‘Making it or Breaking it’ in Iceland :

An Exploration of Expatriate Spouses’ Adaptation Strategies and Experiences.

Cynthia Ulrike 鸿秀 Stimming

Lokaverkefni til MA–gráðu í Félagsfræði

Félagsvísindasvið

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Abstract

Expatriate spouses play a vital role in the decision to quit or pursue an assignment overseas. This study is an exploration of the experiences, themes and dilemmas affecting spouses in Iceland. Iceland's tumultuous weather, its people's 'herd' mentality and the company's interdependent relationship with the spouses all combine in a heady recipe resulting in 'Making it or Breaking it' in Iceland. The social reality of migration and its effects are explored; if the expatriate spouses' migration adaptation strategies and experiences can be regarded as transformative, then migration can be seen as evolutionary and not corrosive. Loneliness and ecstasy, to satisfaction and acceptance is the migrant's story, sorely testing their resilience and the very fabric of their identity.

Key words : expatriate, spouse, migration, adaptation, strategies, transformative, resilience, Iceland, assignment, overseas, company, migrant, identity, "making it", "breaking it".

Útdráttur

Makar erlendra starfsmanna spila stórt hlutverk í ákvörðunum um að takast á við verkefni fjarri heimahögum og ákvörðunina um að ljúka þeim. Þessi rannsókn er könnun á þeirri reynslu og þeim erfiðleikum sem hafa áhrif á maka erlendra starfsmanna íslenskra fyrirtækja. Þessi rannsókn lítur á það hvernig erfitt veðurfar, "hjarðhegðun" íbúanna og samband fyrirtækjanna við makana veldur því að útkoman er 'Making it or Breaking it' á Íslandi. Litið er á hvernig búferlaflutninga geti verið bæði vandamál og tækifæri til þróunar fyrir einstaklinga. Saga innflytjandans einkennist af einmanaleiki og gleði, til sátta og fullnægingar, það er saga innflytjandas, sem reynir bæði á þol maka erlendra starfsmanna og á sjálfsmynd þeirra.

Foreword

This Master´s thesis is a 40 unit requisite research project in Sociology completed at the School of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

Somehow this thesis of migrant- expatriate integration has evolved of itself in the same way that I have experienced my own journey of creating and putting down roots in Iceland. Somehow, the stars seemed to be aligned correctly for me to write.

I would not have been able to undertake this project if it were not for the inspired tutelage and guidance of my supervisor, Professor Guðbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, nor without the patience and forgiveness of my beautiful family, my boys, Gabriel and Pétur especially, my husband, Friðrik.

To the company that picked up the batton I threw to them and ran with it; who will hopefully be benefitting from the lines of dialogue I opened up for them with their expatriate employee spouses, I thank them for their support and enthusiasm. I would like to thank, especially those company employees at the Human Resources department who worked to contact and promote the project.

And mostly, thanks (!) to the resilient and vibrant spouses who I met through the project for their cooperation and frankness. May they find their land of milk and honey where ever they are!

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1 Introduction

This study was undertaken with great personal interest since I have had the privilege of experiencing being both part of an expatriate family and being a migrant in Iceland and elsewhere. Therefore, having chanced upon a number of expatriate mothers in a social capacity my curiosity was thus awakened. A brief preliminary literature review revealed the potential depth of the problem of expatriate attrition and an expanding number of expatriate 'spousal' and 'family' studies indicated that there was room for more exploration. There remains room for more insight to be gained from research into the experiences and understandings, situations and circumstances that expatriate spouses find themselves in, particularly the phenomenon that leads to successful or failed expatriate assignment to Iceland.

The enthusiasm of the company encouraged me to continue with the investigation into the spouse's role in supporting the expatriate employee. The gender aspect was interesting and the negative and positive cognitions involved with migrant adaptation gave indications of possible areas to delve into; a topic ripe for qualitative elaboration. Iceland, being a remote island nation, with assimilationist mentality, having in recent years experienced an influx of both expatriate workers and less glamorous, service and primary industry migrant workers provides a colourful backdrop for examining migrant settlement. In addition, since migrant adaption tends to be viewed as either successful or unsuccessful, the concept of resilience lends insight to the proposition that this dualistic understanding can be seen in a more holistic light, i.e. that the expatriate spouse's adjustment journey can be seen from a less judgemental perspective and more as a stage in a longer, greater life journey.

The study asked the questions, how did the expatriate spouses decide to come to Iceland? What held them to Iceland and what were their

experiences? The exploration centred mainly on the meanings and cognitions that spouses connected with their experiences; how these ideas linked with their adjustment process and how they decided to play this out in their lives in Iceland.

Academic discourse on migration theory, migration adaptation as well as research conducted on expatriate adjustment and an overview of Iceland is presented in the following literature review. Subsequently a chapter on methodology will explain how this study was conducted, followed by the findings of this study. The discussion chapter will ensue with conclusions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Migration theory

The 21st century has seen migration studies become a specific field of academia. Extending to all aspects of social existence, the exploration of migration is an interdisciplinary academic subject. Here to, there is no single theory that encompasses migration (Castles, 2010). Castles explains that there is no common conceptual framework for migration studies. Researchers tend to begin from different foundational understandings; the main issue being, why some people become mobile and others not?

This postulation, from a discipline-based bias is certainly not academically neutral. The underlying attitude to migration has overwhelmingly negative tones, something bad that should be reduced, and ignores the fact that it is a very normal part of modern societal relations. Within this also lie tensions between theoretical perspectives of the functionalist and historical institutional approaches (Castles, 2010).

Generally, it is understood that migration is a phenomenon which occurs in waves, although always occurring to a greater or lesser extent subject to social change. Castles (2010) illustrated the various reasons for migration being linked to the expansion of the capitalist economic system in the 16th century and the inception of the world market. This occurred through cross-boarder trading and labour flows. It was a tumultuous time followed by the age of colonialism; the advance through newly colonised lands, the expansion of imperialism, the development of new structures in society, nation-state building, military expansion, violence and conflict fuelled displacement of persons. A mighty army of administrative personnel, military agents; slaves and indentured workers characterised this period (Castles 2008).

Subsequently, the 19th century saw migrants who were propelled by the changes to society brought by industrialisation of the West. This age is known as the first age of "mass migration" (Hatton and Williamson, 1998 in Castles 2010). The post World War II period, marked by the forces of globalisation gathering momentum is known in migration studies as the second great wave of migration (Hatton and Williamson, 2005 in Castles 2010). Castles and Miller (2009 in Castles 2010) state that we are still afloat upon the second great wave of migration; a wave that has extended to all corners of the earth and witnessed both the extraordinary and disastrous impacts of globalisation[1].

This modern age of migration, has picked up momentum over the past thirty years (Castles, 2010); three per cent of persons globally are recognised as immigrants, although there are far more people who move within their own countries than internationally. Migration is impacted by an accelerated process of globalisation. The hallmark of modern migration is the establishment of regions (and cultures) of emigration and immigration; from developing to developed nations[2] Castles (2010).

Castles, in his paper in 2010 voiced the underlying political motivation behind migration studies that drives public policy. That is, that migration is generally viewed as problematic due to various negative social implications. Migration information is collected by those policing the international borders, especially developed countries. Thus, the rhetoric surrounding migration is framed by the narrative-sayers, that is, those who view it as problematic and worthy of address, rather than migrants or the sending countries[3]. It is seen as a decision initiated by the migrant; social and structural forces are ignored in their role in compelling migration (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). However, the inequality and social justice issues that belie the forces of migration need

[1] In contrast, the first wave of mass migration was driven by the trans-Atlantic economy (Castles, 2008).

[2] This refers to 10 – 25% of the population of OECD states (Castles, 2010).

[3] Olwig and Sorensen, 2002, in Guðbjörg 2010.

to be tackled instead of aiming to stem migration; a goalwhich is unrealistic, given the modern globalised world asserts Castle (2010).

2.2 Migration to Iceland

Iceland has a long and established history of migration, itself being settled in 786 AD. However, after enjoying a relatively long period of isolation, the island saw its first substantial wave of immigration in the 1970's. These migrants were motivated by better job opportunities due to the burgeoning economy and the expanding fishing industry in Iceland. Even in 1995 migrants constituted less than 2% of the population of Iceland; i.e. implying migrants who were born abroad, with both parents of foreign birth. In 2009, immigrants accounted for approximately 8.04% of the total Icelandic population (Statistics Iceland, 2011. See graph 1).

The economic boom times of the late 1990's and early 2000's saw a mass of foreign workers moving to Iceland, mostly to work in the fisheries industry and service sector (such as cleaning and nursing care) and some to participate in the ill-fated financial sector. In 2004 the work force was boosted by the erection of a large power plant, a construction boom and an aluminium smelter. Migrants streamed into the country to keep up with labour demand. These workers were largely only temporarily employed in Iceland and relocated after their contract was finished.

By 2008, when the Icelandic financial crash occurred, Iceland's migrant population had risen dramatically to 25,265, or 8.1% of the population (Statistics Iceland 2009a). Latest statistics, post 2008 show that the immigrant population remains high at 25,693 (Statistics Iceland, 2011a). With many immigrants applicable to receive government unemployment benefits and pensions, many immigrants simply have chosen not to return to their country of origin, either because the employment opportunities are not better there or they still see a future for themselves in Iceland (Skaftadottir, 2010).

A breakdown of the immigrant population by nationality shows that the largest groups of immigrant nationalities are Poles (37%) and Asian

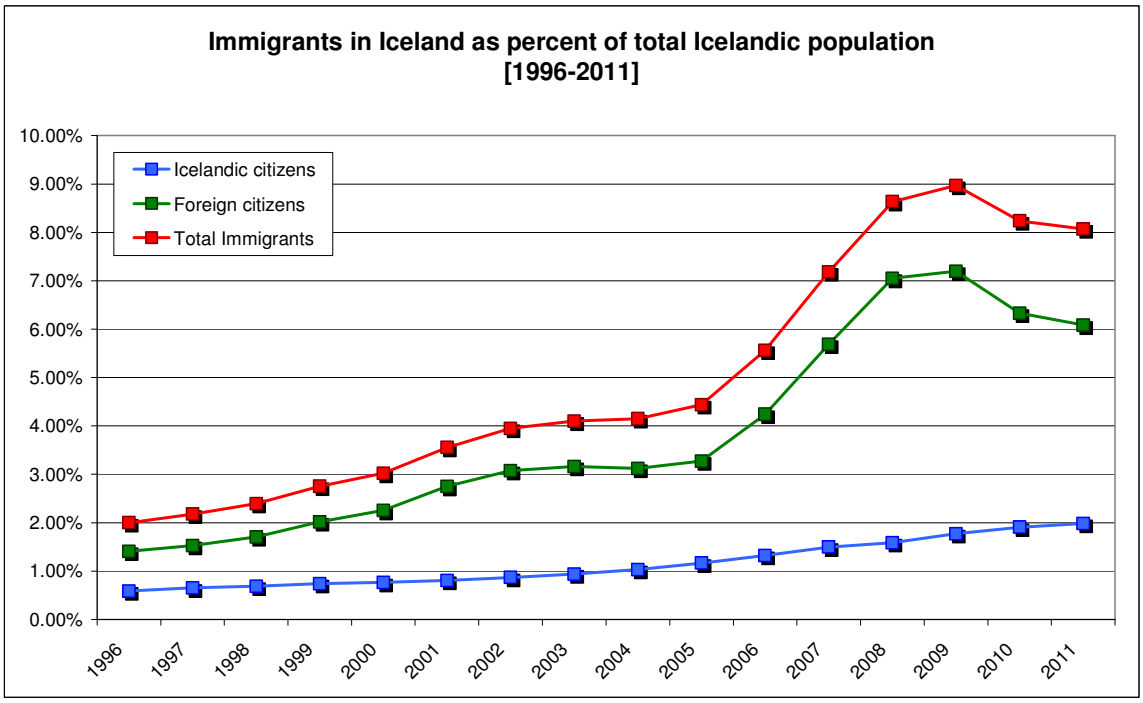
immigrants (constitute 15% of the immigrant population) (Statistics Iceland 2011b). The most numerous Asian nationality in Iceland are the Filipinos (1341[4]) then Thai (908), and Vietnamese (495) (Statistics Iceland 2011b. See Graph 2). Foreigners of European nationality constituted 76% of the total immigrant population in 2011; made up of (from largest immigrant populations to least) Poles, Lithuanians, Germans and Danes (Statistics Iceland 2011). Interestingly, in 2011, the average age of immigrants was quite low, between 20-53 years old, the modal age being 28 years old (Statistics Iceland 2011c). This indicates a young immigrant group.

Since many of these immigrants have now settled in Iceland, considering the island their permanent home, the incidences of family unification occasions for immigration to Iceland have increased. This has been specifically in relation to Asian immigrants who regard their family network as vital to their wellbeing and their understandings of identity (see Skaftadottir, 2010). In addition, study is an increasing reason for migration.

Work permission is related to nationality; European Economic Area (EEA) and European Union migrants are able to settle in Iceland and have the right to work automatically after three months from entering the country[5]. All other nationals are required to hold a work visa before entering Iceland. If a migrant enters the country without the right to work it can be difficult to negotiate residency and employment permits if circumstances change for them.

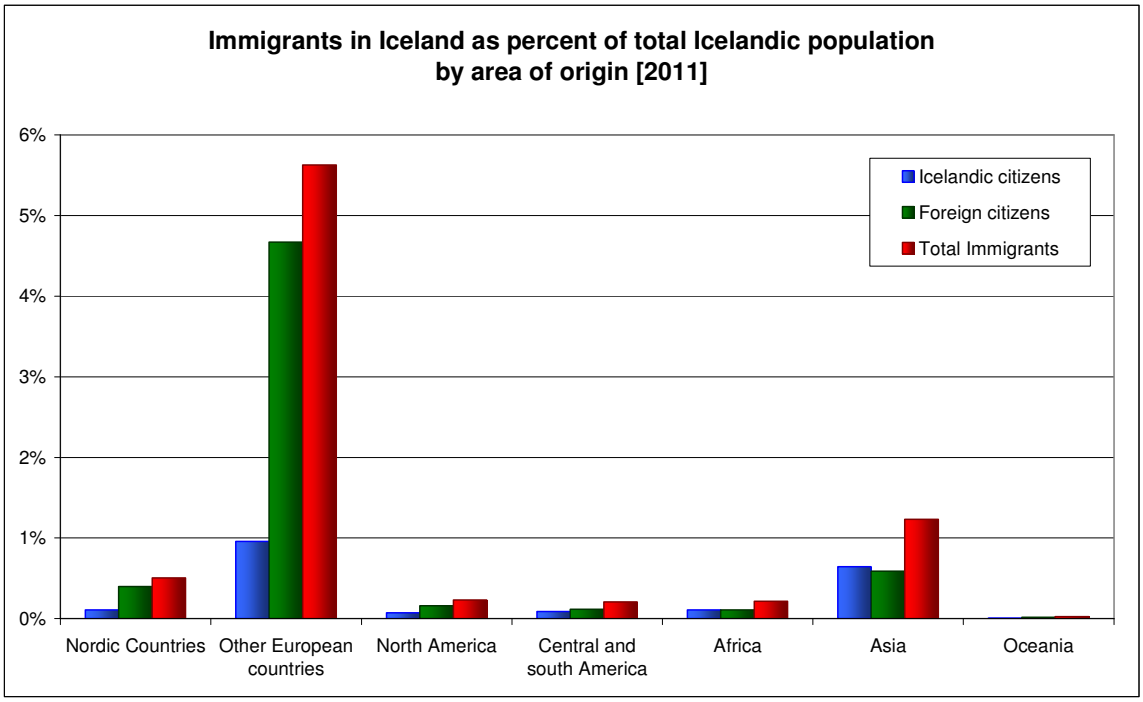
[4] This number has increased 600% since 2000. (Statistics Iceland, 2011)

[5] Icelandic Law : Regulation on Foreigners (No. 96 of 2002 and 27of 2003 augmented by No. 20/2004 and No. 86/2008)



Graph 1. Immigrants in Iceland as percentage of total Icelandic population (Statistics Iceland, 2011)

Graph 1 illustrates the percentage of immigrants, compared with the native Icelandic population between 1996 to 2011. Immigrants are regarded as those who have parents, both of foreign background. Note the steep increase in immigration after the boom years of 2005.



Graph 2. Immigrants in Iceland as percentage of total Icelandic population by area of origin (Statistics Iceland, 2011)

The above graph 2 is a breakdown of the Icelandic immigrant population by area of origin and also indicating how many of them have naturalised in 2011.

2.3 Icelandic Culture

Iceland has dense layers of social networks, which are seen clearly in the entire fabric of Iceland's strong civic tradition and lively civil society initiatives (Sveinsson, 2000). In order to understand this statement it is necessary to delve into the structure of Iceland and its societal and physical formation.

Iceland is a volcanic island of 103,000 km² in size (just larger in land area than South Korea, at 100,210 km²) located smack in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean's rift. It was created by a volcanic plume approximately 10 million years ago and is still volcanically active. It lies just below the Arctic Circle at 63° - 65° North. The weather can be violent or still. During winter, the lack of sun light and short length of daylight hours can affect the mood and psychological functioning, especially for migrants who are not

acclimatised sufficiently. The summer brings an excess of light and this can also cause disturbing effects for those not used to these conditions.

Since settlement, Vikings and their descendents have occupied Iceland, where today the current population lies just over 319,000 individuals (Statistics Iceland, 2012). Its society and culture are very homogenous, due to the island's remoteness and isolation. Until recently Iceland has endured the Danish yoke, to gain home rule in 1904 and national independence in 1944. Relevant to the equation is Iceland's relatively late industrialisation, occurring after independence, with the arrival of American dollars from the establishment of the NATO base in the South of the Iceland.

In their appraisal of life in Iceland for women, Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir (2010) mentioned the demographic fact that there are fewer women than men in Iceland. The study which Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir undertook, attempted to outline in a study on interviews with 24 women, the comparative situation for women in Iceland, stating that Iceland's particular societal characteristics contributes to the decision to move away and return to Iceland to live. That is to say, women are more likely to leave Iceland. In comparative analogy, the research was conducted on the populations of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands; results concluded that women are more likely to emigrate permanently from these communities. This finding was congruent with demographic trends in various regional areas, such as the east coast of Iceland, but could not be conclusively representative of Iceland as a whole.

Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir's 2010 study identified a number of characteristics of Icelandic society which endured in the testimonies gathered from respondents. These included a strong trait of individualism, but contrasted, ironically with a strong peer pressure and a need to confirm to societal (perceived) expectations. Essentially women voiced the relative trade-offs associated with living in Iceland and their experience of living abroad and this included the familial and societal networks of support at home in Iceland verses the 'freedom' felt in being 'themselves' overseas. This

dichotomy illustrated the phenomenon of female emigration and return to Iceland.

Skaftadottir's 2010 article on her study of Filipino women, described the situation for foreigners in Iceland, where their relative lack of ties and societal networks contributed to their overall inability to access Icelandic society. Accompanying this conundrum is the lack of information provided to assist the transition to Iceland for foreigners. Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir (2010) sustain this assertion, stating that women in Iceland found it much more difficult to access social services on returning to Iceland in comparison with other countries which they lived in.

One of the greatest barriers to participation and integration into Icelandic society is the language. Some migrants are even uncertain of their right to remain and work in Iceland because of the difficulty in accessing information on work rights (Skaftadottir, 2010) and also the lack of translation into foreign languages.

In addition to this language difficulty, many migrating to Iceland find themselves in a society very different from what they are used to. The position of the woman in Icelandic society situates them in a particular context. According to the internationally recognised Gender Gap Report (2011), Iceland ranks first on the list as the most integrated gendered society in the world. What this means in practicality is not that there is absolute equality between the sexes in all areas of life, as Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir indicated (2010), but merely that these gender inequalities are played out in different contexts, such as in the home as opposed to in the workplace. The pressure on women to fulfil traditional familial obligations as well as to live up to the expectations applied to them from a gender-equality standpoint can be immense. In addition, the high cost of living and the demand for material goods intensifies the pressure on Icelandic women to work and provide.

2.4 Iceland, migrant women and discrimination

From the literature on the adaptation of migrant women, it is clear that female migrants are subject to a double vulnerability; that is being female and being a migrant (Tse and Liew, 2004). Timur (2000) emphasised the negative experiences of women migrants in settlement, outlining various forms of psychopathology such as depression. It is established that women are prone to higher levels of psychosomatic illness than men (Furnham and Shiekh, 1993, Berry and Sam, 1997). In addition women migrants are more likely to experience partner violence (Raj and Silverman, 2003). Indeed, in Iceland, foreign women are particularly vulnerable to partner violence and occupy a majority of women's shelter beds (IHRC, 2011a). Their partner-dependant financial as well as visa status makes them less likely to report abuse.

Anti-foreigner sentiment or discrimination against migrants overtly or tacitly can put migrant women in an even more vulnerable position. Onnurdottir and Sigurjonsson (2008) found that xenophobic attitudes increased as the migrant population increased. The feeling amongst 40% of Icelanders was that Icelanders should be privileged over foreigners in being recruited if work was scarce. The majority of Icelanders were found to believe that foreign workers competed in the Icelandic job market in a way which caused average salaries to be lower. A 2008 study by Hjalmsdottir and Bjarnason, it emerged that adolescent attitudes reflected a predominant anti-foreigner sentiment present in Icelandic society. Adolescent racially oriented gang violence in Reykjavik also represents the nature of the conflict (Morgublad, 2001).

Latent discrimination such as privileging natives over foreigners in job recruitment as well as explicit acts of foreigner prejudice operate as barriers to foreigners in all categories to acculturation. According to McWhirter (1991) a perceived discrimination can act as a barrier for migrants in practicing assertive behaviours; a sense of self-confidence is necessary for authentic adaptation.

In Iceland, a study conducted by Gudjonsdottir (2010) uncovered the harsh working conditions and high pressured work of foreign women in the hotel industry. As the economic situation worsened in Iceland since the financial crash in 2008, the recession which ensued intensified negative feelings toward Polish immigrants (Bereza, 2010).

Carrasquillo and Shea, (2000) found that migrant women are discriminated against when they are not awarded legal work and residency status. They are forced to accept low paying jobs. The loss of status which women migrants receive puts them also at risk of a general loss of status where they experience a reduced ability to exercise personal control over their lives since they are lesser able to acquire material and social resources (Gutierrez, 1990). The compounding factors of reduced psychological wellbeing, host country language difficulties as well as their dependent status, due to lack of legal rights are additional hindrances for migrant women.

2.5 Globalisation

Migration theorists have long struggled with the concept of context as the framework for the migration process. Hein de Haas (2010:228) illustrates, "…we need to see migration as (1) a process which is an integral part of broader transformation processes embodied in the term "development", but (2) also has its internal, self-sustaining and self-undermining dynamics, and (3) impacts on such transformation processes in its own right. This contextuality has important theoretical implications.

"Because migration is not an exogenous variable, but an integral part of wider social and development processes…" - Hein de Haas (2010:228)

Situated within this context of migration are the forces of globalisation adding an added dimension to the already complex processes occurring. McKinnon (2011) emphasises that globalisation is the Western world's most influencing phenomenon in the modern age. Globalisation is a type of transformation which affects all areas of life; particularly, the economy, culture and society. Globalisation is the transcending of distance; where once

these logistics were once insurmountable features of life. Even the virtual world created by modern society makes the idea of distance redundant in many ways.

Accompanying these extraordinary changes is the development of a new type of migration, a 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' culture between countries benefitting or losing their educated and skilled workers. Unlike previous waves of migration, globalisation sees this flow of employment occurring on a vast scale. This may even hinder the development of a country due to the loss of the majority of a class of workers (Beine, M., Docquier, F. and Rapoport, H., 2008). Compounding formal migration regulations, in the form of migration visas specifically for the skilled and educated, Beine et al. (2008) found that a developing country's loss of educated personnel will be significantly detrimental to its labour force.

With businesses being the principal drivers of this phenomenon, interregional networks and systems of interaction and exchange have developed (McKinnon, 2011). That is to say, the transcending of physical boundaries and national, official markings of land, in all aspects of society is what distinguishes the process of globalisation.

Arjun Appadurai was a principal theorist of globalisation during the 1990's and coined the concept of "-scapes", where imagined communities were organised in *technoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes* and *ideoscapes*, unbridled by the limitations of physical territory[6]. This illustrates how the process of globalisation was unfolding; not at a physical location but according to conceptual changes on the world scale.

The impact of these conceptual changes occurs physically; by the migration of people, goods and services across boundaries. These transactions can be instantaneous, as in internet activity or real movements of persons travelling. Globalisation has made it possible for all these transactions to occur in a 'compressed' manner and with greater magnitude. The implication of this is the faster flow of all goods, services, persons and ideas; greater

[6] Arjun Appadurai, 1996.

information exchange over the local, national and regional areas of the globe. Stephen Castles (2007) illustrates this in terms of the unequal distribution of riches between nations; he cites how in 1970 the share of the world's wealth was distributed such that 68% was held by 'advanced countries' and the rest by developing nations. In the year 2000, this had increased to 82%. This enormous leap in redistribution of wealth occurred primarily due to the mechanisms of globalisation (Freeman, 2004).

Within globalisation is the phenomenon of transnational remittances and brain drain. It implies different things on different levels of society; socially, it interrupts family formation and social networks; economically it contributes to a sizeable part of a country's gross national product (World Bank, Migration and Remittances Factbook, 2011). Culturally, academics talk about the dilution of culture and the blending of culture into a grey featureless mono-entity (Koven and Goetzke, 2010).

Whether or not globalisation is a uniquely new process **(**Kaul, 2011; Anthias, 2001) cannot undermine the fact that the intensity of this phenomenon is at a rate which has never been at such as scale before. There are more foreign born nationals in Iceland than has ever been in history. There are more international business, educational, social and cultural connections in Iceland than has ever been before. What this implies is that irrespective of the government's role, globalization is a force which transcends regulations and policy.

2.6 Migrant integration and theoretical framework

When addressing the issue of integration of migrants, it is necessary to understand *what* it is that immigrants are integrating *into*. According to this definition, different measurements of integration can come about. Castles et al. (2002) commented that when discussing integration there is an inaccurate perception (especially reflected in political discourse) that society is a monoculture, a homogenous whole, in contrast to the reality that society is diverse.

There are many different types of social divisions, as Payne (2000, in Bilton, Bonnett and Jones et al., 2002 : 70) indicates; such as gender, class and ethnicity but all persons have multiple membership in each of these groups which may assume variable importance at different times. This point has implications for setting the measurements of immigrant integration. It can be assumed however that despite having membership in many different parts of society, immigrants in general do recognise that there is such an entity as 'Icelandic society' in general. This idea may be a vague reference, an awareness of belonging to a greater community which make up the Icelandic nation but it is nevertheless an analysable concept. Indeed such acknowledgement has its basis in conceiving of Iceland as another place outside the migrant's homeland. It is inconceivable that the immigrant came to Iceland without establishing some sort of generalisation about the place and the people of the country of settlement.

Despite this issue, it is important not to get too caught up in ideas of multiple identity and membership in society. Even though this aspect is important it must be recognised that any framework has systematic levels to it which relate to the general and the specific. The general refers to 'society' and the specific relates to the 'individual' (Rubinstein, 2001).

Linked to this issue of value orientation is the emphasis on particular aspects of integration which play a greater role in steering the trajectory of settlement. For instance ethnographic studies (Bilton, Bonnett and Jones et al., 2002, Rubinstein, 2001) see culture as the central motivational concept in integration and thus not emphasising with equal weight the role of structure or agency.

Congruent with this description is Valtonen's (2001) multidimensional approach to immigrant integration. She states that integration is the "process by which immigrants (including refugees) become part of the social, cultural and institutional fabric of society" (2001 :251). This definition is based on the principles that integration entails the unimpeded ability to take part fully in society and which its institutions are all available to immigrants (2001:251).

Indicators also characterise the various models of integration in Western industrial countries. Castles and Miller (2003 in Freeman, 2004) indicate that various models of integration are evident in certain countries. These are differential exclusion (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), assimilation (Iceland, France, Britain, and the Netherlands), and multiculturalism (the United States, Canada, Australia, and Sweden). Valtonen (2001) asserts that the foundation for these societies are relative power exchange and interaction between the various actors in society producing either a homogenous society (either assimilationist or 'melting pot' model) or an ethnically heterogenous society, such as the Canadian 'mosaic' society (2001:252), high in cultural diversity.

Iceland can be regarded as adopting a model of assimilation due to its various policies encouraging Icelandic cultural dominance and insistence on language and cultural assimilation. This can be evidenced in the society and State's lack of accommodation, culturally and institutionally to the needs of immigrants. Rafnsdottir and Omarsdottir (2010) mention the difficulty of accessing translated information about legal rights for the migrant. Ethnic organisations tend to be self established and funded privately, as opposed to by the State.

Assimilation is regarded by Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojako (2005) as the relinquishing of one's culture and identity to adopt the new culture as one's own. It is regarded as a unidirectional process where the host society exchanges very little with the newcomers and simply accommodates them into existing institutional structures (Freeman, 2004). It must be stated that assimilationist societies represent an ideology directing acculturation of the migrant individual and as a group, and embody the contrary reality of cultural exchange (Valtonen, 2001). In contrast, integration is a two-way process (Valtonen, 2001:252 supported by Castles, Korac and Vasta ,2002 and Chavez ,1991). (There are degrees of exchange and retention of cultural aspects and structural ties.)

Despite the unidirectional intention of assimilation ideology, cultural exchange permeates society through novel customs, symbols and cuisine,

however resistant the society is to foreign influences. This is poignantly evident in the evolution of the Icelandic language despite tendencies to purism.

Cultural and personal transactions are also performed by the host community with migrants entailing an exchange of meanings which are inherently affected by attitudes of acceptance and exclusion of the Icelandic native population. A recent study showed that the majority of Icelanders perceived discrimination of foreigners to be present in Icelandic society (IHRC Report, 2011b). The impact of foreign culture on the Icelandic population will be influential on immigrant attitudes, as a measurement to some extent of their acceptance in society, overtly or tacitly.

As a result of integration's many facets different perspectives and theories have been developed on the process of integration including Weinfeld's (1997 in Castles, Korac, Vasta, et al., 2002 :33) 'nested process'. This theory is based on the idea that integration occurs in a sequential and graduating way, adapting through concentric circles, consolidating relationships among family, friends then the wider society. Nee and Sanders' (2001) 'forms of capital' model of integration considers all the characteristics that an immigrant brings as capital and can be utilised when and as needed helping them integrate into society. Esser (2003) views integration as an adaptation in a number of different areas and levels, a multilevel polycentrism which occurs at different times. These theories illustrate the importance of taking a multidimensional approach to assessing immigrant integration and that the two-way exchange of foreign and native understandings is an on-going negotiation.

Eva Hoffman (2009) illustrated how identity is constantly being challenged and regenerated with successive experiences. The identity, on initiating migration, undergoes an overhaul and is challenged, with new perspective, but dangerously nostalgic. This process may produce varying degrees of anger or elation, and then finally, acceptance of the new surroundings and circumstances. These characteristics and issues will be expanded upon further below.

2.7 Migration, acculturation, resilience, empowerment and identity

Key to the exploration of adaptation to new circumstances is Vertovec's understanding (1999 in Castles, 2002) that the process of settlement is characterised by complex flows. The different factors influencing integration are a 'constellation' which impact the 'velocity, trajectory and outcomes' of the settlement process. Not in the least is the personality and interior life of the migrant themselves.

As indicated above, there is little consensus as to what constitutes a successful migration event. The literature on acculturation and integration of migrants into society show that both subjective and objective (or structural) indicators will contribute to a broader picture of integration for individuals (Montgomery, 1996).

Both geographic and psychological studies are limited by their necessary disciplinary basis but are useful for the present study in providing an understanding of various concepts. Geographic studies (Oderth, 2002) focus on the dimensions of space and place and their significance in migration. Such studies accord lesser significance to the role of agency and the individual actor. Within the realm of psychology the aspects of the individual psyche is examined and the larger themes in society are not considered to the same depth. Ward and Styles' (2005) study into the psychological impact of migration on British migrant women [7] provides personal insight into the factors influencing the settlement experience.

By the very nature of the discipline emphasis is placed on particular aspects. This does not mean that it is not possible however to produce a balanced and objective picture of the integration process.

The interpretivist paradigm is essentially the exploration of meanings associated with identity negotiation. Interpretivism is essentially the

[7] See also : Burgelt, P. T., Morgan, M., & Pernice, R.'s (2008) study into migrants moving to New Zealand from Europe.

exploration of the subjective mind and provides the theoretical basis of symbolic interactionism; that things only assume meaning through assignment to them by each individual and involve an ongoing process of negotiation through social interaction with others (Crotty 1998:72). For the immigrant a new social structure will challenge established meanings (Blumer, 1969:86 in Crotty, 1998) and force people to make reinterpretations, especially of their personal identity (Denzin, 1992 in Crotty, 1998).

Rubinstein's (2001) theory provides a guide for the construction of identity. He postulates that society is based on the interplay of structure, culture and agency which applies to identity creation as well. Bordieu and Wacquant's (1992) understanding of the *self* is challenged, stating that individuals are not only 'pregnant with history' (i.e. structural factors and cultural heritage) but also agency (Rubinstein, 2001). In his theory Rubinstein views change as opportunity, and illustrates how decisions are made according to the various dimensions considering costs and benefits. The sum of these considerations all contribute to a personal resiliency of the migrant which balance self knowledge and knowledge of options available (Glanz and Van der Sluis, 2001). Migrants then act on this information making decisions which affect their lives to a greater or lesser degree.

When negotiating identity, a constantly changing entity, a growing literature illustrates how resilience can be a key feature of determining impact of disturbance or perturbations. This is both relevant to persons and ecosystems, as evinced by Adger (2000); Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) as well as Daniel and Ortmann (2011). In an academic article by Daniel and Ortmann (2011), resilience is elucidated in its various applications across the disciplines of Geography, Psychology and the new 'climate change' field. Waller (2001) (in Daniel and Ortmann, 2011: 3) describes resilience as being the "positive adaptation to adversity by humans, irrespective of pervasive risk factors and uncertainty that undermines society."

Daniel and Ortmann (2011) elaborate that resilience operates on a continuum which lies between 'proactive' and 'reactive' strategies, both attempting to reinstate equilibrium after a disturbance in the system. An

entity (or individual) with a proactive resilience deals with perturbation by absorbing change as best as it is able to. A proactive method of resilience aims to maximise its flexibility in adapting to new conditions and demands.

A reactive approach tries to minimise the change that can occur by a disturbance, by re-enforcing its status quo and making the established system resistant to any change[8]. In contrast, acting prophylactically, with anticipation is the antithesis to these two methods. Anticipation attempts to predict and prevent damage to the current system before the disturbance occurs. Resilience is an ability to cope with the situation after the event. In lay-man's parlance, it is the characteristic of being able to 'bounce back' after an interruption to the system.

Migrants, as individuals have a greater or lesser quality of resilience inherently and reactively (Barnard, 1994). The degree of cultural distance between the migrant's native (or known culture) and that of the host country is a significant factor affecting resilience of an individual (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2011). For example, Skaftadottir (2010) names the necessity of acquiring a competency in Icelandic language for migrants as a barrier to cultural adaptation in Iceland. This example demonstrates how an external feature of the host country, the important role of its native language, can be seen as a risk factor to promoting resilience and thus acculturation.

Barnard (1994) states the individual characteristics which promote or are risk factors to resilience include personal psychological make-up, familial characteristics and the wider social and environmental context. Barton (2002) mentioned that personal factors include both a biological and socio-relational aspects such as physical health, temperament and intelligence, positive out-look on life, positive self-perceptions and how one relates with others. Barnard (1994) goes on to state that these internal qualities of resilience promoting factors have a sense of self-mastery and personal locus of control which makes migrants feel that they are in charge of their own destiny. Part of this is also the ability to relate with others and accept

[8] Daniel and Ortmann, 2011: 3

external influences which are beyond one's own control (Coutu, 2002) and still find meaning in life. Individuals who are able to demonstrate a sense of flexibility and react innovatively, almost uncannily are also associated with being resilient (Block and Block, 1980 cited in Bonanno, 2005). It is through the transactions of these various mechanisms, features and contexts that resilience operates (Kirby and Fraser, 2004) through adversity. Resilience is a dynamic characteristic more than a fixed attribute. Furthermore, risk and protection can be conceptualised as polar opposites, and resilience emerges from the interplay between risk and protective factors.

Missing from the migration research for many years were the psychological aspects of acculturation; including the more internal aspects of the migrant's experience, their subjective understandings and strategies, how they cope with stress and the difficulties of the process of migration. Until the 1980's migration literature was dominated by economics and labour market outcomes (Sam & Berry, 2006; Timur, 2000). Leading migration research was being conducted in the discipline of psychology where studies were conducted into the challenges of migrant resettlement. The studies focused on mourning, uprooting, alienation, poverty, discrimination, and identity (Ehrensaft & Tousignant, 2006).

Migration leads people to meet with a new cultural context in the host country. This new context brings about psychological and socio-cultural changes for migrating people. These changes are known as acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006). A migrant individual's reaction to the migration related changes is largely determined by personal, social, cultural and economical resources.

Although changes as a response to *acculturation* may involve psychological conflict, such changes may also take place smoothly through a process of culture learning and culture-relinquishing. The latter process refers to positive adjustment and may take place at a personal and social level. In this process, relatively stable psychological changes and subsequent outcomes as a response to the demands of acculturation are referred to as *psychological adaptation* in the migration literature (Berry, 2006).

Until recently, the research on migrants' adaptation has tended to study the pathologies and victimisation experiences among migrants, thus negatively biased. However, in line with recent shifts in the field of mental health, the literature has started to reflect the more positive aspects of adaptation in development rather than the psychopathological. The constructive aspects of migration experience and migrant's positive adjustment and resilience in the host countries have started to be the focus of research (e.g. Abuzahra 2004; Kramer & Bala, 2004). In these studies, sensitivity to elements of resilience and coping rather than pathology has been emphasised.

In the case of migrants, development toward the positive is more complex and multifaceted as they might face multiple factors of adversity. Migrants most often experience something akin to a "new-born" baby situation in a new cultural environment, considering their limited host language skills. In addition to this, they might experience losses of relationships, status, familiar environment etc., which present as additional challenges.

In the migration context, the most important resilience outcome corresponds to gaining power and control in the migrant's life as a response to changes. One of the concepts in the literature which indicates this process is *psychological empowerment*.

The construct of *empowerment* is often discussed in relation to discourse on disadvantaged groups (community psychology) and corresponds with the conceptualisation of good psychological adaptation. Empowerment is traditionally utilised as terminology in literature on situations of stigma and exclusion present in a group of individual's lives, often a minority (Fitzsimons and Fuller, 2002). In such a case psychological adaptation imputes the situation of negotiating changes brought by the challenges of acculturation and involves finding opportunities and achieving one's goals sometimes even beyond the person's initial imagining (Berry, 2006b).

Psychological adaptation equates to Pedersen's "growth" or "educational" model (2000); additional skills and gains are made that may not have been accomplished in any other context by the migrant. This implies some kind of

transformation as a result of the migration experience, which is more than absence of pathology or psychological problems. This resembles resilient reintegration, involving what Richardson (2002) regards as a "reintegrative or coping process that result in growth, knowledge and self- understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities" (2002:310).

With the above conceptualisations in mind, empowerment can be considered as the indication of resilience for understanding psychological adaptation among migrant women. In this way, individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours are linked to matters of social policy and social change (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).

The Empowerment Scale can be a helpful way of assessing migrants wellbeing. Nuthall (1995, cited in Wowra and McCarter, 1999) developed this scale and utilised it in the study of different populations including a sample of college students and then later, with immigrants (Dalgard, Thapa, Hauff, McCubbin, and Syed, 2006). Others such as Hall and Nelson (1996) stated that empowerment was defined as possessing a sense of mastery and perceived control over daily living and a sense of one's own agency. This was regarded as *personal empowerment*, which was integral to emotional well being.

2.8 Moderating factors, strategies and stages of migration

Migrants enter the acculturation process with *different strategies* which reflect their attitude; Berry (2006b) grouped these strategies into four : *assimilation*, which entails not maintaining the individual's cultural identity and seeking daily interaction with other cultures; *separation* which refers to holding their original culture and avoiding interaction with others; *integration* which refers to both maintaining one's own culture while having daily interactions with other groups; and *marginalization* which refers to little interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relationships with others. Integration strategy was reported as the least

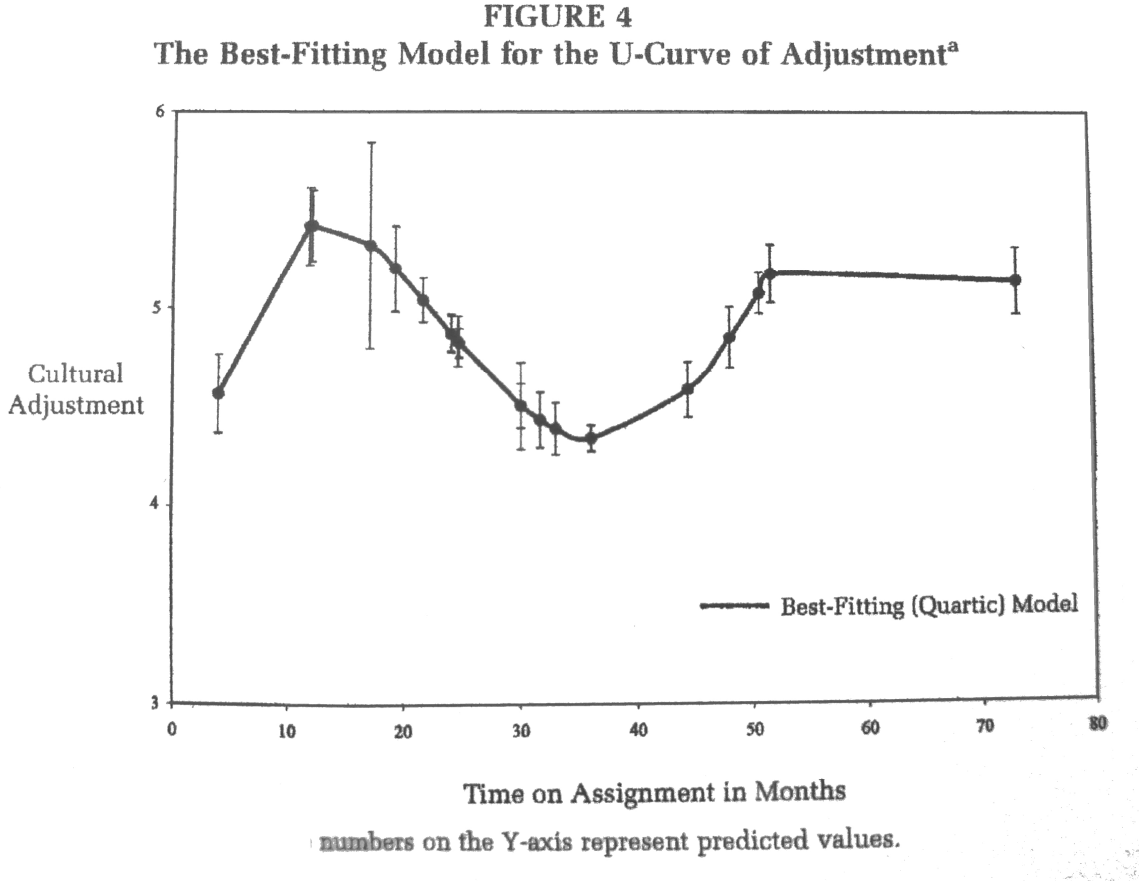
stressful for acculturating individuals or groups among all four strategies (Berry, 2006b). Integration is also found to be linked to the lower levels of acculturation stress, better mental health, better quality of life and higher life satisfaction (Berry, 2006b), and hence it can be regarded as a factor conducive to resilience.

As with strategies, other factors that moderate migrant adaptation include different life phases which the individual goes through (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000), pre-arrival expectations (Caliguiuri et al., 2001), the nature of the host-society (cultural distance and social / civic support available [Kessler, Price and Wortman, 1985]), the type of migrant (e.g. sorjourner, refugee, expatriate, long-term migrant) as well as individual characteristics (as mentioned above) (Berry, 2006b). These factors function to augment, promote or derogate from the migrant's prospects of developing acculturation.

Jasinskaja-Lahti et al (2011) made an interesting study into the factors moderating the relationship between ethnic and national orientation and psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. The researchers found that possessing a stronger ethnic orientation and weaker national orientation was conducive to better adaptation of the migrant individual. For instance, migrants in Israel with a separation mentality, i.e. an attitude of preserving their pre-existing cultural affiliation, were found to experience significantly higher adaptation due to the country's high cultural diversity. And the converse for those which utilised separationist strategies in Finland, a country of low cultural diversity. That is to say that migrants can expect generally better psychological and socio-cultural adaptation in countries of high cultural diversity, even if they undertake assimilationist or integrationist approaches earlier on in their settlement. Since Iceland's policy approach to migrant cultural adaptation is assimilationist and cultural diversity low, this means that according to the study by Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., adjustment and economic and socio-cultural adaptation should be overall *more* challenging for migrants in general.

Linked to this idea of personal orientation is the issue of cultural distance; where the migrant's cultural background informs the adjustment process and can thus suggest grief and bereavement; also a feeling of lack of control as well as specific expectations attached to the migration process (Funham and Bochner, 1986). This personal cultural orientation can also affect life-events and illness, social support, value differences and social skills, like non-verbals, behaviours, expressing attitudes and proxemic posture. These all differ between cultures.

An interesting approach to migrant adaptation is plotting settlement by stages. Proponents such as Oberg (1954), Adler (1975), Berry et al. (1992), Pedersen (1995) and Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) are in concurrence of the basic trajectory beginning with a 'honeymoon' style phase followed by 'culture shock' and then various deviations from these to a general feeling of satisfaction and belonging. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) published a time-frame for this of more or less 36 months (see Graph 3). The 'U' shaped curve is indicative of the psychological positivity of the acculturation journey, with the down indicating a negative swing to less satisfaction or worse adjustment. Congruent with established findings on the migrant's personal emotional and psychological reactions to the task of acculturation, the 'stages' approach outlines a time-phase which serves as an additional moderating factor (see Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2011 and Castles and Miller, 2003) to the process of host country adjustment.



Graph 3. The Best-Fitting Model for the U-Curve of Adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005).

The culture shock stage in migration has been asserted by Pedersen (1995) to be a time of growth and development, and not negatively, as it suggests, despite feelings of depression, psychosomatic illness, anxiety and identity confusion (Berry, et al, 1987). Indeed Pedersen (1995) states that one can be evolving in one plane of functioning but seemingly lagging in functioning in other ways; the analogy is like a constantly swinging pendulum where the individual makes gains in cross-cultural understanding and socio-economic status and suffers setbacks as well.

Berry, et al (1992) express culture shock as being the conflicted meeting between two cultures; the outcome of competing priorities and values. To emerge from culture shock to satisfaction; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) describe the experience as the process of the individual having

appropriate behaviours reinforced along with increasing host country cultural competency.

Eva Hoffmann's 1998 essay on the 'New Nomads' of a Globalising world reflected on the meanings which migrants give to the experience of transplanting their lives to a new world. Her understandings revolved around the experiences of being the *Other* as a migrant, ostracised, distrusted, prejudiced, and how reality is created through the transactions between the inner understandings of the person and the outer world. Hoffmann wrote about the significance of culture and language in generating understandings within the individual; teaching the ideas of what is 'right' or 'beautiful'. This inner world is then informed and then gently moulded by the outside world; and then especially in the case of sudden migration, like in the case of refugees, the jarring transactions are not so subtle. Hoffmann artfully described the life-long acculturation journey of the migrant from first-days bewilderment and astonishment to comfortable acceptances of new ways of thinking and doing things and finally a feeling of belonging. Hoffmann's narrative illustrates the organic and inter-relational manner of the acculturation process.

3 Methodology

3.1 The research aims

This qualitative study of expatriate spouses aimed to explore the context, experiences and meanings associated with migrant adaption strategies and experiences in Iceland. This study examined the quality of resilience in particular and its operation in the migrant adjustment process.

3.2 The participants and data gathering

Seventeen spouses were approached via the company (which has been nick-named, 'Save Ltd') and asked to participate in the research. Twelve of these seventeen were happy to comply and participate in the study. This was achieved through an initial information email which was circulated to all potential spouse participants by an employee from the Human Resources department of the company. This email stipulated the topic of the study and provided a number of issues which the study wished to explore. The information email also provided the participating spouses with a list of issues and topics which would be covered in the interview. This list was very general and asked such questions as, "How do you feel about your life in Iceland?".

In addition to the interview topic briefing, a more specific questionnaire was provided to participating spouses to collect private information, such as the specifics of their personal profile in order to avoid having to spend time on collecting this information during the interviews.

Given the research aims it was important for the data collection to be conducted in such a way which maximized the diversity of issues that affect the adaptation experience of migrants. Factors of time-phase migration, life-cycle, pre-arrival issues, logistics, culture, experiences, impressions and appraisals needed to be collated. Therefore the focus group was chosen for its

function in accumulating a dearth of data, intensively in one sitting from a number of respondents. The advantage of this was apparent in the variety of topics and ideas presented as well as the depth of the discussion. However, in the same way, the disadvantage of the focus group lay substantially in the fact that it was impossible to gather information on any one individual to any great depth due to the fact that time limited the opportunity for individuals to speak. On the flip-side, there were a number of individuals who spoke extensively and at length, compromising those who were not so extrovertly oriented devoiding them of an opportunity to voice their opinions.

In order to counteract the fact that some persons were not so audible during the focus group discussions two in-depth interviews were taken with two individuals. I felt that these particular respondents might provide more insight into issues which emerged in the focus group sessions but due to time restraints or personal dynamics were unable to extrapolate then.

Data was recorded via a voice recording device and many pages of notes written subsequent to each interview session. The first session was marred by the technical failure of the audio-recording device and almost 40 minutes of data had to be recollected from memory and pieced together from the recordings which prior and subsequently resumed after the device failure was discovered and rectified.

An employee from the Human Resources department was assigned to co-coordinate the set-up of the study under direction of the researcher as well as liaise between the researcher and the spouses prior to the focus group meetings. This employee also assisted in contacting and garnering participants from ex-expatriate spouses who had left Iceland.

Ten female spouses and one male spouse participated in the focus group sessions. The majority of them were married, with children and a few of them were in co-habitation with their partners and childless. The participants were aged between their early twenties and early forties. They had all established careers before arriving in Iceland and were mostly tertiary educated. Their ethnic heritage was diverse; coming from Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America; however most spoke English as a first language.

The fact that the vast majority of the spouses were female is largely representative of the demographics of expatriate relationships. There are significantly fewer male spouses accompanying their female partner on assignment than women spouses. However, according to more recent studies this trend is changing. Therefore there is scope for future research on male expatriate spouses.

Three, two hour long focus groups were arranged and participants attended one of three sessions at the University of Iceland, in an interview room. Participants were given the option to attend in a morning or afternoon group discussion and were divided into groups of three individuals, two individuals and six individuals in turn. In addition, the groups were divided into two; those spouses who had been in Iceland for less than one year and those who had been residing in Iceland for one year or longer. The longest residing participant had been in Iceland for just under two years with her partner, an expatriate employee of the company, Save Ltd. The shortest residing member had been in Iceland for only a matter of weeks.

The company was based in Reykjavik and had less than one hundred expatriate workers. In the past three years it had experienced a substantial number of losses of workers, either through expatriate assignment voluntary resignation, retrenchment due to a re-organisation of the company or otherwise.

The company's enthusiasm and cooperation seemed key to the recruitment of participants since the issue was so sensitive and recognized. It was made explicit that the company was keen to receive authentic and extensive statements of all areas of the spouses' experience in relocating to Iceland. The researcher made sure that spouses understood that all measures would be undertaken to protect their identities.

One ex-expatriate spouse out of three responded to invitations to participate in the research and written data was collected from her, to make a total of 12 participants in the study. This ex-spouse was not interviewed physically. In addition, two in-depth interviews were conducted with respondents subsequent to the focus groups in order to corroborate, extend

and deepen the nature of the data which emerged from the group discussions. In maintaining contact with the participants in the focus groups, two follow-up correspondences were also undertaken afterward via email, to make written testimonies a total of three apart from the questionnaires which were provided to all focus group spouses. This strategy allows data to be cross-referenced and provide insights and confirmation as well as adjustment of established theories to refine the thesis and the research process (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

3.3 Data handling and analysis

Following the data collection, interviews were listened to a number of times and meticulously and painstakingly transcribed by the researcher. Many hours were spent attempting to grasp the various meanings and intimations of the speech testimonies. The ideas and meanings yielded were also contextual and it was important to understand precisely the manner of the statements in order to glean accurate significance.

A thematic analysis was conducted through categorising the issues into significance and frequency of manifestation. The categorical significance of these themes were then analysed in accordance with the established literature on migrants, gender, social support theory, theory of the globalisation of work, human resource literature, psychology and social psychology. This situated the research findings within the context of recognized traditional and non-conventional academic discourse on migrants and expatriates since expatriates are often not put in the same analytical category as migrants and the psychological aspects of adaptation are not so well established.

Qualitative interviews can be very rich in material and understandings. The difficulty of analysing the data is compounded by the fact that Iceland is such a 'small place' with multiple channels of connections linking its small number of residents. Remaining anonymous is a challenge for any qualitative researcher but balancing the risk of rendering the data insufficiently specific or over-generalising on themes and providing context-specific testimonies of

very different personalities, psychologies and cultures is a great challenge. This study attempted to protect the identities of those involved, not in the least the company, as well as remain authentic to the experience of personal evolution in migrating to Iceland.

Following the Grounded Theory tradition, as established by Strauss and Glazer (1967), this study collected data from a variety of sources in order to build theory. The collection of data and subsequent analysis into categories, their dimensions as well as the relationships between them (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 201) is used to inform and contribute to the refinement of hypothesis and theory. This is called a hermeneutic circular development of knowledge.

The tradition of symbolic interactionism provides an appropriate perspective on the concept of migrant adaptation paired with grounded theory. The interpretivist tradition maintains that identity is generative and dynamic (Stryker, 2007). These assumptions contrast with structuralist assumptions that social behaviour is shaped by forces residing outside the individual and can be studied by examining social structures (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997).

Interpretive interactionism, then, contends that the empirical world cannot be analysed independently of individual actions, interactions and meanings (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). Moreover, it understands experience, as "an affair primarily of doing" (Dewey, 1972: 329 in Richardson, 2010) based on individual interpretation, interaction and meaning rather than a passive response to external stimuli. It is based on the premise that individuals create their own experiences by acting on things according to the meanings which those things have for them. Meanings are seen to derive from experience, especially interaction with others, interpretation of others' actions and self-indication (Prus, 1996, in Richardson, 2010). Essentially, this approach allows external factors such as work and career to explain just as significantly the reasons why expatriates make a decision when familial negotiations and concerns are taken into account as well.

Those factors which exhibit meaning are both subjective and objective. Montgomery (1996 in Castles et al., 2002) emphasises the importance of giving equal significance to subjective and objective indicators. Such subjective factors include the opinions and perspectives of immigrants on their migration and settlement experience, their life pre-migration and at the present, frame of mind, aspirations and understandings. Objective indicators are the quantifiable data collected such as level of education, work experience, financial security, cross-cultural interaction strategies and even body language and conversation style. In fact, Robinson (1998a:122-3 in Castles et al., 2002) states that from an individual perspective, immigrants set different indicators of integration themselves. This phenomenon will be explored in order to establish adaptive strategies.

The construction of narrative, as a prime characteristic of the interview can reveal a lot about a person and their inner thought processes (Flick, 1992 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), their subjective experiences. Semi-structured in-depth interviewing allows for the participant to delve into a topic of discussion at great depth, a process which will allow free expression (Douglas, 1985 in Ritchie and Lewis 2003) and over a period of time exhibit the meanings which the participant gives to different aspects of the integration process. Topics such as life history, everyday life and free narrative as well as interacting with the interviewer will allow the participant to gain greater confidence and thus provide a greater insight into the understandings of integration. Flick (2001, in Burgelt, Morgan and Pernice, 2006) has pointed out the appropriateness of this technique for comparing differences in experiences and common-sense knowledge between groups.

At appropriate times, the researcher provided personal insights or prompts to the discussion, in a way taking part in the discussions. Douglass and Moustakas (1985 in Ritchie and Lewis 2003) stated that this approach allowed for collaborative-style data collection. This style of interviewing has the potential for empowerment of the participant in producing greater self

awareness as well as illustrating the transformative nature of symbolic interactionism.

3.4 Strengths and Limitations

The semi-structured focus groups and in-depth interviews allowed for participants to freely volunteer narratives and themes which guided interviewing may constrict. In this way spouses allowed their natural personalities to shine and reveal their inner understandings in a unique and personal manner. As well as this, the complexity of the society-family-individual dynamic could be expressed more holistically. Often spouses would narrate their experience through events which affected the family as a whole, or through their significant other's analogies. This showed how spouses' thought processes and experiences were intertwined with their significant others.

Largely the male spouse's testimonies echoed the attitudes, statements and understandings of the female spouses so his data was included and his gender altered to protect his identity. Gender differences were distinctively apparent in the manner which the male spouse narrated his experiences and impressions. In addition, the gender dynamics of the group was noticeably altered with the presence of the male participant. Female respondents became dramatically more animated and candid at the momentary absence of the male participant and then reverted to a more subdued recounting of their narratives on return of the male participant. This was quite apparent to the researcher and reflects the need for further exploration of male perspectives and understandings of the expatriate spousal experience.

It was apparent that the focus groups allowed the participants to reaffirm their sense of group identity, within the expatriate-spouse affiliation. This allowed for identification of the features of this group identity, especially the sense of privilege which they felt they embodied as expatriate families. More research could be extended to study this particular phenomenon, that is, where personal identity is challenged in the interval of

the adaptation transitionary period, whether a stronger affiliation is adopted more strongly in place of the internal insecurity of individual identity.

On the flip-side there was a sense that the group consensus was intolerant of overt expressions of negativity toward Iceland. A few times the group discussed challenges they faced or specific aspects of Iceland which they found difficult to understand and an individual would return the group back to a sense of optimism, as if the group discussion was reigned in to restrict the tone of the discussion to certain limits.

Another disadvantage to the focus group interview is that false or exaggerated features of the phenomenon being studied can be produced due to a type of group over-enthusiasm for maintaining consensus. Alternatively, some individuals may down-play, consciously or unconsciously the opinions and reflects of others. This occurred when one spouses complained extensively about her experiences in Iceland and another spouse interrupted to moderate the complaining spouse's arguments.

The intensity at which the information is gathered means that potential oversight of important points can occur. This is another pitfall of the focus group data collection technique. However, in order to mitigate this, the in-depth individual interviews reiterated many of the points which emerged from the focus group interviews.

The consensus at the close of the discussions was that the focus group served as a type of empowerment of participants; reaffirming and healing. Spouses felt that they had developed a sense of camaraderie with others in the same situation and this served to strengthen their self-esteem.

3.5 Key concepts and categories

'Expatriate'

It is necessary to situate the spouses (11 women and 1 man), within the context of time, space and various other forces. Firstly it is important to stipulate that the term 'expatriate' denotes merely someone living away from their own country.

The Oxford Dictionary (online) provides the following definition :

Expatriate (noun) : a person who lives outside their native country: E.g. *American expatriates in London.* And; (*archaic*) an exile.

Also, (adjective) : denoting or relating to a person living outside their native country: E.g. *expatriate workers.*

However for the purposes of this exploration, 'spouse' will also be imbibed with the following features of privilege and mobility as well as the particular characteristics of their relocation contract negotiation.

The term 'expatriate' is then a synonym for 'migrant' but in modern parlance implies a privileged situation, a special circumstance extended to the expatriate and their family; they hold a higher socio economic status, they are mobile, skilled and have more choices in life than those, who are politicised by the term, 'migrant'; essentially they relocate with work all ready assigned to them.

Castles (2010) stated that migration is something which occurs to those who have relatively little choice, a process that happens to someone who is under-skilled, desperate and poor. This process is said to be almost permanent and unidirectional. On the other hand, the movements undertaken by a skilled worker, looking for career advancement or for study or simply for a 'tree change' is referred to as 'mobility[9]'.

Expatriates can be those who are sent on assignment by a company from another country or simply those who are living in a country not native to them.

According to Selmer and Lauring (2011) these Self Initiated Expatriates (SIE) are in a different category from those who have been sent by assignment abroad by the parent company. This of course entails very

[9] This hostile perception is at the background of a much politicised world that migration theorists inhabit. Castles (2010) continued by asserting the lack of agreement between migration theorists as to a framework for studying migration – For instance, what are the important features of migration?

different risks and psychology according to the situation of the employee. It can be argued that this situation is more stressful with no back-door option is available to return home, since very often company initiated expatriates have the option of returning to the home country office.

Expatriates, by their contract, are entitled to various perks, sometimes being allowed to go home once a year (for example embassy employees), some of them are simply at the mercy at what ever contract the employer can negotiate with them. Therefore there is an understanding that these expatriates, despite not being sure how long they intend to stay in the settling country are undergoing a process of migration. Nevertheless, these expatriates and their families are much more skilled and from a higher socio economic class. There is a sentiment which underlies their move that it is without serious risk; a move back to the home country is always a possibility.

Notwithstanding this mentality, the expatriates identified in this study do not have as privileged a status as those workers contracted to work in third world countries from developed countries since Iceland is a developed country and its currency is quite highly valued.

The influence of the spouse on the employee's career has been well established, according to Black and Stephens, (1989). Their cultural and social adjustment will influence the employee's decision to stay in the country which they are on assignment in; as opposed to returning early to the home country. Until quite recently, the idea of considering the spouse's adjustment was only relevant to company management policy [10]. The impact on companies is financial as well as organisational; where selection of the employee needs to consider the spouse, as well as cross-cultural education and relocation packages.

'The Spouse': For the purposes of this study, the spouse is regarded as the significant person in a relationship with the employee, selected for the job in Iceland from one, international software company with headquarters in

[10] Lebrun (1997) in Canadian HR Reporter reported that Noranda, a large Canadian mining company was offering spousal cross-cultural training for the first time in 1997.

Iceland. This spouse is foreign and is in co-habitation with the employee, with or without children.

Identity : "identities" are cognitive aspects of selves—self-cognitions or self-concepts; they are defined as internalized role expectations attached to positions in organized sets of social relationships. (Stryker, 2007)

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction to participants

The ten women and one man interviewed came from Africa, Asia, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, North America and Scandinavia. They had very diverse backgrounds and varying life experiences, education and ethnic heritage. Most were married and six out of the eleven respondents had children. Their distinguishing characteristic in common was migrating to Iceland at the behest of their spouse's work arrangement with Save Ltd. Also most held at least bachelor level degrees; they were in early adulthood to middle aged and all of them had already established careers before relocating to Iceland. It is important to note that the focus groups were divided into two categories; those who had arrived for less than 18 months and those who had been in Iceland for 18 months or longer.

Three focus group discussions as well two individual in-depth interviews were conducted with expatriate spouses from Save Ltd. In addition, a private, written questionnaire was distributed to the spouses and various correspondence was undertaken with spouses as a follow-up to the interviews. One ex-Save Ltd spouse provided her acculturation narrative through written email correspondence, so in total, 12 spouses participated in this study.

Georgina is an intense personality, ambitious and critically introspective. She arrived in Iceland with her family, charged with a strong admiration for the country, it's people and it's environment. She is educated to university level and had an established career but wanted to find work in Iceland. Georgina, at the time of the interviews was clearly grappling with the contradictions of the unfamiliar in Iceland.

Leonora also arrived in Iceland with her husband and offspring. She was passionate about her experiences adjusting in Iceland. She had established her career before becoming a mother. Leonora feels the need to find a place for herself in Icelandic culture acutely. She is university educated.

Tilly came with her husband's new work opportunity to Iceland with Save Ltd. Save offered them a chance to experience a completely new country and lifestyle, which Tilly was very much in praise of. However Tilly's established career and her frustration with not being able to transfer her skills to Iceland was a source of anxiety for her. She is university educated as well.

Jane appeared independent and ambitious with a cheery demeanour. She had already established a career back home and was university educated. She hoped to live in Iceland for a few years at least and was excited about experiencing a new culture and a new lifestyle.

Elaine's family responsibilities featured prominently when speaking of her experience in Iceland. Elaine had established herself as a career woman back in her home country, but now was concerned mostly with home duties, being largely unemployed. She elected to come to Iceland for her husband's career with Save Ltd.

Nora and her husband came with their offspring touting a sense of adventure for the novelty of Iceland. One of Nora's defining characteristics was how distant her cultural heritage is to Iceland. She had a great sense of her role at home as a mother and wife. She was also university educated and had an established career. Her experience as a migrant was influenced by her past understandings from travelling.

Tiara said that she married her husband so that they could travel more conveniently. Tiara was not as highly educated but had managed to establish a

reputable career experience. On reflection of her time in Iceland, she testified to feeling a sense of loss. She, too, had travelled quite extensively. Her cultural heritage was also very distant to the rest of the spouses'.

Kylie seemed like a very caring person with maternal instincts. She spoke optimistically of her life in Iceland, being well educated and travelled. She intended to live in Iceland for the long term.

Mandy is a quietly spoken lady who comes across as knowing what she wants. Mandy's uncertainty about relocating to Iceland for her husband's new job was allayed by the fact that she had friends in Iceland already. She had relinquished a well paying job to accompany her family to Iceland. She seemed to feel that her anxieties about Iceland could be resolved.

Tatiana's strong opinions were apparent when talking about the difficulties that spouses experienced. Tatiana moved with her spouse to Iceland after leaving a job which she very much enjoyed. She was not as highly educated as the other spouses but was determined to learn Icelandic because, she felt that this essential in increasing her chances of finding work.

Linda is also a very strong personality. She is outspoken and determined to find work in Iceland. She arrived in Iceland expecting things to be a lot easier than they turned out to be. She had established a gruelling career in her home country and was happy to try something new in Iceland. She too was university educated.

It was evident that each of these spouses had very different experiences in Iceland. However the focus group discussions served to unify the spouses in a common concern, the difficulties of living in Iceland and resettling with family. Their combined brainstorming allowed a variety of perspectives to be expressed whilst nurturing a sense of open-mindedness of the diverse.

4.2 The decision to come to Iceland

Most persons stated that their decision was based on a sense of adventure and opportunity. Being able to pursue the opportunity of an employment or career change as well as a lifestyle change was attractive to most persons. These persons, are upwardly-mobile in their 20's or 30's; who in today's job climate are more able to transfer between jobs or lifestyle, are termed 'mobile'. Most persons considered the move a step-up. That means that for career or personal reasons the move to Iceland was considered as a way of improving their lives for the long or short term.

Everybody agreed that there was something in the Save Ltd culture which was different and positive. Many people testified that this was reflective of the Icelandic culture. A spouse talked about how her husband was so pleased that Save Ltd seemed to care for their employees, providing an expensive European designer chair for each recruit where they could save money and buy a cheaper copy version instead. Another spouse said that her husband found it refreshing that the Save Ltd company structure was seemingly horizontal, he could approach his boss quite easily and get changes made without undue complex processes. This feature of Save Ltd was novel, according to the spouse, because the structure of the companies which he had worked at before were very bureaucratic and had made it very difficult to progress in his work and career. One spouse mentioned how Save Ltd's company culture was quite ostentatious; spending on money on company brochures which were unnecessarily produced, or produced extravagantly where she felt spending priorities were differently assessed in the business world of her home country.

"…Then [Husband] came; two days. [Husband] had an interview with ten people and [Husband] came back; like this...And said, "Wow! It's completely different! There is something in this company which is completely different." … But if you look at [Save Ltd], it's Iceland." (Georgina)

One spouse, Tiara described how she felt she had nothing to lose; she had come from a dead-end job, where she did not feel she could progress in and a move to Iceland with her husband provided her with a fresh start. This was a common statement from spouses, who felt that they did not have anything to lose by completely uprooting themselves to come to Iceland, although their career possibilities in Iceland were prospectively unknown.

"What do we have to lose?" said Jane. She, like most of the other respondent spouses was in the beginning stages of their adult lives and still felt the *draw of adventure in Iceland*. Jane followed her husband, deferring her own established career, which she put in second place to her husband's. She portrayed her husband's career as taking primacy over her own and was, at least overtly happy with her role as supporter and auxiliary to their purpose in Iceland. It seemed that Jane was happy to accompany her husband on the relocation to Iceland and her ample supply of optimism would prevail.

A common theme amongst most of the women was that optimism and positivity would carry spouses through the lion's share of difficulties which (imagined, expected or unprepared for) they would encounter in Iceland. Their pre-arrival concept of Iceland was based on reports from their husbands and the images and ideas conveyed to them over the internet.

"Because he, ah, he asked me, 'Would you like to move to Iceland?' And I said, 'Where's Iceland?' ... Ah, so he just kinda, brought his video camera and just kinda video'ed things." (Nora)

4.3 Self-sacrifice for the family

It seems that most spouses gave something up to come to Iceland. At least, this is how they talk about the decision to come to Iceland. Tatiana talked about following her boyfriend for the sake of the relationship. She had a job which she loved back home but she was willing to move to Iceland for her boyfriend's job because he didn't seem to be progressing with his career at home. Kylie also decided to be in Iceland because of her husband. She had spent some time living in Iceland before she met her then boyfriend, but her decision to remain in

Iceland was based on her willingness for the relationship to continue. She also didn't want to go home, which she said sounded like a more sensible decision at the time. So being in Iceland is both a statement by spouses of the primacy their relationship takes in their lives as well as a pleasurable change to normal, every day life at home.

For the spouses who spent their days in the home, there was an enduring theme *of loneliness and isolation*; they felt generally left out of what they perceived to be greater societal participation and that their cultural adjustment and their progress in acculturation was stunted due to their few opportunities, obligations, lack of time and lack of connections to the outside world. One spouse, Georgina talked about how it seemed a lot easier to meet other people in other European cities and make friends, in Iceland it remained a challenge to meet persons of like mind and interests. This, the spouse put down to the fact that they had both recently settled in Iceland as well as not being presented with many opportunities to develop social networks, like being in a particular social, work or interest group. Also Georgina's lack of Icelandic competency remained a barrier to developing friendships with Icelanders. Georgina talked about how much easier it is to develop friendships with people who shared the same native language.

Another spouse, Tilly, felt quite isolated but was satisfied with her life but described her situation as mixed:

"I dunno, yes and no. You know, it depends on the day. You know, there're days when I'm perfectly content just to, do my thing, working from home; you know, get the kids home from school, take them out to play some where, go home and that's it. But, there are times when I kind of wish that I had more,...[searching for the words], a more, a closer social interaction. So, at least for me, it's a bit mixed." (Tilly)

Elaine said that she felt like she was behind the other members of the family in settling into Iceland. She seemed to imply that she had deferred her own acculturation process for the rest of the family; getting her children adjusted to new schools and supporting her husband in his new job and organising the new

household. Nora said that she did not mind that her career was second priority to her husband's.

"Umm… I'd rather raise my kids, I guess I would say. So I wouldn't mind not working, I do love my job before. But I know I can always go back anytime because my experience in my job compared to my husband's experience in his job it's quite different because he's been working for so long and stuff like that. But you know, for me, I can always pick it up again maybe in a few years. For him, it's not the same, especially in IT; once you're behind, then "Bye, bye!" kind of thing… /J: Right!/" (Nora)

Almost all spouses expressed how they perceived Iceland to a *family-oriented society*. Elaine talked about how she felt safe in Iceland with her kids and that this atmosphere could only be compared to her home town many years ago or in very rural areas of her home country. Many spouses were either mothers or contemplating having a family in Iceland and expressed their satisfaction with the circumstances for raising children in Iceland.

On the contrary, another woman said that because of her situation in Iceland, she was unable to be a stay-at-home parent because of the lack of social support offered to mothers at home in Iceland. This spouse lamented that she was both at home longer than she wanted to be with her young child, but could not imagine herself as a stay-at-home parent because of how difficult it would be to find friends for her child. Almost all other children of her child's age were in day care.

Linda said, referring to the health care system in Iceland, as well as the society in general:

"If I was going to have a baby here it wouldn't put me off. I wouldn't think I'd have to move to have a baby or [indistinct]. I'm not planning anything but it wouldn't be a reason for leaving, I don't think."

There was an underlying perception *that Iceland afforded children a freedom* which was rarely found elsewhere in the world but paradoxically Iceland was also understood as being very much focused on supporting working parents. Generally there was a feeling of well-being associated with settling in Iceland with a family. Iceland is thought of as safe, friendly, laid-back and supportive of families.

4.4 Education and individual factors

Most spouses were very well educated, to university level and higher. This was an underlying feature of their migration experience because they had built careers or held understandings of the value of education for their children and how important it is to acquire a second language. Although many of these spouses did not know a second language they all expressed a concern for their children, that they would be competitive on an international scale if they were to relocate again after Iceland. They all expressed an understanding that education is one of the ways to acculturate; going to university to learn Icelandic or re-skill in a society where their previous learning and qualifications are not recognised was the way forward. Linda, Tiara, Tatiana, Kylie, Jane and Tilly had all undertaken some study of Icelandic or had studied at some educational institution in Iceland. They saw education as a way of creating links with Icelandic people through developing the language as well as opening up opportunities for social interaction and work possibilities.

4.5 The work-oriented spouse

The work / career- orientation of an individual affects their ability to culturally adjust depending on whether they find work or not. Most spouses were found to have already established careers before they came to Iceland. They spoke about their careers as giving them status and position in society; many women had built much of their self-confidence and identity around work and did not realise how important it was to them until they came to Iceland and were without work. Linda did not find work immediately, as she had expected, said that she was unprepared for how demoralising this was to her self-confidence. Her status in society eroded so that people only thought of her as auxiliary to her husband's role in Iceland and his company.

"I was just going to say, with the employment thing… Ehm, but they [Save Ltd] kind of, prom… said, I would get a job here. When, just a temporary thing, to get me on my feet. I was under the impression there was a nursery at [Save]… And that they some times took on people who had,… like, partners who had just moved

over… But I did think it was a little bit of money security that I'd come and, 'Ok, for the first six months, there's so much to learn. Get me on my feet that would actually be really nice.' And with a part time job that I don't have to think a bit… I actually moved here thinking I had a job. And then found out, there isn't even a nursery!" (Linda)

Another lady, Leonora felt that her life and self-esteem improved immensely when she became employed. The feeling of desperation she felt when she could not establish a status in Iceland brought things to a head and she went to extreme lengths, concocting ways of trying to meet Icelandic people. Mandy was a successful career woman in the financial sector back home, but on arriving in Iceland, not having her career to ground her, after a time feeling she was in limbo-type state, she managed to transform herself and discover hobbies and interests which she was able to pursue in Iceland; something not possible to her back home in the States.

The move to Iceland was marked for most couples by the loss of one whole income and was the cause of considerable anxiety. Nevertheless, this did not stop couples from undertaking the migration to Iceland. Many spouses mentioned how the comparative expense of goods in Iceland has forced them to be much more frugal with their household expenditure. The spouses did not feel that this was such a hardship; some explaining how they appreciate the value of goods more because of their expense.

4.6 Expensive Iceland

Many persons mentioned how the lack of availability of familiar goods was distressing to them and that they missed many everyday items, easily found at home. Also there were some instances where spouses were genuinely concerned about not being able to make ends meet. Linda said that she did not anticipate how expensive things were so that after she and her partner had found accommodation and basic items, they had used all their available funds and could not afford to buy a bed to sleep in and were worried about whether they could pay for their grocery bill or not. Tiara expressed that she had similar concerns because she had underestimated how expensive Icelandic goods were and did not

have money to pay for furniture. Elaine said that does not have the finances to buy a car to support her personal ambitions; a factor, she feels that impedes her ability to make progress in her life in Iceland. Elaine explained that the cost of relocating to Iceland was very expensive for the family. Another factor in the matter was her husband's disapproval of spending money on a car. Elaine's felt like her opportunities were reduced because her husband was not supportive in this way.

Georgina felt that the expense of travelling to and from home meant that their connections to family were harder to maintain, which meant that they were less supported by extended family due to the remoteness of Iceland from Europe. Georgina felt that this affected her relationship with her partner because the expense of an air ticket meant that Georgina's mother-in-law was less able to baby-sit for the couple.

Although it was generally stated that the cost of living in Iceland is expensive, spouses admitted that they had not anticipated how much assistance they would receive from the company and how much they would have to spend on start-up costs, setting up house in Iceland. Nora said that when they arrived in Iceland, there was no prearranged accommodation for them and they were almost homeless except for a last minute interception by the company. Nora said that her husband had to complain quite profusely before she felt that their needs were heard and met.

Mandy was in a similar conundrum to Linda, she said that she wasn't prepared for how expensive things were in Iceland and was worried about making ends meet during their first month of stay in Iceland. This theme was common to approximately half the respondents.

4.7 Feeling disempowered

Tiara mentioned how she felt lost, she felt that there was no purpose to her life in Iceland except for the fact that her spouse was in Iceland. Most respondents felt that by not being able to work, they lost a lot of confidence and felt as if they were out-at-sea; status-less. They felt isolated because of their inability to access Icelandic society. Leonora was established in Iceland for a longer time; she said

that at some point in the first few months of her settlement she felt like she was naked and totally out of her comfort-zone because she was not able to fit into society; she had no Icelandic friends, limited understanding of information passed around her and limited capacity to participate in her children's lives at school and with Icelandic parents at social activities like soccer practice.

Another aspect to the matter was the dynamic of support within their families/ partnerships at home. Where Elaine felt that her husband was not supportive of her bid to buy a car, others felt that their lack of status, except as an appendage of their spouse's work position in Iceland made them feel anonymous and without status. This situation seemed to cut into their self-esteem and one spouse was visibly angry by being labelled, 'spouse'.

All respondents mentioned how they felt most at home with other foreigners, receiving emotional and tacit support as well as developing friendships more rapidly than with native Icelanders.

4.8 Strategies for coping, balancing self-knowledge and realistic options

The loss of confidence in oneself, the challenge to the identity, the constant regeneration of identity, the loss of meanings associated with ones identity which were here-to constituted by work and the status achieved from work, place in society generated by social networks/ position, family networks and social stratus all change. This can cause great perturbation and strain to the migrant's sense of identity and self. Elaine could not find work and this played very much on her self-esteem. She was forced to stay at home to look after her young son, attributing her family obligations as the main factor holding her back from finding work, which she resented. She expressed that because of this duty, she did not have the opportunity to better her language competency in Icelandic. Elaine also mentioned that making friends was hard work for her personally, and that this chipped into her self-confidence:

"…So it's like, I've met this person at a party, they're really nice. And I chat to them for like an hour and then I may see them at the next party, but at what point

do you actually go, "I've give you my phone number and we'll meet for a coffee. ____ [indistinct]" /Let's meet sober… [smiles]/"(Elaine)

The erosion of self-confidence was perceptible in spouses' talk on *loss* and how they felt that their lives were *lesser* because of their circumstances in Iceland. Elaine, particularly explained how she felt that not having time for herself was detrimental to her aspirations to work. Also the loss of her career meant that she had no personal income which she could manipulate, she felt now dependent and subject to her husband's opinions more in Iceland because she was not earning money. This idea of a lack of autonomy was also relevant to Jane who felt that she was entirely reliant on her husband for money. Tiara said that she felt lost, that she had lost a great amount of direction in her life since moving to Iceland. She no longer understood where she fit into society and what her options for betterment were. It seemed that Tiara was depressed.

"… I don't know, I, I'm… I have to admit that I do feel a little bit lost at the moment because I don't have that , that path of… well, or, or an exit strategy or… ehm… or wattever. And I guess, I'm only here 'cause… Because [Husband's] here. And if he wasn't at [Save] then we would have no reason to be in Iceland. /Mm./ And, um, he's found it much harder than I have to get used to Iceland…Because he… I don't know. I guess he doesn't have the time to make friends and also…" (Tiara)

Also many respondents talked about the *loss of friends and intimate support networks* at home. They did not feel like they had recovered these connections adequately; although many were confident and optimistic that with time, they would find a group of friends. Many suggested that they would like to socialise more with other spouses in the company. Leonora mentioned how she would recourse to her girlfriends on Skype for support. These friends were overseas and she felt she had enough emotional and sufficient social support through this mode of contact.

"Oh, yeah! Definitely. Sure. Um, but there were a lot of times, in the beginning when I didn't have anybody else to go to and I just, like, " I hate Iceland! I wanna leave now!" …You know, I just needed to vent. So I've learned to stop doing that, and now I just go on Skype. And you know, I get a glass of wine before I go on

Skype and I've set a time to meet with my girlfriends and I just, get it out there. And get the responses that I need." (Leonora)

4.9 Mixed experiences and coping strategies

In coping with their new circumstances the spouses evinced how they tried to make meaning out of their lives. Some were overtly positive and exuded a sense of ease and delight with their new surroundings. Jane said how she really enjoyed how small-scale Reykjavik is and she found this novel and quaint. Others evidenced their intellectualisation of the conundrum and confessed how they felt at odds with making friends, and building a new life in Iceland. Tilly said that she found herself becoming more introverted as a reaction to her situation.

"*Well, I, feel we both; well at least, I feel I've become more introverted, here. Um, I think it might be to some extent a response to the culture. To me, the culture seems a bit you know, withdrawn, you know, people aren't overtly friendly...."(Tilly)*

Some were ready to give up attempting to acculturate. Mandy described how she felt it was almost impossible for her to learn Icelandic. She said that she coped adequately with English and that was enough for her for the time being. She did acknowledge however that if the family were to stay in Iceland for the longer-term that she would need to learn Icelandic. Others like Tatiana were at a dead-end and found it frustrating that they could not find the answers to basic problems like where to buy goods or how to receive government services.

Consistently there was the thought underlying all the understandings of spouses who they were mobile and there was a possibility (at varying degrees of probability) of relocating or moving home. It was apparent that all spouses had thought about the possibility of leaving and most of them considered it a very real probability in the next five years. This seemed to mitigate the pressure they felt to fit-in, acculturate or assimilate.

Nora said : *"Um, I would say, we did agree that we would give it another two, three years and see. If we like it, we stay longer, if not then we, just do another adventure or something like that. /Yeah./ I mean, I don't give any time frame for him or anything like that, but I said, right now I know I don't want to be more*

than five years. [M chuckles embarrassedly] But I said, I don't know, for me, I maybe if I speak more Icelandic, it will help a lot more."

Some spouses talked about the cultural differences which were apparent to them. Understandings of etiquette, manners and speech forms was bewildering to many spouses, however Linda put it like this:

"I think the longer you've been here, once you know it's the cultural thing. Like, once you know the intentions are different you kind of become, gradually become less angry. /J: Yeah, and also…/ In [Home country] if somebody be pushing at you, they'd get a punch! You know…? [All laugh] [indistinct] They'd get some verbal abuse, basically…[giggling.] It's just really different." (Linda)

Most consistently women talked about how they didn't understand why it was so difficult to make Icelandic friends and develop a support network in Iceland. Leonora said that it made her feel bewildered and frustrated. Nora talked about how she felt excluded from social communication and Icelanders would rarely smile at her.

Some of the spouses stated how they felt that they needed to accept their circumstances and utilise different opportunities which are more easily available to them like studying or photography or crocheting. Linda put it like this :

"I think, I decided to take a language course partly just to have something to do! Because when I first moved, it was like, well, I'd rather do a course that I'm interested in than a crappy job. And then it might lead down a path or something like that [indistinct]… But then it's like she were saying, if you're looking for some other work, like social worker; and it's all about communication. You know, you can't do that. And…" (Linda)

4.10 Finding place and status in Iceland

One theme which resonated deeply among spouses was their new status and roles in Iceland; where they had once been full time income earners they found themselves in completely different circumstances; almost all of them were without work and spent much of their day at home. Finding something to occupy themselves, for the spouses was not in all cases a matter of need, they spoke

about how their working partners made enough money for the household to make ends meet. However, they were concerned by the fact that in most cases, because of their relocation to Iceland the household income was halved due to them not working. So in fact many of them were looking for work; not just any work, they were looking for work which would satisfy them personally. For some like Nora, the situation was different, she said that due to her visa status, she was not able to work legally and her husband was happy to support the family financially.

It was explained such that the spouses' employment situation was deemed as secondary to the priority of finding something industrious and interesting to occupy themselves and indeed many expected to find work. For the majority of the spouses, they were not content to work in the low-skilled, manual labour or service industry and said as much. Save Ltd had provided a seminar to inform and assist spouses with finding work. Many of the spouses complained that this workshop was not helpful because the class of work that were offered, such as hotel cleaning jobs were below the expectations and interest of spouses. This made them quite disappointed.

To fill the gap created by unemployment, those who were not mothers busied themselves with attending Icelandic classes or re-skilling themselves in areas of interest which were hereto unrealistic options, at least back in their home countries. Mothers with children in day car or at school were also free to pursue other activities. Many found delight in how versatile their lives had become, learning photography, arts and crafts, textiles, Icelandic language or merely sight-seeing. However, they were looking for some sort of direction, either career path or involvement in some area of interest.

Whilst many of the women had not yet carved out definite paths for themselves to pursue in Iceland, be it career or otherwise; generally, they were content with the knowledge that this would come eventually and that their stay in Iceland was not permanent. This was more so pertaining to the newcomers, some of those who had been living in Iceland for a longer period of time expressed greater disappointment and lesser optimism regarding their prospects in Iceland. Whilst the explicit stressors such as paying the bills, finding accommodation and

schools or day care for their children were taken care of spouses qualified that they were busy meeting friends and taking care of their partners and the home.

Some of the spouses had managed to find work either in Iceland or remotely; these spouses displayed higher self-esteem and a greater sense of optimism and confidence in their lives in Iceland.

Nora said that she expected that she would not be able to work, and that was all right with her. She was not particularly ambitious in her career, putting her husband's career before hers. Instead the anxieties the women voiced were more latent and underlying to their immediate needs as mentioned above; that is finding their own 'place' in society.

The spouses were of consensus that one had to be proactive and positive to progress in acculturation in Iceland. Tiara said this :

"Well you have to… You have to make the effort. /L: Yes!/ You have to take that decision upon yourself that, "Ok, this what it is. And I'm going to decide to make it what I want it to be. Because the nice thing that I found about Iceland that I like is that; yes, the language is difficult and there aren't any jobs and the economy is crazy and the prices are not what they said. But it's also something that you can mould it to be what ever you want it to be. /Mm./ Um, like if you… Ok. Maybe it's my situation and I don't have to have a job and I can go to school. But, I've chosen those things because…" (Tiara)

The situation was the same for Linda : *"You have to be able to communicate with people. So it's been like a complete… I've done like a complete career change. I've decided to be a tailor. Because it's a practical skill and if we move again then I've got something that you don't need a language for. So it's kind of been a dream for me, because I've always wanted to do that and this [Iceland] has been a good excuse to do it. /Ok!/ And studying it here is really cheap. Which, is you know, a plus."*

4.11 Identity linked to group identity

Spouses seemed to still be baffled by the difficulties and struggles they were undergoing in their residency in Iceland. Many displayed strong feelings of

anger, frustration or disappointment at various inconsistencies apparent in their lives or cultural artefacts which they did not understand. An example of this is when spouses found that they needed to be much more forthcoming in their communication with Icelanders than otherwise was anticipated. Nora found it very annoying that she does not receive customer service in the way she has come to expect it abroad; she expects more interaction and information forthcoming from sales staff. Georgina was disappointed that government services and information could not be accessed in the same way as in Europe; this she found baffling.

Another consistent theme throughout the interviews was the importance of *Language* skills in living in Iceland. The Icelandic language was generally appreciated as being of high cultural and social value. Although many spouses were lead to believe that they could negotiate and be understood by communicating solely in English many respondents testified to not acculturating adequately to Icelandic society because they did not have a basic competency of Icelandic. Some evinced how they were satisfied by knowing a bit of Icelandic but almost all agreed that even the basic tasks required some degree of Icelandic competency.

Nora said that she found it extremely hard to go about her everyday errands and activities :

"So, in that sense, for me living in [other Country], even though it's not my native language, at least I can get by because I can speak to them and they understand me and I can get questions. Here, with Icelandic it's a lot harder. I mean, there is Google Translate and stuff but sometimes for website, it's… It doesn't have, translate correctly. [All chuckle sympathetically] It's not always easy." (Nora)

The significance of language seemed to extend to being included in social networks. Many ladies testified how they felt left out of basic conversations and that this made them feel inferior because they could not understand the Icelandic language spoken around them. Additionally, the requirement of a high competency in Icelandic for working in Iceland meant that lack of Icelandic language precluded migrants from the majority of jobs. Linda found a job in a

cleaning agency, work which she admits she had never thought she would have to do again. She had last worked in such low-status employment only in university. Linda's story is a testimony of the importance of language skills; when Linda found work apprenticing, she felt she was thrown in the deep end and experienced head aches. Leonora said that she felt so desperate to make Icelandic friends that her lack of Icelandic language drove her to contemplate measures to meet people which were far out of her comfort zone.

4.12 'Make it or break it'

This feeling of being on the edge of one's personal limits, in a grey area where one's very identity and self worth is at question was a common feeling among spouses. The migrants felt that their sense of isolation and bewilderment of the Icelandic culture drove them to feel desperate. Georgina, Mandy, Linda and Leonora stated that they had all at some point felt that their resilience was tested to the limit:

"But we felt like, if we can do this together, and we're here on our own and we have nothing…/ Mm./ There's nothing that we can't handle together in the future. And it's really reassuring for when we have kids and get married and everything," said Tatiana.

There are many instances of spouses mentioning that their experience in Iceland pushed them to their personal limits; this idea that the particular circumstances of Iceland and its society produces very strong feelings. Like Leonora above, Georgina said that she subscribed to the analogy that being in Iceland was like being stripped naked, with ones raw emotions uncontained. This feeling was very confronting and distressing for Georgina.

'...because of living here. And I think you just get, get... essentially you do just end up naked, you just strip yourself bare and really have to look inside of yourself; "What do you really want?" [asking rhetorically Oneself?] "What do you really [G mumbling, /G: Yes, that's completely... /L: Yeah.] want?" "What do you need?" and, "What do you need to do that?" "And can you actually accomplish that?" And, you know, like I said about myself, you know, just completely being out of my comfort zone in a lot of situations... Just to be able to do the things that

are very important to me... Like, "If I'm going to get there, I have to be willing to do this." And either I am going to be willing to do it, or, I'm just going to give up on that. /Right./ And, you know, there have been moments where I have decided that I can't , just can't put myself out there to do that.' (Leonora)

" I mean, you scare...! You will even scare someone to say that. Just because it's, it's very important. It's just a trip in yourself and you need to go quite deep in the... Yeah, in what you want to know from yourself, what's the situation, be alone, etcetera... And if you say to someone, "You gonna stay at home," Oh my God! [Laughs teasingly] It's nice? Sorry, er..." (Georgina)

Jane described her experience of Icelandic people as being a little bipolar in behaviour, she felt that there were two sides to Icelanders' demeanour:

"People are definitely a whole lot more reserved. I mean, in [Home Country] when you walk down the sidewalk, you just smile at everyone and they look at you and you kind of like, have a moment with almost everyone that you pass. It seems like here you can kind of walk around all day and not make that contact with anyone so that is; that is new to me. People certainly come alive on weekend nights /Right/. My neighbours are loud and screaming and everybody kind of embraces you so it's all kind of hot and cold; it's very strange to me." (Jane)

4.13 Emotions and finding personal satisfaction with life in Iceland

Elaine found that coming to Iceland meant that she had to become a stay-at-home parent and found herself unprepared for this new role. She was not comfortable with it and found it a great challenge. She said she felt like she was just hanging on until her child found a place in day care so that she would be free to pursue her personal interests. Her happiness was very contingent on being able to make personal progress in her life in Iceland. This individualism was expressed also by Nora whose cultural background is much more distant; although she did not specifically name her frustrations with not being able to pursue her own direction in life; she too was a stay-at-home-parent she felt more fatalistic and seemed to be more personally vested into the role. The circumstances of her life in Iceland, her lack of legal right to work meant that she

would have to, like it or not, be without work and pursue other avenues open to her.

Mandy said that despite not being able to find work, she achieved a sense of satisfaction and was happier with her life although she was not pursuing her career. She said she felt less pressure and more freedom to engage in interests like crocheting and photography which she would not have the opportunity or simply would not occur to her to undertake usually in her home country.

4.14 'Us' (Foreigners) and 'Them' (Icelanders)

There were many statements which alluded to a consciousness that migrants were not part of Icelandic society; Linda said that she would not be included in conversations because she did not understand Icelandic. Leonora mentioned how distressed and frustrated she felt by not being able to make any Icelandic friends. She put it like this :

"…And that's the difficult thing. It's like, we're seeking more friends in a, in a larger network, but because they already have it. I just feel like because their Icelandic culture is so closed and,…, and, so much about their family. And everyone has these big sprawling families that are connected, you know, in these, wonderful mysterious ways [I laugh]. You know, it's just… They just don' t have room for more people. That's honestly, and they're fine, and they are friendly to you,… but, and, you know, but then, that's it. /Yeah/" (Leonora)

Georgina found it frustrating that she could not make friends in the usual manner. Georgina has children and she understood that children provide many links to the community through their socialising and school as well as outside activities. In Georgina's experience, these links also extended to the parents as well, providing parents with the opportunity to make friends and network as well. However Georgina felt bewildered that this did not apply to Iceland, or perhaps not to foreigners in Iceland.

" No. But it's funny, the kids, you have plenty of park, ah, place you go. Of course if you move in to your own country kids will really acculture to create you a new network of people. /Mm./ You're here, they go to a friend, and that's

it...there's /And their friend is their friend and you're not friends with their parents./" (Georgina)

Adding to the feeling of segregation was the difficulty of acquiring information about services and systems in Iceland. Mandy said that she was so frustrated that someone without Icelandic competency was unable to obtain information from the Icelandic search directory, www.ja.is. This all made to enhance the feeling of separateness dividing foreigner from Icelander.

Georgina exclaimed, *"There is a translation in English of the website of Reykjavik City; a couple of things /K: Yeah, I know, uh…/ . But, er… just getting a guide of, a couple of things, er… Stores! It's a nightmare! [Chuckles] Internet, doesn't have it. I mean, if you do not type in Icelandic you do not find anything. /It's a jungle./ It's a jungle. Completely!" (Georgina)*

*Geo*rgina added that Icelandic systems and processes are not built in the same manner as European ones and this makes it much more difficult to obtain information for a foreigner who is used to the European regulated style.

"No, it's with everything you want. If you want a washing machine, the first place you can go is close to Hagkaup and, er…but in fact, when you start to know, you have several stores, where you can get different things, and you get what you, you.. you find what you want. /Mm/ But… [snaps fingers to indicate speed]. Not like this! It's not obvious. Nothing is like this" (Georgina) !

Nora stated examples of when she felt she did not understand Icelandic etiquette and felt annoyed or even angry by her communications with Icelanders; once when she wanted to enrol her child in sports she approached the Icelandic teacher by telephone who asked her to correspond through email; Nora wrote accordingly but never heard from the teacher. Nora expressed how angry she felt when she was seemingly ignored by the sales person at a car sales lot. She also talked about how she is consistently angry with her intercourse with sales persons in the budget grocery store, Bonus.

4.15 Discrimination

Tilly said that she felt discriminated against when they were trying to find an apartment to rent. She described the task of finding accommodation for them to rent, saying that she would find an advertisement with a property for rent and then she would call and found that the landlord would almost immediately respond that the property was taken even though the advertisement on the internet stated that it was still available for rent. Tilly felt that this was because they were foreigners. She said she could not prove it but she was sure that this was the case. It was evident that she had been marred by this incident and had lost some initial positivity toward Iceland.

Nora talked about the stories she heard of discrimination and especially racism present in Iceland and although she had not experienced any direct racism she felt that this was a part of Icelandic society. Nora spoke about how she perceived that people spoke of Asians, in particular being discriminated against and that she heard about racist acts which had been perpetrated against persons of visible Asian decent.

Linda found that she was experiencing some sort of benign neglect and she equated this to not being welcomed or included in the day-to-day operations of the company she was working for.

A few respondents testified to having experienced a type of exclusion in their workplace due to Icelanders falling back into speaking Icelandic when it was evident that the matter pertained particularly to them. They felt that this was particularly relevant with regards to being able to perform their work tasks and obligations. Without being able to communicate or understand the operations of the company they would not be able to contribute and thus not be able to perform their jobs.

4.16 Cultural distance

Tilly talked about how she experienced an epiphany whilst discovering the effectiveness of taking an assertive approach to transactions with persons and institutions in Iceland. She described how coming face to face with the

administrative office of the university she was enquiring at was very effective at producing the desired results. According to Tilly her extensive experience of dealing with university administration overseas informed her natural approach but that approach was evidently inadequate in Iceland and she had to adjust her way of thinking and behaving accordingly. Initially, she was very frustrated by not being able to acquire the information she required by less direct manners of approaching the university.

" Some people can be quite stand-offish. And, er…we don't know what that's down to. /Mm./ But before I came, I considered, Icelandic people are very warm, they're very friendly. Where as I've only found that about fifty percent of the time. /Right./ And my friend backed me up on that as well. I said, "Do you know if Icelandic people are supposed to be really friendly?" And she said, "You know I've not really gotten to know many of the neighbours. I speak to them in the hallways and things," Some of them are… Two of them are just completely blind to me. /Just stone-wall you?/ Which, seems quite rude." (Elaine)

The established understandings of spouses informed them on how to go about doing things and behave in Iceland with regards to making friends, accessing social services, schools and banking. This, for most spouses was very surprising, that learned understandings did not apply in the same way to Iceland. Spouses expressed their astonishment and surprise at how things were done differently in Iceland. Elaine spoke of how different perceptions of risk and safety were shocking to her at times. Also, the level of trust operating in Icelandic society was surprising. One spouse talked about how she could easily access her husband's finances with his bank card by just declaring that she was his spouse. This was accepted as enough for service operators to authenticate access to banking funds.

The novelty of Iceland was expressed generally as positive. Spouses talked about how they felt that Iceland was a large family and that Reykjavik felt like a cosy village. One spouse spoke of the novelty of being able to walk to all her required destinations, something which she was not used to in her home country. Generally, cultural distance presented positively for those who had resided for a shorter time in Iceland.

4.17 Husband and wife – gender roles

There seemed to be a very ingrained understanding of wives' and mothers' roles in the family. Mothers often made statements which illustrated how their husband's work took priority as a factor in determining how life would be life for them and their families. Jane seemed very tolerant and understanding of her husband's extensive work hours and single-minded commitment to his career and putting his career first. Elaine talked about she felt she had put all of her own needs on hold to organise the relocation to Iceland and make sure that children were cared for, had found schools, the house was installed and her husband was able to attend and pursue his work aspirations.

One spouse, Tiara, felt that her husband was adjusting worse to Iceland than she was. She felt that the loss of their familiar and supportive social network was a blow to her husband and that he did not find an adequate replacement for this in Iceland. Tiara seemed quite down when she spoke of her circumstances in Iceland, her cheery demeanour masking an insecurity in the background.

Jane felt unsupported by her husband, who she seemed to say, expected her to solve her own problems. Jane talked about an incident where she could not access the telephone service in Iceland and she did not know what to do. Despite this, Jane approached this set-back positively and took it as a challenge. She said that it was somewhat satisfactory to solve a problem on her own in this new society which she knew so little about. She said that in this way, by being forced to solve problems creatively; she was learning a lot about Iceland and developing her own confidence and competence through cross-cultural learning.

"Oh, yeah! Definitely. Sure. Um, but there were a lot of times, in the beginning when I didn't have anybody else to go to and I just, like, " I hate Iceland! I wanna leave now!" And. Because he's a man and I'm a woman and we look at things differently and he was trying to always fix it. And [he was] like, "Well, do this!" And I'm like, "No. I just want you to sit there and look at me and nod." [All laugh, particuarly the women]. And, you know, I don't even want to hear, "It'll be ok." I wanna hear, "Yeah," Like, "That's really hard." And then just leave me to it. You

know, I just needed to vent. So I've learned to stop doing that, and now I just go on Skype. And you know, I get a glass of wine before I go on Skype and I've set a time to meet with my girlfriends and I just, get it out there. And get the responses that I need. (Leonora)

4.18 Transformation

It is evident that spouses were experiencing a type of development in their personal lives. Their migration to Iceland were witnessed by multiple examples of problem solving, cross-cultural learning, corrections of misunderstandings and development of personal esteem and confidence as well as logistic functioning. Many spouses talked about how when they arrived in Iceland they underwent a steep learning curve so that after a very short time they became conversant in operating in Icelandic society, although, they said, it was very difficult and frustrating and there remains a lot to develop, improve and accomplish.

Within their personal relationships with their partners spouses often talked about the stress they endured to the point at which they were worried about the security of their relationship with their significant other. One spouse talked about how she felt insecure when she was informed of a 'spate' of relationship break-ups (of Save Ltd expatriate marriages) before she arrived in Iceland. Many spouses talked about how the challenges which they had faced in acculturating had forged a stronger relationship. A few women had chosen to concentrate on their families, giving birth to children whilst in Iceland.

"I don't. I honestly don't think that there has ever been something that we haven't worked out between ourselves in one way or another. /Mm./ I mean, if John's not the right sounding board for me, I mean, if we go back to this spouse thing; it was either going to make us or break us in the first year. And, there were times when it was like, "Oh my God!" Kind of the same when we had our first child and she was cholicy and we didn't sleep for four months. At all. It was that issue of , "Oh! God!" But in the end it makes you stronger. And I think we've become much more, er... tighter unit as a family." (Leonora)

The statements relating to personal development evinced that spouses felt that the trials and tribulations endured in Iceland were cathartic to personal growth. Georgina stated that she felt like there was no choice, that her circumstances in Iceland forced her to learn life lessons and confront her personal inner-conflicts producing greater self-knowledge. She said she felt stronger for being in Iceland.

5 Discussion

This study explored the migration journeys of eleven female expatriate spouses in Iceland. The majority of these ladies had families and children. The factors involved in the individual's resettlement journey as well as the various themes which arose from the focus group discussions will be discussed below.

Essentially, the study tried to explore the texture and context of expatriate spouses' migratory journey through settlement to acculturation. It was apparent that all of these ladies were in a process of transformation; their affiliations which defined their identities were challenged. No man is an island, and migration, being a significant event of great stress impacted the spouses in a variety of ways. Each individual had their story to tell; their mixed experiences testifying to different acculturation strategies and the stages of acculturation that they were in. These impacting factors were either structural or personal; meaning that external influences or internal factors combined to create the migrant's settlement experience.

External factors or structural factors could be the visa status of the spouse, cultural heritage, education or career experience and include individual characteristics. Internal factors are the individual's reflexive decisions as well as psychological and personal reflections on the perturbation in their lives. This study explored the way in which established research described the migrant's experience within the context of an expatriate capacity and how the various structural and personal factors interacted to transform new settlers to Iceland.

The continuum of coping to resilience is constantly traversed throughout the settlement experience and it was apparent that this see-saw of experience was constantly being tipped in favour of certain acculturation strategies. This idea echoes established understandings of the adjustment process expressed as a transformation, a personal evolution that occurs to all migrants. It negates those theses that put a premium on the 'successful' migrant, where the achieving

migrant is seen as having attained a goal. Rather, this study subscribes to the understanding that the migrant's experience is a constant regeneration, a synthesis of various dynamics that interact to produce on any given day a feeling that one can achieve or one is merely coping. This feeling of having a 'good day' in Iceland or a day when negativity rules the experience is common to all persons that attended the discussions.

Essentially the idea that judging the migrant's acculturation outcome, based on one snap-shot of the individual at any given time is misleading as to their overall experience. Barring physiological impediments, such as inherent biological challenges, migrants, and indeed expatriates, when screened for these factors need to be seen in the light of their total understandings and undertakings in adjusting to living in Iceland. Only this can tell the true story of the trials and tribulations that all migrants undergo.

The various acculturation frameworks that have been offered on the subject of migrant integration and expatriate adjustment do not provide a cohesive and equal basis for fitting the various applicable concepts to settlement experience frameworks. Therefore this study attempts to augment the already well-traversed picture of migrant settlement present in the literature; one where the various concepts of acculturation strategies are shown to be linked to migrant psychological functioning and satisfaction. This link is shown to occur within the concepts of stages of acculturation.

Since these spouses, at the time of interview and contact were all still within the first two years of their relocation to Iceland it was evident that their adjustment pattern was not established yet; their acculturation process not yet affirmed. This provides interesting insights into their settlement in Iceland at the beginning stages.

Being a self-initiated expatriate (SIE) in contrast to an employee assigned to a new posting in a foreign country by the parent company puts these expatriates and their families in a unique position (Richardson, 2007). They are neither insured by the thought that they have a return ticket, that is to say, that their contracts have a fixed end date nor are they compensated or bolstered for the upheaval and disruption caused by an international move to the same extent as an inter-company transfer would. This puts these individuals in a category akin to being migrant, however, the relative privilege of job mobility which their working expatriate partners enjoy due to the demand of their skills reassures them (and thus their families) that their chances for onward travel are higher than the usual migrant. Furthermore there is something in the decision testimonies by spouses who consistently divulge their intentions for short to middle-term residence in Iceland. None of the migrants considered spending their lives to old age in Iceland.

5.1 Career orientation

The Career Orientation of the spouse was apparent by the significance they attached to not being able to find work in Iceland. *The work-oriented person* is driven by their subscription to this affiliation. It affects the expatriate spouses' ability to culturally adjust if they do or do not find work (Cole, 2011) in the host country or they experience an interruption in their normal employment. In this study, spouses who did not find work as they expected felt like they were in a social psychological limbo, frustrated by their attempts to find work. It seemed to make them much less satisfied with their roles in the home.

The US Brookfield 2011 survey [11]showed that 60% of spouses and partners were employed before (but not during) the expatriate assignment and only 12% managed to stay employed during their partner's assignment. This is one measurement of the gravity of the spousal adjustment problem reflected in this

[11] This was a Global Relocation Trends Survey Report on all aspects of expatriate recruitment and engagement run by Brookfield Global Relocation Services, a US and Canadian based Human Resources based research and information company, part of the Brookfield family of companies.

study. Since all of the spouses had established careers, coming to Iceland meant a big change in their lives because they did not have any guarantee of employment in Iceland in their fields.

Selmer and Leung's 2003 study showed that female spouses had significantly higher cultural adjustment than male spouses. In addition, career-oriented female spouses whose employment was interrupted had significantly higher cultural adjustment and significantly higher interactional adjustment than career oriented male spouses. This result is consistent with social role theory which suggests that women find themselves able to find meaning in life affiliated to other roles which they undertake. Since this study was conducted on women, it remains to be seen if male expatriate spouses, who fail to find work in Iceland have greater difficulty in acculturating to Iceland, an area of research which requires more attention. However, all the participants in this study exhibited their dynamism in tackling their job-less situation. This is consistent with the above findings that women are likely to adjust better to the host culture than men.

Since all of the spouses in this study had established careers the loss of their *employment status* was felt acutely. The spouses embraced the situation with differing results. Mandy, who exhibited a lesser work orientation because she did not particularly enjoy her job in her home country, found that not being able to find work unlocked the enthusiasm she repressed for pursing leisurely interests such as crocheting and photography. This finding is consistent with established literature which talks about the innovative nature of the resilience process in acculturation (Winkelman, 1994; Pedersen, 1995). This innovation of migrants leads to exploring hereto unexplored avenues of life which expand and fulfil them.

There is a combined affect of the loss of one income, in the case of dual career couples, associated with the anxiety to relocate where one spouse knows that they are not guaranteed work. This has been associated with depression and psychological distress in migrants influencing negatively their ability to acculturate (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). In addition to this anxiety, some

individuals in this study testified to the stress of not being able to work due to visa status. Paradoxically, it appeared in this study that not being able to work caused not only anxiety due to the drop in one income but also a sense of optimism and excitement in response to the challenge to find work. This finding underlines the mixed responses which migrants can have to adversity, where attitude can serve as a protective factor and a bolster to resilience.

5.2 Education

Many of the statements the spouses made illustrated how their identity was not only based on their careers but their elevated status due to having been *educated*. Many were keen to demonstrate that they understood the value of learning a second language and what gains could be had from this. Theron, et al. (2011) referred to the host country's language learning as integral to developing wider social and community networks as well as promoting engagement in educational contexts (2011: 807). The spouses talked about how they looked forward to exploring the Icelandic culture, getting involved in local choirs, knitting groups and book clubs. They all were familiar with the extensive network of information in English which could be found on the internet about Iceland and utilised, particularly the social networking site, 'Facebook' extensively. This type of computer and educational literacy enables migrants to create connections with the Icelandic community and with other foreigners that would not be open to those without the skill or education to obtain it.

Spouses also emphasised the fact that they had established careers which gave them options to pursue similarly linked interests and employment. They all appeared to be quite savvy, being able to use the internet to navigate through the city and search for information about Iceland. Although many participants also complained about the information on the internet being in Icelandic and the fact that translations into English were insufficient. Also, the qualitative data revealed that women had a high level of understanding of what they were going through; that is, that their lack of integration in Icelandic society was a challenge to their concept of 'self' as well as negotiable through greater and deepening

cultural and language understanding. For those who exercised a degree of autonomy; like choosing how to spend their time or making plans for their own future they found themselves participating more in Icelandic society, gaining more awareness of their options.

Cakir (2009) in her thesis on Turkish women migrants to the UK noted how those women who had an educational orientation were both more optimistic and were more able to seize social and educational opportunities to achieve personal and social gains. This educational orientation seemed to serve as a protective factor or an effective coping strategy for the expatriate spouses in gaining autonomy and control over their lives in Iceland.

Education, as well as career is a sign of social status; more advanced and specialised skills are equated with higher social standing. The difficulty at which some spouses expressed in taking on menial and manual labour jobs like cleaning work means that they held great pride in their status and found it difficult to condescension of their profiles. This indicates that greater social standing can also serve as a hindrance or risk factor in adaptation, barring by personal pride migrants' bonding with host country groups and networks.

5.3 Migrant mothers

The special role of being a *migrant mother* put spouses in an additional risk group of isolation. Their situation puts them at risk of being isolated; their nurturing and caring roles for others makes them put others' interests and needs before their own. This is particularly pertinent with regards to lacking assistance with childcare, something that established familial support would provide at home from grandparents and extended family and friends (Erel, 2002). Without this affirming support migrant mothers are put in a position of taking on more obligations and responsibility with their children than at home.

Leonora felt that her parenting style was not developing positively and felt that this was a result of her lack of employment and inability to connect to other mothers in Iceland. Although she did have the extra support of her friends, who

would help her babysit in her home country, she felt that her family was much closer as a result of being forced to spend much more time together on the weekends. These feelings are consistent with the findings of Erel (2002) who stated that migrant mothers are under considerable additional stress because of their mothering roles. This is considered in the light of the disruption to the family network during the migration process.

It must be stated that the spouses' perception of their personal options for employment or other pursuits outside the house impacted their feeling of well-being considerably, and their satisfaction of their role as mother to their offspring. According to Lee (2005) who equates empowerment of individuals with psychological well-being, women who feel that they are in control of the direct consequences of their actions are likely to have more positive psychological functioning. Cakir (2009) confirmed that mothers' personal feeling of empowerment and control in their lives was directly proportional to their mothering skills. That is to say, migrant mothers are better in undertaking their responsibilities in the home when they feel empowered and personally satisfied. Many spouse mothers testified to the stress they felt by not being employed and having sole responsibility of their children at home made them resent their role and perform worse as a parent. Leonora said that when she started working it was a great relief to her and she felt that she was able to be a better mother to her children. She said that she did feel some guilt about not being as 'good' a mother to her children because of her own high expectations.

Some mothers expected that they would be able to extend their connections with the Icelandic community through participation in their children's lives at day care and at school and various sporting and recreational activities. However, to their chagrin, mothers found it very disappointing when staff and parents at their children's school and care facilities were often unresponsive to their greetings and disengaged in conversations with foreign parents. Spouse mothers felt that it was simply hard work to develop social connections with Icelanders through their children. Many parents stated that they found children a much easier avenue for engaging other parents and persons in their home countries.

Since migrant mothers were not able to pursue their own interests due to circumstantial limitations in Iceland; lacking language competency, information and time due to familial obligations, they often conferred their aspirations on their offspring. They cited the fact that their children would be fluent in Icelandic, a second language and that they would develop links to the community, even if the women would not (Richardson, 2006). Also, while emphasising education, the spouses mentioned that they worried that their children would not have as high a level of education in Iceland as back home or internationally. They worried that their children's educational standards would lag behind and that they would no longer be able to integrate with children of their own age at school in their home countries. This is congruent with findings, (Erman, Kalaycioglu, Rittersberger-Tilic, 2002; Leyendecker, Scholmerich & Citlak, 2006) which state migrant mothers' sense of loss is transferred to their children; where they feel disempowered, they transform this into high expectations upon their children to succeed academically.

5.3.1 Mothers with children in school

Mothers with children in school expressed concern that their children were not developing appropriate cultural etiquette or good manners. This they attributed to the Icelandic cultural context which the children were learning from, citing that they felt Icelanders to be rude. Mother spouses felt that they would need to transmit their cultural heritage sufficiently to their children so that they knew how to behave in both cultures. In fact many mothers expressed how they felt that their children's behaviour without this intervention was less polite than children from their own cultural background. This indicates a sense of cultural superiority or lack of cross-cultural understanding by mothers resulting in this seeming intolerance for Icelandic culture. This finding is consistent with Anthias and Yuval-Davis' 1989 thesis which expressed migrant mother's role as educating their children on cultural symbols and language from their home country.

Richardson's research (2006) indicates that children are not *per se* an obstacle in the decision to expatriate to a foreign country, however the individual

meanings which parents attribute to the expatriate experience dominate this debate. Elaine, for instance found that her child's opinion regarding the relocation to Iceland played a substantial role in convincing her and the family to make the move. She mentioned that if his child was not happy with the move the decision would have been much more psychologically difficult.

5.4 Emotions and personal factors, psychology and attitude; adjusting, resilience and strategies

Taking a central role in *making the decision* to migrate puts migrants at lower risk of being depressed than those who are forced to migrate (Hovey and Magana, 2002) and serves as an affective protective factor. This was evident in the optimism which all spouses expressed when they talked about their move to Iceland. Almost all of the respondents talked about the move to Iceland as novel and exciting; an adventure. Their relatively privileged position was buffered by their partner's pre-confirmed employment in Iceland. It was interesting to note that some ladies talked about the uncertainty and anxiety they felt when met, shortly after their relocation with the possibility of the termination of their husband's contract. This illustrated the centrality to the move that their professionally employed spouse's expatriate status granted them.

Richardson (2006)'s research into expatriate families backs up the statements made in this study, where spouses were talking about the decision to relocate to Iceland it became evident that this was not just a unilateral decision made by the employee. Spouses would often use the collective term, "we", "us" instead of "I" or "he" when talking about the decision to move. Richardson's (2006 : 474) findings concur with this study that the decision to move was made jointly, as a family and that all 'significant' persons were considered in the move and that this occurrence is consistent amongst expatriate families. However, in cases in which it was apparent that a spouse was concerned about the power distribution in her relationship with her partner, particularly when thought of as a 'trailing

spouse'[12], a derogatory term, the spouses felt it necessary to reiterate their unilateral role in the matter of deciding to relocate. Linda spoke of the dynamics in the relationship explaining that "He" would follow "Me" where ever "I" wanted to go.

Winkelman's stages (1994, initially, Oberg, 1954 and Richardson, 1974; also Pedersen, 1995) in migrant settlement are useful in elucidating the turmoil of the settlement process. Interestingly, the *'honeymoon'* first stage of the adjustment process (Winkelman, 1994) revealed how the spouses gave meaning to Icelandic society. Those who were at this entry point of their journey to acculturation, their statements related to Iceland revealed the expectations which they had of their life in Iceland ; how unrealistic these were and how much self-knowledge they had when it came to their options in Iceland. For Elaine, she expected it to be possible to find a job in her field of expertise and that she would learn Icelandic and develop social support networks relatively quickly. Elaine had found some part time work and felt from this experience that it must be easy to find similar employment elsewhere. Her pre-arrival expectations as well as the ease in finding her present job guided her optimism.

Cole (2011) reiterated that these *first expectations* are the most vital of all; they set up the migrant for their adaptation trajectory[13]. Some, coming with no expectations found themselves thrown into the unknown and unfamiliar; others, with expectations of job and friends which quickly turn out to be unattainable set themselves up for a fall, realising that things would not go according to their preconceptions; still others who had laid some groundwork, researching their new home before arriving made an investment into a future in Iceland based on knowledge and realistic options. Those persons who laid the groundwork for their migration journey find themselves better prepared for the task of setting up a life in Iceland; pre-arrival preparations thus serving as a context-based protective factor for migrants.

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[12] The terminology used to denote the spouse as an encumbrance (Harvey, 1997; Harvey and Wiese, 1998; Selmer and Leung, 2003, Haslberger, 2005)

[13] Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique and Burgi, 2001.

5.5 Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to generate adaptive strategies in response to adversity (Theron, et al. 2011, 2007 and Masten, 2001). In a study by Theron, et al. (2011), it was found that the protective factors of cultural artefacts, religious affiliation, familial sharing and outlets for using their mother-tongue promoted resilience in youth affected by great circumstantial adversity. The study was an exploration of the resilience promoting characteristics of youth migrating to Canada and those living in extraordinarily difficult circumstances in the slum townships of South Africa. Similarly, spouses in this study talked about their relationships with their family, particularly with their significant others, as crucial to their well-being in Iceland. Much of the talk was centred about the importance of spousal harmony and growing through the trials and challenges of cultural adjustment and logistical settlement together. Husbands and partners helped women to negotiate misunderstandings, mediate feelings and resolve interpersonal disputes with their spouses. It appears that spousal commitment and support amounts to a significant protective factor for women migrants[14].

5.6 Acculturation strategies and the scale between coping to empowerment

Shih (2004) suggests two different conceptualizations of the process which successful individuals go through when they face with adversity: "empowerment" in successful individuals versus "coping" in the case of stigmatized individuals. The difference being that empowering strategies enrich and evolve positively, where as coping strategies avoid negative consequences rather than create positive outcomes.

The above conceptualisation, it must be pointed out, adds value to unequal terminology which then turns back the 'evolution' tide which tried to attach a sense of evolution with culture shock (unhinging it from its value orientation as Adler [1987], etc have established). Shi (2004) asserts that resilience is a quality (or process) which occurs only for those who manage to evolve *positively*. In

[14] Abuzahra (2004)

addition, it seems premature to evaluate the individual's resilience given the information on the time trajectory of migration and its 'U' shaped journey. At what point can it be said that a migrant is exhibiting resilience and others merely coping? Are both mutually exclusive or are they also complex processes which dynamically interact at various times showing both the best and worst of personality? This would seem to suggest that coping is not a part of evolution or personal growth. Essentially, this study found that all participants had experienced at some time that they were merely 'coping' and some features of resilience in their settlement journey. Therefore individuals need to be assessed in light of their over-all experience and not merely categorised as 'successful' or 'unevolved', implying an inability to adapt. A holistic approach would be to consider the entirety of the experience as a transformation process.

In order to undertake resilience one needs to face adversity[15] (Schoon, 2006). Perhaps the task, to find an appropriate instrument to describe resilience, remains remote. A better understanding of what is trying to be achieved must be established first before theoretical advancements on the conceptualisation of resilience can be made. To illustrate the point differently, depending on the position of the migrant on the "U" shape trajectory, their progress will determine whether or not migrants are resilient. Therefore the argument returns to its original dilemma, how to measure immigrant adaptation outcomes? Stigmatising the adaptation journey of individuals does not assist them in their transformation, it only anticipates possible outcomes.

5.7 Resilience involving attitude and ability to utilise support

Some spouses whose expectations put them in a high risk category for ill-adjustment to their new home, were found to be much more resourceful and their attitude, and drive to succeed as well as utilisation of support available proved to supply them with a 'lion's share' of resilience due to being much more resourceful,

[15] This is the main difference between *resilience* and other terms like *positive adjustment* or *competence*.

having attitude and drive to succeed, and/or a utilisation of support available. These combined characteristics as well as realistic goal-setting are illustrations of resiliency in individuals (Killian, 2004). To illustrate, Linda arrived in Iceland expecting to find work, even though temporary and below her skill capacity, she was looking forward to working in a nursery. When she found that there was no work available she resorted to trying to learn Icelandic, and when it was found that this was also not a realistic option, she turned to other avenues for employment and education. The anguish she described, when presented with a number of hindrances to her plans did not deter her from pursuing alternative options. She described the process of her surmounting various challenges as stimulating and empowering; she said that she extended her social network, deepened cultural understandings and broadened her personal horizons. In short, this resilience which she displayed was one of a process of personal growth. This is despite the fact that she too felt that she was merely 'coping' at times.

The process of resilience is described as being the sum of a number of interplaying factors; structural, contextual/ situational, psychological, personal and internalised dynamics. When the migrant exhibits the process of resilience she displays both the structural and internalised factors of resiliency such as being able to interact with others well, make decisions on her own, organise her life in a satisfactory manner as well as feel a sense of control, self-empowerment, self-assertion and satisfaction with her life (Stein, 1997). Established research[16] has shown that the above mechanisms serve to give migrant women the opportunity to exercise a developing control over their socio-political environment, the process of self-empowerment. Mandy suggested that her perception of a 'successful' migrant was someone who was engaged in the community, involved in social and interest groups and was generally active, not passive and static sitting at home waiting for their lives to change. This may have reflected Mandy's cultural values as well.

[16] Cakir, 2009, Zimmerman & Warschausky (1998), Chamberlin and Schene (1997), Zimmerman & Rappaport (1998)

5.8 Loss

The theme of loss and lack of support pervaded the discussions with the spouses and was apparent in the form of social and familial support, status, income, employment; familiar environment and goods, cultural artefacts and familiar societal meanings which were talked about. This was a source of anxiety and mourning for the women who expressed great frustration with those things which could not be replicated in their new homeland, Iceland. This is consistent with Aycan and Berry's (1996) study in which the loss of status which Turkish migrant women endured was associated acutely with the sense of dissatisfaction felt in the country of migration, Canada. In the 1996 study, it was found that the lack of social support was key to psychological adaptation and marital well-being. Werner (1995) stated that a migrant's disposition, their attitude to their surrounding environment made them act reflexively and thus influenced their future processes of adaptation.

One source of depression for the women was the idea that their *family and friends* were so far away and they could not rely on them for support. Georgina told of how there was more pressure on her relationship with her spouse due to the fact that her mother-in-law could not come and baby-sit for them any more. Cohen and Wills (1985) stated that practical and other forms of instrumental support as well as social companionship were primary in their role responding effectively to stressful events.

When Tatiana talked about raising a family in Iceland she said that she could not imagine this without the support of her close-knit family network at home. She said that this would definitely be a reason for her to return home. Cohen and Wills (1985) found that an individual's subjective perception will influence their ability to react to stressors in their lives irrespective of the reality of the situation. This lends credibility to Tatiana's opinion that her extended family's role is necessary in raising a family in Iceland.

5.9 Discrimination

It was evident that some of the interviewees were the target of perceived discrimination; either directly or indirectly. For Nora, the stories which she had heard from friends that made her concerned. Linda experienced a type of language discrimination in which, despite knowing that she could not speak or understand Icelandic, people around her insisted on speaking Icelandic. In an appendix to the Icelandic Human Rights Centre's Third Report on Human Rights in Iceland, 57% of the Icelandic population admitted to perceiving discrimination of foreigners in society and 26% of persons had personally witnessed acts of discrimination. In addition to overt acts of discrimination, inconspicuous xenophobia is evident in some employee's stipulations that all foreigners are fluent in the Icelandic language (IHRC Report, 2011c).

Tilly's suspicions that she was being denied the opportunity to rent a property because of her nationality made her angry and resentful of Icelanders. Shih (2004) suggested that whether people perceive discrimination as legitimate or illegitimate is important because if they see unfairness as legitimate, they repress their anger and do not take any actions against discrimination (Shih, 2004), which may make people more vulnerable to being powerless. This is consistent with Skaftadottir's (2010) findings that Asians in Iceland felt that their physical appearance made them more conspicuous in society and that there was a lot of stigma associated with being a 'bought bride', married to an older Icelandic man.

The 2011 IHRC (2011c) Report further pointed out that a true poverty trap was being established in Iceland due to the lack of adequate legal regulation on the lives of foreign nationals. Certain situations may arise in which persons may not be able to work, for instance due to pregnancy or parental leave and due to their partner's lack of legal status in Iceland are unable to work to provide for the family. Nora spoke of her inability to work due to her legal status in Iceland, although frustrated with the situation, concluded that she was content to concentrate on her role as a mother and supporter of her husband's career. She did comment on how she was not so comfortable with having to reduce the budget

on household expenses and save money when she was not used to thinking about these concerns at home. Even if she wanted to find work to augment their household income she was not legally allowed to and thus unable to resolve her dilemma.

The difficulty of accessing Icelandic society and integrating often drives foreigners to support one another, thus having less opportunity to interact in Icelandic society keeping them further from being able to acculturate. Over time, the progressive difficulty which one experiences with failing to integrate and acculturate to ones satisfaction contributes to a widening gap, a mutual exclusion of cultures, in which the foreign culture(s) are self-sufficient and to a degree operate in their own societal spheres. This is supported by Cakir's (2009) study which documented how due to the self-sufficient nature of the Turkish community, their cross-over interaction with British society was limited.

The impact of this perceived discrimination was to make persons apprehensive of their potential in Iceland to integrate and stay on in the future. Women who expressed some distress as to their progress in integrating in Icelandic society; not being able to make friends due to language discrimination or not being able to find a job described life in Iceland as being difficult. Indeed lower psychological functioning has been attributed to discrimination amongst migrants (Moradi & Risco, 2006; Whitely & Kite, 2006)[17].

5.10 Loss of confidence

The migrant experiences loss in a variety of forms, including loss of confidence in oneself, loss of meanings associated with ones identity that were here-to constituted by work and the status achieved from work; loss of place in society generated by social networks/ position, loss of family networks and social stratus (Copeland, 2009). This study found that these competing interests, where the migrant's social status, traditional values, basic underpinnings to societal understandings are challenged by the host country's characteristics cause a sense

[17] In fact, migrant women experience discrimination less than migrant men do (Liebkind and Jasinski-Lahti, 2000).

of rift in the women's sense of self (Hovey and Magana, 2002). Their corresponding loss of self-confidence was associated with statements of negativity and a sense of cultural superiority. Due to their challenged subscriptions that generate 'identity', the accompanying stress manifested itself in a number of coping strategies. Some women talked about how they felt keen to learn Icelandic but approached their acculturation in their own time and in their own way. Others had admitted to giving up learning Icelandic, at least for the time being and others had decided that at some level they would try to take on Icelandic customs and norms. These various strategies of coping and resilience-promoting methods show how the road to transformation involves the on-going swing of the satisfaction-dissatisfaction pendulum.

Some participants in the study decided to retain a critical and depressed attitude to Iceland. Statements from spouses indicated that opportunities to relocate elsewhere were slim that this was a type of 'blowing-off steam' that helped them negotiate and process their experience and frustrations. It appeared the focus groups were long enough however for persons to express both sides of the spectrum. Almost none of the respondents maintained a negative point of view, point blank. This process of adjusting, readjusting, socialising and re-checking personal opinions serves as a very strong mediator of personal emotions.

These integration, segregation and assimilation strategies have been associated with differing levels of self-esteem (Castro, 2002); the highest being the integrative approach to acculturation. Established literature does not have a standardised way of measuring psychological functioning as regards acculturation, due to the fact that there are different measurement conceptualisations. However one study by Castro (2002) examined 1174 Costa Rican high school students and attempted to link 4 types of strategies of acculturation with psychological functioning that was measured by level of self-esteem. The findings ranked integration strategy as resulting in the highest level of self-esteem, followed by separation, assimilation, and marginalisation strategies, respectively. Marginalisation was found to be associated with poor adaptation (lower self-esteem and more mental health problems). Castro

explained that the success of the integration strategy was due to being able to harness both social support systems, that of the host country's and of the home country's. In addition, this integration of understandings between two cultures would result in lesser inter-ethnic conflict and provide the migrant with a way of achieving social and cultural competencies.

This study explored the ways in which expatriate spouses acculturated in Icelandic society. The loss of self-confidence and the accompanying confusion of identity (Ponterotto, Baluch, & Carielli, 1998) indicated the psychological ambiguity that ensues from cross-cultural contact. Those spouses who subscribed to the integrative strategy, learning Icelandic, persistently with interacting within Icelandic spheres of society and trying to make friends with Icelanders, they appeared much more content with their lives. Linda pointed out that though she had resided for a similar or less time than most of the expatriate spouses interviewed, she had not thought about all the issues discussed for a long time because she felt that she had worked through those distressing issues and moved on, figuratively speaking. Others, such as Tiara felt that the difficulties discussed were still acutely pertinent to her; learning Icelandic language still seemed overwhelming and participating in social activities in her various groups of contact was still limited.

These changes are a great strain to ones identity. The corresponding loss of self-confidence and identity leaves migrants feeling, as if they are in a liminal space, in a void, not belonging anywhere except amongst other foreigners (Choi et al., 2009 and Stryker, 2007). Even in a group with other foreigners, this does not ensure that old status is resumed as identity is constantly being informed by those structural interactions in the surrounding environment (Stryker, 2007) and this can be even more disorienting for migrants. However it is known that a stable number of persons from ones own ethnic community is needed to retain foreigners in general (Chau and Lai, 2011) and can serve as a great protective factor.

For Asian immigrants to Iceland regard their family network as vital to their wellbeing and their understandings of identity (Skaftadottir, 2010). There are the

odd exceptions to this but generally, without the support of home country friends (and sometimes family), migrants stand a slimmer chance of staying in the new country if they are given a choice, like mobile expatriates (Richardson, 2006). They must feel comfortable enough to remain in the new host country. For the spouses in this study, the lack of group cohesion amongst expatriate spouses in Save Ltd. was a source of distress. In the follow-up communications with individuals it became apparent that they were yearning for a stronger group identity as Save Ltd Expatriate-Spouses. This camaraderie was evident amongst co-workers of their husbands and they wanted to take part in this because Save Ltd. employees derived much support from this affiliation. Spouses seemed to say that it was easier for their partners because their social support network was pre-established with the work contract. On the contrary, one spouse confessed that her partner was not adjusting to Iceland as well as she was because he did not derive the same sense of belonging from his social environment at work. This indicates that though a company's culture can be a source of support, it can also produce feelings of ostracism by those employees who do not feel that they fit into the company's team dynamics.

5.11 Language insecurity

Language insecurity featured prominently in the conversations of expatriate spouses. Many spouses felt that their tenuous grasp of Icelandic made them feel vulnerable. Feelings of exclusion, isolation and fear in interacting with the Icelandic culture were apparent mostly because people were apprehensive about missing vital practical and social information that would assist them to develop more control over their lives in Iceland and extend their social networks. This is consistent with the findings of Yeh, Kim, Pituc and Atkins (2008) that observed similar consequences of language difficulties of Chinese migrants to the US. Statements from spouses exhibited that mothers were particularly proud of the accomplishments of their children learning Icelandic at school. It is yet to be seen whether the children's Icelandic language competency may disconcert parents if

they are not able to learn Icelandic to a similar level as that found in Cakir's (2009) research of Turkish mothers in the UK.

Lack of Icelandic language competency can lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. Cross-cultural competency is a necessary aspect of developing acculturation (Cole, 2011) and failure to progress in cross-cultural learning of meanings of cultural artefacts, etiquette and norms can lead to a type of mutual exclusion if not developed. When Leonora confessed that she felt very frustrated by not being able to interact effectively with Icelanders in order to develop friendships, it is the case that not only does Iceland's closed cultural etiquette toward foreigners act as exclusionist but reciprocally, foreigners' misunderstandings of Icelandic social etiquette remain unlearned and unclarified. Cakir (2009) talked about how lack of language skills were the cause of great mental strain and anxiety for Turkish women in the UK and how they found themselves living their lives through and dependent on their children to conduct social interaction.

Lack of Icelandic language competency meant that making friends with other foreigners was much easier, because of the things that the spouses shared in common with other foreigners. They were also drawn to them because of their inability to participate in Icelandic conversations with nationals. Beiser and Hou (2001) stipulated that this camaraderie between foreigners is healthy, even necessary for migrants, at least in the first months of arriving in a new country, providing them with support and promoting good mental health. On the other hand, a developing awareness of their options in the new host country as well as self-knowledge of the consequences of not knowing language in their lives is important in the process of immigrant acculturation. Cakir (2009) states that this developing perspective is something that develops over a number of years of residency in the host country. Here again, it is evident that a long-term perspective of migrant adaptation is necessary in assessing individuals' over-all ability to adjust, not just the 'snap-shot' approach as outlined above.

Beiser and Hou (2001) further iterated the *learned helplessness and hopelessness* of migrants who do not attain sufficient language skills in the host

country over the long run. This is relevant to the current study because a number of spouses mentioned how they had all but given up trying to learn Icelandic because they did not feel that they could acquire the language easily. Also, at the background of their thoughts was the fact that they did not intend to reside in Iceland for the rest of their lives and felt that if they lived in Iceland for more than three years they would then change their mind and make a more concerted effort to acquire the language. In addition many were demoralised by what they felt were inadequate Icelandic language classes provided to them by the company and various language institutions in Iceland. This goes to show that it is not only migrants with lower social status who are affected by the lack of concerted immigrant integration policy by the Icelandic government (IHRC Report, 2011c) but also those with higher social standing, support and links to information such as the expatriate spouses. The general consensus was that it was reasonable to communicate in English in Iceland, since this was spoken by the spouses and English is learned as a second language in Icelandic schools.

The pervasive nature of the Icelandic language in all aspects of life in Iceland means that foreigners who do not understand Icelandic can miss out on substantial and vital information pertaining to them. This adds to the feeling of mutual exclusion, a feeling consistent with the findings on Turkish women who did not gain English language competency in the UK (Cakir, 2009). In testimony to this, Leonora spoke about how she felt inferior and disregarded when her co-workers did not include her in conversations by speaking Icelandic, even though they knew she did not understand Icelandic. In response, Leonora said that she would sometimes desist in insisting on being included in the discussions and retreat to her workstation.

5.12 Trade-offs

Spouses talked about the *trade-offs of moving* to Iceland, now that they were seeing the reality of living in their new home. Many people talked about the perception of the safety of society and how they worried less about their children's safety. They liked how informal procedures were, but conversely how un-transparent processes were for undertaking basic task such as accessing

information on applying for loans, government funding and guidelines pertaining to study. This cognitive process of weighing up the advantages and difficulties of life in Iceland refers again to the perpetual generation of identity (Morley and Chen, 1996, Rubenstein, 2001) and the use of multiple acculturation strategies, negotiated through adjusting perceptions, an idea to which Adler subscribed to (1987). This process is thought of as an opportunity for self-growth and evolution of personal cultural learning (Adler, 1987).

De-emphasizing the hardship and suffering that might come with cross-cultural moves, Adler (1987) thinks of culture shock as a profound learning experience which leads to a high degree of self-awareness and personal growth. Instead of considering culture shock as a disease for which adaptation is the cure, it is paradoxically at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience. It is an experience in self-understanding and change (Adler, 1987).

Ellingsworth's (1988: 269) emphasis on the self-examination dimension of crossing cultures iterated adaptation as confronting not only 'the other', but also the 'self'. In this way, the migrant's experience is seen as situated in a neutral 'salutogenic' manner and not a negative 'pathogenic' process (Glanz and Sluis, 2001). In fact through the process of questioning ones self the spouses exhibited a loss of self-confidence; they considered new ideas and affiliations demonstrating constant generation of identity (Kim, 2011, Rubenstein, 2003). Echoing this, Kim (2011) illustrated how Asian women would change their affiliations and their perceptions of the West after having migrated to the Western world and becoming disappointed with the lifestyle that they had seen initially portrayed in media in their home country. That is to say, those former preconceptions are continually readjusted with the changing reality of the individual. In this study, this point was particularly evident in Elaine's testimony that she considered the schooling system to be more adjusted to serving the children's learning needs than worrying about exaggerated safety measures such as those in her home country. Linda, likewise, testified to how her misunderstandings of Icelandic behavioural norms were clarified within herself when she realised that Icelanders' ideas of proximal etiquette or personal space were not intended maliciously. She put it like this: if someone nudged you or invaded your personal

space in the same way that occurs commonly in Iceland, she or he would receive a punch or a severe reprimand in public.

Carver (1998; and Rogler, 1994) pointed out that adversity can even provide an opportunity for migrant women to develop new skills such as dealing with the ambiguity that comes from a new cultural context. This was found to be linked to elevated self-confidence and strengthened personal relationships. In this study, Leonora felt that her family was better off for their time in Iceland, that they were closer, more "tight-knit". In her home country, she mentioned how they would spend weekends juggling time with the kids and not really spending any substantial time together doing things as a family. However, here in Iceland the weekends were mostly spent as a family. She felt that this was good for them as a family.

5.13 Spouses and their partners

The couples exhibited very distinct gender-oriented roles which pointed to the fact that the female spouse took a greater part in the issues of the household and practical organisational issues. And where the female spouse had previously been the main breadwinner, the migration to Iceland had caused, somewhat a reorganisation of gender roles. This opportunity to reconfigure the obligations of man and wife has often been cited as positive for women migrants (George, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). However, as mentioned above, this redistribution of responsibilities can result in a feeling of being shackled to the home and home duties for women.

Nevertheless, Cole (2011) reiterated the important roles that spouses can play in supporting both the expatriate worker as well as providing unexpected resources in their capacity of educated and skilled persons to support the recruiting company in times of labour shortage. In this way, migrant women can obtain respect and independence despite their relatively secondary social standing to their male partners.

Spouses' acquiescence to the relocation decision was vital in initiating the migration to Iceland. Statements from respondents show that these women

expressed their powerlessness in direct proximity to their control over the decision to stay or leave Iceland. This expressed itself in apparent power differentials between genders but could be interpreted as a subjective statement of the individual's perception of powerlessness in contrast to their actual position of power within the family unit.

One respondent, Nora described the dynamics of her relationship with her husband; she implied that her acquiescence was the primary factor in whether the family would migrate to Iceland and how long they would dwell there. It appears that her direction was perceived as primary in determining the activities and comportment of the family. Nora listed the extensive lengths which her husband took to research and educate Nora on the climate and situation in Iceland when her husband came for a look-see visit.

The study's findings that the theme of sacrifice for the family's needs and putting one's own preferences in a position of lesser priority, or indeed the fact that the women migrated on the behest of their husband's career, shapes their role as one of nurturer and carer (Gilligan, 1982). As stated above, playing a role in decision-making also contributes to the migrants' perception of control over their lives and puts them in a lesser risk of depression (Hovey and Magana, 2002).

Also Hite and McDonald (2003) have reinforced this study's findings that women will consider their 'significant other's needs before their own in making career decisions. Indeed Yui (2009) stated that wives will follow their migrating husbands to established jobs which have been prearranged, where as the wives are largely left to initiate their own employment search. Therefore, it is established that this study followed Yui's findings. Indeed, it is very rare for both husband and wife to be able to relocate whilst both retaining employment on an equal standing. By virtue of the conditions of expatriation, one partner will initiate migration based on the opportunities that the other can offer. Often one person's career will take primacy over the other's and one of them will have to settle for the uncertainty of a new life in a new country. This was certainly the case for the majority of the spouses who were interviewed in this study.

Being in the position of the unemployed, many women exerted their energies in house and home duties such as caring for the family and children. This position of being at home was distressing and frustrating to some because of their lack of alternative options or feeling house-bound. Regardless of their sense of satisfaction with their roles, all women expressed their indignation at being regarded as being 'just housewives' (Liversage, 2009) because they felt that this was derogatory.

Indeed, studies show that a strong work-orientation for individuals can mean that they will adjust or acculturate with more difficulty due to this strong work affiliation to the identity (Linehan, 2002) if they find themselves without work in the host country. That is to say that if men have to adjust to being the second breadwinner to their wives or if they are not able to find work they find it more difficult to acculturate than women, according to Cole (2011) as well as researchers, Selmer and Leung (2003). It was difficult to establish this in the current study since many of the spouses mentioned how directionless they felt not being able to find work.

While women migrants are seen as undertaking a nurturing role in the family, their position is central to the idea of the family as well as their identity as individuals (Richardson, 2006). In relation to their ongoing generation of identity, their personal experience as well as that of their significant others in the family can tend to blur into a shared understanding, where identity as part of the family is multi-dimensional and based on social constructs (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Indeed, Richardson (2010) in her later study stated that family can serve as a vital support structure, the more the host country is culturally distant from the expatriate's home culture. Indeed the importance of the female spouse is more than just a 'trailing' factor and perhaps because of the great responsibilities and supporting role of the spouse, she also holds central power in the family. This was evident from the testimonies of spouses when they spoke of their role in making the decision to relocate as well as the central role they took in organising the logistics of migration, despite their many complaints that Save Ltd did not recognize their part in making the move possible.

5.14 The 'dark' side of the globalisation of work

The glamour of the expatriate position is overshadowed by a number of risks (Richardson & Zikic 2007) which the expatriates undertake in moving to the host country. The lack of support, the inexperience of companies, the inability to deal with expatriate issues accounted for much of the anxiety that spouses testified to in their relocation experience. Also, on arriving and finding out that the impression that the spouses were given of the country, its culture and the support that the company could offer were mistaken set the spouses up for great disappointment in some cases. This situation shows the tip of the iceberg of what is understood as the 'darker' side of the expatriate work experience.

Due to the centrality of the spouse's role in actualising the relocation to Iceland, the company's relationship with expatriate spouses was of an interdependent nature. Employees with families are shown to adjust better than those without (Cui and Awa, 1992). The expatriate assignment is a family decision and each individual's experience affects and supports the other. This goes for couples too.

Richardson and Zikic (2007) talked about the risks that pertain to international expatriate assignments, both for the employee and the spouse; the risk that an assignment would not be considered prestigious or enhance career standing, as well as the stress that this change in lifestyle would cause to the family of the expatriate, such as if the spouse were unable to find work. Many spouses in this study attested to their fear of their relationship not surviving due to the stress of mal-acculturation. This finding mirrored Richardson & Zikic's (2007) statements that the expatriate experience was fraught with transience, lack of permanence as well as the hesitance to make lasting friendships due to the uncertainty of the expatriate time-frame, with relationship break-up a sad side effect of this reality.

Despite these misgivings attributed to expatriate assignment, it is understood that foreign work will bring a fresh start (Richardson, 2010) as well as more control and flexibility over one's career (King, 2004). Many expatriates testify to the sense of adventure they feel when contemplating a move to a new

country (Richardson and McKenna, 2002) so despite all the potential risks and pitfalls, expatriates and their families are still willing to make the move. Similarly, the spouses in this study talked about the many beauties of the Icelandic environment and the unique nature of the culture; they spoke of the romantic attraction of being able to experience a new lifestyle. In particular many spouses mentioned how the lifestyle of modern-day Iceland is akin to how their home countries were over thirty years ago. Nostalgia and romanticism played a large part in the spouse's imaginings of their adventurous lives in Iceland. They all seemed willing to move despite the many downsides and risks of changing their lives.

5.15 Conclusion : Icelanders, culture, expatriate spouses and outsiders

Iceland's people have a collectivist-individualist consciousness which leads to a great sense of independence. The paradox lies in their herd mentality leading to a feeling of great security within the population (Rafnsdóttir and Ómarsdóttir (2010 in Rafnsdóttir (2010) eds.). Migrants feel left out of this 'mysterious network' of society which they feel they cannot enter. This makes them feel at once that there is a definite goal in acculturation, (a simple, straightforward road to being accepted as friend, at least, not as 'other') as well as the feeling that this goal is very difficult and possibly unattainable.

This sense of extremity reflects in a figurative manner the juxtaposing features of Iceland, black and dark at winter, perpetually light in summer: depressive and expressive in art; closed and mute in appearance. Spouses often cited that the experience of living in Iceland and trying to acculturate would either 'make or break' their relationships with their partners. This is how acutely the spouses felt culture-shock in settling into Iceland.

Support from the Icelandic government for immigrants is sparse. The low population means that there is not the same provision for migrant initiatives as in other countries; the capacity to run large-scale and in-depth integration strategies is not there and the financial backing is not provided. For instance migrants in Iceland are not entitled *per sé* to Icelandic language classes; they

have to pay for it themselves unless they are employed. As a result initiatives to translate official and public information are sporadic and inconsistent. The relative impact of large-scale migration is still a new phenomenon to Icelanders so they are still digesting what it means to their culture and their society.

A study by Hjalmsdottir and Bjarnason (2008) revealed that the attitude of Icelandic adolescents towards newcomers are overwhelmingly negative, especially toward those migrants whose physical features distinguish them clearly as not being Icelandic. Part of the problem is the racial orientation of juvenile violence which has occurred in Iceland (Morgunbladid, 20th June, 2001). According to the study conducted by Hjalmsdottir and Bjarnason (2008), adolescents distinguish also between those who have naturalised and those migrants who have come in more recent waves of migration to Iceland such as Eastern Europeans, Asians and Africans. Newcomers are regarded in a more stigmatised light than established migrants. Therefore, spouses' concerns about foreigner discrimination remain a pertinent issue in Iceland.

Despite the ambiguity in which migrants see themselves and their status in Iceland, Eva Hoffman (1998) states that this is not unique. All migrants have to go through a sense of evolution in their personality, travelling through the dark and difficult sides of coping and eventually readjusting their perspectives to enter a new paradigm of understanding in which they can see themselves with a role in Iceland imbibed with meaning and direction. This resilience can then display itself and bloom. Not knowing which way the current economic recession is going to take despite current unemployment levels being just above 5% (Statistics Iceland for June, 2012), it seems that migrants in Iceland are at once both blissfully oblivious and integrally dependent on the outside world. This paradox, that they are at once both very much in touch with the outside world (courtesy of globalisation mechanisms) as well as culturally closed seems to be an apt analogy for the personality of the modern world.

Added to the feeling of being an 'outsider' is the unwillingness to make friends with host country natives due to the added feeling of transience (Richardson & Zikic, 2007). If, it was often stated, Icelanders have well established and

ingrained familial and friendship networks, they are unlikely to want to form new friendships that may not eventuate in any permanent or lasting relationship. This mutual sense of exclusion contributes to the feeling, on the side of the spouses, that "Iceland is tough to crack". Augmenting this feeling is the cultural distance that one experiences in the host culture which contributes to a sense that society is inaccessible to the expatriate (Richardson & Zikic, 2007). This 'cultural toughness' (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1995) perception by expatriates means that their sense of exclusion is augmented and their self-confidence is questioned.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of expatriate spouses in Iceland; particularly, how their understandings affected their adaptation and adjustment strategies. It can be seen from the findings discussed that the picture is a complex one, and uniquely for expatriate families. Expatriate families who travel can experience great cultural disorientation. Without adequate cross-cultural training this can baffle and stump sojourners. Since very few of the expatriate spouses interviewed had extensive experience of travel and migration it remains to be seen whether a new relocation would be just as disconcerting for the individual. Nevertheless the anxiety that Leonora felt was enough for her to question her sense of self and self-worth, so much so that she felt as insecure as she did during her tumultuous teenage years. Another Save Ltd spouse confessed that she "almost broke" trying to traverse the unfamiliar Icelandic cultural environment as well as having to sustain her familial obligations, a common feeling amongst women migrants of having to fulfil too many roles (Menon, 2009).

It seemed unanimous that all respondents found it very heartening to participate in the focus-group discussions. Tacit or implicit support can sometimes be more effective in providing support to individuals than explicit support (as researched by Taylor et al., 2004) because of their collectivist cultural background. Although the interviews gave all persons a chance to speak, time was limited the discussion topics but the over two-hour plus long conversation was considered enough to reinforce the women's sense of solidarity with each other. Finfgeld-Connett (2005) corroborates this need for social support from

people with like concerns and experiences leading to a feeling of trust and intimate familiarity. The function of this is to provide significant protective factors in promoting resilience.

Cohen and Wills (1985) stated that this psychological and knowledge support as reinforced in the interviews makes individuals more resilient to a wide range of perturbations. Thus the dynamic workings of ´resilience´ were explored and seen that the process operates both in response to adversity and as a fortifying factor against future challenges.

In the interviews, the spouses felt heard, understood and more confident that their experiences were not abnormal; this gave them an evident sense of developing self-confidence. These support factors seemed to operate amongst the spouses well and helped them to make sense of their difficulties. It was evident that they were experiencing personal transformations as the discussion ensued.

The adaptation journey for the spouses in this study was undeniably a process of transformation of on-going negotiation between the difficulties, challenges and positives that they experienced in their everyday lives. The dynamic interplay of various moderating factors as well as strategies conspired to produce unique narratives of each spouse. They were still 'making it' in Iceland because at least at the time of the interviews, they maintained a sense of qualified satisfaction with their lives and they intended to stay on. Keeping in mind that cultural adjustment and adaptation is an on-going journey and arguably continues well past the three year charted "U" curve that Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) sustained, it is certain that how ever long these expatriate families decide to remain in Iceland, they will be irrevocably transformed by the experience.

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Appendix

a) Questionnaire scheme 1

This questionnaire outline was sent to all respondents so that they could prepare their thoughts a little before discussion.

"Discovering what life is like in Iceland for [Save Ltd] expatriate families". FOCUS GROUP

(A research project by Cynthia Stimming, MA candidate in Sociology, University of Iceland in conjunction with Save Ltd.)

Topics to consider discussing in the focus group :

- How did you decide to come to Iceland?
- What did you know about Icelandic society before migrating?
- What kind of assistance (formal or informal) did you receive?
    - Who gave you that assistance?
- Your first impressions of Iceland and Icelandic society.
- Your later and / or lasting impressions of Iceland and Icelandic society.
- What impact has this move been on your relationship with your spouse and the rest of your family?
- What kind of challenges and experiences have you had during the past year/s that have been related to your migration experiences?
- How do you cope with the challenges that you encounter in Iceland?
- How important is a sense of personal fulfilment or well-being to you? How and in what ways is this evident?
- Do you feel this move has been positive for your relationship with your spouse?
- What do you feel you need to enhance your life here in Iceland?
- In what ways have you / or have you not connected to Iceland?
- What made up your social network before coming to Iceland?
    - What makes up your current social network?
- Can you imagine raising your children in Iceland long term?

b) Private Questionnaire

This private questionnaire was also sent to spouses prior to participating in the focus groups.

FG

PARTICIPANT Information Form :

(Please be assured that the following information will be kept strictly confidential and the information sheet destroyed on completion of thesis write-up in Spring 2012)

Participant (First) Name :

Contact details : telephone email

Sex :

Age:

Religion (?):

Relation to [Save Ltd] employee : (e.g. married)

Intentions for stay in Iceland – long term, short term, wait and see?

Cultural/ ethnic background:

Home country :

Please write a short paragraph to answer the following :

- **Before coming to Iceland, how long did you plan to stay in Iceland?**
    - **How long do you see yourself staying in Iceland now?**
- **What kind of preparations did you make before migration?**
- **How do you feel about your life in Iceland currently?**
- **What kind of social and private support do you rely on in Iceland?**
- **What support network did you have in your home country?**
- **Where would you like to see yourself in a year's time, regarding your circumstances or feelings for Iceland?**
- **Please name 3 areas where you would have liked to see [Save Ltd] give spouse support :**

1. 2. 3.

(Contact Cynthia Stimming, XXXXXXX)