

**Counselling minority migrant groups:**

**Supporting Maltese-Australian Females and their  
Descendants affected by Acculturation stress**



**ROSE MARIE VELLA**

**Master of Counselling**

**2006**

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



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**FTS**

THESIS  
305.488  
9279094  
VEL



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Supporting  
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305.4889279094 VEL  
30001009957780  
Vella, Rose Marie  
Counselling minority migrant  
groups : supporting  
Maltese-Australian females

*Dedications*

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the First Generation Maltese Migrant Community in Victoria, Australia, namely my parents Joe and Jessie Vella whose courage, tenacity and love of family has forged a path of opportunity for their descendants in Australia.

Signed .....

Date .....

## *Acknowledgments*

I would like to acknowledge Victoria University, in particular my supervisor Anthy Kapsalakis for being instrumental in encouraging and supporting women from all cultures to complete their education. I was availed an opportunity and realised my dreams to study at a tertiary level as a mature age student due to the support from lectures and staff at Victoria University.

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## *Abstract*

This thesis examines the counselling needs of ethnic migrant groups, in particular the counselling needs of Maltese-Australian females and their female descendants. Research indicates that some Maltese migrants in Australia have experienced acculturation difficulties. Maltese- Australian women record a high prevalence of depression. Reports indicate that children of Maltese- Australian migrants experience lower self- esteem and more parent-child conflict than their Anglo- Australian peers. Research indicates that some members of the Maltese- Australian community, in particular Maltese –Australian females experience more mental illness than other groups and that this may be attached to experiences of unresolved acculturation stress. Children of Maltese- Australian females are at risk of being affected by trans-generational acculturation stress. Therapeutic interventions for Maltese-Australian females need to target specific cultural needs, identity confusion and experiences of unresolved acculturation stress. An integrated trans- theoretical model of counselling was recommended and included a culturally focused Narrative, Existential and Family therapeutic model for Maltese- Australian females and their female descendants.



## *Overview of Aims*

One of the main objectives of this thesis is to present the major counselling issues that may be relevant for minority migrant groups, in particular for Maltese- Australian females and their female descendants. Minimal research is available for the Maltese – Australian migrant community however research available indicates that Maltese- Australian women experience high levels of depression and that this may be connected to acculturation stress. The aim of this thesis is to focus on the specific cultural needs in counselling for Maltese- Australian females and their descendants who may be affected by unresolved acculturation stress. A comparison will be made between general counselling and cross cultural counselling, focusing on the specific counselling needs of Maltese –Australian females.

# Chapter One

## 1 Introduction

Migration and adaptation to a new country for some minority migrant groups can be a traumatic experience (Borg, 2005). Research indicates that migrants are at risk of suffering disproportionate incidence of mental problems in comparison to the rest of the Australian population (Kanitsaki, 2001). The settlement of Maltese migrant families in Australia and the impact this has had on their mental health has not been well documented. Women of Maltese- Australian families record considerably higher depressive incidents (Proctor, 1998). In addition, research indicates that descendants of Maltese migrants in Australia are at risk of developing psychologically related illnesses (Borg, 2005) possibly indicating a trans- generational effect of risk to psychological wellness for this sector of the Australian community.

Family therapists working with Maltese families admit to not having extensive knowledge of the specific cultural needs of Maltese- Australians. The distinct Malteseness of the Maltese client can be overlooked in therapy (Proctor, 1998). There are misconceptions that the Maltese, as British subjects and an assimilated group in Australia have similar cultural needs to Anglo –Australians. Therapists working with Maltese - Australians report difficulty in engaging with them in therapy and describe therapeutic results as being “like hitting a brick wall” with therapists feeling powerless to assist Maltese – Australians in their psychological struggles (Proctor, 1998). According to Briffa (1998) women of Maltese- Australian families require the most psychological support. Drofenik (1997) found that women from Maltese families frequently expressed experiences of isolation and exclusion during their adaptation in Australia. Further knowledge of the specific counselling needs of Maltese- Australians in particular Maltese-Australian females is required.

The report by the Victorian Government’s Policies, Programs and Services for Migrant Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, (2005) found that isolation and depression were associated and continue to be key issues for women from diverse backgrounds in Australia. Added challenges were

recognized for second generation migrant women in Australia due to their need to juggle multiple identities. In struggling with identity confusion, second generation migrant women are likely not to identify with their cultural ethno specific organizations and may perceive the ethnic minority group labeling as alienating. According to Victorian Government report for Services for Migrant Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (2005) support services need to better understand the underlying issues for migrant women and second generation migrant women.

Similarly, Proctor (1998) found that it is possible that higher incidence of psychiatric illness amongst the Maltese –Australian community may be related to their migration experience and the cultural contrast between the Maltese and Australian communities. Professionals in Proctor’s research, working with Maltese- Australians report that members of the Maltese- Australian community and their descendants, in therapy express a need to narrate experiences of past emotional life events related to their own or their families’ acculturation stress and loss of cultural belonging. These professionals believe that there is a link between the incidence of mental illness for members of the Maltese-Australian community, especially women of this ethnic community and their unacknowledged need to belong to a community that makes sense to them. Child Behaviour difficulties may also be an indicator of loss of ethnic belonging for descendants of Maltese - Australians (Proctor, 1998). Maltese- Australian females in counselling may benefit from counselling that better understands their specific life and cultural experiences that may be connected to unresolved acculturation stress, identity confusion and loss of cultural belonging.

### **1.1 The specific cultural and personal needs of minority migrant groups in counseling.**

Effective therapeutic assessments and interventions may need to consider the background of the ethnic groups’ customs, social practices, history and specific factors that influence the migrant’s subjective well-being (U.S. Department of Health services, 2001 cited in Leuwerke, 2005). Eurocentric counselors are encouraged to develop the competency to work with multicultural communities. Wilton (2005) reporting for the VTPU organization on the delivery of Mental Health Services to people of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background in New South Wales found that the

mental health system has adopted a “blanket approach to diagnosis and treatment”.

Wilton reports that the biggest difficulty is the mental health’s rigid system that treats everyone the same. According to Wilton, the general perception from CALD clients is that the mental health profession in Australia does not understand their experiences and views them as a uniform group. Wilton highlights the need for an increase in the mental health workforce’s knowledge of CALD issues and recommends appropriate awareness and the adaptation of reliable evaluating mechanisms for this sector of the community. Leuwerke, (2005) reports that understanding racial identity in counselling encourages the counselor to assess their own biases, assumptions and beliefs and to actively develop competencies in working with culturally different clients and their families.

Indications are that overall the counselling profession has had a slower delivery of mental health services for minority migrant groups due to the failure to accurately assess the migrant client as a cultural entity prior to defining the problem and planning for the intervention (Sabnani & Ponterotto, 1992). Research indicates that there are multiple complexities in counselling across cultures. According to Sabnani and Ponterotto factors that may be considered during cross cultural counselling may include the differences in world views between counselor and client, their acculturation processes, racial and ethnic identity levels and subtle or even unconscious racist attitudes and beliefs.

Failure to consider the experiences of culture shock, alienation and identity confusion for migrants in counselling may overlook elements of acculturation stress that may be transmitted to later generations of ethnic migrant communities. According to Marsella and Pedersen (2002) the response that mental health services provide now will shape the nature, quality and meaning of the lives of many multicultural community members in the future. Marsella and Pedersen report that it is possible that the deep rooted framework of individualism, rational thinking and empiricism may result in invalid assessments of multicultural clients in therapy. These authors recommend a system of therapeutic intervention that combines quantitative and qualitative or focused group perspectives for future cross cultural assessment and counselling. Marsella and Pedersen perceive a paradigm shift in counselling that specifically caters for the needs of ethnic migrant communities. Marsella and Pedersen highlight the need for future empirical results and therapy that is holistic and recognizes the cultural similarities and differences of clients from different cultural backgrounds.

Totikidis, (2005) in collaboration with Prilleltensky and Gridley, focused on a multicultural community well-being model “The Community Wellness Cycle of Praxis” assessment tool to assess community well-being in Victoria. Ethnic minority groups included in the research were from Vietnamese, Maltese, Italian and Anglo – Australian groups in the Brimbank area of Melbourne. The research found that 32.47 % of residents in the Brimbank area were from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and that residents in the Brimbank area had lower rates of education, higher rates of unemployment and various unmet needs related to disadvantage in this community. This qualitative method of research used in the Brimbank area was found to be a suitable tool for measuring the needs of a multicultural community. Furthermore, the results indicated that the praxis model was a useful tool in various areas of social work and community psychology work. Models that highlight migrant minority groups’ specific needs may appropriately address their specific cultural needs in therapy.

Graham and Sharples (1999) researched the adaptive process and cultural needs of minority migrant populations. Researching the adaptation needs for migrants in the Western suburbs of Victoria, this study found that migrants experience adaptation to a new society differently. Also that acculturation for migrants varied and was dependant on a range of factors that included the original reasons for migration.

Counselors are required to consider the individual migrant’s method of adaptation to a new environment. Counselling for the individual needs of Maltese – Australian females may include assessments of the clients’ method of individual coping, their stage of acculturation and their cultural and social experiences. According to Sabnani and Ponterotto (1992) clients that are less acculturated may be more responsive to emic (culturally specific) counselling which may address their personal needs in therapy and support them in their issues within an ethnically and culturally appropriate method.

## **1.2 Targeting the cultural needs of Maltese – Australian females in Counseling.**

The Maltese –Australian community in Victoria is the fifth largest ethnic community. The main area of residence for many Maltese families is in the Western



suburbs of Melbourne. Second and third generation descendants of Maltese migrants account for the largest proportion of the Maltese community in Australia (Proctor, 1998). Major challenges for therapists in counselling migrants such as Maltese – Australian females include the fact that children of migrants may experience their parent's adaptation stress combined with their own experiences of blurred cultural boundaries and dual cultural loyalties. Hartley (1995) highlights the changing nature of diversity for second and third generation migrants in Australia compared to first generation migrants and reports that later generations experience increased challenges in the area of blurred cultural boundaries.

Research indicates that children of Maltese migrants in Australia experience less self-esteem than their Anglo- Australian counter parts. Maltese –Australian adolescents experience increased parent –child conflicts compared to Australian adolescents (Borg, 1999). At the Connecting Intergenerational Communities through Creative Exchange conference (2006) Borg and Fisher reported that there is a substantial generational gap between Maltese born parents and their Maltese – Australian children. Focusing on the life satisfaction for Maltese – Australian youth Borg and Fisher found that there is a discrepancy between Maltese parents' provision of high level of care needs at a practical level and their children's emotional and contemporary needs in Australia. According to Borg and Fisher, Maltese parents were functioning at a level of psychological survival which may be a by product of a history of trauma of colonization, compounded by the trauma of migration and most likely unresolved adaptation issues (Briffa, 1998 cited in Borg and Fisher, 2006). The evidence indicates that the Maltese –Australian community, in particular Maltese- Australian females may be affected by acculturative stress that has been transmitted to their children and requires specific treatment that tailors for the historic, cultural, social and individual needs of this ethnic community.

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 Definitions

Many terms appear in this thesis. Due to the limitations of this thesis only some terms are defined for the sake of clarity. Definitions of a few of these terms can be difficult as they are culturally specific however the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the context in which each definition will be used specifically in this thesis.

#### **Acculturation:**

Acculturation is defined as the culture change which occurs as a result of ongoing contact between distinct culture groups and can be experienced at an individual and group level (Berry, 1992). Pires And Stanton (2000) define acculturation as the degree of an individual or ethnic group's learning to adopt to another group's values and may involve radical changes in ethnic intensity, eventually resulting in ethnic identity change.

#### **Acculturation stress:**

Refers to the stress and by extension, the accompanying psychological difficulties often observed in immigrants struggling to adapt to a new culture (Reber & Reber, 2001).

#### **Adaptive/ maladaptive:**

Adaptive is the functioning so as to facilitate adaptation, the appropriate, useful, aiding in adjustment (Reber & Reber, 2001). It is the process of adjustment that is ideally congruent between the individual and his/her new environment (Berry, 1992).

Adaptation when used in Multicultural issues refers to the social and psychological adjustment of individuals or cultural groups, to the new cultural environment in which they now reside (Adelman, 1988 cited in Hall, 2004). Maladaptive in clinical psychology refers to the patterns of behaviour likely to produce psychiatric distress so that therapy is required (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Anglo-Australian:**

Is derived from the term Anglo- Saxon which refers to German (Anglo- Saxons and Jates) who settled in Britain in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century but now includes descendants of England, Scotland and Ireland (Highland 1975, cited in Pires & Stanton, 2000).

**Authoritarian:**

Refers to individuals who are rigid and conforming to conventional cultural values, believing that most moral issues are clear matters of right and wrong and are strongly ethnocentric (Macionis, 1991).

**Assimilation:**

Refers to newly arrived migrants and their children who are expected to assimilate into their host society and to shed their old language and cultural practices and acquire their host societies' way of life ( van Krieken, Smith, Habbis, Mc Donald, Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). Cultural assimilation refers to the adoption by minority ethnic groups of their host (dominant cultures) believe attitudes, values and behaviour in a linear progressive learning process (Kim 1997, cited in Pires & Stanton, 2000).

**Biculturalism:**

is the embracing of dual cultures that of the native cultural values and that of the dominant culture (Sciarra, 1999).

**Blurred cultural boundaries:**

For the purpose of this thesis are the overlap of boundaries and the non distinction of difficult cultural loyalties.

**British subjects:**

For the purpose of this thesis refers to those individuals (Maltese) governed/colonized and under British rule.

**Choice less migration:**

For the purpose of this thesis this refers to individuals who do not perceive themselves as having a choice in moving from one part of the world to another part.

**Collective community:**

According to Durkheim the collective social conscience is one where the belief in moral values was reflected in a social consensus as a collective conscience and consisting of common beliefs and sentiments (cited in Haralambos, van Krieken, Smith & Holborn, 1997).

**Community belonging:**

Community refers to a settlement of people concentrated in one geographical area and the defining feature of a community is self- consciousness on the part of each member that the group is a social unit and that he/she shares group identification with the others. Belonging in social psychology and sociology refers to the feeling of inclusion in or acceptance by a group (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Community psychology:**

Is an applied psychology in which the practitioner works in a variety of ways with a community targeting the improvement of the quality of life in the community (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**National identity:**

Is a general concept which refers to a broad set of shared understandings within a nation about its people and values. National identity also refers to a common language, symbols and practices which help to constitute them as a nation (Haralambos, van Krieken, Smith & Holborn, 1997).

**Consciousness:**

Consciousness is a state of awareness: a state of being conscious.

**Copying strategies:**

Refers to the conscious, rational ways of dealing with the anxieties of life ( Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Counselling:**

Is a process of interviewing, testing, guiding, advising designated to help an individual solve problems and plan for their future (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Culture:**

Is defined as the beliefs, values, and behaviour and material objects shared by a particular people. Culture is expressed everyday in what we wear, when and what we eat and how we enjoy and spend our free time. Culture provides the framework within which life becomes meaningful. Culture is never a static (Macionis, 1991).

**Culture Clash:**

Refers to the conflict that occurs when a person or a group is confronted with two or more contradictory standards or practices both of which are partially acceptable and over which there are conflicting loyalties (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Cultural diversity:**

Refers to lifestyles of families of different ethnic groups and their religious beliefs (van Krieken, Smith, Habibis, Mc Donald, Haralambos & Holborn, 2000).

**Cultural lag:**

Refers to the inconsistencies within a cultural system resulting from the unequal rates at which different cultural elements change (Macionis, 1991).

**Cultural shock:**

Is the emotional disruption often experienced by persons when they pay an extended visit to or live for some time in a society that is different from their own? Cultural shock can be experienced as feelings of strangeness and last for a considerable length of time (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Cultural transmission:**

Refers to the process by which culture is passed from one generation to the next. For most human history culture transmission has been through speech (Macionis, 1991).



**Cross-cultural method:**

A method used in social psychology, sociology, anthropology for evaluating cultures on several different cultural dimensions, such as child –rearing practices, literacy and language use. In research cross- cultural method compares various practices in different cultural settings (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Depression:**

A mood state characterized by a sense of inadequacy, a feeling of despondency, a decrease in reactivity, pessimism, sadness and related symptoms (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Dominant (culture):**

Dominant refers to the display of characteristics of dominance in any of the meaning of that term.

**Dual cultural responsibilities:**

For the purpose of this thesis this term refers to the individual's loyalties to two different cultures, for example to the Australian culture and the Maltese cultural.

**Environmental refugees:**

For the purpose of this thesis this term refers to the migrant (Maltese) forced to leave their country of birth due to economic hardships and overcrowding.

**Ethnicity:**

Is described as the social and psychological factor that defines a set of people who share a common culture or background, often because of similarity of race, nationality or religion (Abound & Skerry, 1984).

**Ethnic belonging:**

Phinney (1992) defines ethnic belonging as a sense of group membership and positive attitudes and feelings toward one's ethnic group.

**Ethnic group:**

Refers to the acquisition at birth of ethnic originality that never changes and is independent of country of residence (Pires & Stanton, 2000).

**Ethnic identity:**

Can be defined as the driver of a perceived behaviour associated with a given ethnic group and may vary between individuals. Factors that may influence ethnic identity over time may include economic and political factors, family, and socialization, occupational and intergenerational or educational influences. The overall tightness or looseness of an ethnic group determines ethnic identity (Aboud & Skerry 1984 cited in Pires & Stanton 2000).

**Enmeshment (family):**

Enmeshment refers to entanglement (Pusey, 1976). Family enmeshment may occur as a result of family members delayed pursuit of individual autonomy (Kwak, 2003).

**First generation Maltese migrants/second generation Maltese migrants:**

For the purpose of this thesis first generation Maltese migrants are Maltese born individuals residing out side Malta. Second generation Maltese migrants are descendants of Maltese born individuals residing outside of Malta.

**Gender:**

Is a biological distinction that develops prior to birth? Gender is the meaning that a society attaches to being female or male, that is thoughts, feelings and behaviour that are defined as feminine or masculine (Macionis, 1991).

**General psychology (counseling):**

Broadly defined as that orientation in psychology that seeks general, even universal, principles that apply to objects of study (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Generation gap:**

Reflects changes in family life in which more than two generations live closely together (Macionis, 1991).

**Generation gap:**

Reflects changes in family life in which more than two generations live closely together (Macionis, 1991).

**Integrative (cultural) perspective:**

Is the blending of cultural traits which were originally conflicting to form a modified integrated system (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Malteseness:**

Is one of the multiple layers of human identity but in particular for individuals of Maltese descent. It is the unique aspect that is like no other except for others of non Maltese decent. Therefore the Maltese individual has their own unique feminine or masculine identity and because they were nurtured in a Maltese environment they also share characteristics of a small group of people who share this unique cultural heritage (Drofenik, 1997).

**Maltese –Australians:**

For the purpose of this study are individuals or families that were born in Malta and reside in Australia. The term may also include the descendants of Maltese born parents residing in Australia.

**Maltese- Australian females:**

For the purpose of this thesis refers to females that are either born in Malta and reside in Australia or are descendants of Maltese born parents and reside in Australia.

**Migrate:**

Refers to an individual or group who move from one place to another (Pusey, 1976).

**Minority group:**

Refers to races and ethnicities that stand out from those dominating any society these are minorities. A racial or ethnic minority is a category of people defined by physical or cultural traits, who are socially disadvantaged (Macionis, 1991).

**Multicultural communities/ or ethnic pluralism:**

Refers to ethnic groups maintain their separate cultural identities. The result being a pluralistic society characterized by the presence of numerous ethnic identities each of which is valued (Haralambos et al 1996).

**Segmented community:**

Is the physical and social separation of categories of people? Racial and ethnic minorities sometimes voluntarily segregate themselves, usually however minorities are segregated involuntarily as others choose to exclude those (Macionis, 1991).

**Specific cultural needs:**

For the purpose of this thesis refers to the distinctive cultural needs of the ethnic community, for example the Maltese community.

**Subjective well-being:**

Is related to the well-being of the subject. Subjective characteristics are ones dependant on the individual. That of which is subjective is internal, personal, not available for public scrutiny. The subjective mental cognitive is experiential or psychic as opposed to physical or somatic (Reber & Reber, 2001).

**Stereotypes:**

Is a set of prejudices that characterize a category of people? Because stereotypes often involve emotions of love, hate or fear toward members of an out group, they are hard to change even in the face of contrary evidence (Macionis, 1991).

**Stress:**

Refers to the notion of stresses an external load or demand on the biological, social or psychological system (Lazarus, 1998).

**Traditional family ties:**

Refers to the family's expectation for descendants to maintain strong and reliable traditions and family connections (Sharma 1984).

**Trans-generational cultural conflict:**

Refers to conflict between family members when parents withdraw from the dominant culture and their children continue to become aligned with the dominant culture thus creating conflict (Lau, Me Cabe, Yeh, Garland, Wood and Hough, 2005).

**Transmission of acculturation stress:**

Is when stress of adjustment is inherited by second generation from first generation migrants (Sluzki, 1979).



## **Chapter Three**

### **3 Specific factors when counselling Maltese- Australian females.**

The aim of this chapter is to investigate some of the specific factors that may be considered when counselling first and later generations of Maltese- Australian females. The higher prevalence of mental ill health for Maltese-Australians in particular Maltese- Australian women may be the result of repressed traumatic emotional life events, possibly connected to migration and acculturation (Proctor, 1998) Effective therapeutic interventions supporting the specific needs of Maltese- Australian females may focus on the historic, cultural, social and individual needs of this sector of the Australian community. Victor Borg (2000) president of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria acknowledged that there are many cultural and language factors that apply to the Maltese community in Australia and that these require specific focus when supporting Maltese-Australians.

Migrants in counselling may present with common psychological symptoms of loss, grief and trauma however migration and resettlement can be experienced differently by particular migrants. It is possible that specific factors that apply for some migrant groups may require counselling methods that address these unique factors. Abraldo, Armbrister, Florez and Aguirre (2006) recommend that the multiple dimensions of acculturation and cultural differences for minority migrant communities, be measured from ethnically appropriate scales when supporting culturally and linguistically different ethnic groups.

#### **3.1 Historic and political factors considered in counselling Maltese – Australian females.**

The Maltese islands are a tiny group of limestone islands with no hills higher than 300 meters and no rivers. Malta's indented shoreline and sheltered harbor has attracted traders and invaders alike through history (Borg, 2000). Comprising of three small islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino the Maltese islands are situated in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, half way between Sicily and North Africa. The Maltese islands can be seen as the link between Western and Eastern Europe. Covering an area of 316

square kilometers, Malta is densely populated with approximately 380,000 inhabitants at 1, 164 people per square kilometer. The Maltese have experienced a long history of colonization and invasion mostly due to the islands' global strategic position. The Maltese history is one of survival and bravery (Proctor, 1998).

Malta's origin dates back to 4500 years BC and its first inhabitants were from Sicily. Malta's history includes the occupation of the islands by the Phoenicians (800 BC), the Carthaginians in (500 BC) and the Romans (218 BC). Malta became part of the Roman Empire during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War (218 BC). The Arab invasion (870-1090) influenced the Maltese language (Bonnano, 1994). The Normans occupied Malta until 1194 AD. Malta also encountered Spanish Feudalism following the Norman rule which contributed to Malta's European cultural influence (Borg, 2005). Maltese bravery, communal collectiveness and strenuous efforts to protect their culture can be found throughout Maltese history (Drofenik, 1997). Frequently these efforts were expressed in defensive acts, conducted as a means of survival as a conquered nation (Borg, 2005).

Under the occupation of the Knights of St John (1530) Malta prospered (Drofenik, 1997). Malta was subjected to a short invasion from the French during the Napoleonic wars. The Maltese, oppressed under French rule requested British assistance to overthrow the French in 1800 and this led to Malta eventually becoming a British colony. Malta experienced both prosperity and poverty under British rule (Borg, 2005). The Maltese received the George Cross medal for bravery during World War II in defending their islands against the Italians and Germans (Drofenik, 1997). According to Frendo (1991) Malta's colonization shaped the method of resilience for the Maltese in Malta and overseas. The Maltese through their historical experiences have learnt many survival strategies. Drofenik (1997) believes the Maltese possess a cultural preservation trait which is operationalised through expediency in order to survive. It is the tactic of lying low and blending in, in order to survive. Knowledge of possible historic and trans-generation coping strategies for the Maltese community is beneficial when counselling Maltese- Australian females.

### **3.2 Assimilation factors: in counselling Maltese-Australians females**

During Post World War II the period between 1954 and 1966 the Australian Commonwealth Consensus recorded an increase of 35, 000 Maltese migrants (York, 1995). Malta during this period experienced over population and large unemployment. According to Cahill (1998) the Maltese were forced to migrate to other countries such as Australia as environmental refugees, in search of a better future for their families. The Maltese congregated in the Western suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney (York, 1995).

It is possible that Maltese migrants, during this period, may have experienced a refugee mentality due to a forced migration and the experiences of loss of home land, families and culture (Borg, 2005). Forced immigrants have additional adjustment issues and are required to address feelings of guilt in leaving relatives and friends behind. Migrants that are forced to migrate may also be required to deal with issues of loss of identity and loss of community belonging (Landau & Straton, 1982).

Post World War II Maltese migrants kept a very low profile due to racism and perceptions of Maltese migrants being a menace in Australia (Azzopardi, 1983). According to Frendo (1986) such a low negative profile may have affected the acculturation process resulting in a low retention of Maltese culture. York (1995) reports that during the main post World War II Maltese migration period Australian policies did not include Multiculturalism and children of non-Anglo origin were made to feel ashamed of their backgrounds. York believes that second generation Maltese-Australians experienced difficulty in connecting to their ethnic community because for second generation Maltese –Australians it was not always easy to grow up displaying a Maltese identity in Australia.

Cahill (1998, in Briffa, 1998) compared the post World War II Maltese-Australian migrants' social and economic progress with other European migrants from Italy, Greece, Germany and The Netherlands ( Australian 1991 census). Cahill found that while many migrants from other ethnic backgrounds experienced hardships during their adaptation in Australia, research indicates that for the Maltese acculturation was a difficult process. These difficulties are apparent in their methods of safe residential encapsulation, evident in their non risk taking behaviour and close geographical settlement to one another. Cahill reports that unlike the Dutch and German migrant

groups, who became quite scattered across Australian's urban and rural areas, not long after migration, the Maltese searched for security within their ethnic community and huddled together as urban settlers in the Western suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. Records (1975-1976) indicate that Maltese fathers compared to South American fathers showed little job mobility even when they were dissatisfied with their salaries and conditions (Taft & Cahill, 1978 cited in Cahill, 1998). These patterns of cultural encapsulation may be indicative of an insecure and difficult process of adaptation for Maltese migrants in Australia. Drofenik (1997) reports that Maltese- Australian women expressed feelings of isolation as migrants in Australia. It is possible that unresolved issues of isolation, experiences of forced migration, loss of family, home land and culture may be internalized and continue to affect Maltese- Australian women and their children.

Lee and Dean (2004) suggest that counselling psychology direct the focus of its research on the understanding of theories of assimilation and acculturation. These authors hope that this sheds light on how these theories have ignored the diversity of nations among the working class, the fastest growing segmented sector of many communities. Abraldo, Armbrister, Florez and Aguirre (2006) support this recommendation and report that acculturation issues and assimilation factors should be examined in the context of residential segregation and racism for minority migrant groups.

According to Cahill and Taft (1978 cited in Cahill, 1998) the Maltese in Australia were expected to have reasonably good English skills and able to easily assimilate due to their association with Britain as part of the British Colony. However Cahill and Taft report that frequently Maltese English language skills were found to be of a superficial competency level and resulted in the Maltese in Australia receiving limited support for their linguistic needs. Briffa, (1999: Cahill, 2000) reports that first generation Maltese migrants were expected to easily assimilate to the Australian culture because of their connections with Britain. As part of the British Colony, the Maltese may have been perceived as knowledge in Anglo culture and cultural differences between the Maltese and Anglo culture minimized due to their association.

Cahill and Taft's (1978) research indicates that Maltese- Australians experienced adaptation difficulties. Cahill and Taft compared Maltese, Italian and Greek migrants in Australia. The Maltese appeared to possess a negative impression of their settlement in

Australia for a longer period after migration than the other two groups of migrants, indicating a slower transitional process for the Maltese. According to Cahill and Taft, the Maltese, in their attempt to preserve their ethnic group identity closed in on themselves, resembling a segmented ethnic group. Children of Maltese parents, in Cahill and Taft's study, reported that their parents were pre occupied with the nostalgic affairs of their homeland. Cahill and Taft report that this fixation and delayed adaptive mentality was passed down to the children of Maltese migrants. Children of Maltese migrants interviewed in the Taft and Cahill study believed that they would be better off in Malta however appeared to be reasonably happy in Australia. These results suggest that these children were experiencing competing cultural loyalties connected to identity confusion.

Tensions for women of Maltese families, according to Briffa (1998) appeared to be connected to the major cultural differences between the Maltese and Australian cultures which were played down by authorities and contributed to family tensions for this ethnic group. Drofenik (1997) found that Maltese- Australian women's struggles and their achievements are missing a narration and recognition in Australian society. Counselling methods for Maltese –Australian females may examine the effects of non recognition of acculturation difficulties, denied cultural differences and identity confusion for Maltese –Australian females that may continue to affect these members of the Australian community.

### **3.3 Cultural and social factors considered in counseling Maltese-Australian females**

#### **3.3.1: The Maltese culture: differences in language**

The Maltese language is testimony of the historical influences of Eastern and Western cultures in Malta. Derived from a semantic background, the Maltese language is written with a Roman alphabet. The Maltese language also contains influences from Italian, French, Spanish and English languages (Proctor, 1998). It is the only language of Arabic origins that is written in the Latin alphabet (Brincat, 2005). Indications of subservient practices in Malta can be found in the usage of the Maltese language. The Maltese language, in the past was not the official language in Malta and was considered inferior to the language of the ruling power of the day. This historic oppressive practice



of the Maltese language as a secondary language may have influenced the relinquishing and non-retention of the Maltese language for Maltese-Australians and children.

Skodra (1989, cited in Proctor, 1998) found that when oppressed, traumatized and disadvantaged groups have their voice silenced and regulated to background noise, there is the possibility that symptoms of sadness, grief and depression emerge.

Bovington (2004) believes that it is possible that language in Multicultural societies is not lost but changed to meet the needs of the societies in contact with each other. However according to Borland (2006) challenges exist for diasporic communities such as the Maltese community in Australia, in the transmission of their heritage language especially if the language is one that has low visibility. Results indicate that the main influence affecting the transmission of their heritage language for such communities such as the Maltese are related to opportunities provided at a governmental level for this retention, both in Australia and in Malta. The loss of language transmission has dramatically affected Maltese culture in Australia. According to Sultana (1994) the needs of Maltese descendants have not been addressed in Australia in the area of language education and the study of the Maltese culture. Counsellors are required to address experiences of loss for Maltese- Australian females in counselling which include loss of culture and language.

### **3.3.2: The Maltese culture: differences in religious practices:**

Considerable cultural differences for the Maltese in Australia can also be found in religious practices. Maltese families are entrenched in Roman Catholic religious values and beliefs (Abela 1991; Drofenik, 1997). Family values and traditions are intertwined within religious beliefs (Borg, 2005) that are connected to every facet of Maltese life and the Maltese community. Religious customs in Malta that serve as communal and social connections can be found in the celebrations of the annual Fiestas. Cauchi (1990) highlights a dilemma for many Maltese in Australia in that religious practices in Australia do not cater for their spiritual, emotional and social needs that were part of cultural practices for Maltese families in Malta. Sensitive religious issues and their influence requires specific understanding in counselling for Maltese –Australian females.

### 3.3.3: The Maltese culture: differences in the Maltese social customs within a collective system:

Maltese- Australian women are confronted with major contrasts in their social practices. According to Proctor (1998) the Maltese have a language of plurality connected to a collective emotional belonging. Maltese social customs and the geographical closeness for the Maltese have been link to serve as a process of healing, health and belonging for Maltese communities in Malta. Proctor highlights the stark contrasts between the communality of the Maltese culture and the individuality of Australian suburban life. Maltese –Australian females are required to juggle these major social contrasts in their daily lives. Social ethnic collective customs and social connections are increasingly difficult to practice for Maltese- Australian females. Borg's (2005) report indicates that membership to social peer groups for Maltese natives in particular Maltese adolescents is common in Malta however evidence of membership to their ethnic social group, for Maltese –Australian females, especially for younger members is not so apparent. According to Skowron (2004) practices that highlight the distinction between collectivistic and individualistic solidities are essential in multicultural counselling.

Baptiste (1993) reports that feelings of loss of social net works and family is a common experience for migrants however for collective communities familiar with social connectedness this loss may be accentuated. Baptiste found that the availability of social support including extended family support, and the extent to which migrants interact with supportive networks are determinants of these migrants' ability to adapt effective in their new societies.

Maltese-Australian females' perceptions of differences in social practices and their perception of the availability of culturally specific social supports requires special understanding in counselling Maltese- Australian females affected by acculturation stress. Heller, Swindle and Dusenbury (1986) found that it is not the social process or activity but how the activity is perceived and interpreted by the individual that is the decider of psychological well-being. Lazarus and Folkman's (1985) cognitive model of social support is based on a cognitive appraisal system. The individual, confronted with a stressful life event will perceive the event as threatening or challenging and coping methods will depend on the individual's perception of the extent of their social support. Psychological and Psychosocial well-being may be reliant on the perceptions of the

individual migrant or migrant descendant's social support system during their adaptation process. Psychological well-being may be achieved within a supportive social environment. In counselling Maltese- Australian females, their access to and their perception of availability of culturally appropriate support services may need to be considered.

#### **3.3.4: The Maltese culture: Maltese family practices:**

Maltese families are considered to be traditional and the family unit is held in the highest regard in Maltese culture. Parents of Maltese – Australian families uphold traditional customs, religious values and beliefs that are consistent with native Maltese family practices. Borg (2005) found that despite the high level of parental care that there was a lack of communication and openness in Maltese –Australian families which results in a lack of intimacy between parents and children, with Maltese –Australian parents perceived as strict and authoritarian. Borg (1999) found that there was an indirect positive effect between ethnicity and parent- child conflicts for Maltese- Australian children.

Positive family relationships involve feelings of closeness, love, doing things together, supportive arrangements and bonding. Family cohesion and social support are related to the health and well-being of children, reducing the likelihood of problems such as depression in children. Parent –child interactions can affect children's behaviour over and above the influence of socioeconomic or demographic factors (Moore, Chalk, Scarpa and Vandiver, 2002)

Migration and relocation is a major life event that can create a substantial amount of stress for migrants and their families. The stress of relocation may lead to developmental problems for migrant family units. Family Developmental therapists suggest that when family patterns block the normal development of the family and its members, dysfunctional patterns can occur. The family may experience major stress during the transitional process between cultures, creating rigid and inflexible family patterns. Family members functioning from locked and rigid sets of roles may experience difficulties in individual growth (Cornille and Brotherton, 1993).

Differences between ethnic migrant groups' family practices and those of the major culture's family practices may also result in stress for individual members of minority migrant families. According to Eamon, Urbana and Mulder (2005) multiple

factors were identified for Latino youths in Hispanic families in the United States which place these youths at risk of exhibiting antisocial behavior. Consistent with previous research Latino males were found to be more at risk of exhibiting antisocial behaviour than females. These results emphasize the necessity for gender specific risk assessment for migrant family members. Socio-environmental factors, namely poverty, were found to influence the risk of antisocial behaviour for Latino youths.

Communication barriers and conflict in the areas of values, roles and expectations increasing parent and youth conflict were also a stress factor in the adaptation needs for Latino youths in the United States.

According to Baptiste (1993) intergenerational clashes are often the result of what the youth wants for him/her self and what the parents want for the offspring. Children of migrants may proceed towards a faster acculturation than their parents. Variations of adaptations and acculturation can create conflict and stress between family members. As a result of stress family members may initially become closer as an enmeshed family in the attempt to adapt to the new environment. Sometimes the family may postpone or deny existing transitional problems due to more immediate survival needs. Baptiste found that there are a number of reasons for trans-generational conflict. These may include changes in familial and generational boundaries, differences in parental authority over children, parents' fear of losing their children to the new culture, not being prepared for the migration experience, and extended family enmeshment or disengagement.

Landua, (1982) observed that migrant family's satisfaction and adjustment to the host society depended in part on how their expectations for migration compares to actual living in the new country. According to Robinson –Zahartu (1960 cited in Laundau, 1982) when levels of acculturation vary significantly between parent /community and children, acculturation stress develops. Indications are that the experiences of acculturation stress for migrants may result in disharmony, diffusion of identity and a sense loss of belonging in the world for migrants.

These factors can be applied to Maltese- Australian women. Briffa's (1999) interviews with family therapists working with Maltese families in Melbourne, experiencing family tensions, found that family issues are contained within the family and that enmeshed family boundaries were apparent. Intergenerational conflicts frequently involved fathers and daughters in Maltese families. Maltese parents that

reportedly clung to traditional values experienced more family relational tensions. Briffa reports that a considerable amount of anxiety and depression is experienced in Maltese- Australian families and those females of Maltese –Australian families require increased support.

Counselling interventions for Maltese- Australian females may be required to address the differences in family practices between the Maltese family's tight culture and its inter-dependence and conforming practices and the loose Australian culture where family members practice more independence. Borg (2005) reports that the risk of cultural clash between members of Maltese families may be due to Maltese parents' methods of care giving being in line with a collective and traditional social system and their children's more acculturated system which may be more inline with an individualistic Australian social system. Borg found that Maltese –Australian youths report dissatisfaction with the authoritarian parenting styles of their traditional parents. Maltese –Australian youths report that family conflict is distressing to them. It can be said that distress and parent- child conflict connected to parenting rigidity and adaptation insecurities may result in unresolved and transmitted stress for children of Maltese migrants, especially for female descendants of Maltese- Australian women. Maltese- Australian female descendants are required to juggle dual cultures and report that conflicts with their parents go unresolved (Borg, 2005). Avoidance in conflict resolution creates distance and feelings of disengagement with significant others (Reis et al 2000 cited in Borg, 2005)

Calleya-Capp (1999) describes the Maltese family unit as the most important institution in Maltese communities. According to Calleya-Capp Maltese families have endured the challenges of colonization and migration but now have the need to receive culturally sensitive health and psychological treatment. Unresolved acculturation stress experienced by Maltese families in Australia, in particular by Maltese- Australian females may be transmitted to their descendants.

### **3.4 Subjective and emotional factors: in counseling for Maltese- Australian females**

According to Schyns (1998) it is really more or less universal that a positive relationship exists between economic prosperity, cultural freedom and happiness but it is possible that migrants due to their state of transition are in fact unhappier than they

can be. Maltese- Australian females who have experience inter- relational ethnic group disconnection and intergenerational conflict within their families may experience less happiness and life satisfaction.

According to Rampichini and Schifmi (1997) life satisfaction is a central concept in research on the individual's subjective quality of life. Happiness is the degree to which one judges the quality of one's life favorably. Rampichini and Schifini report that it is possible to measure life satisfaction objectively by the degree to which living –conditions meet the observable conditions of a good life in its context. Schyns (1998) found that the individual's happiness was correlated with the national economic and cultural living conditions. Life satisfaction can also be measured subjectively by assessing how people appreciate their life personally which can vary between individuals. Smart and Smart (1995) found that lack of clarity of environment makes the individual's appraisal, judgment and decision making more difficult. Smart and Smart report that the lack of structure and familiarity results in anxiety and loss of control for migrants. According to research (cited in Smart and Smart, 1995) the loss of social control and social support for migrants is connected to acculturative stress which can destroy both the will and the ability to cope with life's challenges. Smart and Smart report that the greater the level of acculturative stress, the less likely one invests in the development of skills or the accumulation of resources that may be helpful in difficult circumstances. Low development of coping skills influenced by acculturative stress may result in the development of low self –esteem for migrants experiencing adaptation stress. Similarly, children of Maltese- Australian women who experience lower self – esteem may be affected by their parent's acculturative stress and require specific understanding of their needs in counselling

Counselling that addresses the subjective and emotional needs of Maltese- Australian females and their descendants may need to focus on issues of identity that may be connected to their level of self – esteem. Giang and Witting (2006) found that ethnic identity is linked to self-esteem at the personal and collective levels. With respect to collective self –esteem Giang and Witting report that results show that individuals with higher ethnic identity have more positive views about their ethnic group. Higher ethnic identity appears to be associated with greater feelings regarding the importance of ethnicity to one's self-concept and worthiness as an ethnic group member.

Phinney (1996 cited in Skowan, 2004) defined ethnic identity as an enduring fundamental aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership to an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership. Members who have more positive ethnic identity have been shown to exhibit higher self-esteem. According to Phinney (1992) measuring ethnic identity on the Multi Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) incorporates factors of ethnic identity and is the development of cognitive components of identity. The MEIM includes affirmation as a component of ethnic identity and is the belonging and commitment which measures greater feelings of belonging between them and their ethnic group.

In Multicultural societies the work of emotional connectedness and social inclusiveness, according to Skowron (2004) is more important then ever. The ownership of one's thoughts and feelings while valuing intimacy and connection with others is of utmost importance. Skowron found that positive attitudes and stronger ties with one's own ethnic group results in feelings of less emotional cut off in relationships with family and significant others.

Factors of emotional disconnectedness can be applied to the Maltese community in particular to Maltese –Australian females and their female's descendants. Feelings of shame of being a member of their ethnic group for Maltese –Australian females may be an indicator of the migrant's low self esteem that may be transmitted to later generations. According to York (1995) children of minority migrant groups such as the Maltese in Australia pre- Australian Multicultural policies displayed feelings of shame of being a member of a minority ethnic group. Maltese- Australian females who may have experienced pressure to assimilate into the Australian culture may have experienced less self esteem and questioned their ethnic identity. Assessment of the psychological effects and the specific therapeutic needs for Maltese migrants and their descendants is missing in this area of research (Borg, 2005; Proctor, 1998). The Maltese-Australian migrant community's displacement due to forced migration and political pressure that influenced their adaptation in Australia may be considered in the process of therapeutic interventions for Maltese- Australian females. Experiences of cultural contrasts between the Australian and Maltese cultures, Malta's history as a conquered nation, family, religion and ethnic social practices may require special focus for Maltese- Australian females and their female descendants. Meeting the emotional and subjective needs of this sector of the Australian community in counseling may also



require a focus on issues of self esteem and identity confusion and Maltese- Australian female's sense of **community belonging**.

### **3.5 Gender specific factors: for Maltese- Australian females in counseling**

Gender roles in Maltese families are traditional. Women are considered to be the main carers of the family. The Maltese family is a network of immediate and extended family that is relied on when necessary (Drofenik, 1997). In a framework of a collective society Maltese – Australian women and their female descendants are faced with gender confusion due to their obligations to maintain traditional gender roles handed to them within Maltese family traditions while also complying with the less traditional Australian family practices. Borg (1999) reports that daughters of Maltese families in Australia are expected to maintain close family ties and family loyalties. According to Borg (2005) high levels of cohesion in Maltese families encourages interdependence among family members. Borg reports that daughters of Maltese parents use less productive coping measures in managing life stresses than their male counterparts.

According to van Krieken, Smith, Habibis, McDonald, Haralambos and Holborn (2000) gender is the social organization of the facts of biological sex into something recognizable as masculinity or femininity. Biologically based explanations of the behaviour of men and women have not been confined to hormones, brains or genes of the two sexes but also to more physical differences between males and females that relate to the operation of gender roles. According to van Krieken et al one very basic problem with seeing gender differences as “natural” is the enormous diversity of gender roles across human cultures. van Krieken et al report that gender is supported by a social machine instruction system that constantly enforces social sanctions that distinguish between masculinity and femininity.

Sharma (1984) reports that many ethnic minority groups in Multicultural countries such as America, Canada and Australia, retain traditional and conservative family practices. According to Sharma, Indian migrants in Britain are extremely traditional and conservative. This study indicated how family situations and traditionalism can affect the process of assimilation for ethnic minority groups and their children, in particular female descendants of Indian migrants. Results indicate that second generation Indian females experience increasingly more pressure to follow a

pattern of traditional sex roles identical to that of their first generation female parents when compared to their English counterparts and second generation Indian boys. Indian parents expected by their daughters to be more positively involved in household matters and to maintain strong and reliable traditional family ties. Second generation Indian girls in Britain perceived their freedom as limited when compared to girls from more permissive societies (Sharma 1984). These results can be related to Maltese –Australian females who carry the dual responsibilities of maintaining traditional Maltese gender roles and to adapt to more a permissive gender role of an Australian society.

Counselling methods for Maltese –Australian women need to consider inequalities for women in general, but also to examine the contradictions between the Maltese and Australian gender role divisions for Maltese – Australian females and the influence these contradictions have in their adaptation process. It is possible that daughters of Maltese families who develop inter- dependent social skills and less coping with life skills may require specific counselling that addresses the areas of autonomy, psychosocial skills and the subjective aspect of self esteem. Drofenik (1997) reports that policies that have side lined women in general but have especially muted Maltese –Australian women during their process of adapting to Australian society, need to support and recognize that Maltese women's roles are most important as institutions of cultural transmission for future generations of the Maltese-Australians.

## Chapter Four

### 4 Acculturation and acculturation stress

This chapter highlights models of acculturation, in particular Berry's Acculturation Model (1992) and Sluzki's model of Adaptation (1979). In the process of focusing on modes of adaptation and maladaptation for minority migrant groups, the specific factors that may be connected with unresolved acculturation stress for Maltese-Australian females will be examined. The connection between this group's unresolved acculturation stress and the transmission of acculturation stress to second generation Maltese-Australian females will be considered.

Adaptation to a new society and leaving one's native country can be difficult, even traumatic in some instances for migrants. This radical change can be experienced on a number of levels which include cultural differences and psychological experiences of alienation, loss and grief (Cauchi, 2002).

Acculturation has been defined as the process of culture change which occurs as a result of ongoing contact between distinct cultural groups and can be experienced at an individual and group level. Although culture change occurs in the dominant and non dominant groups the main change normally occurs for the non-dominant ethnic group, as a result of influences from the dominant group (Berry, 1992).

Stress is described as hardships or adversity that was initially described from a biological term. Later it was used to describe notions of over load and stress. According to Lazarus (1993) the theme that survives in modern times regarding stress is the notion of stress as an external load or demand on the biological, social or psychological system. Lazarus describes stress as a set of psychological and physiological reactions to noxious agents.

Research indicates that acculturation stress is the result of adjustment difficulties for the migrant or migrant family. According to Sluzki (1979) second generation migrants inherit the unresolved acculturative stress experienced by the first generation migrants. Bhugra and Mastrogianni report that there is an increased prevalence of mental illness in minority migrant groups during the process of transition and adaptation (2004). Research indicates that there is a high prevalence of mental illness in Maltese families in Australia and that Maltese women require greater support in this community (Briffa 1999) Maltese-Australian females due to experiences of

cultural contrasts, easily assimilation expectation and emotional experiences of alienation may have experienced acculturation stress that in turn has influenced their children's acculturation. Counselors for Maltese-Australian females require specific understanding of the individual and social relations connected with acculturation stress for this ethnic group.

#### **4.1 Operationalising acculturation/acculturation stress**

The process of adaptation to a new society according to Berry (1992) is the process of adjustment that ideally results in the congruence between the individual and his/her new environment. Berry's Acculturation Model includes the state of assimilation where the individual complies with the host country's cultural norms and relinquishes their culture of origin. The second state is separation where the individual chooses to maintain the traditional culture and does not seek contact or involvement with the dominant culture. The third state is integration and occurs when the migrant embraces both the original culture and the dominant culture and fourth is marginalization which is when the individual rejects the original culture however at the same time has minimal contact and participation with the dominant culture. Berry reports that the Integration stage is considered as the least stressful for acculturating migrants and marginalization as the most stressful.

Accurate assessment of the phase of the migrant's acculturation and the measure of acculturation stress is vital in acculturation psychology and it is the foundation of successful therapeutic interventions. Floyd, Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) critiqued psychometric measures in acculturation psychology. Studying attitudes between Norwegian and Iranian cultures Floyd et al found that the four fold measures were pinned to limited-choices that did not accurately measure the adaptation practices of Iranians in Norway. According to Floyd et al unconstrained fourfold measures may contain a bias contamination and unreliable measures of adaptation due to scale constraints. Floyd et al recommend a paradigm shift in measuring acculturation stress that includes the processes of the migrant's own perception and cognition during acculturation. The acculturation process according to Floyd et al probably begins with a perception which requires a perceptual –cognitive framework for understanding social relations and the effects of acculturation for the migrant. Floyd et al recommend the

Heiderian Model which includes multiple measures of internal and private inferences, perceptions of the migrant's belonging to a cultural group and can include the migrant's physical features. Assessments and therapeutic interventions that incorporate the migrant's individual subjectivity and their inter relationships may provide a holistic process of intervention for migrant minority groups, particularly for Maltese-Australian females.

Supporting the need for accurate measures of acculturation and stress for migrants is the study by Schwatz, Montgomery and Briones (2006). These authors recommend accurate operational methods that incorporate the notion of culture and identity for migrants and their families in treating migrants affected by acculturation stress. Schwatz et al recommend the individualization of specific variations between one migrant group's specific needs to another' in a model that focuses on the specific needs of the particular migrant or migrant group.

Fuertes and Westbrook (1996) researching Hispanic college students' acculturation process found the Social, Attitudinal, Familial and Environmental (S.A.F.E) a reliable and valid measurement for this minority ethnic group in America. Fuertes and Westbrook identified social stressors, communication difficulties, the sense of loss of home and loneliness as stress factors for this ethnic student group. According to Fuertes and Westbrook, school counselling may be pivotal as a preventative therapeutic method for ethnic minority migrant children. Culturally specific assessments of the needs of the migrants and their families would provide support for migrant minority groups and act as a referral point and barrier against transmitted acculturation stress.

Sluzki (1979) highlights the difficulties experienced by migrants and their families and their need to transmit their cultural values to their children. Sluzki reports that as previous research has identified, the family is the main socializing agent and transmitter of social norms, morals and cultural beliefs for the individual. The family is responsible for conveying myths that formulate the family's specific view of the present and also in transmitting the families past history. Therefore, according to Sluzki when the family experiences long term delays in adaptation to a new society there is the possibility that the effects of these difficulties in the transmission of culture is experienced by the ethnic groups' second generation.

Sluzki (1979) studying Chinese families' adaptive patterns, in America found that if in the process of adapting there has been the avoidance or delay in conveying not only the norms of their culture at large but also the family's specific styles, modes and values within the acculturation process, these factors will appear in later generations and may be expressed as a clash between generations. According to Sluzki intergenerational delay of adaptation is usually expressed by first generation and later generations in the area of differences in extent of belonging to the native culture.

The maintenance of a similar neighborhood to the experiences of the native country by migrant families in the new country can act as a buffer zone from exposure with other cultural groups, however it may also slow down the adaptive process. This can be seen in the practices of the close geographical settlement of first generation Maltese families in Australia (Cahill, 1998). According to Sluzki (1979) if in migrant families experiencing adaptation difficulties the second generation of migrants is socialized in the same environment as the first generation the non adaptive process will repeat itself with no major consequences for the second generation. However, if the socialization of the second generation reflects a mixture of the norms and values of the dominant culture then the unresolved adaptation issues that have not been negotiated by the first generation will need to be addressed by the second generation. Sluzki's adaptation model for migrant families and individuals includes the preparatory stage of migration, the migration stage, a period of overcompensation, the period of crisis or de-compensation and the trans-generational phenomena. .

Therapists facilitating therapeutic interventions for migrants require an awareness of the migrant and their family's stage of adaptive process, the specific developmental and cultural needs during the adaptive process. Sluzki (1979) in describing migrant families' conflicts relating to migration within the "curve of performance under stress" reports that in the course of the ups and downs of the process of adaptation individual family members are required to negotiate new family rules and roles in relation to the migration and adaptation. Family members who were responsible for the move or those who experienced the greatest loss due to the migration can hold the roles of either victim or oppressor.

Coping strategies for migrant families that bind family members together immediately after migration may be relinquished at a later stage, because of pressure of their new reality as migrants. This pressure may trigger a crisis period. Negotiating the

family's continuity of identity and its compatibility in the new environment requires delicate balancing and can be difficult to achieve by members of a migrant family. According to Sluzki many family rules and values that were effective in the native country may prove to be less directive in the culture of the country of adoption. Frequently, the family crisis is projected through the migrant families' off springs (Sluzki, 1979). Awareness and assessment of high stress provoking stages such as the de-compensation stage or the more chronic period of acculturation stress in the trans-generational stage must be acknowledged and addressed during the process of transition and adaptation. The trans-generational stage may be the stage where unresolved acculturation stress is transmitted to descendants of migrants (Sluzki 1979). Indications are that some first generation Maltese families may have experienced a segmented or maladaptive acculturation process which may have resulted in the transmission of trans-generational acculturation stress (Proctor, 1998). Counselors supporting Maltese-Australian females and their female descendants are required to consider the stage and process of acculturation for these individuals.

#### **4.2 Methods that address acculturation stress and culturally specific factors in counselling for migrant groups.**

Indications are that Maltese –Australian women who have experienced major cultural contrasts in Australia, confused identities through expectations of assimilation and adaptation difficulties are at risk of increased prevalence to depression and psychological illness. Bhugra and Mastrogianni (2004) found that due to recent influences of world globalization and cultural interactions there are increased expectations of cultural homogenization for migrants, especially those from vulnerable minority cultures. Culture, according to Bhugra and Mastrogianni influences the individual migrant's coping mechanisms and support seeking practices. The migrant's identity, self esteem and social interactions are also closely connected to the individual's cultural background. Bhugra and Mastrogianni found that there is a stronger prevalence of depression in ethnic minority groups, specifically in women of non-dominant groups in the United Kingdom when compared to the dominant population. Bhugra and Mastrogianni recommend that qualitative research and the focus-group methods may be more useful in collecting information and identifying the specific needs and stages of acculturation for migrant minority populations.

Therapy that addresses acculturative stress may require a sense of openness and a sharing of the cultural diversity, cultural histories, life styles and life experiences of both the therapist and migrant. The counselor's own awareness of their personal attitudes and biases relating to immigrant families combined with a direct, active and focused intervention may provide the migrant with opportunities to address their acculturative stress (Baptiste, 1993).

Measuring the specific acculturative needs of Hispanics, Smart and Smart (1995) report that therapeutic interventions require specific needs interventions that address the acculturative experiences and cultural differences for immigrant minority groups. Therefore the therapeutic intervention must be tailored specifically to meet the needs of the individual or ethnic migrant groups. According to Smart and Smart counselors are required to support migrants in a process that is in harmony with the culture of their new society but that also addresses the culture specific needs of the migrant.

Therapeutic interventions that focus on the specific needs of the migrant or migrant group may need to include the pre and post factors of migration. Steel, Silove, Phan, Bauman and Lancet (2002) researched the effects of acculturative stress for Vietnamese refugees in Australia and their mental health, which included chronic psychiatric disabilities. These authors found that pre migration factors, for example exposure to repeated trauma, increased the risk of mental illness for this ethnic group. Post migration factors were also associated with the mental health of Vietnamese refugees and included an emphasis on social relationships, their economic standards and family separations. Steel et al highlighted the need for culturally sensitive measures to assess the levels of trauma and the risk of mental illness for this ethnic group. These recommendations can be extended to the Maltese migrants in Australia, in particular females of this ethnic community who may have experienced pre migration environmental hardships and post migration adaptation trauma.

#### **4.3: Emotive and attributive factors for migrants in counselling acculturation stress**

Maltese migrants in Australia, in particular Maltese –Australian females, as members of a Maltese collective society may have experienced fear of social



marginalization from their community resulting in a state of separation from main stream Australian society. Maltese –Australian migrant women interviewed in Drofenik’s 1997 study reported feeling alienated and isolated as migrants in Australia. Migrants frequently express feelings of loneliness and problems with life satisfaction during the process of acculturating into a new society. In examining the subjective well-being and specific needs of migrant groups in Canada Goodwin, Cook and Yump (2001) found that there is a relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction for Chinese- Canadians. This report highlights the possibility that Chinese- Canadians, due to their native social collective practices fear social marginalization which in turn results in acculturation stress for some Chinese-Canadians. Goodwin et al recommends that therapeutic interventions need to target the promotion of social inclusion for the successful acculturation of Chinese Canadians and similar ethnic collective migrant societies. .

Neto (2002) found that low host country language competency, high co- national cultural maintenance, high incidence of acculturative stress and low satisfaction with life were the strongest predictors of social –adjustment difficulties for Portuguese adolescents in France. Neto reports that social models of acculturation have been known to omit the areas of affective and cognitive components which may be connected to acculturation. According to Neto cognitive and emotional components, for example life satisfaction in the host society, or feelings of acculturative stress during the adaptation process are important emotional factors to consider in therapy for migrant minority groups.

Tatar’s (2001) study of Soviet Union adolescent migrants in Israeli highlighted the necessity for inclusion of cognitive and emotive factors in counselling for migrants experiencing acculturation stress. Soviet Union adolescent migrants in comparison to their counterparts, expressed less satisfaction with their lives and reported less congruence between their self –concept and the ways in which they thought they were perceived by others. Pre-dispositional factors were taken into account in Tatar’s study and reportedly played a part in the adjustment process of acculturation. Factors of whether the migrant believed they had a choice in migrating and the perceived loss of previous support systems were found to be connected to the psychological adjustment of this cohort. Perceptions of Soviet adolescents’ parents expectations combined with demands for these adolescent to adapt to the new society were also found to be factors

connected to the psychological adjustment of Soviet adolescents in France. Tartar recommends that preventative measures should be adopted that address the possible mismatch or gaps of social understanding between immigrants and their host peers in targeting the reduction of risk to chronic alienation and acculturation stress for migrants.

Migrants frequently attribute the events of acculturation as their main cause of stress and therefore view their efforts of adaptation to the new society negatively. Paukert, Petit, Perez and Walker (2006) found that negative attribution was significantly associated with negative emotions and global attribute style. This study showed that negative attribution of life events impacted on the individual migrant's life, in many areas. Paukert et al report that acculturative stress was mainly associated with anxiety and recommends that therapeutic interventions focus on the reduction of negative mood and the application of increased relaxation training rather than in the induction of a positive mood state for migrants experiencing acculturative stress. It may be said that for minority migrant communities such as the Maltese- Australians therapeutic interventions that are holistic need to address the migrant's individual subjective and social well-being and the stage of adaptation or mal-adaptation. Therapeutic interventions that focus on social inclusion and individual acceptance models may address the individual or migrant group's sense of marginalization

#### **4.4: Bi-culture: addressing acculturative stress from a bi-cultural perspective**

Indications are that a portion of the Maltese- Australian community have experienced identity confusion and divided cultural loyalties in their efforts to assimilate in Australia. A therapeutic intervention that incorporates the effects of bi-culturalism may benefit Maltese –Australian females and their children.

Berry (1990) found that denying minority ethnic groups the opportunity to maintain their native culture can lead to mental health problems for migrants when the emphasis is to relinquish their native culture. Supporting the benefits of bicultural identities as a process of acculturation and reduction to stress during adaptation is the study by Sciarra (1999) into adaptation of Hispanic families in U.S.A. Sciarra's study highlights the benefits of Bicultural Effectiveness Training (BET) as a model for

counselling with migrants and their families. Members of migrant families can experience grief, loss, alienation, separation and conflict in the process of adjustment to their new environment. Family conflict due to adaptation can affect the natural family developmental process by inflicting stress between individual members of the family during their separate and combined efforts to integrate. According to Sciarra family conflict can be perceived within a family systems theory and acculturation stress can be reframed as intercultural conflict which is the giving to the individual the blame for what is really a system or family problem (Becvar & Becvar, 1988 cited in Sciarra 1999). Therapeutic interventions for members of families in conflict can be reframed as conflict between cultures in which each member has a point of view that is culturally determined. This approach reframes fundamentals of Family Systems theory into terms of intercultural conflict. According to Sciarra BET encourages a different kind of interaction where individual members of the family have the opportunity to accept and appreciate aspects of the other's cultural view in a dual acceptance of a bi-cultural perspective. Family members embrace the native cultural values and the dominant cultural values as part of a multicultural perspective. According to Sciarra, biculturalism can be described as the transition from intergenerational dysfunction to bicultural effectiveness. Success of treatment for migrants experiencing acculturation stress may be dependant on the understanding of the functionality of the family structure in their new environment within their own cultural perspectives.

Highlighting the benefits of a Bicultural model is the study by Arora, Inose, Yeh, Okubo, Li and Greene (2003) into Japanese migrant youth's adjustment to the U.S.A. Results indicate that Japanese participants maintained bicultural identities and managed to cope with related problems of both dominant and native cultures. Psychological well-being for migrants according to Arora et al, is related to the maintenance of the migrant's sense of belonging to at least one culture. Arora et al reports that Japanese self identity tends to shift in order to fulfill social roles and obligations of both native and dominant cultures. Japanese in the U.S.A. appear to be able to manage cross cultural relationships in their contexts, effectively. However these participants did encounter difficulties with racism/ stereotyping, prejudice, language barriers, and conflict regarding identity and values. Counselors may consider the BET model as a method of acculturation stress reduction and maintenance of a sense of

belonging and connection to cultural identity as part of an integrated model when addressing acculturation stress.

In contrast Beiser and Morton (2002) assessing dual cultural identity as a form of reduction to acculturation stress found that the maintenance of ethnic multiple identities was often a double edged sword for some migrants and their descendants. Beiser and Morton found that Southeast Asian refugees in Canada who retained a strong connection to their ethnic identity reported that this factor was a deterrent of socioeconomic mobility and not a guarantee of mental well being. Ethnic identity was found to make resettlement more enjoyable but according to Beiser and Morton did not protect Southeast Asians in Canada from unemployment and racism.

#### **4.5: Acculturation stress for descendants of migrants.**

Children of migrant families and descendants of first generation migrants are required to negotiate their acculturation process. According to Delores (1997) twelve percent of children and adolescents in the U.S. suffer from some form of mental disorder and the figure would be much higher if the problems of immigrant children were included. Children's psychosocial and adjustment problems, school failure and deviant behaviors are frequently associated with acculturation and assimilation problems and migrant children are at increased risk of mental health difficulties. Unresolved acculturation stress for Maltese- Australian females may continue to affect their descendants throughout their lives.

Although migration and acculturation stress is not automatic for migrants and their children, unrecognized acculturation stress combined with some migrant's resistance to counselling may disadvantage migrant descendants in their struggle with acculturation stress. According to Delores (1997) minority migrant ethnic groups including Asian American, Hispanic and Native Americans were found to terminate counselling after the initial sessions at a much higher rate than Caucasians. Resistance to counselling by some ethnic groups can be attributed to distinct cultural differences and attitudes towards counselling. It is possible that early termination of counselling by some migrants may be due to the lack of understanding of the culturally specific therapeutic needs of the migrant.

According to Delores (1997) it is essential to address the inner and outer worlds of migrants and their children. Counselling services may be limited in addressing the specific needs of migrants and their descendants due to inadequate culturally specific assessment tools and difficulty in communication due to language differences between the counselor and migrants. Delores reports that educational staff including counselors, nurses, teachers and health educators should be trained to recognize stress and refer children to support services, in particular migrant children experiencing psychosocial and psychological problems. Culturally appropriate counselling in schools may be instrumental in detecting acculturation stress for descendants of migrants such as Maltese- Australians females. Migrant children may possess different levels of coping skills due to the process of acculturation. According to Esquivel and Baptiste (1994) migrant children from low socio economic status and those who are not able to access appropriate support services appear to be at increased risk of experiencing psychological distress during acculturation.

Mc Goldrick (1982) reports that the presenting issues for migrants in therapy may not appear to be related to a culturally transmitted stress because often the migrants are unaware of the stress attached to the migration and the transitional process of acculturation. According to Mc Goldrick individual migrants and migrant families can be supported by the counselor's understanding of the migrant's culture and the migrant's methods of interaction and the factors that impede the migrant's growth.

Mc Goldrick (1982) reports that migrants and migrant families are in the continual process of reviewing family needs and prioritizing family values from the past in preparation for the launching of their family's next generation. Mc Goldrick highlights the benefits for migrants in counselling when the therapist has an understanding of the migrant or migrant family's experiences and their difficulty in negotiating past cultural and family values into the new and present cultural values. Maltese- Australian females and their children would benefit from counselling that acknowledges and recognizes their own culturally specific struggles during their acculturation process

## **Chapter Five**

### **5: Trans-generational acculturation stress: for second generation Maltese- Australian females**

Children of migrants are frequently considered resilient and able to adjust easily to their changing environment (Markowitz, 1994). In multicultural societies, addressing the psychological and support needs of the descendants of minority migrant groups such as the Maltese community and in particular female descendants of Maltese-Australians may be a form of retaining and preserving community well-being.

A growing literature on immigrant families has implicated acculturative stress as a risk factor for mental health problems during the process of adaptation for migrants and their families (Lau, Mc Cabe, Yeh, Garland, Wood and Hough, 2005). Despite the rising numbers of second generation immigrants globally Springer-Veriag (2003) reports that there is little information regarding the successes or failures of their integration into host societies, and the reasons why children of immigrants may fare better or worse in some countries. Supporting the need for further research into acculturation stress affecting descendants of migrants is the study by Kuo and Roystirear (2004) who report that the migrant population in Canada is the fastest growing population however remains the most understudied.

According to Harker (2001) in 1997 twenty percent of the American population was either first generation migrants or children of immigrants. Harker found that inter-generational assimilation tends to lower the protective familial and communal mechanisms experienced by migrant groups. Indications are that the acculturative process for the first generation Maltese community in Australia, especially for women during the mass migration period of the 1950s 60s and 70s may have been a difficult one that included stress connected to migration, major cultural differences and a forced cultural homogeneity. Second generation Maltese report confusion of identity and a lost sense of belonging to their ethnic community in Australia (Borg, 2005, Vella, 2006 unpublished) Understanding trans-generational issues and specific cultural needs in

therapy is a necessity for therapists working with minority ethnic groups such as the Maltese- Australian women and their descendants.

According to Burney (2004), second generation Latin Americans in Australia report poorer levels of mental health when compared to first generation Latin American migrants. Burney reports that conventional assimilation theories hold that with time migrants adopt the cultural patterns of their host country (Alba & Nee, 1997 cited in Burney, 2004). This linear model of the assimilation process assumes that latter generations of migrants should be more advantaged in comparison to first generations; however this theory is not always supported. Recent research into CALD migrants' adaptation does not support a linear model of the assimilation process (Rumbaut, 1997 cited in Burney, 2004). Burney reports that a critical analysis of these results may provide valuable information regarding the process of assimilation and the decline of psychological and physical health among CALD migrants and their descendants living in Australia. Higher levels of hardiness were connected to lower levels of perceived stress and a sense of control for both first generation and second generation groups of Latin Americans in Australia. Ethnic social involvement was stronger for first generation migrants than for second generation migrants (Burney's 2004). Similarly descendants of Maltese-Australians report less involvement socially in their ethnic community in Australia (Borg, 2005) and report feelings of alienation from their Maltese- Australian community (Vella, 2006).

Min (1999) believes that it is possible for second generation migrants to experience their family's segmented acculturation which can result in these children's blockage of academic learning, difficulty in social mobility and psychological well being. According to Min trans- national ties from both host and home societies assist children of migrants in maintaining their cultural, social and psychological ties to their native country.

The experiences of second generation migrants may be directly linked to their own, their family or ethnic group experiences of adaptation, in their cultural context. Second generation Maltese -Australian females witnessing their family's stress of adaptation may be affected by their families acculturation stress. Reitz (2004) reports that accurate assessment of the support needs for second generation migrants should include the migrant's context and the ways in which the context in both the migrant

family's and host societies can directly and indirectly influence the experiences of second generation migrants.

### **5.1: The migrant family: main transmitter of cultural, social values and acculturation stress**

Hartley 1995 found that the cultural differences and diversity of the Australian society is changing in nature for descendants of migrants when compared to their parents. This difference is frequently experienced in the blurred cultural boundaries for individual members of migrant families. The family is often regarded as the site of change for its members and this change may be observed in individual members' behaviors. Hartley reports that large gaps exist in research into cross- cultural studies particularly in the area of second generation issues for migrant descendants. According to Hartley, the message for the therapist is that they may be required to deal with issues of identity crisis when counselling descendants of migrants. Harley reports that descendants of migrants may require particular understanding and a witnessing of the cultural complexity that sometimes exists within the migrant family, in their new community and in the context of their native community.

Indications are that Southern European ethnic minority groups in Australia such as the Maltese community have continued to maintain strong family ties. Burnley (2005) examined the geographical factors of three generations of Greek and Italian ancestry in Sydney, Australia. These results indicate that second and third generation migrant Italian and Greeks have evolved through acculturation mobility however they have retained an ancestral identity which is reflected in their familial ties and cultural traditions. The choice of area of residence for second and third generation Greek and Italians in Sydney was found to be based on familial and individual choice. This indicates that while living conditions and means of communication varied overtime between generations, cultural linkages to the older ethnic community survived. Southern European closeness and family ties may be a method of general family practice however indications are that for Maltese –Australian families, family closeness may serve a dual role which is a method of maintaining family traditions but also a method of preservation against adaptive stress.



Kwak (2003) in researching the influence of culture on the family, and its continued cultural transmission across generations found that migrant family members' contrasts in core culture values can threaten the harmony of immigrant families. However when the family is embedded in their own culture values and are supported in their ethno cultural social network, immigrant families are able to maintain healthy inter generational relations. According to Kwak (2003) immigrant families, especially those from collectivistic societies, sustain positive family relations in part by delaying their pursuit of individual autonomy. This can be applied to the Maltese community in Australia, especially to Maltese- Australian females. Close family ties as part of a traditional Maltese family network and close geographical residential proximity for Maltese- Australian families can be interpreted as traditional Maltese family practices; however indications are these practices were tactics of delay of the pursuit of individual autonomy as a result of the family's enmeshment or adaptation difficulties (Cahill & Taft, 1978).

According to Kwak (2003) culture distance between the culture of origin and the new society can threaten the harmony of intergenerational relations. This can also be applied to the cultural distance between the Maltese and Australian cultures ( Briffa, 1998) which may threaten Maltese families' harmony of intergenerational relations. Cultural contrasts in language, religion, family and social practices enforce dual responsibilities of cultural preservations for second generation Maltese – Australians in particular female descendants.

Retrospective examination of difficulties experienced during migration and adaptation for immigrant Soviet Jewish women in the United States found that they experienced family enmeshment (Markowitz, 1994). Family enmeshment during migration and adaptation can be argued to be both a source of protection but also a delaying factor to acculturation. Markowitz argues that on one hand immigrant youths are considered flexible and adaptable, able to absorb culture shock, making them very good bridges between their native parents and the host societies but on the other hand children of migrants can be alienated from both their parents and the host society. This places them at risk of social and psychological distress, especial during difficult stages of their development. Markowitz (1994) reports on the messages that a migrant family transmits to its descendants and how teenagers interpret and act on these messages. Results indicate that although family enmeshment for Jewish families was a powerful

adaptive mechanism, the enmeshed family can produce children with strong tendencies for psychopathology, dependency, grandiosity and mistrust. Soviet Jewish adolescents showed high levels of stress as they attempted to cope with dual demands of personal acculturation and the cultural expectations of their families. Migrant parents can perceive their children as an extension of them selves and over look their children's need for autonomy. Markowitz found that Soviet Jewish women in USA reported that they have learned to live within their family context and have managed change and expectations from others, learning to blend these into their own goals and desires however they have achieved this at the cost of losing, or at least suppressing parts of them selves. These findings can be applied to female descendants of Maltese-Australian women that may be at risk of psychological distress due to pressures to cope with dual ethnic identities and cultural contrasts that suggests the risk of transmission of intergenerational acculturation stress.

Borg (1999) found that Maltese second generation adolescents report family enmeshment resulting in family conflict. According to Borg, Maltese- Australia adolescents report more issues of parental control and family stress compared to non immigrant Australian families. Borg identified various reasons for these family conflicts which included the Maltese traditional authorititarian styles of parenting, strongly influenced by religious believes and Maltese- Australian descendants' and their families' migration experiences and stress of adaptation. Limited research has been conducted into the specific support needs for second generation Maltese, in particular Maltese females suffering from stress and family conflict connected to emigrational and adaptation issues (Borg, 1999).

## **5.2: Family conflict- generational gap connected to acculturation stress for second generation Maltese- Australian females**

On an individual level, family relations between Maltese- Australian family members were frequently found to be distant and not an open system of communication. According to Borg (2005) it is possible that Maltese- Australian parents are operating from a basic psychological needs levels on Maslows Hierarchy of needs model (1970 cited in Borg 2005) where they provide high levels of basic needs but have not had the opportunity to establish intimacy with their off springs. A possible

explanation for the lack of Maltese parent – child intimacy may be that Maltese-Australian parents' insecurities generate from the need to retain a sense of cultural connection for their families. It can be argued then that second generation Maltese - Australians experience increased levels of trans -generational psychological stress incurred from their parents insecurities of losing familial and culture connection. According to Borg (2005) second generation Maltese- Australians describe their parents as bad listeners and traditional, resembling “broken clocks” (Borg & Fisher, 2006) that stopped ticking and became culturally stagnant at the time of migration. Cultural fixation and enmeshment of family boundaries for Maltese- Australian families may be responsible for major generation gaps between first and second generation Maltese- Australians.

According to Borg (2005) Maltese-Australian parents report that they retain close ties with their children because they wish to protect their children from experiences of hardships similar to their own experiences. Borg found that Maltese Australian descendants are likely to experience more life events due to their adaptation process than their Anglo –Australian counterparts. Borg reports that as second generation Maltese- Australians shift towards the non-traditional culture they are likely to experience a mismatch between their parents' care giving needs and their own psychosocial and psychological needs. Counselling descendants of Maltese- Australian women experiencing intergenerational acculturation stress needs to take into account traditional family practices but also family conflict related to adaption difficulties.

Reporting on the transmission of acculturation stress which results in a generation gap is Lau, Mc Cabe, Yeh, Garland, Wood and Hough's (2005). These authors describe an “acculturation gap-distress hypothesis” for high risk Mexican American youth and their families and question whether faster adapted Mexican America youths are the ones more distressed when compared to slower adjusted adolescent migrants. Intergenerational rifts between faster acculturating children of migrants then their parents may be connected to an acculturation gap that has implications for risk factors of maladjustment for migrant children and descendants of migrants.

Discrepancy between the generations of Maltese –Australians adaptation may be having a negative effect on both the psychological and psychosocial development of Maltese-Australian descendants (Borg, 2005). Children of Maltese parents in Australia

report that they perceive their parents as caring however they experience notions of helplessness generated from their parents need to control them. According to Borg (1999) Maltese-Australian adolescents also experience lower self-esteem compared to Anglo –Australian adolescents. In researching the subjective well-being for Maltese-Australian adolescents as part of their integration and acculturation Borg found that when psychosocial variables were accounted for, the strongest predictor of life dissatisfaction was loneliness for Maltese descendants. These results particularly apply to female descendants of Maltese –Australian women affected by acculturation stress.

Supporting affective predictors as indicators of life satisfaction for migrant second generation Portuguese in France, Nito (1995) found that loneliness is an important indicator of a poor quality of life and may indicate social and interpersonal disconnection. This study recommends that although psychosocial factors have been shown to be very important to satisfaction with life however there is a need to investigate the affective predictors of positive and negative influence of life satisfaction for second generation migrant minority groups.

Sluzki (1978) presents an alternative perspective to family conflict related to acculturation. Sluzki reports that this conflict may be a part of the normal adaptive process for immigrant families. Lau, McCabe, Yuh, Garland, Wood and Hough (2005) support this theory and report that acculturation stress is not necessarily connected to family conflict in Mexican American and Asian families. Therefore it is necessary to separate the effects of acculturation gap-stress from other types of family mismatches (Lau et al, 2005).

On the other hand Mc Goldrick (1982 cited in Proctor 1998) argues that stress that is connected to the migration or acculturation process for migrants although may be buried or even forgotten can continue to influence the individuals and family's beliefs and values for long periods of time. According to Mc Goldrick, migrants are more vulnerable in the present, the more they have repressed in their past. Mc Goldrick believes that these repressions will have a profound impact on the messages migrants will transmit to their children even though the subject may never be directly addressed.

Proctor (1998) reports that specific understanding in counselling is required to understand the implications of high psychiatric illness amongst the Maltese- Australian community that may be related to the migration and adaptation difficulties. Without the knowledge of where the family have come from and what motivates their historical

stories across generations, both spoken and unspoken and that shapes their beliefs, attitudes and fears, it is difficult to consider supporting Maltese- Australians and their descendants in counselling. Second generation Maltese- Australian female descendants in therapy require a cross cultural method of counselling that addresses their subjective well-being in the context of their dual cultural roles. Counselling that permits these women a voice to distinguish their cultural identity and allows them the understanding of their own and their families' process of healing of past trauma may prevent chronic acculturative stress for this sector or the Australian community.

### **5.3: Trans-generational stress for second generation Maltese- Australian females**

Drofenik (1997) in her study of Maltese women migrants and their descendants in Australia reports that Maltese women are the keepers of Maltese culture and have transmitted some important and necessary aspects of their culture to their children. According to Drofenik younger Maltese Australian women although far removed, have witnessed the migration experience through their families. Maltese families are traditionally matrilineal and there is normally a close relationship between mothers and daughters, a tradition that ensures Maltese women are linked and supported through every stage of their lives within their own families.

According to Drofenik (1997) first generation Maltese women were requested to assimilate in Australia and became “faceless”. First generation Maltese migrant women who were fully employed and whose children were in child care witnessed deterioration of traditional gendered cultural practices. First generation Maltese women's voices became muted and subdued in the Australian public arena. Women experienced traditional gender role confusion as they left their traditional nurturing roles as full time careers of their families for full time employment. According to Drofenik, this provided a contrast of enculturation for their off springs compared to their own. The absence of grandmothers who traditionally supported the cultural and family influences for grand children in Malta was severed and hastened the loss of cultural identification. According to Drofenik racism, gender and class discrimination in Australian institutions promoted alienation for some first generation Maltese and their children from their culture. Maltese women and their daughters possibly

internalize this stress and possibly relinquished aspects of their cultural identity, including their language.

In a Feministic framework Skodra (1989 cited in Proctor 1998) focused on the unique needs of ethnic women and their response to the disappointment of their changing life situations due to immigration. Skodra believes that disempowered women in a therapeutic relationship may be further disempowered in a differential powered relationship due to social construction of the professional being the keeper of knowledge. For second generation Maltese –Australian females experiencing internalized emotional difficulties therapeutic interventions may require a combination of empowering, a narration to address their family history within a cross cultural counselling framework and an understanding of Maltese culture. Counselling for Maltese- Australian women and their female descendants is required to focus on supporting the maintenance of personal choice of identity and freedom to combine their dual cultural backgrounds.

## Chapter Six

### **6: Cross –Cultural counselling: incorporating specific cultural factors in an integrated counselling model for Maltese-Australian females**

The current literature research has focused on the counselling needs of minority migrant groups experiencing acculturative stress, specifically Maltese- Australian females and second generation Maltese- Australian females experiencing adaptive difficulties. The research investigated the specific cultural factors that may be considered when counselling Maltese-Australian females. First and Second generation Maltese- Australian women may require a unique model of cross -cultural therapy which combines a number of theories tailored specifically to address the cultural, interpersonal and subjective needs of Maltese –Australian females experiencing trans-generational acculturative stress. Culturally specific counselling may have increasing benefits for migrant minority groups such as Maltese- Australians compared to general counselling.

The current research indicates that second generation Maltese- Australian females require therapeutic interventions that address their specific cultural needs. This study found that there are indications that Maltese- Australian females have experienced their own or their family's acculturation stress. Also that unacknowledged social and cultural differences for Maltese females in Australia may have impacted on the emotional and psychological well being of Maltese- Australian females. Therapeutic interventions are required to address these factors for Maltese-Australian females from a cultural appropriate perspective. Emotive factors that may influence counselling for this ethnic group may include aspects of life satisfaction for Maltese-Australian females, self worth issues, identity confusion and factors of loss of belonging to their community. Counselors may be required to consider these factors from a feminist perspective in order to capture the possibility of added adaptive stress for Maltese- Australian female descendants that may be connected to traditional gender roles and social inter-dependency.

According to Moodley and Palmer (2006) psychological distress is difficult to measure generally in psychotherapy, and investigating psychological distress for ethnic minority patients is increasingly challenging. The American Psychological Association

(APS), (2002) in its guidelines for psychotherapists encourage the field to develop awareness for the need to practice from a culture-centered manner. The APS recommend that it is necessary to interpret psychological results keeping in mind the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the person being assessed.

Sabnani and Ponterotto (1990) highlighted the difficulty within multicultural counselling in that the phenomenon of cross-cultural counselling must include so many cultural variations of specific ethnic groups. However these authors stress that now is the time for ethnic focused counselling research that focuses on the specific long term agenda for the field of counselling psychology.

Limitations mainly begin to surface when psychotherapeutic ideas are applied to ethnic minority groups without a reference to a knowledge base of meanings that an illness has in the particular culture or how distinct culture shape the language or emotions (Bhugra & Bhui, 1998 cited in Moodley & Palmer, 2006). Therapeutic practices can be problematic without a picture of the influences that are culturally sensitive for the individual migrant in counseling. According to Moodley and Palmer (2006) the link between culture and mental illness must be considered within the socio-cultural environment of the individual. Moodley and Palmer report that the interplay between the individual and society is a complex one and one that has only been minimally acknowledged in psychotherapy. These authors believe that research and practice lack the rigorousness of theory in dealing with the interplay of biology and human societies and their relationship to psychopathology.

Constructing psychopathology and psychological experiences from a Westernized view regardless of the therapists' theoretical orientation involves both technical skill and theoretical awareness of a particular orientation. According to Moodley and Palmer (2006) successful therapeutic outcomes should be governed by empirical and theoretical validation criteria which are aimed at supporting the individual towards a more integrated personality. Moodley and Palmer provide an example such as the theoretical framework of psychoanalytic therapy which contains a construction of the idea of a horizontal split between the conscious and unconscious mind that is formulated and accepted in Western European counselling psychology. However according to Moodley and Palmer an ethnic minority migrant may not conceptualize a vertical or horizontal split of the self and psychotherapy derived from such a theoretical framework and such theories may not make any sense to them.



Moodley and Palmer report that ethnic minority groups use different conceptual models to represent their illness. It is therefore of utmost importance when counselling minority migrant groups that the therapist is both technically skilled and theoretically knowledgeable in the culturally specific needs of the individual such as Maltese –Australian females.

Marsella and Pedersen (2004) highlight three culturally bound elements that affect the present Westernized counselling psychological framework and these include the egocentricity of the self, where individuals are seen as self contained and autonomous units, the mind-body dual which separates psychological and physical problems, and the assumption that culture is a vague superimposition on the otherwise biological reality. Cross- cultural counselling may be required to advance beyond such rigid culturally bound syndromes.

Multiculturalism is a reality that cannot be ignored by practitioners if they hope to meet the needs of their diverse client groups. Neufeldt, Pinterits, Moleire, Lee, Yang, Brodie and Orliss (2006) found that there is a broad definition in psychotherapist's conceptualization of diversity factors. This study found that although nearly all respondents integrated an awareness of cultural issues, integrating multicultural knowledge with practical skills varied widely between practitioners.

According to Corey (2001), psychotherapist are required to integrate cultural factors in the assessment and treatment process when treating migrant minority groups due to the increased diversity of client problems and the diversity of the client population. Corey reports that harm can come to clients who are expected to fit all the specifications of a given theory whether or not these values are consistent with their own cultural values. Corey believes that rather than stretching the client to fit the dimensions of the single theory, practitioners must make theory and practice fit the unique needs of the client. Some practitioners recommend the creation of a separate multicultural counselling and practice based on a theory that addresses the cultural diversity of the individual, however according to Corey it is possible to integrate, expand and modify the current theories to include a multicultural component. Counselors are charged with developing a knowledge base of various cultures also to be aware of their own cultural heritage and to have skills to assist culturally diverse clients in meeting their needs within the realities of their culture.

### **6.1: A Trans-Theoretical Therapeutic model for Maltese- Australian second generation females**

The challenge in cross- cultural counselling according to Corey (2001) is to find practical strategies for adapting the techniques you have developed to support clients in questioning the impact their culture continues to have on their lives and to make decisions about what they want to change. An integrative perspective involves broadening the base of the contemporary theories to encompass social, spiritual and political dimensions of the culturally diverse individual in counselling. Although integrating theoretical and practical practices of counselling have provoked debates regarding single or integrated theoretical frameworks. The issue remains that the practitioners' own philosophical assumptions will be their main guide and must be consistent with their own personality and belief system. Corey recommends the formulation of creative models and techniques that may be extended to meet the needs of migrant minority groups. Maltese –Australian females and their descendants may benefit from a cross- cultural counselling model culturally specific to the Maltese community that incorporates theoretical and practical perspectives addressing unresolved issues relating to migration and adaptation difficulties.

Sharf (2004) supports the creation of models that incorporate the best fitting constructs from existing models to address the needs of the client. Sharf recommends Prochaska and Norcross' (2003) trans-theoretical model. According to Sharf, this model is an approach that transcends or goes beyond specific theoretical constructs and encourages therapists to create new, innovative techniques by drawing the most effective ones from other therapies therefore picking and choosing constructs that address the client's readiness for change.

In a trans-theoretical model, a Constructivist Narrative perspective may connect with the specific needs of Maltese- Australian females. This model may target Maltese- Australian females' issues of migration and adaptation that include factors of cultural contrasts, family and social interactions and emotional factors. The model may also be directed at addressing identity confusion, low self esteem and issues of ethnic belonging for this sector of the Australian community. Constructive Narrative therapies that focus on the individual's cultural needs in a technique that is the telling of the individual's story may examine the client's story and look at the ways to tell it

differently or to understand it in another way. In doing so, the individual finds it helpful to put the problem outside of themselves or their family, thus externalizing it. Narrative therapists look for unique outcomes, positive events that are in contrast to the problem-saturated story. The therapist can then deconstruct a problem or story and reconstruct a preferred story which can help defeat a problem rather than hold on to the individual's stories of the problem.. This becomes the beginning of a new story. According to White and Epsom (cited in Shaft, 2004) a social constructionist takes a view of the world and focuses on the importance of the stories and alternative ways of viewing them. The narratives or stories that are people's lives may represent political, cultural, economic, religious and social influences. When these stories are problem oriented or negative, they affect the attitude of the client, their family or ethnic community. Maltese-Australian females may benefit from reconstructing stories of trauma and hardships connected to their adaptation. Reconstructing their stories of stress of adaptation may assist Maltese- Australian females in viewing these stories in a way that promotes emotional and psychological release of unresolved experiences connected to acculturation stress.

According to Proctor (1998) the themes of connectedness and belonging expressed in the "collective" over the "individual" and the importance of rituals and story telling of culture is missing for the Maltese community in Australia, these points to a need for therapy that addresses the missing context for the Maltese- Australian community. Proctor reports that it was evident in her findings that methods of counseling that includes empowerment for Maltese- Australians and the voicing of their stories of adaptation is beneficial for Maltese- Australians.

Kandanza (1998) provided examples of how Maltese –Australians have attempted to narrate their experiences of migration and acculturation as a minority group in Australia in exhibitions of Maltese Folksong "Ghana". The Maltese folksong Ghana creates an atmosphere and a way of celebrating the understanding of the influences of being a member of an ethnic group in Australian. It is a form of narration of Maltese history and heritage that the Maltese community shares within their Australian culture. Ghana narrates the treasured landmarks of Malta that were a fundamental part of the Maltese identity and their connectedness to Malta and its heritage. According to Kandanza, "Ghana" recalls memories that describe and maintain a connection with Malta for the Maltese, away from their homeland and unites them

together in their efforts to retain their Maltese identity. Ghana is seen to be a way of expression for the Maltese community in Australia, a narration of their experiences as a nation and a way of retaining and projecting their heritage and identity to future generations. Forrest (2001) believes that the elements that define individual and ethnic group identity are contained in and communicated through the history, mythology, folklore, art, music, literature, religious beliefs and practices of ethnic culture (Isaacs, 1974 cited in Forrest, 2001) and can be explored in music that creates and maintains an ethnic identity. Music, like other arts, may be used to maintain identity at three distinct yet interrelated levels. On a social level music may help to define and articulate social identities and boundaries, it can also serve as a form of communication and information about the world as it is understood by people at a particular time, and as an aliment of identity formation in a particular place and within a particular cultural and social context.

Maltese-Australian females in addition to the narration of their connection to past ethnic group experiences that has impacted on their lives may need to connect with the meaning of life in the context of their added responsibilities of life that requires embracing dual cultures and dealing with a sense of identity confusion and cultural belonging issues. According to Proctor (1998) Maltese professionals interviewed expressed the hope that therapist working with Maltese families would focus on aspects of identity, the meaning of life and the acknowledgment of pain which are connected to alienation and perhaps contribute to Maltese-Australian family members' distress and psychological ill health for this sector of the Australian community.

Maltese migrants and their descendants in Australia may not only struggle with cultural differences and a sense of loss of belonging to the Australian community but also with the sense of missed opportunities to formulate their identity after their independence from colonial rule (in 1974). The Maltese, historical have struggled with ethnic self identity and self image both in Malta and Australia but Maltese – Australians have the added pressure of formulating an ethnic identity away from their historic and sociopolitical context (Proctor, 1998) There fore it can be argued that second generation Maltese –Australians females whose ethnic group is struggling with a national identity and who are away from the context of their historic and cultural influences may have difficulty in achieving a sense of community belonging. For these reasons Maltese – Australian females and their descendants may need to contemplate

the meaning of life in an existential manner in connection to the commonalities with other individuals in their Australian community.

Existential theory, although imbedded in Western European history does have many similarities to Eastern thought which may connect with Maltese- Australians. In general, Existential psychotherapy appears to strike a universal chord because it emphasizes the individuals' responsibility and their struggle with mortality, isolation and socio-cultural factors that may be overlooked for diverse communities. Vontress and Epp (2001) describe a "cultural anxiety" which refers to the anxiety that individuals experience when they move to or visit a new culture. According to these authors studying existential themes as they relate to cultural values of different groups serves to widen the application of existential therapy. Recognizing the external pressures of discrimination and oppression can help therapists increase their understanding of the forces that have an impact on existential themes and crises. According to Vontress and Epp research indicates that existential counselling is particularly relevant for work with cross –cultural issues.

Existential therapy also acknowledges gender factors that highlight the aspect that cultures and societies may differ in the gender –role expectations placed on men and women. Existential theory emphasizes that gender role stereotyping does affect the way individuals deal with existential themes. Gender specific Existential therapy is a contribution of humanistic psychology that encourages a gender self –actualization to rise above the stereotyping. Existential therapy, addresses many societies' expectations that women need be subservient to men and focuses on women's need to deal with how to make choices authentically. Being aware of the clients' gender-role stereotypes can often assist the therapist in identifying those existential issues that the client fears (Vontress & Epp, 2001).

Incorporating an Existential theoretical framework within a trans- theoretical model for Maltese- Australian females and female's descendants may address the meaning of life and sense of loss of belonging to a community, their identity confusion and gender role expectations for Maltese- Australian females. According to Proctor (1998) the Maltese- Australian community's migration experience and assimilation process was identified as a major influence on the sense of belonging for Maltese – Australians. Frustration and an unacknowledged "need to belong" to a community that they can relate to was identified as a factor that may influence Maltese -Australians.

A trans- theoretical model may address the needs of Maltese –Australian females by the narration of their and their ethnic community's life stories, and may also focus on the existential need to gain a sense of membership and identity in their community, The third aspect in a trans- theoretical model for Maltese- Australian females may address family relations and the transmission of their families' acculturation stress.

Borg's (2005) study recommends that awareness of Maltese families' discrepancy between the care-giving provisions by Maltese parents and the psychological and psychosocial needs of their children, with a focus on parent -child conflicts, is required for contemporary Maltese –Australian descendants. Borg (2005) highlights the need for therapeutic interventions that address the effect of acculturation stress and family conflict in Maltese- Australian families. Proctor (1998) supports the need for Family therapy for Maltese- Australian families that is focused on family relationships, the sense of belonging, family connectedness and is generally enhancing in the relationships between individuals, within the family and their community.

Bowen's Intergenerational approach is a Family Systems therapy based on the individual's ability to differentiate his own intellectual functioning from their feelings which then can be applied to family therapy with the aim of assessing the ways that the individual can project their own stresses onto other family members. Often this is achieved in a triangular relationship between the parents and the child. In the concept of Bowen's multigenerational transmission process the functioning of parents and grandparents and other family members can be influential on the pathology of their descendants. Bowen observed that highly dysfunctional families who are vulnerable to stress lack the differentiation of thoughts and feelings and project this to their children. Bowen looked not just at the immediate family but at previous generations for the projection of stress on later generations (Sharf, 2004).

Therapy that is directed toward individual differentiation that addresses parent and child conflict may prove helpful to enmeshed Maltese – Australian families, in particular for Maltese- Australian females. Family therapy that focuses on the effects of transmitted acculturation stress and family members' adaptation process may address family conflict for females of Maltese- Australian families, family connectedness and relationships. This method of Family therapy may also act as a preventative therapy

against transmitted acculturation stress for migrant migrants groups such as Maltese-Australians.

Limitations of this literature research include the difficulties of generalization. It is possible that some individuals of second generation Maltese- Australian female descent in the Maltese –Australian community are well adapted in Australia. Researching the needs of minority migrant groups in Cross –Cultural counselling is an enormous task. This study was restricted in its limitations and may not have considered other major factors that may influence adaptation of migrant’s minority groups. These limitations may include factors that focus on migrants in between cultures or the effect of mixed marriages in Maltese-Australian families and their adaptation process. Also the combination of the preferred integrated theoretical model presented for counselling this ethnic group may be only one of many model combinations that may be well suited in counselling Maltese- Australian females. Despite its limitations this study points to the necessity for further research in the areas of investigating the specific factors that influence cross cultural counselling for minority ethnic groups such as the Maltese community in particular Maltese- Australian females.

This thesis supports previous studies in its recommendation for the provision of effective mental health services and counselling needs for minority migrant groups and their families such as the Maltese- Australian community. Assessments that recognize the specific therapeutic needs of minority migrants groups may act as a preventive method against the transmission of acculturative stress for second and later generations of migrants. Child and School Psychologist may have a crucial role in detecting the transmission of acculturation stress in migrant children and second and later generations of migrants.

The settlement of Maltese migrants in Australia, in particular Maltese females, and the impact this has had on their mental health has not been well documented. Further research is required in this area in order to address Maltese- Australian females’ higher prevalence to mental illness. The distinct cultural, social and individual factors that effect first and second generation Maltese- Australian females in counselling must be further researched in order to provide this sector of the community with the coping strategies that are required to minimize the effects of trans-generational acculturative stress for Maltese- Australian females.



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