
- The cultural background
- The professional position

Theories of culture shock assert that at the beginning of a stay abroad, newcomers usually tend to regard all aspects of their experience as positive ones (Kim, 2001; Martin and Nakayama, 2007). Since this study aims at gathering immigrants' experiences and critical views on them, it seemed more relevant to select individuals who had been living in Finland already for some time.

The study of Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (1999) guided the choice regarding immigrants' length of stay in Finland. Their study investigates the change in the affirmation of ethnic identity among Russian speaking adolescents living in Finland. Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind's (1999) empirical study relies on Phinney's theoretical model of *identity development* which is composed of three stages. Their results show a clear evolution over time of their participants' ethnic identity. The first stage lasts at least during the first year of living abroad. During that time immigrants have not dealt with their ethnic identity yet. The second stage takes place between the first and third year and consists of strongly questioning one's ethnic identity before progressively accepting what was rejected beforehand about it. The last stage occurs after three year of residency abroad when immigrants have a bi-ethnic identity. This study shows the importance of time in the process of affirming one's identity, and thus one's status in a foreign environment. These results are relevant to acculturation studies as well since they show that three years is a period of time that allows individuals to deal with their identity and their experience as an immigrant. In order to collect interesting experiences and reflections upon them, participants chosen for this study had been living in Finland for at least three years already.

The cultural background was important when selecting the participants as it was necessary that they would be regarded in Finland as belonging to ethnic minorities. It could be expected that the more different people and culture are from one another, the more one is likely to experience host conformity pressure. For this

reason, it was decided to select participants with a cultural background that would strongly differ from the Finnish western type of culture. It was also decided to select participants who had visible different physical features from most Finnish people. These two criteria were ways to enhance the probability of selecting participants who experienced the phenomenon researched.

The professional position of immigrants in the Finnish society was the last criterion. Kim (2001) explains that host conformity pressure is likely to be felt with more intensity by strangers whose living depends on the receiving society. Building on this idea, immigrants who work in Finland were selected as participants for this study. Once again, the idea was to increase the likelihood of selecting individuals with experiences of host conformity pressure.

In addition to these three criteria – the time spent in Finland, the cultural background and the professional position – it is important to mention the status of the participants as immigrants. Even though the reason to come to Finland was discussed in the interview, it was not used as a criterion for the selection. Therefore, immigrants who came as refugees or who came voluntarily were interviewed likewise. The difference between the two statuses is likely to influence one's acculturation process, one's appreciation of the host society, and one's experience of host conformity. Nevertheless, these are relevant differences in the study of host conformity pressure that are worth investigating. The present study focuses on individuals' experiences of host conformity pressure in the Finnish society, which stands for the common denominator. It therefore seemed appropriate to authorize a certain variety in the sampling so as to examine various types of experiences happening in the same environment. The qualitative type of study allows for such heterogeneity in the participant population.

Five immigrants living in Finland accepted to be interviewed for the purpose of this study. Participants are described throughout this chapter so as to provide all relevant details that would be necessary to reproduce this study in the future. The rich description of participants should allow transferability but without endangering interviewees' anonymity (Creswell, 1998). For ethical reasons, all pieces of information that could compromise participants' identities have been left out. Similarly, their real names have been modified and new ones invented for the purpose of this study. Details about all five participants appear in table 2 below.

As explained beforehand, the selection of the participants was based on three criteria: the time spent in Finland so far, their cultural background, and the fact that they were employed. All participants, to the exception of Ulya, had been living in Finland for already a minimum of ten years. Most of them thus arrived at a time when the immigration rate was very low and have witnessed the progressive increase of foreigners coming to live in Finland. Interviewees all came from different cultural backgrounds – Nigeria, Iran, Bangladesh, Philippines, and Kenya – and most of them had come to Finland for different reasons. One of them was a refugee – Adar – two came to pursue their studies – Ulya and Rosa – and two came for familial reasons – Patrick and Georgianna.

TABLE 2: Description of the participants

|  | **Patrick** | **Adar** | **Ulya** | **Georgianna** | **Rosa** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | Male | Female | Female | Female |
| **Age** | 46 | 47 | 35 | 57 | 42 |
| **Time spent in Finland** | 10 years | 17 years | 3 years | 20 years | 22 years |
| **Country of origin** | Nigeria | Iran - Kurd | Bangladesh | Philippines | Kenya |
| **Finnish nationality** | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| **Mother tongue** | English | Kurd | Bengali | English / Tagalog | English |
| **Education** | Master's Degree | Vocational Qualification | Master's Degree | Bachelor's Degree | Bachelor's Degree |
| **Reason to come to Finland** | Family | Refugee | Studies | Family | Studies |
| **Additional Information** | - | - | - | - | Physically impared |

The participants also had very different contacts with Finland before moving to the country. Georgianna, Ulya, and Adar had never been to Finland beforehand and the culture was therefore entirely new to them. Patrick and Rosa, on the other hand, had some prior knowledge about the country before moving there since Patrick's spouse and Rosa's mother were both Finnish.

All participants were chosen because they had a professional position in Finland at the time of the interviews. However, the nature of the profession itself was not a criterion of selection. Four out of the five participants happened to be working for the city in relation with immigration. The link between their professions and their status of immigrant enabled some of the respondents to have a more advanced reflection on their own experience and status. Ulya was the only one to work in a different field as she was a part-time cleaner for a private company.

The participants showed a certain level of differences and similarities that definitely contributed to enrich the data. They all had various cultural backgrounds, reasons to come to Finland, and prior relations with the host society. On the other hand, they all were from a mid-size town in Finland, had distinguishing physical features from the typical Finnish type, and most of them worked in the same professional area. The balance between variety and similarity enabled to broaden the scope of experiences collected while maintaining some common characteristics between the participants.

## 4.4   Instrument of data collection

The purpose of this study is to investigate the meaning of host conformity pressure from immigrants' perspectives and the ways in which it affects them and their acculturation processes. Two main instruments of data collection allow to gather such qualitative data: interviews and questionnaires. The first one was chosen for this research for various reasons.

Using qualitative interview for this research goes hand in hand with the aim of the study. Both Kvale (1996) and Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe the principal asset of qualitative interviews as the opportunity for researchers to understand people's opinions and thoughts about their own experiences.

Qualitative interviews are characterized by the use of open questions, which gives participants the opportunity to speak their minds (Frey et al., 2000). Semi-structured question interviews were used for this study as they allow for more flexibility. They enable interviewees to freely introduce new dimensions or concepts and allow researchers to add or skip questions depending on the answers given by participants (Frey et al., 2000; Kvale, 1996). It can be argued that using questionnaires instead of interviews enables to diminish the influence of external parameters such as the role played by the interviewer (Frey et al., 2000). Despite the accuracy of the statement, the possibility for the researcher to be active was regarded as a positive aspect in this study. It was a way to adapt each interview to the respondent by asking questions relevant to the experience of each participant.

### 4.4.1 Interview questions

The theories and studies introduced in the literature review indicate the variety of factors involved in the way host conformity pressure can be perceived and experienced by immigrants. A set of interview questions had been prepared (see appendix 1) using various components of host conformity pressure highlighted in previous research projects and theories on host conformity pressure.
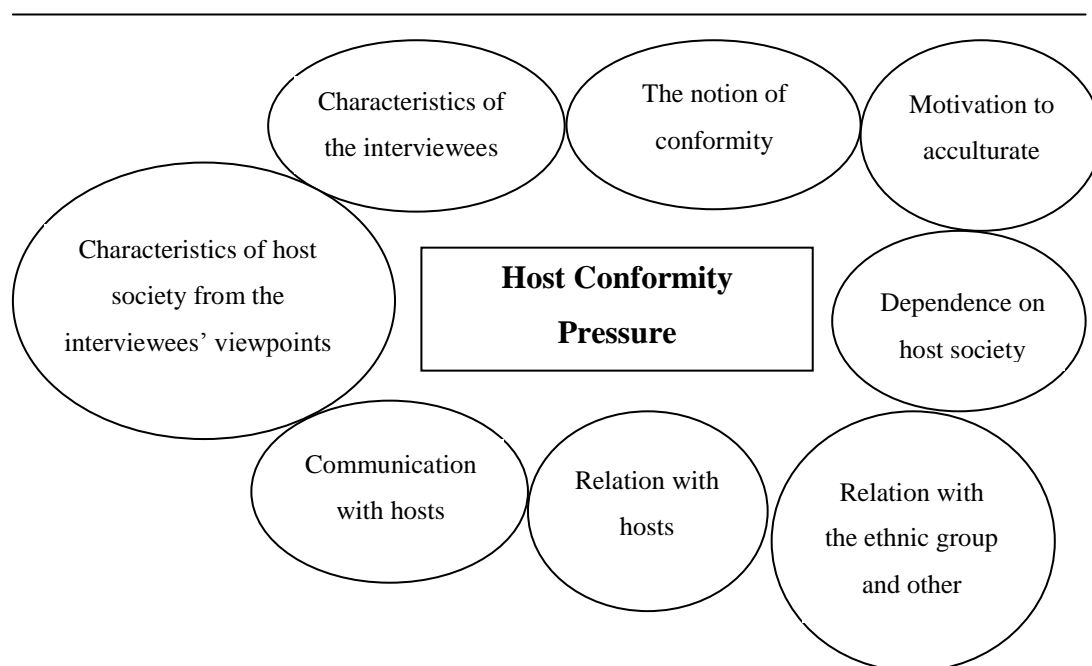


FIGURE 2: Features of host conformity pressure as categorized for the theme interviews

The features involved in the process of identifying, experiencing and reacting to host conformity pressure were gathered into eight themes used for the interviews. The aspects chosen are presented in figure 2 above in a straightforward manner and as they are understood in this research. That is, without hierarchical or ranking order between each other.

Throughout the interviews, questions that focused on searching for immigrants' perceptions of their experiences in Finland were favored so as to follow the aim of the study. That is, to investigate immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure and their influence on their acculturation.

One of the themes concerned immigrants' own characteristics and encompasses questions related to the age, nationality, reason(s) to move to Finland, and time spent in the host country. It also included questions that aimed at understanding interviewees' perceptions of their living situation and status in the receiving society. Knowing about interviewees' experiences prior to their arrival to Finland was seen as relevant information in order to investigate their experiences once living there. As Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker and Obdrzálek (2000) point out in their own study about acculturation attitudes, immigrants' personal histories influence the relation they have with their respective national cultures, which in turn has an impact on their relation with the host culture.

The relation immigrants have with the host society – here, Finland – is central in this study since it investigates one particular aspect of the receiving environment: host conformity pressure. Therefore, one interview theme was dedicated to the description of the host society by the interviewees. The questions asked within this theme particularly focused on the reactions of the Finnish society towards the participants when they arrived and in the present days. Here again, the aspect was researched from immigrants' perspectives. Those questions were related to what Kim (2001) calls "host receptivity". She defines it as one of the three characteristics of the receiving environment – along with ethnic group strength and host conformity pressure – and uses it to consider the extent to which a host society welcomes newcomers.

As explained in the theoretical background, several scholars assert that influence, power, and thus conformity pressure, appear through people's relations, interactions, and communication (Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Emerson, 1968; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). For this reason, one of the themes focused on

immigrants' communication with the hosts. The aim of these questions was to examine interviewees' level at Finnish, the places and contexts where they use it, as well as the people with whom they converse in the host language. The intention was also to investigate immigrants' points of view on their communication experiences with hosts. This was a way to examine whether, and to which extent, interviewees saw communication as the medium by which host conformity pressure was exerted.

The theme dedicated to describing the communication with the hosts was very close to the one concerning the nature of the relations between the hosts and the interviewees. Studies have indeed shown that individuals are likely to resist the influence of somebody they do not appreciate. Similarly, when pressures are felt to be forced upon or illegitimate, individuals are more inclined to resist them. (French, Morrison & Levinger, 1960; Zipf, 1960 cited in Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963).

The relation immigrants have with their ethnic group and other foreigners is relevant to the study of acculturation process and host conformity pressure, and therefore constituted a theme interview. Cartwright and Zander (1968) mention the two most common reasons for resisting influence: the width of differences between the situation before and after being influenced, and the value attributed to the position prior to influence. A parallel can be made between the latter one and immigrants' ethnic cultural identity. Cartwright and Zander (1968) point out that the more individuals are attached to and confident about their original status, the more they tend to refuse external influence.

Since this study focuses on host conformity pressure and is conducted from immigrants' points of view, one central aspect of it concerns the understanding interviewees have of the term "conformity". Kim and Markus' (1999) study highlights very well the connotations that can be attached to this word and the importance of being aware of them when researching this concept. The way one regards conformity, as a positive or negative thing, can influence people's willingness to conform (Bond & Smith, 1996). Similarly, the values attached to conformity are likely to be significantly interrelated to the way one reacts to conformity pressures.

Interviewees' motivation to acculturate was another component of the theme interview which enabled to examine immigrants' perspectives on their acculturation processes. Berry's (1997) model of acculturative strategies was largely used to articulate the questions. The aim was to investigate what acculturation path

interviewees favored, how they followed this path, and what obstacles they may have encountered on the way. It also gave an opportunity to examine whether interviewees had felt free or pressured to acculturate to their own pace and degree. Immigrants' motivation to acculturate is an indicator of the extent to which immigrants are willing to change and thus relates to their readiness to accept host conformity pressure. For this reason, interviewees' motivation to acculturate is also associated to their dependence on the host society.

Building on Kim's (2001) conceptualization of host conformity pressure, immigrants' dependence on the host society was selected as a theme. Kim (2001) asserts that newcomers who are involved in the receiving society are more likely to undergo host conformity pressure. The reason for this lies in the definitions of power mentioned previously. Power, similarly to influence or pressure, appears through communication (Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Emerson, 1968; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). Therefore, immigrants whose social situation leads them to interact with hosts

TABLE 3: Relations between research questions and interview questions based on the literature

| Research Question 1: **What do immigrants identify as host conformity pressure?** | | Research Question 2: **How do immigrants feel about host conformity pressure?** | | Research Question 3: **How do immigrants react to host conformity pressure?** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Possible factors* | *Possible illustrations* | *Possible factors* | *Possible illustrations* | *Possible factors* | *Possible illustrations* |
| Dependence on the host society | Host Receptivity | Understanding of the notion of conformity | Description of host society | Relations with ethnic group | Acculturation strategy |
| Motivation to acculturate | Relations with hosts | Characteristics of the interviewees | Description of their experiences | Relations with hosts | Choice to conform |

are expected to experience conformity pressure. Moreover, immigrants who are committed to staying in the receiving society probably undergo host conformity pressure more in that they become dependent to the host society. As Emerson (1968)

explains, it is the dependence of some that empowers others and put them in a situation of having influence or being able to exert pressure.

The literature shows that all the factors mentioned beforehand are interrelated when it comes to identifying, experiencing and reacting towards host conformity pressure. Building on the literature, table 3 above illustrates the relations between the main themes of the interviews and the three research questions of this study.

### 4.4.2  Description of the interviews

In total six interviews were conducted, the first one served as a test interview and the five others were used to gather the data. All the interviews were conducted in February and March 2012 in Finland. Practical details about the interviews are gathered in table 4 below.

TABLE 4: Description of the interviews

|  | Test Interview | Patrick | Adar | Ulya | Georgianna | Rosa |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Date** | 17/02/12 | 21/02/12 | 21/02/12 | 22/02/12 | 06/03/12 | 14/03/12 |
| **Contact** | Through a friend | Through a teacher | Through another interviewee | Through a friend | Through the webpage of an immigrant association | Through another interviewee |
| **Lenght** | 45 min | 1 hour | 40 min | 35 min | 45 min | 1 hour 10 min |
| **Venue** | University Library | His office | His office | University Library | In a multicultural centre | In a multicultural centre |
| **Recorded** | yes | yes | yes | yes (technical problem ) | yes | yes |

Before the interviews, participants were given a letter of consent (see appendix 2) to read and sign in order to learn about the confidentiality clause and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also able to choose whether they agreed to be recorded, and for the transcript of their interviews to be quoted in this research. All participants agreed to these terms.

Participants also answered few questions from a printed questionnaire concerning their age, gender, nationality, mother tongue, educational background, and time spent in Finland. This set of questions was originally designed to be answered some days before the interview so as to prepare for the face-to-face meeting. Nevertheless, for all participants except Patrick, interviewees answered these questions at the beginning of the meeting. This change in the original organization enabled to start the interviews in a nice manner with lighter and more straightforward questions than the rest. Adar filled in the letter of consent and the short questionnaire by email after the interview due to practical reasons. His interview was not originally planned on the day it actually took place and there were no more copies of these documents left.

As explained beforehand, the interviews consisted of open-questions so as to collect participants' thoughts and own perspectives on their experiences of host conformity pressure in Finland. Even though a set of questions had been prepared, not all interviews strictly followed the same order of questions. Using semi-structure question interviews enabled to add, modify, or skip questions depending on the answers given by the participants (Kvale, 1996; Frey et al., 2000).

The interviews all took place in a venue agreed upon with the interviewees. Ulya's and Georgianna's interviews took place in open spaces apart from other people so as to ensure enough privacy to speak freely. Patrick's, Adar's, and Rosa's interviews all took place in a separate, closed room with only the interviewees and the researcher present. This higher level of privacy was especially important for Rosa who shared and displayed more personal emotions than the other respondents.

The interviews were all conducted in English as it was the only common language between the researcher and the interviewee. Only Patrick, Georgianna, and Rosa were native English speakers. However, Patrick was the only one to speak in a very fluent way. All others participants sometimes had to search for words or think in Finnish first as they had not used English on a regular basis. However, no

misunderstandings or communication problems arose during the interviews and all the participants seemed at ease to express themselves in English.

All the interviews were recorded using material lent by the University of Jyväskylä (recorder and player Edirol R1 Portable 24-Bit wave/mp3). No other technical problems occurred expect when during Ulya's interview the recorder stopped for about ten minutes in the middle of the conversation.

All the interviews were transcribed afterwards using the software F4. This study did not rely on discourse analysis methods, that is the study of narratives and the way people talk about their experiences. For this reason, participants' silence, small hesitations, or emotions were not strictly written out. Interviews were meticulously transcribed and changes made only to the extracts used in the results' section of this study in case of obvious and non-ambiguous language mistakes.

## 4.5   Data analysis

The data analysis process did not follow one single method but borrowed characteristics from different qualitative ones. The analysis was done throughout time, inductively, and following aspects of grounded theory.

The analysis of the data started immediately after the interviews and throughout the transcription process by taking notes. Qualitative studies investigate the meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences. It is therefore important for researchers to be very familiar with the data so as to gain a deep understanding of participants' testimonies. Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) emphasize the importance of taking notes throughout the whole analysis process in order to avoid leaping to conclusions. These notes enable to extend the analysis process and progressively make sense of the whole data. They also introduce the possibility to keep trace of first impulsive ideas of analysis that may be useful towards the end of the analysis process.

Some aspects of grounded theory – especially the coding part – were used in the analysis of the data. Starting by slowly and meticulously reading all of the transcriptions permitted to organize pieces of information from the interviews under different categories (e.g. difficulties when arriving in Finland; process of learning Finnish; relations with Finnish friends). Those groupings were

spontaneously made while reading the data and were based on what participants had said. Even though the use of entirely inductive analysis is impossible because of the choices made by researchers and their pre-conceptions, it enables to give a greater emphasis to the participants' voices. Inductive approach is particularly important for phenomenological research like the present one which explores individuals' experiences of a phenomenon.

After the first phase of "open coding" or "initial coding", the different categories were examined in relation to each other in order to discover possible relations or contradictions between them. Finding patterns and relations within the data should not lead to generalization but maintain its richness, complexity, and diversity. "Axial coding" or "focused coding" enables to move from linear to analytical reading of the data and proceed towards a deeper analysis. (Creswell, 1998:150; Lofland et al., 2006:201). This stage was particularly important to gradually formulate answer to the research questions. The relations established within the data and with the aim of the study were constantly verified by going back to the collected materials. This was a way to maintain proximity with the data in order to avoid deforming participants' statements and thus ensure accuracy in the long-term. This process contributed to the coherence of the whole research project and its credibility which Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as one of the fundamental features of qualitative research. Thorne (2008) also points out the risk of detaching oneself too much from the data and unconsciously start producing a deductive analysis where the categories produced become the references. A constant returning to the data enables to give time to the analysis process and keep it open longer.

This whole analysis process, and especially the coding part, permitted to highlight some of the main characteristics of participants' experiences of host conformity pressure (chapter 5.1), to find out what participants perceived as absence (chapter 5.2) and presence of host conformity pressure (chapter 5.3), and to discover factors (chapter 5.4) and consequences (chapter 5.5) of both absence and presence of host conformity pressure. The analysis thus permitted to establish relations between what immigrants judged as instances of absence or presence of host conformity pressure and possible reasons and consequences of those experiences. Coding was also especially important to go beyond each individual experiences and judgments and gain a more general overview of what the participants could understand as

instances of absence or presence of host conformity pressure. All of these issues are further discussed in the following chapter.

# 5   RESULTS

The main findings regarding the experience of host conformity pressure are presented and highlighted in the present chapter. Using extracts from participants' interviews, the main aspects relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon of host conformity pressure are exposed.

First, the main characteristics of the participants' experiences of host conformity pressure are described and commented on. In addition, various instances of both perceived absence and presence of host conformity pressure are introduced and discussed. Finally, possible factors in the experience of host conformity pressure are presented before talking about the consequences of perceived absence and presence of host conformity pressure on immigrants and their acculturation processes.

## 5.1   Main features of the participants' experiences of host conformity pressure

Despite the fact that the participants were selected according to criteria which were supposed to reinforce their chances of experiencing host conformity pressure, not all interviewees expressed such views. While some participants hinted at the experience of host conformity pressure, the same interviewees also talked about the absence of host conformity pressure. These results were not anticipated and enabled to expand the understanding of the phenomenon of host conformity pressure by observing different facets of it. Given the large number of references made about the absence of host conformity pressure by the interviewees, it is important to underline the fact that

four out of five participants worked for the city in the field of immigration. This type of profession is likely to decrease one's experience of host conformity pressure, notably because of the immediate relation it has with their personal situations and skills. It also appeared throughout the interviews that some of the participants had enough distance on their experience to reflect upon them, maybe thanks to their profession which enabled them to observe other immigrants' struggles. The importance of the participants' work is discussed more thoroughly in the analysis part. Throughout the following two subchapters, results present what participants seemed to understand as constituting both absence and presence of host conformity pressure.

All participants had different experiences and opinions about what presence and absence of host conformity pressure can concern. Throughout the interviews, it appeared that Patrick was the one with the weakest sense of conformity pressure and Adar the one with the strongest one. This is noteworthy as Adar was the only participant of this study who had a status of a refugee. That is, he was not originally a voluntary migrant and was still not able to go back to his home country at the time of his interview. This result as well as the fact that previous studies about host conformity pressure – notably by Ruggiero et al. (1996) and Croucher (2006, 2009) – were conducted exclusively with voluntary immigrants highlight the importance of considering immigrants' statuses in further research on the topic.

In addition to the existence of host conformity pressure and its absence, results of this study show that the phenomena can be experienced on different levels and in different contexts. Participants' testimonies highlighted the existence of host conformity pressure and its absence on both micro- and macro-levels. Interviewees identified various contexts or areas in which host conformity pressure and/or the absence of host conformity pressure can appear. In total, 11 different themes appeared to be related to the experience of absence or presence of host conformity pressure out of which five are related to both. These contexts are listed in table 5 below and presented more thoroughly in the next two subchapters.

TABLE 5: Contexts in which host conformity pressure and its absence appear to the participants of this study

|  | Host Conformity Pressure | Absence of Host Conformity Pressure |
|---|---|---|
|  | Contexts/Areas | Contexts/Areas |
| **Macro-level** | Way of life | State services |
|  | Mass Communication | Values |
|  | Work | Work |
| **Micro-level** | Interpersonal relationships | Interpersonal relationships |
|  | Status | Status |
|  | Perception of immigrants | Perception of immigrants |
|  | Acculturation | Acculturation |
|  | - | Public Sphere |
|  | - | Ethnic background |

The researched group was heterogeneous enough to present various instances of absence and presence of host conformity. Both apparent contradictions and similarities appeared between and within their testimonies, which underlined the subjectivity of the experience of host conformity pressure. Experiences can be identified as absence or presence of host conformity pressure depending on the individual and the situation but other factors are involved as well. Results indeed show that some participants associated the same context with both absence and presence of host conformity pressure. Rosa for instance regarded work as both a source of integration (absence of host conformity pressure) and a source of differentiation between immigrants and Finnish people (presence of host conformity pressure). Results concerning possible factors in the experience of host conformity pressure are exposed in chapter 5.4 and discussed more thoroughly in the analysis part. The way participants can associate the same context to different experiences of host conformity pressure can also evolve throughout time because of the evolution of both the host society and immigrants. Experiences of absence or presence of host

conformity pressure can thus not be considered as absolute but rather constantly evolving ones.

Participants associated different ideas of presence or absence of host conformity pressure to the contexts presented in table 5 above. Some of those illustrations were restricted to one context but others corresponded to several ones. For instance, being on an equal footing with hosts was a recurrent aspect of absence of host conformity pressure for some participants who mentioned it both on the macro- and micro-levels in relation to society values, state services, status, or public sphere. However, results showed no regular pattern as some of those illustrations of host conformity pressure could also be regarded as neutral examples by participants. Being judged only through their foreignness was considered by most of the respondents as a sign of host conformity pressure. Rosa's comment below however shows that this interpretation was not systematically made by the interviewees:

> …many people say that I'm only, my color is only, it's only African. I'm a bit brown. But I'm so Finnish! […] They say, many people have told me that if they wouldn't see me, they, that they would think that I'm a Finn when I speak, if they don't see me. (Rosa)

Similarly, Patrick talked about the way his skin color sometimes led hosts to behave differently towards him. He however did not associate it to racism or host conformity pressure:

> …because I'm like orange skin; wherever I went the first language someone spoke to me was automatically English. (Patrick)

The way participants identified and interpreted host conformity pressure did not follow a systematic correlational pattern of one person-one interpretation or one context-one interpretation. In some cases, participants' interpretations could even go against outsiders' assumptions, which emphasized the subjectivity of experiencing host conformity pressure or its absence. The respondents' also mentioned the importance of their own attitude in dealing with their experience as an immigrant, and more specifically with their experiences of host conformity pressure:

> [Communicating with Finns can be easy,] it depends on how, in what situation. But I think it would be with my experience, it is how we deal with them. And that is what I am doing with myself. Just to be open, and just to be honest and then to be this kind of sociable person is very very important and then of course with my positive outlook of thinking or positive thinking (Georgianna)

The way participants identified but also reacted negatively or positively to the experience of host conformity pressure seemed to come from their personality to some extent. Adar's comment below emphasizes the role played by immigrants to handle what they perceive as host conformity pressure:

> You must act, you must learn, you must do something, but it is not easy, it is not easy for everyone. It is very very difficult for some people, in some stages they are disappointed when the Finnish people act towards them badly, don't accept them as a human, accept them only as a foreigner. It is very bad for those, myself sometimes I am flexible, I accept managing, but many people do not accept managing. (Adar)

The interviewees could also identify host conformity pressure in mixed and indistinct ways. These statements – like Rosa's below – revealed a mixture between immigrants' own motivation to adapt that seemed to create internal pressure to acculturate, and external pressure produced by the receiving society:

> When I came to stay I think the society … I feel that this would be good for me to know the system, how the society works, how the educational system works when I went to school, because everything was new at that time. So I felt yes, I felt that I should, I am required to know. (Rosa)

Results highlight the fact that host conformity pressure cannot be restricted to the characteristics of a certain context or to the personality of an individual and that more factors thus need to be considered. Results also show different characteristics of host conformity pressure: its presence on both micro- and macro- levels and in different contexts, its evolution throughout time, and the subjectivity of experiencing it. More specific instances of what participants understood as absence and presence of host conformity pressure are exposed throughout the following two subchapters.

## 5.2   Instances of the absence of host conformity pressure

Participants related the absence of host conformity pressure to both micro- and macro- level contexts. On the latter on, the absence of host conformity pressure was judged by interviewees to correspond to services provided by the states, values of the host society, and working life.

The participants regarded the *support* and *universality of Finnish state services* as characteristics of absence of host conformity pressure. The efforts of

Finnish State to help immigrants were for instance described by Patrick who established a comparison with his previous experience in the United Kingdom:

> … it's amazing I must actually advertize this thing, or actually say this wonderful thing that there is here in Finland. […] When I came to Finland I was shocked to find out that they actually had a law that helped immigrants with the integration into the Finnish society. That was a shock for me because I had come from England and in England you don't have anything, you're actually on your own. If you wanna attend courses you have to pay, when here the Finnish government pays. (Patrick)

The universality of State services – that is their accessibility to everyone without discriminations – notably appeared in Rosa's discourse who related it to her feeling of security and safeness in Finland:

> …being a disabled I have all facilities, all medicals facilities, everything is provided here in Finland, everything… I go to therapy twice per week, sometimes thrice, and so, they take care of me very well in all aspects, so it's very sure. (Rosa)

The feeling of safeness was mentioned by several of the interviewees who associated it with the trust that exists in Finland. Most of them regarded it as a value inherent to the Finnish society and felt that they enjoyed the benefits of it as well. None of the participants thought that the trust or the security present in Finland existed only for Finnish people but that, on the contrary, it was shared by everyone. The universality of the Finnish values seemed to be a factor of participants' sense of belonging to the receiving society as it enhanced their sense of being on an equal footing with the hosts.

The absence of host conformity pressure in state services and societal values illustrates the fact that the receiving society enhances immigrants' sense of belonging. The integration law in Finland is an explicit instance of it whereas the universality of – what participants described as – Finnish values is implicit and can be conveyed in various ways throughout the host society. Another explicit instance of the integration law is mentioned by Ulya who described a *two-way acculturation process* where the host society met some of her needs concerning her cultural and religious practices:

> In my area actually, at the daycare almost everyone can speak English so I feel it is easy for me. […] And I have to take care and give some time for praying, for my children as well in the school, like we have to pray five times a day, maybe morning, afternoon, like this way, separate five times. So if they accept our view, then it is easy for me. (Ulya)

Meeting immigrants' needs also appears when referring to *the freedom to express* and the possibility to *maintain one's cultural identity*, which can exist thanks to associations or state initiatives. Adar's interview illustrated the last one as he expressed his satisfaction to be able to attend Kurdish language courses in Finland, a right he did not have in his home country:

> For example in our country, it is impossible to study mother language Kurdish. But in this society it is possible to practice it. […] It is very very important, very very nice in this society far away from our culture that our our children can study. It is very very appreciable. (Adar)

Further illustrations show that the absence of host conformity pressure can have other meanings for participants. It is for instance the case of work, which was regarded as a context in which both absence and presence of host conformity pressure can appear. Patrick, Georgianna, and Rosa gave very positive descriptions of their working experiences in Finland which they regarded as significant factors of integration. Interviewees mentioned various positive aspects in relation to work that contributed to their life in Finland as a whole:

> I have always seen myself as an equal member of the society who through work would be able to achieve the things that I want to achieve. (Patrick)

Patrick strongly related his work to his status in Finland as it represented for him the way to be on an equal footing with others. Similarly, Georgianna strongly associated her personal development to her professional achievement in Finland:

> …this makes me proud that my work, part of my work here in Finland I develop it myself, as if I am a businesswoman who builds up her own business here. […] it gives me a chance to build up my own skills and my own identity here, and of course myself, to boost my self-confidence, to develop my self-confidence. (Georgianna)

Some of Rosa's work interviews had also been ways to receive positive feedback from the host society on her language skills:

> …when I go to an interview people are so 'oh!', when I go to an interview 'oh! You speak Finnish so well!', that 'you have a foreign name oh it's surprising that you speak Finnish so well'. (Rosa)

In Patrick's case, work had also been a way to improve his Finnish language skills, which facilitated his integration in the host society in general:

> …the thing that helped the most was when I started work because you had to communicate, you had to write emails, you had to speak to people, and I was speaking to seminars, and things like that and I had to learn how to express myself in the language […] what actually helped me speak the language was the use of it, and when I was forced to use it, in the village or more importantly at work. (Patrick)

For most of the participants, work was also a medium to build more or less deep relationships with Finnish colleagues and thus create long-lasting contact with some of the hosts. Thus, some of the participants' working lives came to constitute an important bridge between them and the receiving society by helping them to achieve a status in Finland, develop their linguistic abilities, and socialize with hosts. In this study, the perceived absence of host conformity in working life therefore corresponds to the possibility to use work as a factor of integration.

Some participants also considered work to be an illustration of absence of host conformity pressure because it reinforced the congruence between the way host society saw them and the way they saw themselves. Rosa, Patrick, and Georgianna especially appreciated their skills and experiences to be recognized as assets by hosts, for instance through the jobs they were offered:

> As I said was shocked that there was a law here, and I felt the law to help immigrants, great as it is, it could be something that could be improved on. And so I wrote in a number of articles on how I feel it could be improved. Then I got invited by a lady who used to work at the office in charge of immigrants affairs. So she said okay what ideas do you have about how this whole immigration process was, could be improved, so I expressed some views to her of how things could be and then […] this lady came to me […] and said look there is a possibility to try one of your ideas. […] And so I was then invited to implement the project here, it was a national project, and my area then was the south of Finland basically (Patrick)

Interpersonal relationships constitute another context of absence of host conformity pressure mentioned by Georgianna, Rosa, and Patrick. The three of them talked about the timidity of Finnish people that can impede or slow down the development of relationships between hosts and foreigners. As opposed to Adar, they did not interpret Finnish people's shyness as being directed only towards foreigners but as a regular trait of character. The difference also lied in the fact that Georgianna, Rosa, and Patrick managed to go beyond this first obstacle and to develop strong intimate ties with several Finnish people. Rosa for instance explained:

> …Finns are very … they are very timid, very shy. I know that one but it will take some time to know a Finn, but after you have known a Finn you will be a very good friend. (Rosa)

*Hosts' interest in foreigners* and *evolution towards immigrants* constituted another factor in the absence of host conformity pressure in interpersonal relationships. Georgianna found that Finnish people were inclined to participate in events organized by immigrants' associations or were at least interested in visiting them:

> Because I could see it when we try to arrange different programs or different happenings, they participate here in the centre. That is why I would say that the Finnish people are very interested when it comes to cultural events like that, getting to know different cultures. (Georgianna)

She also noted the increase of intercultural couples in Finland over the last decades as a consequence of the increase of foreigners coming to the country. In her opinion, the higher number of immigrants had positively contributed to the relation between Finnish and foreigners:

> …they (Finns) are more open now, because at that time they were a little bit distance. But then, as little by little, as the immigrants grow and the foreigners grow, they also change and are much more open than before. Yes, there are changes. (Georgianna)

Adar had also noticed the same evolution:

> …the beginning was difficult but now things have changed. Also, Finnish people have learnt how they can act to immigrants. (Adar)

Developing relationships with hosts, witnessing their interest and evolution towards immigrants all correspond to the same idea of absence of host conformity pressure. These three different illustrations generally hint at the openness of hosts towards immigrants.

Similarly, the absence of host conformity pressure on the micro-level was also mentioned through the *accessibility of the public sphere*. That is, the possibility to influence society in general by talking to other members of the society. This was described by Patrick as a clear form of empowerment.

As the illustrations introduced over the last pages showed, the absence of host conformity pressure can correspond to multiple realities. The participants in this study mentioned different illustrations of absence of host conformity pressure. Some of these enhanced the participants' sense of belonging, some functioned as factors of integration, some illustrated the openness and accessibility of the host society, and some were related to the capacity of the host society to meet the participants' needs

and promote their skills. These different instances show that participants in this study regarded two main aspects as being characteristics of absence of host conformity pressure. First, the fact that the receiving society tends to *bring people together* by being an environment which offers integration tools, whether they are explicit (like the integration law) or implicit ones (like participants' work experiences). Second, the fact that the receiving society accepts others as they are and thus *accepts differences*, for instance by meeting immigrants' needs or appreciating their skills. The interviewees' conceptions of host conformity pressure are tackled hereafter which also show a great variety.

## 5.3   Instances of perceived host conformity pressure

The nature of the participants' relationships with Finnish people was related to the experience of host conformity pressure by Adar. He described his relation to hosts as resulting only from his initiative, which he felt put him in a position of *inferiority* where he had the impression that the power to agree on starting a relationship was only in the hands of the hosts:

> We live here, it is not well, not good for me every time… it is not up to me to push it away. If I push away everything, in the future I will be alone, and alone is not good […] you must be with them, but sometimes it is very difficult. Sometimes they don't accept you… sometimes when you are going like this maybe they come, but only the time you are going. (Adar)

Adar's testimony showed that the sense of hierarchy between the status of Finnish people and immigrants can be transmitted through interpersonal relationships. He also referred to the *distance* that he felt was maintained by Finnish people:

> If it is according to my culture we don't really have friends [in Finland]. According to my culture friends come to visit, friends come and call anytime, friends are together at anytime, they can borrow anything. But with the Finnish people sometimes it is difficult, but how to say this … sometimes, nowadays my Finnish friends respect me but I couldn't well … really ask something; to visit my house, can I visit you, can we go somewhere. According to some, some say we are friends, but out of the same thing we are not friends. Only with "hey", "hello", "how are you?" or something like this. (Adar)

Hosts' perceptions of immigrants can also contribute to creating a sense of hierarchy between hosts and newcomers. Adar for instance regretted having his identity reduced to a status of a foreigner. He moreover deplored being judged only through

the Finnish cultural prism, which he felt negated part of his skills, knowledge, and identity:

> Even if you cannot speak the Finnish language you have your own experiences as well, you are an own man, you have gradually built your personality in your homeland. But in this society sometimes it feels that they act to you as a child. (Adar)

The process of acculturation was another area that some of the participants related to the experience of host conformity pressure. The interviewees believed that their acculturation experience was marked by host conformity pressure when they felt that *changing was required* by the receiving society and that it was exclusively a *one-way process*. Ulya for instance referred to the use of the language:

> …they want me to speak Finnish. You should know Finnish language like that. They didn't want to speak English. They told us they prefer to speak Finnish. (Ulya)

Some of the participants also interpreted the *absence of feedback or positive reaction* to their acculturation as a form of host conformity pressure.

Work was another area where the interviewees explained that host conformity pressure could appear. Two main aspects stood out within this category: *hiring criteria* and one's *status as a worker*. The process of searching and applying for work was described by several of the interviewees as being difficult. Rosa associated her difficulties in finding work to her physical impairment as she stated that the reason was also explicitly given by employers. She nevertheless thought that her ethnic background may have sometimes been an obstacle to find a job:

> Many places have told me no. Some of them … [she shows the wheelchair] the reason, they told me that there are steps, that they don't have a lift. Yes… but we were talking in the employment office that maybe it's because I'm not a Finn, that it is maybe the reason but they put it behind the wheelchair. So, but we don't know … because my name is not a total Finnish name, so you cannot know. (Rosa)

Whether Rosa's assumptions were true or not is, to some extent, less interesting than the fact that she made those assumptions. In her mind, being a foreigner in Finland can lead to difficulties when looking for a job. Adar also related his struggle to find a workplace to his ethnic origins:

> For 1 year, 2004-2005, all the time, I sent CV in Finland. I never received any answer. Because I haven't any relations, you must know someone. If I send my CV to some company when they see my name they throw it out. (Adar)

Rosa and Adar thus both shared the idea that in the Finnish work system it is possible to be dismissed because of one's foreignness. Adar also mentioned the hiring criteria – and notably the language skills that need to be as good as natives' – as another impediment to enter Finnish working life:

> There is this opening for work for example. They put that you must speak Finnish language, writing, reading, speaking well. But it's not as well as the Finnish people our language. I manage, there is no problem at all, but they put the criteria here. […] the criteria it is discrimination how can I say it. (Adar)

Host conformity pressure appeared in two closely related ways in Rosa's and Adar's experiences. First, the feeling they had that foreigners face more difficulties than natives when looking for work. Second, their impressions that one needs to be or speak like a native and that being different – for instance by having an accent – will make one fail. The fact that work was regarded as maintaining or increasing differences between hosts and immigrants was also shown through Ulya's professional experience in Finland. Ulya's profession indeed seemed to be determined by her status as an immigrant rather than by her knowledge and skills:

> I think for my career, I think it is not good to be in Finland. In my country I was a lecturer in the physical therapy department […] my career was very high in my country but here I am just doing cleaning job, part time. (Ulya)

In this subchapter, the participants' experiences of one-way acculturation process, their sense of hierarchy, inequalities regarding one's chances, and impression that differences can be a factor of failure were presented. These different illustrations of perceived host conformity pressure could all be grouped as they correspond to the same perceived phenomenon of maintaining differences. Other instances show that participants' can also perceive host conformity pressure as being pressures towards uniformity.

This is for instance the case of the *perceived omnipresence of the Finnish way-of-life* mentioned several times by Adar who saw it as an obstacle to the expression of his cultural identity:

> It is not easy to practice our nationalities, celebrations, or to keep our traditions. It's not easy because our life situations do not let us practice those. (Adar)

The Finnish way of life and the *impression of uniformity in the mass communication* were closely related to one another in terms of host conformity pressure. Both were regarded as obstacles for immigrants to maintain their ethnic cultural background:

> …but day by day it is very difficult to keep it because all around you is Finnish, Finnish culture, Finnish language, Finnish people, and we are at work all the time. (Adar)

Mass communication was also regarded as complicating the adaptation process by Ulya. Whereas Adar referred to the whole environment, Ulya's experience of host conformity pressure in the context of mass communication concerned the use of *only Finnish in administrative documents*:

> First time when I came here I found it's much too difficult for me because I don't know their language […] and I found that any official letters, and anything anything in official papers, everything is in Finnish. (Ulya)

As explained beforehand, the experience of host conformity pressure – or its absence – is a subjective one. For this reason, the list of contexts and areas concerned by host conformity pressure over the last pages is far from being exhaustive. The various instances presented here however hint at the existence of two fairly clear types of host conformity pressure behaviors: *pressures from the host society towards uniformity* or *to maintain differences* with newcomers. The latter one is thus a more indirect type of host conformity pressure where disapproving of divergence is a way to highlight the importance of convergence, that is conformity.

## 5.4  Factors in the experience of host conformity pressure

Results suggest that participants' understanding of and stance on both conformity and acculturation can affect their perceptions of host conformity pressure. Their views on these two notions are introduced hereafter.

The participants of this study all positively regarded the cultural changes that one undergoes when adapting to a new society. All but one participants had a positive understanding of the term conformity and the fact that one would change in order to conform to the norms of a receiving society. Only Patrick had a negative

stance when explaining the meaning he gave to the word conformity because of the notion of pressure or imitation of others that he attached to the word. Even though Patrick regarded conforming as a bad thing, he defined change as a very positive feature that contributes to developing oneself throughout life. In his opinion, conformity and change differed in the way individuals have or have not the freedom to decide how to change. Other participants explained conformity to be positive as long as the changes to be made did not necessarily concern everything about themselves. That is, conformity is good to some extent.

The participants also gave different reasons why one would benefit from conforming or acculturating to a new society. Georgianna saw it as a way to develop oneself in a new environment; Ulya explained that it was a way to learn new things and respect others; Adar regarded it as a way to become a member of the receiving society; Rosa saw it as way to integrate and also survive in a new environment. Patrick did not associate conformity to any experience in his life but considered change as a main feature of his existence. He explained change as a way to learn from others, and develop oneself and one's understanding of the world.

All five participants' descriptions of their favored acculturation strategy corresponded to the one named *integration* in Berry's model (1997). That is, all participants expressed the will to adapt to some Finnish habits and be in contact with Finnish people while maintaining some aspects of their cultural identities and customs. Not all participants expressed those choices directly but implied them through their interviews. Ulya for instance insisted on the importance of changing so as to adapt to a new environment. She explained being inclined to modify some of her habits when she judged the Finnish ones to be better. Similarly to other participants, Ulya accepted to conform to Finnish customs that mostly concerned superficial aspects but did not want to modify her deepest and most important values. Her experience of conformity was thus related to what Moscovici (1976) calls "external conformity":

> I am a Muslim, so our culture and here their religious views are totally different and I don't want to change myself on that point of view, I am Muslim so I don't wanna change myself from a religion perspective (Ulya)

Georgianna, Rosa, and Patrick also emphasized their will to change only to some extent and preserve the manners that they considered to be better or more important to them:

> But if you know that you have better values than the other one don't give them up, just live with them, let they help you develop yourself. Do not get that value that does not work on you, that is how I see it. But if that value will help you develop yourself, okay I can get it. But if it will make me more, more as a person, as a bad person, I will not do it. (Georgianna)

Results highlight the importance of taking into consideration participants' understandings and judgments of the notions of acculturation and conformity in order to investigate their experiences of host conformity pressure and their possible consequences. The relation between acculturation, conformity, and host conformity pressure seems to be highly intertwined. One's conception of acculturation and conformity can affect one's perception of host conformity pressure, which in turn seems to influence one's acculturation. Results concerning eventual consequences of perceived host conformity pressure and its absence are discussed in the next subchapter.

## 5.5 Consequences of perceived presence and absence of host conformity pressure

Results show that the experience of absence or presence of host conformity pressure has consequences on participants' acculturation but also beyond that.

It appears that the perception of host conformity pressure can affect individuals themselves but also the people with whom they are in contact. It can especially have an impact on immigrants' acquaintances among other foreigners. Newcomers' judgments and expectations of the receiving society are likely to be shaped through former immigrants' experiences. Negative feelings resulting from the experience of host conformity pressure can thus be conveyed to other immigrants and newcomers through the ethnic network:

> Also, it's bad for the newcomers. They receive a bad image, that bad picture of this society when the new refugees or immigrants arrive to this society. When they see us, that we are very very in the start and how many years we have been here … it's very disappointed for the most of them. (Adar)

Immigrants themselves can be affected by host conformity pressure in different ways and in particular regarding their acculturation processes, which is explained hereafter.

Out of five interviewees, four did not report perceived pressures from the host society on how much or at which pace to acculturate. On the contrary, they emphasized being in charge of the aspects they wish to change and the extent to which they acculturate. Adar did not refer to host conformity pressure in relation to his acculturation process. However, he did not express the same decision-making power as other participants in terms of managing his own acculturation process. He was the participant to report the strongest experiences of host conformity pressure and associated them with negative consequences on his acculturation process and status in the host society:

> Sometimes I feel that it's impossible to be as a member when you see something that put you down, forbid you, it's a disappointment for us. It's very very difficult, very very hard for us. You are 100% trying to learn and when they put you down, they stop you. It's very very difficult, it's a disappointment, you feel that you will never never go up, you will never be as a ... active member in the society. (Adar)

Results thus suggest that the absence of perceived host conformity pressure encouraged participants to follow the acculturation path of their choice by modifying their customs and habits as they wish. Georgianna, Rosa and Ulya described instances of acculturation that were entirely free of host conformity pressure. They explained having a feeling of freedom to choose which cultural changes to undergo, which ones to refuse, and at which pace to acculturate.

Results also imply that perceived host conformity pressure and its absence have consequences on the relationships between participants and hosts. All interviewees explained that they aimed at having positive relationships with Finnish people. To the exception of Adar, all participants felt that they had good and genuine relationships with at least some Finnish people. Ulya and Georgianna both made such descriptions but also said that their relationships with hosts were in general more superficial than the ones they had with people from their ethnic groups. When talking about her free time, Ulya for instance explained spending most of it at home or with her friends from Bangladesh living in Finland. When describing the nature of her relationships in general, Georgianna attributed most of the ones she had with Finnish people to work, and most of the ones she had within her ethnic group to

leisure. Those variations in the nature and depth of relationships show that participants have different ways to fulfill their intention to positively relate to hosts.

Relations between participants' experiences of presence and absence of host conformity pressure and their acculturation processes appeared as they talked about their living situations in Finland and their understanding of acculturation and conformity. Results suggest that participants' experiences of host conformity pressure can influence their acculturative strategies. Consequences of the experience of presence and absence of host conformity pressure therefore are not that straightforward as regards the impediment or acceleration of one's acculturation process. Rather, the consequences seem to concern the types of acculturative strategies developed by participants in reaction to instances of perceived absence or presence of host conformity pressure.

## 5.6   Summary of the results

Not all participants necessarily identified the same aspects of the receiving society or hosts' behaviors as instances of host conformity pressure. All respondents however reported negative experiences to illustrate the phenomenon. Feelings of inferiority, hierarchy, and foreignness were reinforced by the experience of host conformity pressure which tended to emphasize the existence of a gap between hosts and participants. On the contrary, positive experiences were associated to the absence of host conformity pressure. Notions of equality, universality, accessibility, freedom, interest, support, and evolution contributed to participants' development and positive adaptation to the Finnish society. Experiences of host conformity pressure seemed to correspond to two main categories: *pressures from the host society towards uniformity* and *pressures to maintain differences between hosts and immigrants*. That is, host conformity pressure can appear to immigrants as pressures to be brought together or kept apart. Participants' different experiences of absence of host conformity pressure also showed similarities that made it possible to group them under two main categories: *bringing immigrants and hosts together* while *accepting differences*.

Participants' testimonies implied that there is a relation between the perception of host conformity pressure and the way one understands and judges the

notions of conformity and acculturation. This relation seems to have an impact on the types of acculturative strategies developed by the participants. Most of the interviewees seemed for instance more inclined to accept host conformity pressure when it involved superficial changes than deep and value related ones. Participants also seemed to adapt their relationships to hosts, quantitatively or qualitatively, so as to positively relate to them in their own way.

The results of this study have numerous implications for the phenomenon of host conformity pressure and the understanding of immigrants' acculturation strategies. These findings are discussed in the following chapter.

# 6  DISCUSSION

The present research investigates immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure in relation to their acculturation processes. The results show that participants can have different experiences of host conformity pressure in Finland. Some of the interviewees mostly discussed the absence of host conformity pressure while others mentioned instances of both conformity pressure and its absence. Those different experiences of the phenomenon can vary depending on the situation but can also occur within the same context. This chapter examines the possible reasons behind the variety of experiences and compares the results with previous studies in more detail. Consequences of presence and absence of host conformity pressure on acculturative strategies are also investigated in the light of the participants' testimonies and former research.

## 6.1  Factors in the experience of host conformity pressure

A majority of the participants reported experiences of absence of host conformity pressure. Most of them also talked in ways which suggested that they were in control of their acculturation experiences in Finland. As explained in the results section, some of the participants' statements could be interpreted as illustrations of host conformity pressure but informants presented them as neutral instances. Because of the subjectivity of people's testimonies, it is important to be critical and careful when analyzing them. Some of the participants may for instance have a positive judgment on some of their experiences for psychological benefit. A previous study by Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) explains that immigrants tend to underplay instances of

discriminations as it increases their sense of security and control in social exchanges. Disregarding discriminations or host conformity pressure can therefore be a conscious or unconscious strategy so as to feel more confident and eventually ease the adaptation process. The present study also suggests that immigrants' positive state of mind is intertwined with positive acculturation experience as it is both a factor and an outcome of it.

The congruence between immigrants' and the host society's understanding of acculturation also seems to be central in a positive adaptation. As stated earlier, all the participants of this study favored the acculturative path named *integration* in Berry's model (1997). In addition, they all emphasized the necessity for newcomers to make some changes in their behaviors or customs. Respondents explained those changes as ways to ease the adaptation process, learn from the host society, find a place in the receiving society, or show respect to others. All participants of this study regarded change as a positive feature and some even considered it to be indispensable. One possible reason for not identifying host conformity pressure could be the congruence between the extent to which immigrants are ready to change and the changes the host society demands from them. The notion of pressure may disappear if both sides have similar expectations regarding the acculturation process since the changes made are not forced upon or regarded as illegitimate. Previous studies indeed show that such influence is regarded as pressure and is likely to be opposed (French et al., 1960; Zipf, 1960 cited in Bandura et al., 1963).

On the contrary, the participants of this study seemed to identify host conformity pressure when it affected what they saw as the logical or wanted outcome of their acculturation. Adar for instance explained that changing is positive and necessary as it enables to be on an equal footing with hosts and to belong to the receiving society. Adar's motivation to acculturate was to become a member of the Finnish society, a status that he expected to be granted through hosts' behaviors towards him. His feeling of failing to reach this acculturation outcome was therefore attributed to hosts and regarded as a form of host conformity pressure. He seemed to think that only natives or immigrants who go native by extensively conforming to the norms are accepted as equal members. Adar's situation shows the relevance of examining immigrants' expectations of acculturation in understanding their experience of host conformity pressure. Contrarily to Roccas et al., (2000:332) who

assert that "acculturation attitudes reflect only the desire to assimilate, integrate, or separate", results of this study indicate that immigrants have more personal and varied reasons to acculturate. The participants for instance mentioned the will to develop themselves or learn from the receiving society. Those wanted outcomes are possible reasons to acculturate and reaching them represent the achievement of one's acculturation process. Whether host societies allow immigrants to reach their goals may determine to some extent newcomers' sense of host conformity pressure. Participants of this study who reached their wanted outcome of acculturation were also the ones to give the most instances of absence of host conformity pressure. This ties up with Ruggiero and Taylor's study (1997) that emphasizes the importance of self-confidence and esteem in order to positively adapt. Enabling immigrants to reach their acculturation goal may be a way to enhance their sense of achievement regarding their acculturation process, but also their identity and status in the host society.

Having a secured identity and status in the receiving society is also emphasized by the results of this study as a factor to undergo less host conformity pressure. Patrick, Rosa, and Georgianna were the participants whose interviews illustrated such correlation. All of their testimonies highlighted the importance of work in developing one's identity and status in the receiving society. They all had found jobs thanks to their previous qualifications and special skills such as their linguistic abilities. Being recognized as a skillful and capable person was regarded by the interviewees as highly contributing to their self-esteem and development in Finland. Such findings contradict Kim's (2001) assertion that work is a factor of dependence on host societies and is therefore likely to increase experiences of host conformity pressure. For the participants of this study, work was a factor of independence as it enabled them to go beyond their statuses of immigrants and become actively involved in the receiving society. Here again, it is important to remember that four out of five participants worked in the field of immigration for the municipality, a professional position which is likely to have positively affected their experiences as immigrants on the whole. One interviewee (Patrick) explained that being hired enabled him to perfect his Finnish speaking skills, which contributed to his acculturation process on the whole. This experience highlights the numerous benefits of work for immigrants. Other participants' interviews also revealed the different contributions of work to one's acculturation process: connecting with hosts,

developing oneself, or/and achieving a status in the receiving society. Those findings emphasize the role of work as a factor of integration rather than an outcome. That is, work should be regarded as a medium in facilitating immigrants' integration rather than an award for the potentially and successfully integrated immigrants.

The professional situation of immigrants is especially important to examine in Finland because of the gap between foreigners' and hosts' employment rates. Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002) indicate that immigrants' unemployment rate is significantly higher than the one of natives and their qualifications often disregarded by employers. Putting immigrants on the fringes of working life may put them on the fringes of the society in general; as explained by Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002). The present study indicates a similar but positive correlation between work and integration. Being involved in the working life of host society thanks to one's qualifications and skills is likely to enhance immigrants' involvement in the receiving society.

Two interviewees (Patrick and Rosa) were spontaneously hired to join municipal services so as to contribute to the improvement of immigrants' experiences in Finland. Beyond the individual benefits gained from their professions, the participants also operated as a bridge between the integration policies and practices of Finland, and immigrants. Their work in immigration offices can illustrate a more global will of the receiving society to include immigrants at the very core of its integration policy. The outcomes of involving immigrants in the working life of the receiving society therefore seem to be positive for the immigrants concerned but also for the society in general and other newcomers. Those results are also supported by Heikkilä, Gómez Ciriano, and Ojalehto (2011) who advocate for more ethnic diversity in state services to improve integration. The benefits of immigrants' involvement in the working life of host societies also mirror Nye's (2010) definition of reciprocal power gains. Recognizing immigrants' skills and allowing them to enter working life could be a way for host societies to grant power to immigrants. In return, immigrants' could develop themselves, a secured identity and status, and contribute to the host society as active members. For the participants of this study, work was the medium to achieve such virtuous circle where positive experiences of immigrants affect them, other foreigners, and the receiving society.

As explained so far, results show that factors in the experience of host conformity pressure are multiple. Participants' expectations regarding their

acculturation process are a relevant cause. Their previous experiences – as immigrants or in their home countries – can also play an important role. Immigrants' original cultures can influence their judgments of receiving societies and consequently their experiences of host conformity pressure.

All the participants of this study described their cultures as being more collectivistic than the Finnish one. According to Griffin (2009:392) collectivistic cultures favor "similarity and mutual concern within the culture". Because of the importance of groups' interests over individuals', it could be assumed that conformity is more important in collectivistic societies than in individualistic ones. Four out of five participants of this study explained the notion of conformity as a positive one. They also seemed to have higher expectations of conformity and conformity pressure than what they actually experienced in Finland. Their understanding and expectations of conformity may have been factors in the diminution of their experience of host conformity pressure. The way conformity is regarded in both immigrants' original cultures and in the host culture seems central to measure experiences of host conformity pressure. Similarly to the notion of acculturation, the congruence between immigrants' and hosts' expectations of conformity may contribute to the decrease of experiences of conformity pressure.

Those results emphasize the importance of considering the concept of host conformity pressure in relation to other factors and not as a unique entity. They notably suggest the importance of collectivistic and individualistic characteristics in examining experiences of host conformity pressure. Previous studies on conformity pressure highlight the role played by features of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Moscovici (1976) and Cartwright and Zander (1968) point out that the more uniform a majority group is, the more likely it is to exert conformity pressure on deviant individuals. That is, homogeneity can cause conformity pressure. Kim (2001) also explains that heterogeneous urban areas tend to exert less conformity pressure on newcomers than homogeneous rural areas. The present study suggests that explaining the experience of host conformity pressure only in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity may be too limited. Finland is largely regarded as a homogeneous society in Europe, notably because of its low immigration rate (Heikkilä & Peltonen, 2002). However, the participants of this study put more emphasis on Finland's individualistic characteristic than on its homogeneity. This may suggest that the way receiving societies are can sometimes matter less than the way they want to be.

Homogeneity in itself may not be a decisive factor in exerting host conformity pressure. It may instead be the value attached to homogeneity that drives societies to impose host conformity pressure. Since homogeneity is positively regarded in collectivistic societies, those cultures may enforce more pressure to conform. Going from a collectivistic society to an individualistic society, and vice-versa, may thus be an important factor in the experience of host conformity pressure.

The results of this study show that identifying host conformity pressure depends on numerous factors. The participants' testimonies emphasized the importance of work as a factor of positive adaption that benefits immigrants, their network, and the receiving society. Work gave respondents opportunities to develop themselves and their status in the receiving society, which consequently diminished their experiences of host conformity pressure. Immigrants' and hosts' understanding of the notions of acculturation and conformity also seems to be a significant cause to the experience of host conformity pressure. Results notably highlight the importance of considering viewpoints from both immigrants' and host societies' perspectives so as to examine and relate their discrepancies and similarities.

## 6.2 Host conformity pressure and immigrants' acculturative strategies

The reasons and consequences of experienced host conformity pressure or its absence are manifold. Similarly to previous studies (Croucher, 2006, 2009; Ruggiero et al., 1996), this research shows that host conformity pressure has an impact on immigrants' acculturation. However, the results do not suggest the existence of a systematic relation between one's willingness to acculturate and hosts' pressure to conform. Moreover, results show the development of two main types of acculturative strategies that can either result from the absence of host conformity pressure or be ways to avoid it. The relation between experienced host conformity pressure and participants' acculturation strategies is detailed throughout the next pages.

Previous studies present contradicting views on the relationship between host conformity pressure and immigrants' acculturation processes. For instance, Croucher (2006, 2009) found that immigrants' willingness to acculturate tend to decrease when facing host conformity pressure, whereas Ruggiero et al. (1996) found

that it tends to increase. The results of the present study may help to understand some of the contradictions that appear in previous research. The results suggest that it is more accurate to consider the *reason* for acculturating rather than the *willingness* to acculturate. It indeed seems that host conformity pressure can be experienced without impeding the acculturation process. It may however hinder one's acculturation when it affects the reason one has to acculturate. The relation between host conformity pressure and acculturation is thus not systematic but depends on the area it concerns and the attachment of immigrants to that area.

For instance, Adar's reason to acculturate was to become a member of the society in order to be on an equal footing with hosts. He explained both the importance of being considered like a Finn and his discouragement to keep acculturating when he did not succeed. His willingness to acculturate was thus affected because his experience of host conformity pressure invalidated his reason to acculturate. Immigrants all have reasons – most likely different ones – to acculturate; something they want to reach and for what they are ready to change. When the experience of host conformity pressure impinges on these reasons and prevents immigrants from reaching their goals, it is likely to disturb their acculturation process itself (see figure 3 below). Host conformity pressure and acculturation are therefore interrelated but the relationship may mostly depend on immigrants' own reasons to change. The variety of motivations may explain the differences of host conformity pressure experiences between individuals living in the same environment at the same moment. It also corresponds to the temporal evolution of the identification and experience of host conformity pressure since immigrants' reasons to acculturate are likely to evolve throughout time.
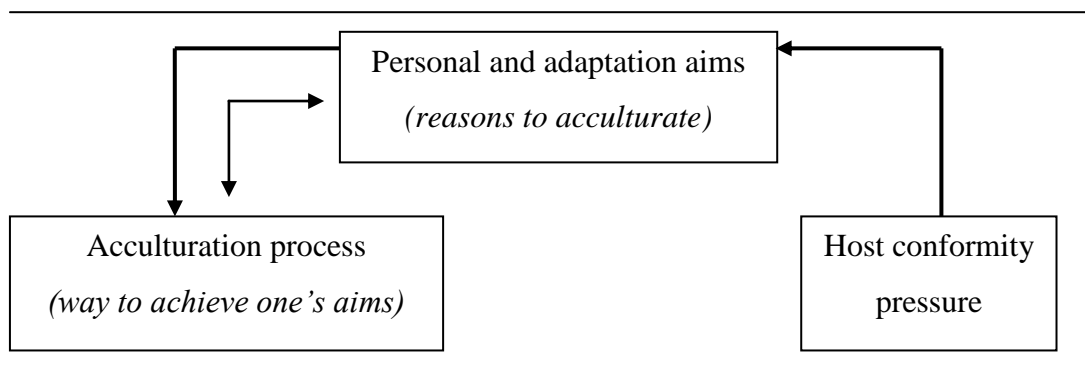


FIGURE 3: Influence of host conformity pressure on acculturation process

The consequences of the absence and presence of host conformity pressure are also visible through the different acculturative strategies chosen by immigrants. Two different patterns of selective acculturation appear through participants' testimonies. The first one seems to derive from the absence of host conformity pressure because immigrants who feel in charge of their acculturation process have more opportunities to diversify their acculturation strategies. They then have the possibility to adapt the acculturation path they favor to make it fit their very own situation. In the present study, all participants found *integration* to be the best adaptation path as it enabled them to both maintain some ethnic cultural background and develop positive relationships with hosts. From this one path, immigrants can take different parallel byways.

Results of this study show that the nature of relationships is a central aspect of selective acculturation, which also corresponds to Valenta's (2009) research. It is indeed possible for immigrants to adapt the strength of their relationships so as to fulfill their acculturation needs. Georgianna for instance explained the way she had positive relationships with Finnish people while maintaining contact with her ethnic friends. The nature of those relationships was however different as she associated her relations with Finns to work, and her relations with ethnic friends to leisure. Her acculturation pattern shows the variety of meanings that can exist behind one single acculturative strategy – in this case the integration path. It also illustrates the active role immigrants play in their acculturation process, whether it is conscious or unconscious.

The second acculturative pattern to appear in this study seems to be both a consequence of absence of host conformity pressure and a way to avoid it. As explained previously, experiences of host conformity pressure can appear in different contexts and on different levels. Immigrants can therefore happen to experience it only in some places. They can also confront it at some moments of their lives and not at others. Results suggest that immigrants can choose to develop relationships so as to avoid contexts where host conformity pressure can be experienced while following their favored acculturation path. For instance, Ulya reported having friendly relationships with both Finnish people and individuals from her ethnic group. Her host friends however all seemed to be from the same environment as they were university students. She explained the way she maintained relationships with them as they regularly spent time together. She however seldom met them outside from the

university campus and rarely met other natives either. She thus seemed to restrict her relationships with hosts to one environment and type of individuals with whom she was on an equal footing and felt safe. This type of relationship limits the risks to undergo host conformity pressure and can be enough to represent one's connection to the receiving society.

This study shows a correlation between experienced host conformity pressure – or its absence – and the process of acculturating. It suggests that the impact of host conformity pressure on acculturation is not a direct one. Results imply that the experience of host conformity pressure influences immigrants' acculturation because it first affects their personal and adaptation goals. Acculturation seems to be a way to achieve one's aims when living in the host society but not the aim itself. Berry's model (1997) already suggests this as it explains that immigrants choose different acculturative paths depending on the type of relationships they want to develop with hosts and the extent to which they want to retain their ethnic background. These two aims also appear in the present study but as umbrella terms that encompass various realities.

Developing positive relationships with hosts can for instance take on different meanings for immigrants. Selective acculturation is a way for newcomers to adjust one main acculturation path to their own adaptation aims. It can also be a way to avoid host conformity pressure by developing acculturative strategies that ensure to achieve one's personal and adaptive goals. Acculturation is thus an active process that enables immigrants to reach their goals in a new environment. Results of this study reveal that restrictions imposed by host societies on outcomes of acculturation are likely to be regarded as host conformity pressure by immigrants and can therefore affect their acculturation processes.

## 6.3 Host conformity pressure as a dynamic and an interactive phenomenon

Results of this study have brought factors and consequences of participants' experiences of host conformity pressure to light. These findings enable to move from specific instances of the phenomenon to a broader understanding of it. Examining the

factors and consequences of host conformity pressure enables to suggest a dynamic and interactive definition of the phenomenon itself.

The very nature of host conformity pressure hints at its interactive nature since it is exercised by receiving societies and identified by immigrants. It is therefore central to consider characteristics of host societies and immigrants as they both participate in the experience of host conformity pressure. In her definition of the concept, Kim (2001) introduces host conformity pressure as a characteristic of the environment. Her understanding suggests a very direct and one-way influence of host conformity pressure on immigrants. She explains the concept as being mostly a consequence of hosts' behaviors (conscious or unconscious) and national policies of the receiving environment in terms of immigration. The results of this study highlight the limitations of such understanding as it disregards the importance of the interaction between hosts and immigrants in the identification, strength, and consequences of host conformity pressure.

When examining the reasons why host conformity pressure or its absence is identified by immigrants, it appears that it is mostly due to the contact between host society and immigrants. The experience of host conformity pressure partly derives from both host society's and immigrants' characteristics. It is the way those characteristics meet and whether they correspond or not to each other that may determine one's experience of host conformity pressure. Based on the results of the present study, figure 4 below illustrates this interactive model where host conformity pressure emerges out of environmental and individual characteristics. Participants' interviews enabled to gather a list of factors involved in the experience of host conformity pressure, which should however not be regarded as an exhaustive list but rather as instances of the participants' experiences. The divergence or congruence between those environmental and individual factors seems to be respectively responsible for the identification of host conformity pressure or its absence. Results indicate that each individual characteristic corresponds to a feature of the receiving environment. For instance, immigrants' understanding of conformity principally relates to host societies' tendency to be individualistic or collectivistic. Immigrants' understanding of acculturation is associated with immigration policies. Finally, immigrants' expectations are connected to host societies' receptivity.

These results emphasize the fact that host conformity pressure is not an absolute characteristic of the environment but rather a subjective experience. They

also enable to make a parallel between host conformity pressure and Emerson's (1968) understanding of power. That is, similarly to power, host conformity pressure is not an intrinsic feature but a construction that appears through interaction and communication. From this perspective, host conformity pressure cannot be predicted solely based on host society characteristics since it emerges out of immigrants' responses to them.
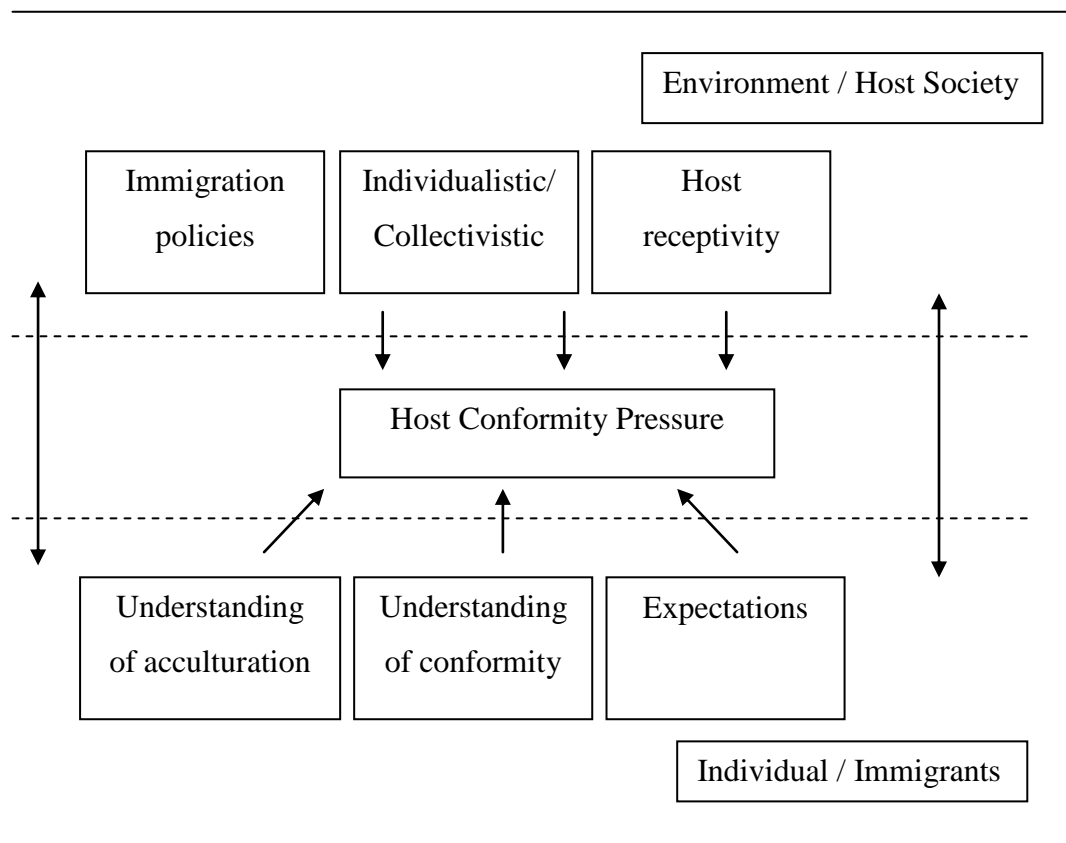
FIGURE 4: Host conformity pressure as a dynamic and an interactive phenomenon

Describing host conformity pressure as a dynamic concept highlights the fact that it evolves throughout times and depending on situations. As immigrants develop, so do their understandings of acculturation and conformity, reasons to acculturate, and expectations towards the receiving society. Host societies also undergo societal changes that affect their structure and national policies. The constant evolution of individuals and societies contribute to the variety of experiences of host conformity pressure even for the same person. The different factors involved in the emergence of host conformity pressure also highlight the constant interaction between individual and cultural characteristics that exist between and within people.

Finally, understanding host conformity pressure as a dynamic and interactive concept is especially relevant when studying immigration from an intercultural communication perspective. It reminds of the human experience of individuals crossing borders, entering new environments, and dealing with cultural differences. It enables us to focus on the possible consequences of different cultures coming together, especially concerning the meaning and values attached to central notions such as acculturation and conformity.

The results of this study are manifold and their implications concern both the experience of host conformity pressure and the understanding of the phenomenon. It is however important to consider the possible limitations of the present research and their influence on the results, which is discussed in the following subchapter.

## 6.4 Evaluation of the study

Constant care has been given to ethical considerations during the present study to protect participants' anonymity and ensure the quality and coherence of the research. However, despite efforts to be as objective as possible, subjectivity can never be totally dismissed. The choices made throughout the study are evidence of the researcher's implication and influence. As one's impact cannot be entirely avoided, it is important to be aware of the risk by continuously question one's pre-conceptions about the topic researched (Cresswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is especially true when dealing with issues such as adaption that are highly anchored in time and hardly ever neutral. Researchers often belong to the assimilationist or the multiculturalist paradigm and have to consider the influence that this might have on their work. Being aware of one's biases is also particularly important in intercultural communication studies. Investigating the possible consequences of different cultures and their values coming together requires being aware of one's own culture and values (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The researcher and his or her choices are central to the quality of the work. The methods used in the present study were selected in relation to the aims of the research in order to obtain relevant results. The ways to ensure the credibility and transferability of this study have been described in the methods section following the

understanding of Lincoln and Guba (1985). It could be argued that the small number of participants (5) limits the scope of the results. This is indeed true and corresponds to the aim of such qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of host conformity pressure from immigrants' points of view. The small amount of participants did not prevent from collecting varied experiences and opinions since having a reduced number or respondents enabled to collect expanded and detailed testimonies.

Most of the participants conveyed very positive feelings towards their acculturation process in Finland, which must be considered with precaution. First, informants with positive experiences might be more inclined to participate in a research. Moreover, as Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) explain, immigrants can minimize discriminations or experiences of host conformity pressure for their own psychological wellbeing. This suggests that researching host conformity pressure only from immigrants' point of view may lead to limited results. The experience of host conformity pressure could be explored more thoroughly by being examined from the hosts' perspective as well. This would better correspond to the understanding of the concept as being dynamic and interactive. It would also contribute to verify this view.

As a qualitative research, this study did not look for universal and systematic patterns of the experience of host conformity pressure. It rather intended to discover possible illustrations of it through immigrants' eyes and the meanings attached to those experiences. The main results contribute to the understanding of what immigrants can perceive as host conformity pressure, their feelings towards it, and the possible consequences of the phenomenon on their acculturation process. Those findings and implications for future research are exposed over the next pages.

## 6.5  Conclusion

The present study aimed at understanding immigrants' experiences of host conformity pressure and their possible consequences on acculturation processes. Participants' interviews enabled to extend the original scope of this research by

providing varied illustrations of both host conformity pressure and the absence of host conformity pressure.

Results showed that both phenomena can occur on the macro- and micro-levels and concern multiple areas of everyday life. Participants had mentioned different contexts where host conformity pressure or its absence appeared to them. Their experiences differed from one another but also had some similar features. Despite those resemblances, no generalization can be made at this point regarding the contexts and aspects of life concerned by the absence of presence of host conformity pressure.

One of the main results of this study indeed revealed that the experience of host conformity pressure is a subjective one that can vary throughout time and depending on people. The illustrations reported by the participants of this study are not universal ones but rather some instances of the experience of the phenomenon. Even though undergoing host conformity pressure may be very subjective, the reasons for identifying it may nevertheless be true for other people than the participants of this study. Respondents' experiences of host conformity pressure depended on a combination of factors and the way they correspond to each other. This study highlighted immigrants' understanding of conformity, their opinions about acculturation, and their expectations towards the host society as three main individual factors in the experience of host conformity pressure. Results implied that the way these individual factors correspond to the following characteristics of the receiving society contributes to the experience of host conformity pressure: immigration policies, individualistic or collectivistic society, and host receptivity.

Results also revealed that the participants' feelings towards host conformity pressure mostly depended on the aspect it concerned and whether it seemed legitimate to them. However, informants mostly associated negative feelings to the experience of host conformity pressure and positive ones to the experience of absence of host conformity pressure. Furthermore, the respondents appeared to have higher expectations of conformity pressure than what was actually exerted by the Finnish society. From this result, it was hypothesized that conformity pressure may be stronger in collectivistic cultures, which would decrease the sense of host conformity pressure for immigrants moving to individualistic societies. People from collectivistic cultures may regard a wider range of conformity pressures as legitimate because of the positive connotation of the term conformity. The present study

however suggested that if host conformity pressure affects the aim that immigrants have for their acculturation process, it is regarded negatively by them. Similarly, if host conformity pressure prevents immigrants from achieving their acculturation aims, it can impede their acculturation process.

On the other hand, the participants related their experiences of absence of host conformity pressure to their sense of security, achieved status, and freedom to acculturate in their own way and at their own pace. The respondents emphasized the importance of work as a positive factor to develop oneself and one's integration in Finland. In this research, work appeared to be a significant way to decrease one's experience of host conformity pressure.

This study provided many insights into the phenomenon of host conformity pressure by examining immigrants' experiences of it. Results highlighted the subjective nature of experienced host conformity pressure. These findings indicate the relevance of regarding this phenomenon as a dynamic and interactive one that stems out of the interaction between immigrants and receiving societies. Even though Kim (2001) does not explicitly associate host conformity pressure to the notion of power, definitions of it were used in the present study. They happened to complement well previous explanations of conformity pressure in social psychology studies. The definition of power as a product of social relations and communication is especially relevant to the understanding of host conformity pressure (Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Emerson, 1968; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951). Similarly to power, host conformity pressure and its absence are not static features. They both are phenomena that appear through interpersonal communication and the interaction between immigrants' and host societies' characteristics. Those characteristics (e.g. understanding of conformity and acculturation) are differently valued and understood by individuals and across cultures. Host conformity pressure is thus a phenomenon that illustrates very well the complexity and challenges of intercultural encounters.

The present research only focused on immigrants and not on hosts. It would therefore be worth investigating both sides so as to increase the understanding of the phenomenon and examine its possible interactivity. It would also be important to further test the suggested correlation between collectivism and the experience of host conformity pressure. Conducting more studies in different settings would contribute to deepen the understanding of this relation. It would also be a way to

extend the factors, illustrations, and possible consequences of host conformity pressure, which would undoubtedly increase the understanding of this phenomenon.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: The Interview Questions

8-Theme interview:
1) Characteristics of the interviewee
2) Characteristics of the host society from the interviewee's point of view
3) Communication with the hosts
4) Relation with the hosts
5) Motivation to adapt
6) Conformity
7) Relation with the ethnic group and foreigners
8) Dependence on the host society

## 1) Characteristics of the interviewee

- Why did you come to Finland in the first place?
- How would you describe your living in Finland so far?
- What status would you say is yours in the host society?
- What aspects of your identity do you see as most important here in Finland?

## 2) Characteristics of the host society from the interviewee's point of view

- How do you feel that Finns reacted to you when you first arrived in Finland?
- What expectations would you say the hosts have towards you, if any?
- Do you think people see you differently now compared to when you arrived?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the host society?

## 3) Communication with the hosts

- What would you say is your level at Finnish?
    - How did you learn Finnish?
    - How did you feel towards the process of learning the language?
- What language(s) do you use the most nowadays in your everyday life?
- When do you communicate with the hosts?
    - In which places?
    - On which occasions?
- Which language do you use to communicate with the hosts?
- How often would you say you communicate with the hosts?
- How would you define the communication?
    - (When you speak Finnish) Is somebody particularly leading the conversation?
    - How easy is it to communicate?
    - How do you feel after those conversations?

- Give an adjective to characterize the communication. *One way/two way? // Friendly/dominating? //Pleasant/Awkward/Irritating?*

## 4) Relation with the hosts

- Among the Finnish people you know, would you call any of them "friends"?
- Is it important for you to have Finnish friends?
    - Why?
- What do you do with your Finnish friends?
- What feelings do you have towards the hosts?
- What feelings do you think they have towards you?
- What adjectives would you use to define your relation with the hosts?

## 5) Motivation to adapt

- Ideally, do you think that it is important to try to have positive relations with Finns?
- Ideally, do you think that it is important to keep your cultural identity and customs?
- How is the situation concretely?
- What could/has come on the way of how you wanted it to be?
- Think about the two questions again, what do you think Finns would answer to that?
    - Based on what?
- What changes have you made since you live in Finland?
    - Why did you make these changes? // Why did you make no changes?
    - What motivation did you have to make these changes? // What could motivate you to make changes?
    - Would you be ready to change more?
- Do you feel that you are the one deciding on how much you change?

## 6) Conformity

- What is conformity to you?
- To whom or what would you say that you conform?
- How willing are you to conform?
- Do you associate the term "conformity" to any particular aspect of your life?
- What consequences does conforming have on your life?
    - On your state of mind?
    - How does it make you feel about yourself?
    - On your relation with others?
- What adjectives would you use to talk about conformity?

## 7) Relation with the ethnic group and foreigners

- Where do you most often go to leisure, what kind of environment?
- How close are you with your ethnic group?
- What place do you give to your ethnic group in your life?

- How often do you meet?
- How many friends are from your ethnic group?
- How important is your ethnic group in your life?
- How important are the values of your ethnic group in your life?
    - Are they in opposition to the value of the Finnish society?
- Among your friends, with whom do you feel the most at ease?

## 8) Dependence on the host society

- What services do you use that are from the host society?
    - What services do you use that are not from the host society?
- What is your current professional position?
    - How did you find this job?
    - How long did it take you to find a job in Finland?
    - How do you regard your experience of job hunting in Finland?
    - Can you recall any particular event related to it?
    - Do you feel that your experience of job hunting has influenced you in any way? If yes, which ones?
- How often do you go back to your previous place of residence outside from Finland?
    - How easy is it for you to go back there?
    - How important is it for you to return there?

**Appendix 2: Letter of Consent**

# LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear participant,

I am very grateful that you accepted to take part in this study. I am a Master's Degree student in Intercultural Communication at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. My research project investigates immigrants' life experiences in the Finnish society.

Your contribution in this study involves taking part in an interview that I will personally conduct and that will be audio taped. Your participation is **voluntary**, you are entailed to withdraw at any point and ask your data to be taken out after the interview has been conducted.

The interview will be written out and only used in ways you agreed to. You are entailed to ask for a copy of the written transcript of your interview. The results of the research may be published but **your name will be kept confidential at all time**.

If you have any question concerning the research project feel free to contact me to this email address (------). A copy of this letter of consent will be addressed to you.

Respectfully Yours,
Mélodine Sommier

I agree to take part in this study by being interviewed and audio-taped.
Yes ☐      No ☐

The written transcript of my interview can be attached to or quoted in the present research project.

Yes ☐        No ☐


The written transcript of my interview can be kept in archive for other researchers.
Yes ☐        No ☐


Name of the participant:    _____

Signature:                        _____

Date:                               _____