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ACCULTURATION OF RUSSIAN REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS:
THE LIFE DOMAIN OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School of Social Work

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Andrew Morozov

June 2010

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Title: ACCULTURATION OF RUSSIAN REFUGEE ADOLESCENTS:
THE LIFE DOMAIN OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Advisor: Dr. Enid Opal Cox

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover the meaning of acculturation as experienced by the Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships. This qualitative study implemented a purposeful sampling strategy. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 refugee adolescents from Russia (3 ethnic Russians and 9 Meskhetian Turks), male and female, aged 15-18, who resided in Denver, Colorado. Applying Moustakas's (1994) phenomenology method of analysis, 8 main themes emerged. The essence of the phenomenon can be described in terms of the refugee adolescents' need for self-worth and belongingness. Belongingness is understood as identification with and acceptance by peers of the culture of origin and host culture in a culture-contact situation upon immigration. It was found that exclusion by peers pushed refugee adolescents to search for restoration of dignity, acceptance, and identification with other culture(s) available to them. The findings revealed important factors moderating acculturation to the American culture in the peer relationships domain: refugee adolescents' perception of pre-migration experience, a limited pool of potential partners, deprivation of the adult status, perceived discrepancy in the level of maturity between themselves and their American peers, cultural discrepancies in understanding friendship and ways of courtship, English language competence/use/preference, and perceived discrimination/negative treatment by part of the American

peers from the dominant culture. In particular, negative treatment received from members of the dominant American culture was identified as a factor moderating acculturation to non-dominant American cultures in the peer relationships domain, and along with other factors, served as a basis for identification of the participants with the heterogeneous group of immigrant/minority youth from different countries who perceived similar negative treatment from their American counterparts. Perceived negative treatment was found to be a powerful risk factor, creating conditions for reactive identity formation towards the American culture, idealization of an oppositional culture, and self-radicalization. Implications for social work education, research, and practice, as well as future research opportunities are suggested.

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my maternal great-great-grandparents who perished in the Ukrainian famine of 1930s but managed to nourish my grandfather. To my grandparents, Klara and Yakov, to my parents Isabella and Alexander, and my daughter Elizabeth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The focus of this study is acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the life domain of peer relationships. The overall purpose of this study was to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the sphere of peer relationships. The study's research question, supporting its purpose was, What is the meaning of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships?

The problems of acculturation of immigrant adolescents and their peer relationships are intertwined: According to Kovacev and Shute (2004), "We can expect acculturation, peer social support and adjustment to be intertwined for those young people" (p. 260). There is a link between the immigrant adolescents' peer relationships, their experience of acculturation, and outcomes in terms of psychological adjustment and short-term and long-term functioning (Collins, 2003; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Stodolska, 2008).

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research on the nature and meaning of the Russian refugee adolescents' experience of acculturation in the domain of peer relationships. It includes the nature, history, background, and significance of the problem, along with a definition of the key terms used. Chapter 2 provides an integrated review of literature relevant to the topic, and is divided into two parts. In the first part, a theoretical approach to the study-- Berry's theory of acculturation (Berry et. al., 2002)--is discussed.

In the second part, relevant research literature is critically analyzed. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, which is phenomenological in nature. In Chapter 4, the findings are presented. Finally, Chapter 5 consists of a discussion of the findings, implications for the social work profession, and the conclusion.

The Nature of the Problem

Acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the United States is a complex and largely under-researched problem (Birman & Trickett, 2001; Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002). Acculturation of refugee adolescents (including Russians) constitutes an important social issue due to its impact on the mental (and physical) health of the vulnerable population (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; Ponizovsky, Ginath, & Durst, 1998). Refugee adolescents, including Russian adolescents, are under double stress, caused by immigration and developmental changes (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Sam, 1998). Double stress denotes an accumulation of risk factors, and this leads to a greater level of vulnerability (Espino; Garbarino & Kostelny; Kinzie et al.; Mollica et al.; Sack et al.—all cited in Hodes, 2000). Refugee adolescents across cultures are vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and risk of suicide (Bemark & Greenberg, 1994; Black, 1996; Blair, 2001; Duong-Tran, 1996; Hodes, 2000; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2002; Papageorgiou et al., 2000; Sack, Clarke, & Seeley, 1996). According to La Greca and Harrison (2005),

Symptoms of depression and social anxiety are particularly important to study during adolescence, as both are common (Birmaher et al., 1996; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Peterson et al., 1993) and may be risk factors for impairment in adulthood (Aalto-Setälä, Martunene, Tuulio-Henrikson, Poikolainen, & Loennquist, 2002; Devine, Kempton & Forehand, 1994). Symptoms of depression

and social anxiety may also be precursors to more severe psychopathology, including major depressive disorder and social anxiety disorder, which are chronic disorders that often originate in adolescence and continue into adulthood (Birmaher et al., 1996; Moutier & Stein, 1999). (p. 49)

In addition to the double stress caused by immigration and developmental changes, other risk factor impact adolescents' mental health: discrimination (Berry. Poortinga, Segal, & Dansen, 2002; Trimble, 2003) and parental mental health problems (Davies, Dumeci, & Windle, 1999; Lustig et al., 2004; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996). Discrimination, as a negative acculturating experience, contributes to acculturative stress (Berry et al., 2002; Trimble, 2003). As a result, discrimination negatively impacts the mental health of acculturating individuals (Berry et al., 2002), and of Russian refugee adolescents in particular (Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Leibkind, 2001; Vinokurov, Trickett, & Birman, 2002).

Parental suffering from depression and PTSD and its link to adolescent mental health problems emerge across cultures (Davies et al., 1999; Lustig et al., 2004; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996). According to the Surgeon General's report on mental health, "Research has found that children of depressed parents are more than three times as likely as children of non-depressed parents to experience a depressive disorder" (Office of the Surgeon General, 2002, p. 1).

PTSD and depression in adolescents often remain unrecognized and untreated (Land & Levy, 1992; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996). Depression may manifest itself in such behaviors as truancy or alcohol abuse (Land & Levy, 1992) or in irritability, hostility, and anger (in boys), rather than in sadness (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). In addition, refugee families might not seek help for their children due to many factors, such

as lack of awareness of the problem, stigma (Carlson & Strober as cited in Land & Levy, 1992), lack of knowledge of the system, and absence of medical insurance.

If left untreated, depression puts adolescents at high risk of suicide, according to the report of the Surgeon General, “Adolescents who suffer from depression are at a much greater risk of committing suicide than are children without depression (Shaffer et al., 1996)” (Office of the Surgeon General, 2002, p. 1). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, teen suicide rates among adolescents have more than tripled (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999). Immigrant adolescents are at greater risk of depression than their American counterparts (Land & Levy, 1992;), and therefore, they are more vulnerable to committing suicide.

History and Background of the Problem

Pre-migration experience.

Overall, in the past 25 years, over 339,000 refugees from the former Soviet Union arrived in the United States (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, 2002). In the former Soviet Union, refugee adolescents and their families experienced oppression on the basis of their religion and/or ethnicity. A few years prior to and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there were several armed ethnic conflicts between and within the republics of the former Soviet Union. Thus, many refugee adolescents came to the United States from the war-torn regions of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Chechnya.

Among the most recent refugee arrivals from the former Union of Soviet Social Republics are the Meskhetian Turks. According to the Church World Service (2005), “Meskhetian Turks make up one of the largest groups of refugees ready for resettlement

in the United States right now” (p. 1). In 2004 alone, the United States accepted over 10,000 refugee applications from this group (Mirkhanova, 2006).

The modern history of this population is a tragic one. The Meskhetian Turks “have suffered persecution and repeated displacement for 60 years” (Church World Service, 2005, p. 1). Originally this group populated the republic of Georgia’s region called Meskhetia, but in 1944, Joseph Stalin decided to exile the entire Meskhetian Turk population from their native lands, and over 100,000 were forcibly deported from Georgia to the Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (Audingun, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov & Swerdlow, 2006; Church World Service, 2005; Mirkhanova, 2006;). According to Audingun et al. (2006), the reason for this forcible relocation was that Meskhetian Turks were presumed disloyal to the regime and resided too close to the Turkish border, at a time when Turkey was seen as a possible ally of Nazi Germany. The Meskhetian Turks remained in Central Asia until 1989, when “a pogrom against Meskhetian Turks occurred in Uzbekistan’s territorial share of the Fergana Valley—a resource-rich and densely populated area in Central Asia, shared between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan” (Mirkhanova, 2006, p. 1). The Soviet government responded with resettlement of the majority of this population in the Krasnodarsky Kray of Southern Russia (Audingun et al., 2006; Mirkhanova, 2006). However, in Russia, they were not welcomed by the ethnic Russians of Krasnodarsky Kray. Based on their ethnicity, place of origin, religion, and language, Meskhetian Turks in Russia continue suffering persecution related to “the right to employment, social and medical benefits, property ownership, higher education, and legal marriage” (Audingun et al., 2006, p. 9), as well as denial of citizenship to them and their children (Mirkhanova,

2006). There were also many instances of physical attacks on Meskhetian Turks perpetrated by the ethnic Russian majority (Audingun et al., 2006).

Most of the Meskhetian Turks, who resettled in the United States, arrived from Krasnodarsky Kray of Russia (Audingun et al., 2006). Audingun et al., (2006) provided the following details:

As of mid-June 2006, approximately 9,000 Meskhetian Turks were resettled in 33 states and the District of Columbia, with Pennsylvania (785 individuals) and Gerorgia (623) host to the largest numbers. Other sizable populations are found in Washington (590), Illinois (508), Kentucky (499), Arizona (497), Idaho (471), Texas (417), Virginia (417), New York (394), and Colorado (365). (p. 26)

Meskhetian Turks belong to the Sunni Muslims. “Due to the Soviet Union’s official policy of discouraging religion and promoting atheism, the majority of Meskhetian Turks like Bosnian Muslims, are not strictly observant Muslims” (Audingun et al., 2006, p. 15). The majority of Meskhetian Turks who resettled in the United States are multilingual people, speaking both their native dialect of the Turkish language, as well as Russian, and sometimes other languages, such as Kazah, Kyrgyz, or Uzbek. (Audingun et al., 2006). “In Krasnodar, Russian has become the primary language Meskhetian Turks use for communicating with the surrounding population” (Audingun et al., 2006, p. 24). According to Audingun et al. (2006),

The elderly in Krasnodar speak the Meskhetian Turk dialect of Turkish among themselves, while younger couples living in urban setting may speak in Russian among themselves and to their children when they want to speak quickly, or when they are engaged in deep discussion. (Audingun et al., 2006, p. 26)

Many refugee adolescents are from families of mixed ethnicity and/or religion, wherein at least one of the parents belongs to a minority group. It is estimated that over 60% of Russian refugee adolescents, aged 15 to 17, are of mixed ethnicities (Tolts, 1997). According to some estimates, among Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet

republics, “Seventy-three percent of males and 62.8% of females [are of mixed ethnicities]” (Tolts, 1997, p. 184). Based on persecution in the country of origin, these adolescents and their families were granted refugee status and immigrated to the United States.

Post-migration experience.

Upon immigration, Russian refugee adolescents often perceive prejudice and stereotyping in the host society, on account of their country of origin, language, and ethnicity (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Leibkind, 2001; Vinokurov et al., 2002). Therefore, one can conclude, in general, that the experience of Russian refugee adolescents, both in their country of origin and then in the host country, the United States, might constitute an ongoing form of prejudice (e.g., negative attitudes, stereotyping), although of a different nature. Perceived or real discrimination can make these adolescents feel isolated and excluded (Stodolska, 2008; Zhou, 1997).

The historical roots of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination of Russian refugees in the United States are embedded in a deep fear of the Russians: first, fear associated with “the ghost of communism,” beginning with the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (Barson & Heller, 2001; Davis, 1922); then fear related to the threatening military power of the Soviet “evil empire” during the Cold War years (Barson & Heller, 2001); and finally, a fear of Russian mafia in recent decades. Thus, starting in 1917, the words *Russian*, *communist*, and *Reds* became synonymous (Davis, 1922). I would add the word *mafiosi* to this synonymous row of derogatory terms. The negative attitudes and stereotyping that accompanied these fears resulted in judicial discrimination

of Russian immigrants in the United States during the "Red Scares" or "Red Hunts" of the 1920s (Davis, 1922).

Fear of the Russians created an enormous anti-Communist, anti-Russian propaganda campaign. "Propaganda is based on the creation of recognizable stereotypes that oversimplify complex issues for the purpose of controlling mass opinion. The U.S. government encouraged Red-baiting and witch-hunting (much as the Nazis did anti-Semitism) through the mass media of the day" (Barson & Heller, 2001, p. 8). The anti-Red/anti-Russian campaign "was the longest continuous American propaganda campaign of its kind" (Barson & Heller, 2001, p. 8).

Therefore, beginning in 1917, the stereotypical image of the evil Russian was created and carefully maintained by propaganda for more than 70 years. Such negative stereotyping contributed greatly to the mass hysteria and judicial discrimination against Russian immigrants. "The power of anti-Communist propaganda was so effective (and perhaps, so seductive) that Americans shamefully relinquished basic rights and liberties so that the government could persecute its opponents" (Barson & Heller, 2001, p. 8).

Although, the Communist regime in Russia collapsed in 1991, the evil enemy image of the Russians is still deeply embedded in American society and constantly reinforced by a new breed of anti-Russian stereotypes. The image of the Russian immigrant as being a secret Communist conspirator, a saboteur, and a spy was gradually replaced by the image of the criminal and terrorist Russian, substituting one stereotypical, negative image of Russians with another. These negative images are continuously being reinforced by countless Hollywood action movies where the criminal characters represent Russian gangsters or international terrorists.

According to my knowledge, there are no statistical data available at this time on the number of movies in which Russians are depicted as a menace to the American way of life, and the civilized world in general. However, one can speculate that in the 18 years since the end of the Cold War, movies with evil Russians might number in the many dozens if not hundreds. The old Cold War era movies are still being replayed continuously by numerous TV channels. These movies are being shown on television channels broadcasting in the English language, but they are also being translated and broadcasted on the American Latino television channels (and probably by other American ethnic TV channels). In the growing field of computer and video games, American teenagers can even engage in virtual mortal combat with Russian soldiers, terrorists or mobsters.

It is hard for the public (children, teenagers, and sometimes adults) to tell myth apart from reality. The association with being either a communist or a mobster has had a tremendous negative impact on Russian refugee adolescents. If during the Cold War era, Russian adolescents were stigmatized as being “commy bastards,” now they are stigmatized as being the “scum of the earth.” Overall, because of such negative association, Russian teenagers are continuously stigmatized and sometimes discriminated against by their American peers, adults, and authority figures at school and in the community (e.g., teachers, school counselors, and police officers).

Peer Relationships and Adolescents

Peer relationships are of salient importance for adolescents (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Stodolska, 2008). As explained by La Greca and Harrison (2005),

Adolescence is a critical period in social development, marked by expansion of peer networks, increased importance of close friends and emergence of romantic relationships...During adolescence, close friends begin to surpass parents as adolescents' primary source of social support, and contribute in important ways to adolescents' self-concept and well-being (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). (p. 49)

However, for immigrant adolescents, the domain of peer relationships often becomes an arena of distress: They feel "discriminated by the mainstream youth" (Stodolska, 2008, p. 216) as well as by their more acculturated peers from the same ethnic group. They feel victimized and unaccepted by their peers (La Greca & Harrison, 2005), as well as "isolated," "alienated," "ostracized" (Stodolska, 2008, p. 216).

Minority groups (e.g., immigrant adolescents) "tend to internalize positive and negative messages expressed by the larger society (Alvare & Helms, 2001)" (Lain, 2005, p. 4). This finding is supported by research on different minority groups in different host settings, such as immigrant Vietnamese adolescents in the United States (Lain, 2005), and Ethiopian adolescents integrating in Israel (Ringel, Ronell, & Getahune, 2005). The internalization of the negative attitudes of the host society is linked to depression (Ringel et al., 2005) and poor psychological adjustment of the acculturating immigrant adolescents (Lain, 2005). Both perceived and real discrimination have a negative effect on their mental health and their success in the host society (Berry et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Leibkind, 2001; Stodolska, 2008; Trimble, 2003).

Further, Zhou (1997) pointed out,

There has been a growing 'oppositional culture' among young Americans, especially those who have felt oppressed and excluded from the American mainstream...Many of these American children have responded to their social isolation with resentment toward middle-class America, rebellion against all forms of authority and rejection of the goals of achievement and upward mobility. (p. 69)

As was found by Matute-Bianchi (as cited in Zhou, 1997) in regards to Latino adolescents who were born in the United States, they “reacted to their exclusion and subordination with resentment...[and] constructed an identity in resistance to the dominant majority white culture” (p. 69).

“Students in school shape one another’s attitudes and expectations” (Zhou, 1997, p. 69). It is well known that “adolescents tend to sort themselves along...lines of similarity such as race and ethnicity” as well as generational status (Berkowitz King & Harris, 2007, p. 365). Constructing an identity “in resistance to the dominant majority culture [as a reaction to] feeling oppressed and excluded” (Zhou, 1997, p. 69) creates conditions for immigrant youths’ joining the “oppositional culture” (p. 69). Joining the oppositional culture puts these adolescents at risk of becoming a target for recruitment into participation in illegal activities, including those of radical Islamist inspiration. (As mentioned earlier, the Mesketinan Turks are Sunni Muslims). Recruitment into the homegrown jihadist networks is a relatively new phenomenon: “A full-fledged acknowledgement of the presence of homegrown networks of jihadist inspiration came only in 2006” (Vidino, 2009, p. 12).

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, I define *Russian refugee adolescents* as persons aged 12 to 18 years at the time of immigration, who immigrated to the United States as refugees from Russia. The term *Russian* has different meanings as it is used in the United States and in the former Soviet Union. In the United States, *Russian* includes the notion of nationality in reference to the Soviet Union. However, in the republics of the former Soviet Union, it has a different meaning: Only persons of Russian ethnicity

are considered Russians. Thus, Russian refugee adolescents in the United States constitute a heterogeneous group of persons of different ethnicities from all republics of the former Soviet Union, united by Russian culture and language. The Russian language was the state language in the former Soviet Union, and thus it is the *lingua franca* for all immigrants from Russia, including the refugee adolescents.

The term *refugee* is used as it is defined by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (1996):

A person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution . . . on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Russian refugee adolescents in the United States, in accordance with the definition of Marden, Meyer and Engel (1992), can be characterized as a *minority group*, as “people who are different in life-style or appearance from those in power” (p. 3), based on cultural, linguistic, religious, and racial characteristics. The term *peer relationships* is defined in this study as Russian refugee adolescents’ relationships with other adolescents (American, Russian, and others) in the country of resettlement.

In this study, *prejudice* is defined as “a general negative orientation toward a cultural group other than one’s own” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 481). It has three components: affective (negative attitudes and evaluations), cognitive (stereotyping), and behavioral (discrimination) (Berry et al., 2002).

Negative attitudes refer to attitudes “unfavorable to (or disparaging of) a whole group [other than one’s own]” (Marden et al., 1992, p. 39). Negative attitudes can be displayed by the whole dominant group or by its individual members.

A *stereotype* is "an oversimplified generalization that emphasizes only selective traits of another group" (Marden et al., 1992, p. 43). Those traits, "real or imagined, are deemed virtuous in the larger society" (Marden et al., 1992, p. 43). Stereotypical traits are considered innate and hereditary, and therefore, no change in attitudes toward the stereotyped group is necessary (Marden et al., 1992).

Discrimination refers to "unequal treatment by the dominant group of the non-dominant" (Marden et al., 1992, p. 34). In this study, *discrimination* refers to individual-level unequal treatment (negative attitudes and behaviors) by adolescents from the dominant group towards their peers from the non-dominant groups, based on their ethnicity, country of origin, language, immigration status. The terms *discrimination*, *negative treatment* and *peer victimization* are interchangeable in this paper. (The term *peer victimization* was used by La Greeka and Harrison, 2005, p. 50).

In this study, the term *acculturation* is used as it is conceptualized by Berry et al. (2002): "changes in a cultural group or individual as a result of contact with another cultural group" (p. 475). For the concept of *mental health*, I use the definition of the Surgeon General in his report on mental health: "Mental health refers to successful performance of mental functions in terms of thought, mood, and behavior. Mental disorders are those health conditions in which alterations in mental functions are paramount" (Mental Health: a Report of the Surgeon General, 2002, Chapter 1).

Significance for the Social Work Profession

Due to severity and magnitude of the problem of psychological adjustment and functioning of refugee adolescents, this problem is creating public concern for the well-being of a large number of Russian refugees in the United States. The immigrant

population in the United States has reached 12.4% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Immigrant children and adolescents constitute a significant part of all American children. By the year 2020, one in every three children in the United States will be either an immigrant or a child of immigrants (Williams, Alvarez & Hauck as cited in Stodolska, 2008).

Refugees from the former Soviet Union constitute the largest refugee group in the United States (World Church Service, 2004). In the year 2002 alone, 9,800 Russian refugees were admitted to the United States (World Church Service, 2004). Furthermore, according to Census 2000, the Russian language ranked eighth of the non-English languages most frequently spoken at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The number of people in the United States speaking the Russian language at home tripled from 242,000 in 1990 to 706,000 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Stodolska (2008) explained the seriousness of the problem as follows:

Immigrant children and adolescents constitute the backbone of the growing ethnic population in the U.S. and will represent a critical component of the future American society (Zhou, 1997). Thus, it is of crucial importance to identify, examine, and understand problems that young immigrants might have with their social and psychological adjustment after immigration. (p. 198)

The problem of acculturation of immigrant adolescents is pertinent to the social work profession. According to National Association of Social Workers (NASW) policy statements, issues of immigrants and refugees, including those related to mental health, should be a main focus of the social work profession: “Social workers must take a forceful and assertive stand to ensure that policies, programs, and practices protect all individuals who reside in the United States” (Mayden & Nieves, 2002 p. 171).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research on the nature and meaning of the Russian refugee adolescents' experience of acculturation in the domain of peer relationships. In this introductory chapter, I described the focus of my research, presented the rationale for the study, and provided definitions of key terms. Finally, I built an argument for why the social work profession should consider the main topic of this study--acculturation in the domain of peer relationships, as it was lived and assigned meaning by Russian refugee adolescents--to be an important social problem, related to a vulnerable population, and, therefore, of central interest to the profession.

Chapter 2: Review of The Literature

An integrated review of the literature relevant to the topic of this study is presented in this chapter. In the Theory part, I provide the theoretical context for analysis on the topic of acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the United States. Berry's theory of acculturation is utilized (Berry et. al., 2002). In the course of the analysis, I define concepts, state propositions, and analyze the relationship between the major propositions of this theory, beginning with a theoretical explanation of acculturation and its relationship to mental health at the macro and micro levels. I conclude with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of Berry's theory and its ability to offer implications for social work, also identifying opportunities for theory development

In the Research Literature Review part, I provide a focused literature review, identifying and critically analyzing relevant research studies. In the course of the critical analysis, I identify important gaps in the knowledge base and methodological approaches.

Theory

In this section, I provide a theoretical context for analysis on the topic of acculturation and its impact on mental health of Russian refugee adolescents in the United States. Only one theoretical approach has been chosen as the focus of this analysis: Berry's theory of acculturation (Berry et al., 2002), which includes an acculturation strategy classification in addition to a general framework for understanding acculturation.

Berry's Theory of Acculturation

John W. Berry is one of the pioneers and leaders in theory development in the field of acculturation. His general framework for understanding acculturation was conceptualized in the 1970s and further developed in the 1990s (Berry et al., 2002). This theory explains acculturation in terms of the *change*, *stress*, and *adaptation* that individuals undergo, due to contact with another culture (Berry et al., 2002). *Culture contact* is a particular kind of cultural change; *acculturative stress* is an example of a broader category of stress; and *adaptation* is the result of changes in values, attitudes, behavior, and identity that groups and individual members of those groups undergo as participants in culture contact (Berry et al., 2002). Berry's theory offers an explanation of acculturation at two levels: macro (cultures in contact) and micro (individual members of those cultures in contact) (Berry et al., 2002).

Major concepts.

Berry et al. (2002) provide the following definitions of concepts related to acculturation theory:

- *Acculturation* refers to "changes in a cultural group or individual as a result of contact with another cultural group" (p. 475).
- *Acculturation strategies* refer to "the way that individuals and ethno-cultural groups orient themselves to the process of acculturation" (p. 475).
- *Acculturative stress* represents "a negative psychological reaction to the experience of acculturation, often characterized by anxiety, depression, and a variety of psychosomatic problems" (p. 475). "Acculturative stress is a response by individuals to life events [that are rooted in intercultural contact], when they exceed the capacity of individuals to deal with them" (Berry & Ataca as cited in Berry et. al., 2002, p. 475).
- *Adaptation* refers to "the relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to environmental demands, and has two

main facets: psychological and sociocultural” (p. 365). Furthermore, adaptation “refers to the long-term ways in which people rearrange their lives and settle down into a more-or-less satisfactory existence” (p. 369). Schmitz (as cited in Berry et. al., 2002) explains that *psychological adaptation* “largely involves a person’s psychological and physical well-being” (p. 370), whereas *sociocultural adaptation* refers to “how well an acculturating individual is able to manage daily life in the new cultural context” (p. 370).

- *Assimilation* represents “the acculturation strategy in which people do not wish to maintain their own culture, and seek to participate in the larger society” (p. 475).
- *Cultural distance* refers to “the degree to which groups differ culturally, measured by ethnographic indicators, or by individuals’ perception of such difference” (p. 477).
- *Dominant culture* describes an ethno-cultural group within society which has the tendency to dominate other, non-dominant, ethno-cultural groups.
- *Non-dominant culture* represents an ethno-cultural group within society “receiving the greater influence” (p. 352) from the dominant culture.
- *Exclusion* is a strategy of the larger society toward a smaller ethno-cultural group. Exclusion is defined as “marginalization, when imposed by the dominant group” (p. 355) on a non-dominant group. The extreme form of exclusion is referred to as *ethnocide*.
- *Integration* refers to “the acculturating strategy in which people wish to maintain their cultural heritage, and seek to participate in the larger society” (p. 479).
Integration “can only be pursued in societies that are explicitly multicultural” (p. 355).
- *Marginalization* describes “the acculturation strategy in which people do not maintain their cultural heritage, and also do not participate in the larger society” (p. 480).
- *Melting pot* represents a strategy of the larger society toward a smaller ethno-cultural group. Melting pot is referred to by Berry as “assimilation, when sought by the dominant group” (p. 355) and applied to a non-dominant group.
- *Moderating factors* are individual characteristics, both pre-existing and “those that arise during the process of acculturation...that are widely

believed to influence how people deal with psychological acculturation” (p. 362). Moderating factors “can be seen as both *risk factors* and *protective factors* [italics added], depending on their degree and level” (p.364).

- *Multiculturalism* refers to “both the existence of, and policy supporting the many ethno-cultural groups living together in the larger society. It involves both the maintenance of diverse ethno-cultural groups, and the participation of these groups in the larger society” (p. 480).
- *Segregation* is a strategy of the larger society toward a smaller ethno-cultural group and occurs “when separation is demanded and enforced by the dominant group” (p. 355).
- *Separation* describes “the acculturation strategy in which people wish to maintain their cultural heritage, and seek to avoid participation in the larger society” (p. 481).
- *Stressor* refers to an acculturation experience appraised by the individual “as a source of difficulty...a problem” (p.364).

Acculturation at the macro level and mental health.

The explanation of acculturation at a macro level is based on interactions of acculturative (intercultural) strategies of the groups in culture contact: “views about how they [groups and their individual members] want to live following contact” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 353) in terms of culture shedding or maintenance (in regards to the heritage or non-dominant culture) and culture learning (in regards to the new or dominant culture) (Berry et al., 2002).

Cultures in contact are classified as *dominant* and *non-dominant*: The classification is based on the level of influence that the cultures in contact have on each other (Berry et al., 2002). The dominant culture, as defined above, has more influence on the non-dominant culture(s) (Berry et al., 2002). Changes in the dominant culture, stemming from contact with the non-dominant culture, result in the formation of certain

attitudes of the larger society toward the non-dominant culture. According to the works of Berry, and Sommerland and Berry (Berry et al., 2002), such attitudes are reflected in policy toward the non-dominant culture(s), as well as revealed in the following acculturation strategies of society: multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion. The dominant culture can limit the choices of acculturation strategies of non-dominant groups by setting constraints (Berry et. al., 2002). Non-dominant cultures may choose from the following acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, although their choice will be constrained by the acculturation strategy of the dominant culture (Berry et. al., 2002).

Multiculturalism of the dominant society suggests that integration is chosen by the non-dominant group (although this group is free to choose any other strategy). The melting pot strategy of the dominant group pushes the non-dominant group toward assimilation (integration is constrained). The segregation strategy of the dominant culture limits the choice of the non-dominant group to separation or marginalization; and exclusion as a strategy of the dominant group is translated into marginalization of the non-dominant group. Applying these acculturation strategies to mental health maintenance for the non-dominant group, “preferences for integration are expressed over the other three strategies, with marginalization being the least preferred” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 356). Schmitz (as cited in Berry et al., 2002) observed that “integration seems to be the most effective strategy if we take long-term health and well-being indicators” (p. 369).

Acculturation at an individual level and mental health.

“While these population-level changes set the stage for individual change,” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 352), there will be variations in acculturation at an individual level.

Persons can violate their group trend to a degree and act more as individuals than group members (Berry et. al., 2002). Acculturation on an individual level is explained by Berry in terms of acculturative stress and adaptation to the dominant and non-dominant culture.

Berry’s contribution to the theory development of acculturation is his conceptualization of acculturative stress, which stems from general stress theories (e.g., Lazarus, as referred to in Berry, et al., 2002). Aldwin (as cited in Berry, et al., 2002) stated that dealing with life events “places a load of demand on the organism” (p. 364), and when these demands exceed the coping capacity of an individual, they result in stress. “During acculturation these demands stem from the experience of having to deal with two cultures in contact, and having to participate to various extents in both of them” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 364). There is a difference between the cultures in contact, which makes the acculturation experience demanding and often stressful (Berry et al., 2002).

Acculturative stress impacts mental health and often results in “anxiety, depression, and a variety of psychosomatic problems” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 475). Mental health problems lead to the risk of poor long-term psychological and social adaptation (Berry et al., 2002). According to Berry et al. (2002), mental health is linked to moderating factors. Moderating factors (protective and risk factors) that exist prior to acculturation (age, gender, education, religion, health, language, pre-acculturation status, migration motivation, and expectations) and those factors that appear during acculturation (contact discrepancy, appraisal and use of social support, appraisal and

reaction to societal attitudes, coping strategies and resources, and acculturation strategies) impact mental health outcomes (Berry et al., 2002). Protective (moderating) factors (a) decrease the possibility of appraisal of acculturation experiences as stressors, (b) decrease acculturative stress, (c) increase the possibility of successful coping with acculturative stress, (d) and increase the possibility of positive psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry et al., 2002). On the other hand, risk (moderating) factors (a) increase the possibility of appraisal of an acculturation experience as a stressor, (b) increase acculturative stress, (c) decrease the possibility of successful coping with acculturative stress, and (d) increase the possibility of a negative psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Berry et al., 2002).

Strengths and limitations of Berry's theory: Opportunities for future theory development.

John W. Berry is one of the most respected and highly cited scholars in the field of acculturation. The strengths of his theory include its explanatory and predictive power, its contribution to theory development and possibilities for future development, its ability to guide research, and its value in providing implications for social work. Utilizing Berry's theory, one is able to explain and predict a broad range of phenomena.

Berry's work has contributed greatly to theory development in that it explains acculturation at both the macro and micro level and allows the prediction of mental health outcomes for acculturative individuals. It has enriched other theoretical approaches related to acculturation (e.g., identity theories and stress theories), promoting a multidisciplinary approach when "the boundaries between disciplines become increasingly blurred as insights from one are incorporated into others" (Phinney, 2000, p.

255). Berry's theory has been guiding and generating a huge body of research for almost 30 years (Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2003). Lastly, it provides implications for social work due to its similarity with social work in understanding individuals in their environment as well as power relations in society.

As with any theory, Berry's acculturation theory has limitations, in addition to its strengths. I view its limitations as opportunities for future theory development. As a living and vibrant theory, Berry's theory has the potential to be developed further. I suggest that one of the limitations of this theory is insufficient clarity regarding the differentiation between risk and protective moderating factors. Discussing this differentiation, Berry et al. (2002) explained, "It is not possible at this point in acculturation research to unambiguously claim them [protective or risk factors] to be one or another" (p. 365). I further contend that the theory requires further development in regard to a theoretical explanation of centrality and the different weight of moderating factors (e. g., language) in terms of their impact on the acculturation process and subsequent mental health outcomes. And finally, the most important issue, in my opinion, is that theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of language and its role in acculturation needs further exploration. (Please see the next four sections for a more detailed discussion).

Language and acculturation: Theoretical understanding.

Centrality of language to acculturation.

Language, according to Berry et al. (2002), is one of the pre-acculturation moderating factors. Other acculturation theorists and scholars saw the role of language differently: as a stage in acculturation (Gordon, as referred to in Birman et al., 2002), as

one of the aspects of acculturation (Birman et al., 2002), and as a factor salient to acculturation (Phinney, 2003). Gordon theorized that language competence is the first stage of the acculturation process, which precedes the next two --behavior participation and identification with culture (Birman et al., 2002). Birman and her colleagues (2002), based on Gordon's theory, proposed that acculturation is a multidimensional phenomenon, wherein language competence is one of the three dimensions of acculturation (behavioral participation and identification with culture being the other two). Phinney (2000, 2003) recognized the salience of language to acculturation, explaining,

Language [and social interaction] have been generally considered to be central to acculturation and are widely used to measure it (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Cueller et al., 1995; Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1998; Marin & Marin, 1991; Suinn et al., 1992). (Phinney, 2003, p. 71)

In fact, "language is frequently used as the primary indicator of acculturation" (Phinney, 2000, p. 257).

Acculturation may be measured along three dimensions of language: *competence*, *use*, and *preference* (Birman, 1994; Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Padilla, Olmedo, & Loya as referred to in Miranda & Unhoefer, 1998; Roberts & Schneider, 1999). These dimensions can be described as follows: First, language competence is a process with no end result. Therefore, it moderates acculturation not only at the pre-acculturation stage but at all stages, both directly and indirectly, by affecting language use. Second, language use influences acculturation as follows: (a) Language use is necessary for social interaction and participation in culture; (b) culture learning is achieved through social interaction with members of the culture; and (c) behavioral change, an aspect of

acculturation, is the result of culture learning. Therefore, language use (and indirectly, language competence) influence acculturation during the participation stage. Finally, due to the near impossibility of achieving a level of competence in a foreign language (e.g., English) equal to that of the natives (e.g., Americans), situations of language use will always (at all stages of acculturation) be a stressful experience, and thus, impact mental health outcomes of the acculturating individual.

Linguistic acculturative stress and mental health outcomes.

“Restriction in function” (Schumann, 1976a, p. 396) in terms of comprehension is part of the experience of acculturating individuals. Schumann (1976a) explained restriction in function in a foreign language in terms of an individual’s motivation to keep or overcome psychological distance from the members of the host culture. Acculturating individuals will, probably, never be able to fully understand others or fully express themselves in a foreign language. Awareness of such linguistic restriction per se is stressful. Further, actual and perceived restricted linguistic functioning contributes to additional stress, and thus, affects mental health.

Stengal (as cited in Schumann, 1976a) coined the term “language shock” (p. 11) to describe this kind of experience. I would describe it as “linguistic acculturative stress,” that is, stress generated by (a) an awareness of the discrepancy between restricted linguistic functioning in a foreign language in comparison with linguistic functioning of the acculturating individual in his or her native language; (b) the actual experience of restricted linguistic functioning; and (c) the perception of such discrepancy and experience.

In terms of comprehension, an acculturative individual's *passive vocabulary* (i.e. words understood in somebody's speech) in a foreign language is not as rich as it is in his or her native language. In regard to self-expression, one needs to acquire the "linguistic virtuosity" of a native speaker (Schumann, 1976a) in terms of *active vocabulary* (i.e. words understood and actively used by the speaker himself) and pronunciation. Due to the practical impossibility of the task, acculturative individuals remain restricted linguistically, unable to fully express themselves. Stengal (as cited in Schumann, 1976a) explained this as follows:

The narcissistic gratification to which the learner is accustomed in the use of his native language is lost when he attempts to speak the target language. Finally, when speaking the second language the learner has apprehensions about appearing comic, child-like and dependent. (p. 401).

Such experience can be described as stressful. In effect, linguistic acculturative stress contributes to general acculturative stress and results in negative mental health outcomes for acculturative individuals.

Acculturation: Language, culture, and culture learning/maintenance.

Language is at the very heart of culture: It is an integral part of culture, an index of culture, and a symbol of culture (Muhlhauser & Harre, 1991). That is why language plays a crucial role in the process of not only learning the new culture, but also maintaining the heritage culture for an acculturating individual.

In regard to language being an integral part of culture, all cultural practices are language-embedded: ceremonies, rituals, songs, myths, stories, and prayers. Furthermore, socialization, education, and negotiation are influenced by language (Muhlhauser &

Harre, 1991). Knowledge and meaning are created through language and do not exist without language.

Language as an index of culture reveals a way of thinking and organizing experiences of the culture (Whorf, 1939/1956). By developing typologies of categories (e.g., things, people, processes, and attributes), language reveals the manner in which each particular culture perceives and organizes reality (Whorf, 1939/1956). In other words, language influences thinking, determining how a particular culture or individual member of that culture “analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness” (Whorf, 1939/1956, p. 154).

Therefore, learning the language is key to understanding the culture, that is, the way people in a particular culture think and perceive the world. Consequently, in the case of Russian refugee adolescents, knowledge of two or more languages (e.g., Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, English, and Spanish) opens an opportunity for acculturating individuals to understand several realities. Using the above example of languages learned, the Russian adolescent understands reality from the point of view of his or her heritage culture (e.g., Russian), other cultures in Russia (e.g., Meskhetian Turkish), the dominant culture (e.g., American) and other non-dominant cultures in the larger U.S. society (e.g., Spanish). However, at this point in theory development, there is not enough clarity on the phenomenon of multilingualism and its relationship to the mental health of multilingual individuals. (Please refer to the Research section of this chapter for a more

detailed discussion in regard to the contribution of research to theory development on bilingualism, and language brokering in particular.)

Language is also a symbol of culture (Cooper & Spolsky, 1991; Dunton, 1992; Muhlhauser & Harre, 1991). Due to the fact that language is the most important part of culture, it becomes a symbol of the particular culture in which it exists (as in the example of a part representing the whole). The language preference reflects the symbolic meaning of language for an acculturating individual.

Loss of language, at a group level, is associated with destruction of culture, which means loss of cultural practices and the unique worldview generated by this culture (Cooper & Spolsky, 1991; Dunton, 1992; Muhlhauser & Harre, 1991). In the case of Russian refugee adolescents, loss of the Russian language at an individual level will lead to loss of the acculturating person's ties with his or her heritage culture. Moreover, inadequate command of the English language will restrict his or her opportunities for understanding the new culture.

In sum, language, as an integral part of culture and an index and symbol of it, in addition to the consequences of loss of language, all explain the salience of language in acculturation processes. These explanatory factors also demonstrate the importance of language learning/maintenance ("linguistic acculturation strategies," in my terminology) for acculturating individuals and groups. Linguistic acculturation strategies are interrelated with more general acculturation strategies.

Linguistic acculturation strategies.

Berry's model of understanding acculturation in terms of the interrelationship of acculturation strategies provides an excellent starting point for explaining the linguistic

acculturation strategies of dominant and non-dominant groups in a culture contact situation. I define *linguistic acculturation strategy* as the way the dominant and non-dominant cultures orient themselves to the process of maintenance or shedding of the non-dominant languages and learning of the dominant language by the non-dominant group. I consider the linguistic acculturation strategy to be an integral part of the more general acculturation strategy. The salience of language to culture (Cooper & Spolsky, 1991; Dunton, 1992; LaMendola, 2002; Muhlhauser & Harre, 1991; Whorf, 1939/1956) determines the centrality of the linguistic acculturation strategy in regards to the general acculturation strategy of each group in a culture contact situation. Hence, the linguistic acculturation strategy impacts acculturation and influences the mental health outcomes for acculturating individuals.

Based on Berry's 1997 model (Berry et al., 2002), I posit that unequal power relations between dominant and non-dominant cultures allow the dominant culture to limit the choices of linguistic acculturation strategy of non-dominant groups by setting constraints. These constraints are reflected in government linguistic policies as well as institutional support (or lack of it) of the non-dominant languages (Baron, 1990; Crawford, 1992; Sknutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

By analogy with an Berry's acculturation model (Berry et al., 2002), I suggest the following linguistic acculturation strategies of the dominant culture: *multilingualism*, *linguistic melting pot*, *linguistic segregation*, and *linguistic exclusion*. These dominant-group strategies correspond to the following acculturation strategies of the non-dominant

group: *linguistic integration, linguistic assimilation, linguistic separation, and linguistic marginalization.*

Multilingualism is an integral part of multiculturalism and suggests linguistic integration of acculturative individuals. With this strategy, both languages have equal status in a pluralistic society, and both languages are equally and fully supported by societal institutions of both the dominant and non-dominant cultures. The linguistic melting pot strategy of the larger society expects linguistic assimilation of the members of the non-dominant culture, that is, giving up their native language in favor of the dominant language in both public and private domains. Maintenance of the non-dominant language is supported neither by societal institutions nor by non-dominant cultural institutions, including the family.

Assimilation, and particularly linguistic assimilation, can often result in alienation from the native language and culture without a guarantee of acceptance in the dominant culture, in spite of linguistic proficiency in the dominant language. Referring to linguistic assimilation, Marden et al. (1992) stated,

[It] sometimes led them [acculturating individuals] to a narcissistic pride in their linguistic achievement [in the English language], alienating them from their linguistic roots and confusing their sense of identity as they attempted to become part of the dominant world that almost never fully accepted them. (p. 15)

Linguistic segregation, as a linguistic acculturation strategy of the larger society, suggests linguistic separation or usage of the non-dominant language only in ethnic enclaves, ethnic mass media, and in private domains, but not in the public domains of the larger society. Public spheres are the domains of the dominant language only.

Accordingly, maintenance of the non-dominant language is supported by non-dominant cultural institutions, including the family, but not by the larger society.

Fishman (1982) argued that “compartmentalization” (referring to linguistic segregation/separation) and separate institutional support represent the only way to maintain two languages “on a stable basis past three generations” (p. 34) on a group or individual level. In contrast, Berry’s theory (Berry et al., 2002) presents alternative strategies and suggests multiculturalism and therefore multilingualism/linguistic integration as a more preferable mode for the peaceful, mutually beneficial and long-term coexistence of two languages.

The strategy of linguistic exclusion pushes acculturative individuals of the non-dominant culture into the corresponding strategy of linguistic marginalization. In this situation, the acculturating individuals gradually lose their native language and are not able to master the dominant language well enough to fully participate in the dominant culture. The maintenance of the non-dominant language is supported neither by non-dominant cultural institutions nor by the larger society.

Other approaches to classifying linguistic acculturation strategies toward learning the dominant language, from the perspective of the non-dominant group, have been presented, such as that of Gardner and Lambert (Schumann, 1976a, 1976b). Schumann’s (1976b) classification was focused on the motivation for learning the dominant language as determined by the learner’s desire to participate in the culture at a certain level and to seek a certain psychological distance or proximity with the members of the new culture. In a later study, Schumann (1986) explained that “the learner will acquire the second

language only to a degree that he acculturates” (p. 379). Schumann (1986) defined acculturation as “social and psychological integration of the learner [the acculturating individual] with the target [dominant] language group” (p. 379). However, elsewhere Schumann (1986) defined acculturation as “social and psychological contact with speakers of the target language” (p. 381) and then argued that acculturation triggers acquisition of the target (dominant) language. From a critical perspective, Schumann's (1986) definition would benefit from more conceptual clarity: Social and psychological contact not always results in integration. Further, Schumann's (1976b) classification suggests three strategies affecting acquisition of the dominant language from the perspective of the non-dominant individual: “assimilation, acculturation, and preservation” (p. 136), which is analogous to assimilation, integration, and separation, in Berry et al's. (2002) terminology. Though Schumann (1976b) mentioned the issues of “dominance, non-dominance, or subordination” (p. 136) and “attitudes of the two groups towards each other” (p. 136), he did not examine acculturation strategies of the dominant group in relation to the non-dominant group. Thus, in comparison with Schumann's (1976b) approach, Berry's acculturation model (Berry et al., 2002) allows for the explanation of linguistic strategies at a higher level of sophistication: from the *dual* perspective of the dominant and non-dominant groups in interaction, and as part of a larger phenomenon of general acculturation strategies.

Schumann's work (1976b) is limited in other ways. He proposed a linguistic acculturative model explaining the competence of the members of the non-dominant group in the dominant language in terms of cultural distance. According to Schumann

(1976b), the factors of dominant/non-dominant status of the groups, level of cohesiveness and size of each group, congruence between the cultures, attitudes of the groups towards each other, and intended length of residence, all influence cultural distance, and consequently, the level of competence of the members of the non-dominant group in the dominant language. Similar to Berry, he stated that “an individual can violate the modal tendency of his group” (as cited in Berry et al., 2002, p. 143). However, Schumann’s (1976b) model limits the explanation solely to the level of competence of the members of the non-dominant group in the dominant language. Thus, I contend that Berry’s model (Berry et al., 2002) explains a broader range of phenomena than do the model of Gardner and Learner (referred to in Schumann, 1976a,1976b).

Opportunities for guiding research by Berry’s Theory.

Based on the contemporary state of acculturation theory, several directions for future theory-guided research are suggested. According to Chun et al. (2003), “In our attempts to investigate the relationship between acculturation and mental health... attempts should be made to focus on mini theories...that examine the conditions and principles that govern the relationship” (p. xx). Consistent with the contemporary demand for mini theories, understanding of how people “fit the environment is a critical factor in acculturation and mental health” (Chun et al., 2003, p. xxiii). Regarding acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents, Berry’s theory can be of particular value to those scholars who are interested in investigating the impact of the host society on acculturation processes and mental health outcomes by comparing the acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents living in different countries, such as Germany, Israel, and the United States. Moreover, it may be useful to those who want to examine the impact of the culture of

origin on acculturation processes and mental health outcomes by comparing the acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents coming to the United States from different republics of the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, Berry's theory may be helpful to researchers interested in understanding the relationship between acculturative stress, resilience, and mental health.

Research Literature Review

In this section, I provide a focused review of literature, identifying and critically analyzing relevant research studies. In the course of this critical analysis, I identify important deficiencies in the knowledge base and methodological approaches.

Acculturation of refugee adolescents.

Stress, acculturation, and mental health of Russian refugee adolescents.

The relationship between acculturation and mental health is complex (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Phinney, Horenczyk, et al. (2001) proposed an *interactional model* to explain the relationship between immigration processes and psychological outcomes, taking into consideration interaction between such factors as “attitudes and characteristics of immigrants and the responses of the receiving society” (pp. 493-494), characteristics of a concrete setting, and meaning-making processes. “Good understanding of the complexity of the relationship between migration and mental health outcomes in adolescents requires...an analysis of the factors involved in the acculturative process (Aronowitz, 1992; Gill, Vega, & Dimas, 1994)” (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001, p.184). Mental health outcomes are associated with the choice of acculturation strategies (Unger et al., 2002), successful acculturation to the host culture (Birman et al., 2002; Roberts & Schneider, 1999; Sam, 2000) as well as to

the ethnic culture (Birman et. al., 2002; Leibkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Phinney, 1990, 1992, 1993; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang , 2001; Sam, 1998, 2000). Further, acculturative stress is an important factor related to mental health (Berry et al., 2002; Berry & Sam, Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 20001997; Ponizovsky et al., 1998).

Successful acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents to the American culture is linked to positive mental health outcomes (Birman et al., 2002). Research findings on Russian immigrant children in Germany (Roberts & Schneider, 1999) are in congruence with Birman et al. (2002), as well as findings on adolescent groups of different cultural backgrounds (Sam, 2000). Successful acculturation to the Russian culture is also linked to positive mental health outcomes for the Russian refugee adolescents in the United States (Birman et. al., 2002). Liebkind and Jassinskaja-Lahti (2000) came to a similar conclusion regarding successful acculturation of Russian immigrant adolescents to the Russian culture in Finland. Studies on other immigrant groups showed similar results (Berry & Kostovcik; Vega, Kolody, Valle, & Weir; Ward & Kennedy—all cited in Berry et. al., 2002; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Sam, 1998, 2000).

Regarding the choice of acculturation strategies, according to Unger et al. (2002), assimilation and integration are more typical among younger adolescents than are separation and marginalization. Sam (2000) reported integrative acculturation strategy to be linked to life satisfaction among immigrant adolescents in Norway. Measurement of the acculturation strategies of adolescents by using the Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents (AHIMSA) “could lead to a more complete

understanding of the role of acculturation in the development of adolescent health-risk behaviors” (Unger et al., 2002, p. 249).

According to Jassinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2001), “Immigration coincides with the most vulnerable stage of their [adolescents’] lives” (p. 175). Therefore, the issues of acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; Ponizovsky et al., 1998), developmental stress (Gilman & Huebner, 2003), and vulnerability to mental health problems, such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and risk of suicide (Bemark & Greenberg, 1994; Black, 1996; McClosky & Southwick, 1996; Ponizovsky, Ritsner, & Modai, 1999), are in the focus of researchers. Mental health outcomes are moderated by risk and protective factors that impact acculturation (Berry 1997; Berry & Sam 1997); therefore “researchers must investigate factors that contribute to psychological well-being in addition to those that contribute to mental disorders in order to understand the entire spectrum of psychological outcomes” (Gilman & Huebner, 2003, p. 192).

Moderating factors.

I have summarized findings of relevant studies regarding moderating factors related to Russian refugee adolescents and grouped these factors across the following life domains: family, peer relationship, and school/community setting. This ecosystem approach in regard to acculturation—across life domains—was conceptualized and used by Birman et al. (2002) and Vinokurov et al. (2002) in their research on acculturative hassles of Russian Jewish refugee adolescents in the United States. The models of these researchers seem logical and promising. It is based on two propositions: (a) Mental health outcomes are associated with acculturative stress related to interactions of refugee

adolescents with representatives of both cultures in contact (Berry et al., 2002; Vinokurov et al., 2002); and (b) these interactions are taking place in concrete settings, across life domains of refugee adolescents (Vinokurov et al. 2002).

In the family domain, moderating factors in regard to mental health of Russian refugee adolescents include (a) “the inability of parents to help children with school problems, intercultural dating, or perceived discrimination from school personnel” (Vinokurov et al., 2002, p. 3); (b) differences between American individualistic culture and Russian collectivist culture regarding family relationships (e.g., in child-rearing practices and the level of interdependence/emotional involvement) (Kartalova 1996; Markowitz, 1994; Orlek, 1999); (c) high parental expectations (Orlek, 1999); (d) parental mental health problems (Barankin et al.; Yaglom—both cited in Orlek, 1999); (e) acculturation gap between parents and children (Birman & Trickett, 2001); and (f) the child-parent role reversal (Mirsky, 1997; Orlek, 1999). In the domain of peer relationships, the moderating factors include (a) cultural differences in the meaning of friendship (Kartalova, 1996; Orlek, 1999), (b) love/dating (Kartalova, 1996), (c) humor (Katarova, 1996), (d) money/possessions (Katarova, 1996) (e) intensified concerns about fitting in or making friends (Orlek, 1999), and (f) lack of background cultural knowledge—“little things, like never having seen ‘Flintstones’ cartoon series” (Orlek, 1999, p. 175). In the domain of school/community, moderating factors consist of (a) negative stereotyping towards the Russians in the Western world, based on historical reasons (Jassinskja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001), and (b) language discrimination (Vinokurov et al., 2002).

It is important to differentiate between risk and protective factors (Berry et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Organista, Organista, & Kurasaki, 2003; Sam, 1998, 2000). However, sometimes it is not “possible to unambiguously claim them to be one or the other” (Berry et al., 2002. p. 48). Some findings are controversial or induce dual effect (e.g., in the case of language brokering). (Please see the following section of this dissertation for a detailed discussion.) Another example of a dual effect of a moderating factor is the role of adherence to traditional family values. Jassinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2001) reported that, on the one hand, such adherence increases parental support and diminishes acculturative stress; however, on the other hand, “the more adolescents adhered to family values, the less they seemed to be oriented towards contacts with the host society, and this, in turn, was found to slightly increase perceived discrimination” (p. 182).

Next, the same moderating factors (e.g., the acculturation gap between parents and children) may play a different role in different immigrant groups. In a study on acculturation of Soviet Jewish refugee adolescents and parents, “an unexpected acculturative gap was observed between parents and children with respect to Russian identity, with adolescents being more identified with the Russian culture than their parents” (Birman & Trickett, 2001, p. 456). The finding is in contrast to similar studies on other immigrant groups, where “adults adapt to American culture at a slower rate than those who arrive as children or who are born in the United States, a pattern that Portes (1997) calls ‘dissonant acculturation’ is observed” (Phinney et al., 2000, p. 530). “This finding regarding Russian identity is most provocative, as we have found no other

reported instance of this in the acculturation literature” (Birman & Trickett, 2001, p. 473). Birman and Trickett (2001) named several possible explanations for this finding: (a) children’s lack of agency regarding the decision to immigrate, (b) a reaction to discrimination in school, and (c) a different meaning of *Russian* for adolescents from that of their parents—all of which resulted in “reactive identity formation” (the term is used by Rumbaut as cited in Birman & Trickett, 2001, p. 470). Building on these explanations, I suggest that this controversial finding reflects two sides of the same phenomenon--a reactive identity formation to actually experienced and perceived discrimination--in both the Russian refugee adolescents and in their parents as well, though the nature of the experience is different. The parents actually experienced discrimination in Russia and therefore justify their decision to immigrate by forming a reactive identity towards Russian culture. The children perceive their experience in American schools as discrimination based on their language and Russian nationality, and react to this experience by forming a reactive identity toward American culture (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

This example illustrates my caution regarding comparison across cultures related to the role of moderating factors. In sum, in regard to moderating factors as culture specific or common for other immigrant groups, I argue that these factors have to be identified and their role explained in each culture based on research evidence. The emphasis has to be on interpretation, based on deep knowledge by the researcher of the culture.

Regarding the specificity of the relationship between acculturation and mental health, lack of parental support is linked to increased acculturative stress (Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000) and suicidal ideation (Ponizovsky et al., 1999); whereas parental support is associated with increased self-esteem, sense of mastery, and life satisfaction (Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Regarding the relationship between discrimination and mental health, perceived discrimination is reported to be associated with acculturative stress and decreased global self-esteem (Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Similarly, studies on other immigrant group reported discrimination to be linked to low self-worth (Kimidis, Stuart, Minas, & Ata, 1994).

Language, acculturation and mental health of Russian refugee adolescents.

Relationships between language, acculturation, and mental health of Russian refugee adolescents are complex. Language is suggested to be central in acculturation by some researchers (Birman & Trickett, 2001; Phinney, 2003). Language of the heritage culture promotes ethnic identity (Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001) and indirectly affects mental health: Successful acculturation to the ethnic culture is linked to positive mental health outcomes (Birman et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Leibkind, 2001; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Sam, 1998, 2000). The host language indirectly impacts mental health by affecting acculturation to the host culture: Acculturation to the host culture is linked to positive mental health outcomes (Birman, et. al., 2002; Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Roberts & Schneider, 1999; Sam, 2000). Among the research body, there are only a few studies on heritage language (e.g., Vinokurov et al., 2002).

Language is assessed on three dimensions: *language competence, use, and preference*, as discussed earlier. In the case of the United States as a host culture, English language competence is a predictor of school achievement (Birman, 1994). Host language mastery is correlated with global self-esteem and sense of mastery (Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Similar results were found in a study on Russian immigrant children in Germany (Roberts & Schneider, 1999). In this study it was found that the host language competency increases self-concept and the size of the social network, and decreases anxiety and insecurity in immigrant children (Roberts & Schneider, 1999). English language use is considered to be the most important moderator in acculturation to American culture (Padilla, Olmedo, & Loya as cited in Miranda & Unhoefer, 1998). Difficulties using the English language are correlated with acculturative stress and discrimination, according to Vinokurov et al. (2002). They explained that “adolescents who have difficulties with English are likely to experience more pressures to assimilate into U.S. culture and, thus, experience more acculturative stress and difficulties coping” (p. 441).

In regard to the dimension of language preferences, it is reported that discouragement of the youth from speaking their native language, especially by the teachers, is perceived by Russian refugee adolescents as discrimination (Vinokurov et al., 2002). Language discrimination is part of a more general issue of discrimination. “Experience of discrimination may give rise to reactive ethnic identity in adolescents (e.g., Rumbaut, 1994),” (Birman & Trickett, 2001, p. 470). This is in agreement with another study on Russian immigrant adolescents in a different host society, Finland

(Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999). In this study, negative stereotyping of Russians in Finland was linked to reactive identity formation to the Russian culture by Russian immigrant adolescents. Further, perceived discrimination is correlated with acculturation stress (Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000) and decreased self-esteem (Kimidis et. al., 1994; Liebkind & Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000).

Complex relationships between language, acculturation, and mental health have been further illustrated in the literature by the phenomenon of child/adolescent *language brokering*. Researchers McQuillan and Tse (1995) described language brokering as a phenomenon “where a third party provides communication among different linguistic and/or cultural agents” (p. 195). They posited that language brokers should be differentiated from formal translators and interpreters: (a) “They are mediating communication rather than merely transmitting it” (p. 195); in other words, they are influencing the outcome; and (b) “there exists an unequal power relationship between the broker and the agent, usually one in which the broker [e.g., a child in the family] is normally under authority or supervision of one of the beneficiaries” (p. 195).

There are only a few research studies regarding the relationship between the language brokering role assumed by immigrant children and adolescents and their mental health; such studies do not address the phenomenon properly, and the findings of these studies are contradictory (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2000; Weisskikh & Ava, 2002). On the one hand, the role of language brokering is associated with better acculturation to both cultures, increased independency and maturity, better relationships with parents (McQuillan & Tse, 1995), feelings of pride (Orellana et al.,

2000), and self-efficacy (Weisskikh & Ava, 2002). On the other hand, it is linked to an increased level of stress (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Weisskikh & Ava, 2002)--stress that is difficult to detect (McQuillan & Tse, 1995)--and feelings of shame and frustration (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana et al., 2000). Furthermore, some adolescents feel ambivalent regarding their role as language brokers for their parents (Vinokurov et al., 2002). The existing interpretations of these contradictory findings err in simplifying the complexity of the phenomenon and do not fully explain the contradictory findings. I agree with Schumann (1986) that individuals' interpretations are more important than the findings per se.

These contradictory findings regarding language brokering can be explained in terms of interaction of the following factors identified by Orellana and colleagues (2000) in their study: (a) the asymmetrical power relationships between the immigrant parents and authority figures (e.g., landlord/tenant, doctor/patient, teacher/parent, and government/immigrants); (b) parents' actual and perceived functional impairment; (c) level of the emotional load of the situation; (d) the child-broker's understanding of his or her own role in such encounters; and (e) the overall meaning-making of all of the above. According to Orellana et al., (2000), the child-broker witnesses and "feels the situation" (p. 518) in regard to the way the parents are viewed by others as "powerless...functionally impaired...[and] infantilized,...[often treated with] humiliation" (p. 518), thereby reversing roles with the child. Feeling "insecure," "frustrated," and "ashamed," (Orellana et al., 2000, p. 519), the child-broker perceives him or herself as the protector of the family from the "hostility," and such role can make

him or her feel proud. The language broker represents the adult-level role of a problem solver, according to Orellana et al. (2000). The feeling of pride might also be related to awareness of the broker role in providing access to cultural knowledge and resources of the host society (Orellana et al., 2000).

The findings regarding adolescent brokers' feeling ambivalent about their role can be explained if the same factors are taken into consideration. In situations where the asymmetrical power relationships are less emphasized, the situation is less emotionally intense, and therefore the parents actually are (and are perceived by the child as) less functionally impaired. Hence, there is no need for the child to act as a protector. Consequently, feelings of neither shame nor pride emerge in the child; they feel ambivalent about their role. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis and to shed light on the complex phenomenon of language brokerage and its impact on the mental health of immigrant adolescents.

Peer relationships of refugee adolescents.

Peer relationships during adolescence: Developmental and acculturation perspectives.

“Adolescence is a time when the social world expands—a time of increasing engagement beyond the family sphere to the school, the peer group, and for most young people in the United States, the workplace” (Thiede Call & Mortimer, 2001, p. 1). The life domain of peer relationships grows in importance for adolescents (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Peer relationships start surpassing family relationships in terms of providing support (Furman & Buhrmester as cited in La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 49). However, based on their longitudinal survey research, Thiede Call

and Mortimer (2001) found that support from family impacts adolescents' adjustment to a greater extent than supportive relationships with friends, at school, and at work.

Peer relationships evolve as close friendships, peer group affiliations, and romantic relationships (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Peer relationships in all of these forms are important in terms of their functions—"providing support, experience, companionship, a sense of identity, and experience with the opposite sex" (Kovacev & Shute, 2004, p. 260). Peer relationships can be "an arena of comfort" (a concept used by Simmons & Blyth; Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford, & Blyth, 1987—all cited in Thiede Call & Morimer, 2001) or a source of distress (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Stodolska, 2008).

For many immigrant adolescents, peer relationships (especially with the peers from the dominant culture) became a source of distress (e.g., loneliness, social anxiety and depressive symptoms) (La Greca & Harrison, 2005) and "hindered their adaptation" (Stodolska, 2008, p. 197). For many acculturating immigrant adolescents, "growing up in America [turned into] dramatic confrontation" (Zhou, 1997, p. 90).

At a time when the normative developmental task for adolescents is to expand peer networks (La Greca & Harrison, 2005) and when peer relationships become of crucial importance (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; La Greca & Harrison, 2005), immigrant adolescents "face the (probably, total) disruption of their previous peer support networks and must therefore start afresh" (Kovacev & Shute, 2004, p. 260). They seek and start building relationships with their American counterparts as well as with adolescents from their own cultural group (Stodolska, 2008; Trickett & Birman, 2005). Language and

cultural differences (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Ringel et al., 2005) as well as perceived negative attitudes on behalf of the teachers and other school authorities (Stodolska, 2008; Trickett & Birman, 2005) and perceived discrimination from the peers of the host society (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Lain, 2005; Ringel et al., 2005; Stodloska, 2008) are considered main difficulties in the process of building relationships with peers from the dominant culture and to psychological adjustment of immigrant adolescents (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Lain, 2005; Ringel et al., 2005; Stodloska, 2008). In addition to difficulties in building peer relationships with adolescents from the host society, there are research findings regarding divisions within the same ethnic group along the line of level of acculturation to the dominant culture (Stodolska, 2008).

It is of crucial importance to note that immigrant adolescents face being discriminated by their peers at a time when the normative task for adolescents is to seek acceptance by their peers: “Acceptance by peers is an important part of adolescent self-identity and has a strong influence on psychological adjustment (Harris, 1997)” (La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 50). Immigrant adolescents seek peer acceptance; their acculturation problems are often related to the lack of peer acceptance (Ringel et al., 2005; Stodolska, 2008).

Acceptance by the dominant culture is of importance for immigrants and refugees of all age groups, e.g., for elderly Russian refugees (Morozova, 2008). For acculturating individuals, being accepted in their authenticity means feeling at home, belonging in America (Morozova, 2008). Similarly, for acculturating Russian refugee adolescents, acceptance by peers might be of vital importance in terms of feeling at home and

belonging in America. Search for acceptance and belongingness in the larger society can be understood as a part of immigrant adolescents' search for identity. Search for identity is one of the main developmental tasks of adolescence (Erikson, 1959). One of the main functions of peer relationships is to provide a sense of identity for an acculturating adolescent (Kovacev & Shute, 2004).

Affiliations with peers from the American culture and from their culture of origin.

Adolescents' acceptance by peers can be measured by their "peer crowd affiliations" (Brown as cited in La Greca & Harrison, 2005). "Peer crowds are 'reputation-based collectivities of similarly stereotyped individuals who may or may not spend much time together' (Brown, 1990, p. 177)" (La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 50). Those who do not fit end up being classified as a "crowd of misfits who keep to themselves (Loners or Nobodies)" (La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 50).

From the acculturation point of view, peer crowd affiliations can be helpful in understanding affiliations of immigrant adolescents with their peers in the American culture and with peers in the same culture of origin. Acculturating adolescents sort themselves along the lines of the level of acculturation to the dominant culture and acceptance in the dominant culture (Stodolska, 2008). Those with lower levels of acculturation to the dominant culture (e.g., newly arrived adolescents in early stages of acculturation) are often aware that they are perceived as misfits and, in spite of their efforts to fit into the American culture, are subjected by their American peers to psychological and social isolation (Lain, 2005; Stodolska, 2008). As a result, those immigrant adolescents are not accepted into American peer groups, are segregated into

closed ethno-cultural groups, and affiliate with peers within their own ethno-cultural group (Stodolska, 2008).

In addition, there are divisions among adolescents of the same culture-of-origin group of peers along the lines of the level of acculturation (Stodolska, 2008), as mentioned earlier. Stobolska (2008) found that the students with a higher level of acculturation diminished and alienated their newly arrived peers of the same culture of origin, who were less acculturated to the American culture, were embarrassed by them and tried to disassociate from them. On the other hand, they were perceived by their less acculturated peers as “snobbish,” “arrogant,” and “pretentious in their display of ‘Americanness’” (p. 218).

From the perspective of peer affiliations, it is interesting to discuss the findings of a remarkable quantitative study on Russian refugee adolescents ($N = 110$) conducted by Trickett and Birman (2005). The focus of the study was assessment of the relationship of acculturative styles to school adaptation. The researchers found that “higher levels of American acculturation predicted school adaptation while aspects of Russian acculturation were differently related to school adaptation for different subgroups” (p. 27). Whereas the first finding is not surprising, the second finding regarding acculturation to the Russian culture is important and interesting enough to be discussed in detail below.

Trickett and Birman (2005) reported a high negative correlation between overall American and overall Russian acculturation ($-.63$). They interpreted the finding: “The magnitude of this correlation suggests the difficulty in being bicultural; and the school, as

an emphasis on one culture implies the relative diminishing of the other culture” (p. 36), concluding that “American acculturation at this school is less an option than a requirement” (p. 36). Next, the researchers analyzed data regarding two outlying groups, with no overlap in membership: One consisted of students with high academic achievement ($n = 30$); the other consisted of students with disciplinary infractions ($n = 28$). The excellent students were more highly acculturated to the American culture than to the Russian culture, whereas the students with disciplinary infractions were more Russian than American in terms of identity and behavior. The researchers interpreted this finding by suggesting that at school Russian identity and behavior is associated with risks of accumulating disciplinary infractions, whereas acculturation to American culture promoted school adaptation.

And the most surprising finding was, “Greater Overall Social Support contributed to higher levels of School Belonging and, surprisingly, to increased disciplinary infractions” (Trickett & Birman, 2005, p. 36). In order to better understand and interpret this finding, the Overall Social Support was differentiated into support from parents, American peers, and Russian peers. As a result, Trickett and Birman (2005) found that support from parents and American peers are contributors to School Belonging, whereas support from Russian peers contributes “to getting in trouble with school authorities and rules” (p. 36). For acculturating adolescents who do not fit into the American school and do not feel a sense of belonging there, support from their ethnic peers is of crucial importance in terms of “creating alternative sense of belonging” (Trickett & Birman, 2005, p. 36).

Trickett and Birman (2005) creatively interpreted their notable findings from the perspective of larger trends in American society regarding acculturative strategies of the dominant culture, because these strategies towards acculturating individuals are applied in different societal institutions, including high schools. The researchers used the concept of *assimilationist press* (Murray, Barrett, & Homburger as cited in Trickett & Birman, 2005, p. 36) to illuminate “the ways in which schools reward or punish varied acculturative styles” (p. 36). The school site of their study is an example of applying the assimilation press strategy towards Russian refugee adolescents (Trickett & Birman, 2005). The Russian participants in the study were punished by the school for identifying with their culture of origin, for behaving in accordance with Russian cultural norms, and for affiliating with peers from the Russian culture;. As a result, assimilation to the American culture and shedding of the Russian culture represented a demand for acceptance at that school.

Peer relationships: Perceived discrimination.

Immigrant adolescents often perceive discrimination on behalf of peers from the dominant culture (Stodloska, 2008). This finding is consistently supported by research on different immigrant youth groups acculturating in different host cultures, such as Polish, Korean, Mexican (Stodolska, 2008), and Vietnamese (Lain, 2005) adolescents acculturating in the United States; Yugoslavian adolescents acculturating in Australia (Kovacev & Shute, 2004); and Ethiopian adolescents acculturating in Israel (Ringel et al., 2005).

Researchers have interpreted peer discrimination as being rooted in the historical patterns of acculturation of different ethnic groups to the dominant culture, coupled with

“stereotypes pervasive in the American society [towards these groups]” (Stodolska, 2008, p. 220). In her qualitative study, Stodolska (2008) identified and described patterns of different treatment (on behalf of their American peers) of Mexican, Korean, and Polish adolescents acculturating in Midwestern United States. Ringel et al. (2005) researched acculturation and integration of these Ethiopian youth into Israeli society and found that pervasive negative attitudes in the Israeli society hindered acculturation of Ethiopian youths.

Discrimination by peers from the dominant culture is described by the researchers as taking different forms: teasing, ridiculing, “using ethnic/racial slurs...[and]...refusing to engage in personal contacts with immigrant youth” (Stodolska, p. 216). The researcher reports that “immigrant adolescents were acutely aware of the fact that they were being ostracized and pushed away” (p. 216).

In regards to discrimination of Vietnamese-American adolescents, Lain (2005) described social and psychological isolation as subtle forms of discrimination used by the mainstream youth: “In addition to infrequent but readily apparent forms of racism such as hate crimes, there are subtle forms of racism, one of which is social and psychological isolation” (p. 4).

La Greka and Harrison (2005), in their study on American adolescents’ peer relationships, use the term “peer victimization” (p. 50). Their study was conducted in the Southeast of the United States; the sample consisted of 421 adolescents of different ethnic backgrounds (Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, Black, and mixed/other), including Hispanic youth whose families originated from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Columbia.

According to La Greka & Harrison (2005), peer victimization includes both “overt peer victimization” (p. 50) (e.g., physical violence and threats) and “relational victimization” (p. 50). Relational victimization refers to more subtle forms of peer victimization: “rumor spreading, friendship withdrawal, and social exclusion (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Prinstein et al., 2001; Vernberg, Jacobs, & Hershberger, 1999)” (La Greka & Harrison, 2005, p. 51). Both boys and girls consider subtle forms of peer victimization (relationship victimization) to be more common than physical violence and threats (overt peer victimization) (Prinstein et al. as cited in La Greka & Harrison 2005). Based on their findings, La Greka and Harrison (2005) reported “a developmental shift in terms of boys’ aggression against peers. By mid-adolescence boys are using more sophisticated and less overt peer victimization strategies” (p. 58). Based on the fact that White adolescents represented a “statistical minority” (p. 58) in the sample (as well as in their school and county), these researchers suggested that “it is possible that peer victimization has a greater impact on adolescents who are in the minority, regardless of their cultural or ethnic background” (p. 58).

Acculturating adolescents are “acutely aware” (Stodolska, 2008, p. 216) of being discriminated against and react to this in different ways (Ringel et al., 2005; Stodolska, 2008). Stodolska (2008) reported that immigrant adolescents consider their American counterparts to be “bossy, upright, and unfriendly” (p. 216). Further, due to inadequate English proficiency, it was difficult for shy immigrant adolescents to retaliate and resolve their conflicts verbally (or only verbally); Mexican boys often reserved to fights (Stodolska, 2008).

Ringel et al. (2005) found that Ethiopian youth “were fundamentally angry rather than depressed at racist attitudes in Israeli society and culture as a whole” (p. 70) and, in particular, at perceived discrimination at school from their teachers. The researchers suggested that this finding can be interpreted as “active resistance [of Ethiopian youth] to the racist attitudes that Ethiopian youth encounter, rather than an attitude of passivity and despair” (p. 71).

One of the ways to react to discrimination involves a change in perception. For example, Stobolska (2008) reported that Korean students in her study interpreted conflicts between different ethnic groups as personal conflicts between individuals, not as “incidents of anti-immigration discrimination” (p. 217).

Peer relationships as a moderating factor for psychological adjustment and well-being of acculturating adolescents.

Peer relationships are associated with psychological adjustment (e.g., global self-worth and social acceptance) of acculturating adolescents (Kovacev & Shute, 2004). According to Kovacev and Shute (2004), “Strong positive relationship was found between classmates’ support and self-worth” (p. 266). In other words, peer relationships (i.e., peer social support) function as a moderating factor, mediating effects of acculturation on psychological adjustment (Kovacev & Shute, 2004).

However, as was well established by Trickett and Birman (2005), “Social support is a differentiated rather than a global concept” (p. 36). By differentiating the concept of social support, they identified the role of culture-of-origin peer support as an important source of belongingness for acculturating adolescents, and, simultaneously, a risk factor for school adaptation in a setting where the school used the “assimilationist press” (p. 36)

strategy on Russian refugee adolescents. Simultaneously, social support from American peers was found to contribute to a sense of the acculturating adolescents' belongingness at school (Trickett & Birman (2005).

“Multiple aspects of adolescents’ social relations [with peers] uniquely contribute to feelings of internal distress” (La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 59). Discrimination by the peers from the dominant culture negatively affects immigrant adolescents’ adjustment (Stodolska, 2008). In congruence with other studies that associated peer victimization with inner distress, including loneliness and depression (Crick & Bigbee; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg—both referred to in La Greca & Harrison, 2005), and low self-esteem (Prinstein et al. referred to in La Greca & Harrison, 2005, p. 51), La Greca and Harrison (2005) found that relational victimization was “a salient factor contributing to adolescents’ social anxiety and depressive symptoms...[and] substantially predicted social anxiety and depressive symptoms” (p. 57).

Romantic relationships.

Adolescent romantic relationships “are distinctive from the contexts created by familial and work settings and even by friendships” (Collins, 2003, p. 6). Romantic relationships are similar to friendships in some aspects: The same as friendships, they are characterized as intimate, ongoing, mutual, voluntary, emotional (Karney et al., 2007). Yet, romantic relationships differ from friendship, being “erotically charged” (Karney et al., 2007, p. 8). Referring to the works of Brown, Furman, and Feiring, as well as Reis and Shaver, Collins (2003) explained that romantic relationships include “experiences of sexual relations, eventually if not now” (p. 2). Karney et al. (2007) emphasized the difference between romantic relationships and sexual ones: (a) Sexual experiences can

take place within romantic relationships, but sexual relationships can occur without being an integral part of romantic relationships; and (b) romantic relationships are characterized as intimate and emotional, whereas sexual relationships can occur without an emotional connection between partners.

Peer groups are important in regards to adolescents' romantic relationships: They "form a proximal context for the initiation of romantic relationships" (Karney et al., 2007, p. 59). The same is true for immigrant adolescents: "The peer group is especially important for immigrant adolescents because it provides opportunities for romantic relationship involvement" (Berkowitz King & Harris, 2007, p. 344). The peer network is associated with both the timing of engagement and the quality of romantic relationships (Connolly & Goldberg; Furman—both referred to in Karney et al., 2007). Referring to the work of Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins, Karney et al. (2007) pointed out that being accepted by peers predicts earlier timing of engagement into romantic relationship; and based on Franzoi, Davis, and Vasques-Suson's study, Karney et al. reported that more popular students dated more frequently than less popular ones. Furthermore, the quality of friendship was reported to be directly correlated with the quality of adolescent romantic relationships (Collins et al.; Connolly et al.; Seiffgekrnke, Shulman, & Kissinger--all referred to in Karney et al., 2007).

In regard to immigrant adolescents, Berkowitz King and Harris (2007) conducted the first (according to these researchers and to my knowledge of the literature) quantitative study that focused on romantic relationships of immigrant adolescents. The data came from a nationally representative sample ($N = 20,000$) of school students, in

grades 7 to 12, in the United States. The researchers found that (a) compared to the native-born adolescents, the first-generation immigrant youth are less likely to enter romantic relationships; and (b) the number of friends is directly correlated to involvement in romantic relationships. In addition, according to these researchers, the number of immigrant and opposite-sex friends is associated with involvement in romantic relationships. In other words, the dating pool of first-generation immigrant adolescents is limited by the number of opposite-sex friends among immigrant adolescents, due to the adolescents' tendency to sort themselves along the lines of similarity (e.g., race, ethnicity, and generational status), including selection of a romantic partner among those similar to them, which is important in terms of identity formation: "Adolescents may seek partners similar to themselves to reinforce their ascribed place in the society or seek partners who differ in order to explore new cultures" (Berkowitz King & Harris, 2007, p. 346). In a qualitative research study on Russian adolescents in Israel, it was found that Russian immigrant girls who dated boys from the host culture increased the size of their dating pool (Eisikovits as referred to in Berkowitz King & Harris, 2007).

Developmental significance of romantic relationships during adolescence.

Until recently, the area of adolescent romantic relationships was under-researched due to the fact that these relationships were considered trivial and transitory (Collins, 2003). However, "even when relationships are relatively transitory, evidence implies that far from being trivial events in development, romantic relationships are significant for adolescent functioning and for longer term outcomes" (Collins, 2003, p. 5).

The quality of romantic relationships can be perceived as positive or negative (Karney et al., 2007). The outcomes in terms of psychological functioning can be

negative (e.g., alcohol use and behavioral problems) (Davies & Windle; Neeman, Hubbard, & Masten; Thomas & Hisu; Wright--all cited in Collins, 2003), which is “conditional on specific features of adolescents’ romantic behavior and experiences” (Collins, 2003, p. 7). A breakup in a romantic relationship can trigger the first episode of a major depressive disorder, which according to Monroe, Rhode, Seeley, and Lewinson, is considered “the most common trigger” (as cited in Collins, 2003, p. 5).

Contemporary research has focused not only on negative outcomes but on positive ones (Collins, 2003). Involvement in a romantic relationship per se and the quality of such a relationship is positively correlated with identity formation in terms of a romantic self-concept; a romantic self-concept is linked to feelings of self-worth (Connolly & Konarski; Harter; Kuttler, La Greca, & Prinstein--all referred to in Collins, 2003). Furthermore, regarding the role of romantic relationships in identity formation, Collins (2003) pointed out, “In the minds of adolescents themselves, being in a romantic relationship is central to ‘belonging’ and status in the peer group (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999; Levesque, 1993)” (p. 6). In addition, the experience of being in a romantic relationship during adolescence is important in terms of later relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski; Connolly & Goldberg; Furman & Wehner-- all referred to in Collins, 2003). Nevertheless, Collins (2003) warned, “Research on the developmental significance of these [romantic] relationships, however, barely has reached the toddler age” (p. 9).

Deficiencies in knowledge and methodology.

Researchers only recently have started focusing on the problem of acculturation and mental health of Russian refugee adolescents in the United States (e.g., Birman &

Trickett, 2001; Birman et al., 2002; Vinokurov et al., 2002). Therefore, at this state of knowledge, there is an urgent need for qualitative studies in order to better understand the nature and meaning of the experience of acculturation and mental health outcomes for Russian refugee adolescents in the United States (Birman et al., 2002; Markowitz, 1994).

In the case of quantitative studies, there are some methodological issues that should be discussed as well: conceptualization, generalizability, measures, and instruments. Lack of conceptual clarity is one of the cornerstone problems in achieving the systematization of research (Organista et al., 2003; Roberts & Schneider, 1999; Sam, 2000), and therefore, it leads to the emergence of validity and comparability problems (Roberts & Schneider, 1999).

Many researchers have contended that a comparative approach should be the goal of the future research (Berry et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Phinney et al., 2001; Vinokurov, et al., 2002). Moreover, the use of standard instruments is necessary in order to compare the findings of different studies (Berry et al., 2002; Unger et al., 2002). Relevant to the topic under scrutiny, it is essential that two kinds of instruments be developed: (a) those that are relevant to a variety of cultures (e.g., Unger et al's., [2002] Acculturation, Habits and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents [AHIMSA]) and (b) those that are culture specific (e.g., the measures of multiple acculturative hassles in different life domains of Russian immigrant adolescents, designed by Vinokurov et al., 2002). In reference to the measurement of acculturation, Unger et al. (2002) suggested that "further research is necessary to translate the AHIMSA into other languages and to assess its validity among non-English speaking adolescents in English Second Language

(ESL) classes or ethnic enclaves” (p. 249). A culture specific instrument was designed to measure “hassles involving person-environment transactions occurring in life domain of school, family, peers, and language” (Vinokurov et al., 2002, p. 1).

I contend that it is very important to further investigate the role of language as a possible salient moderating factor in regard to short- and long-term effects on mental health. In particular, research must focus on such aspects of the acculturation phenomenon as (a) language discrimination and its predictors (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi., 2002), (b) the interactive relationship of the factors of age at the time of immigration, language, and acculturation (Phinney et al., 2000); (c) language competence and language hassles (Phinney et al., 2000; Roberts & Schnieder, 1999; Vinokurov et al., 2002); and (d) language brokering as a multifaceted phenomenon (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Orellana et al., 2000).

Overall, understanding the complexity of the relationship between acculturation and mental health requires (a) a deeper understanding of acculturation (Organista et al., 2003; Unger et al., 2002); (b) development of more sophisticated models (Phinney, Horenczyk et al., 2001); (c) application of a systematized approach to research (Berry et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Organista et al., 2003; Sam, 1998, 2000; Vinokurov et al., 2002); and (d) identification of a wider range of moderating factors, with differentiation between risk and protective factors (Berry et al., 2002; Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Organista et al., 2003; Sam, 1998, 2000; Vinokurov et al., 2002), and identification of the most salient factors among them.

It is evident that “much more research is needed to better understand the acculturation process in various cultures and its relationship to the mental health [of immigrants]” (Organista et al., 2003, p. 157), especially among refugee adolescents, including Russian adolescents (Birman & Trickett, 2001; Vinokurov et al., 2002). In the case of Russian refugee adolescents, it is important that future research takes into consideration the heterogeneity of this group, because “in culturally heterogeneous immigrant groups different acculturation processes or models have to be expected” (Roberts & Schneider, 1999, p. 128). Hence, more attention should be placed on variations among individuals within the group (Berry et al., 2002).

Furthermore, there is a need to shift research from cross-sectional to longitudinal studies (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Roberts & Schneider, 1999; Organista et al., 2003). Acculturation should be understood and assessed as a dynamic process (Organista et al., 2003). And, as described earlier, research should be focused on the interaction of acculturative and developmental processes (Phinney et al., 2000; Roberts & Schneider, 1999; Vinokurov et al., 2002). Therefore, there is a need for an interacting model to explain the complex relationship between acculturative and developmental processes and its impact on the mental health of refugee adolescents. According to Roberts and Schneider (1999), in order to address the need to differentiate between acculturative and developmental processes, “non-immigrant children of the same age and from the same classrooms [school, community] should therefore be included in the study” (p. 128), in order to differentiate between developmental and acculturative processes. This was accomplished by Roberts and Schneider in their study.

Need for the development of more sophisticated approaches means the shift from rather simple linear explanations to the construction of multivariate causal models that reflect the complexity of acculturation and its relationship to mental health (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001; Organista et al., 2003). A more sophisticated approach also implies the search for alternative interpretations of research findings (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001), especially controversial ones (e.g., the issues of child language brokering or reactive identity formation, as discussed earlier). Another requirement for understanding the complex relationship between acculturation and mental health is systematization of research (Berry et al., 2002; Sam, 2000). This is difficult to achieve due to the problems described above related to conceptual clarity and the use of standard instruments.

In sum, based on deficiencies in the knowledge base and methodology, there is a great need for qualitative research on Russian refugee adolescents, in order to better understand the nature and meaning of their experience (Markowitz, 1994). My research study represents just such an attempt.

The study's research question was, What is the meaning of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships? As mentioned earlier, in this study, *acculturation* is defined as "changes in a cultural group or individual as a result of contact with another cultural group" (Berry et al., 2002, p. 475). For the purposes of this study, *Russian refugee adolescents* is defined as individuals who immigrated from Russian to the United States as refugees and were aged 12 to 18 years at the time of immigration. And, finally, the term *peer relationships* is defined in

this study as Russian refugee adolescents' relationships with other adolescents (American, Russian, and others) in the country of resettlement.

Chapter Summary

In the first part of this chapter, I provided a theoretical context for analysis of the topic of acculturation in general, and Russian refugee adolescents in the United States in particular. The focus of my analysis was Berry's acculturation theory. In the course of this analysis, I defined major concepts, stated propositions, and analyzed the relationship between the core propositions of that theory. Also, I analyzed strengths and limitations of Berry's theory, including its ability to offer implications for social work. Finally, I suggested ways in which Berry's theory might be of importance to researchers interested in the topic of acculturation.

In the second part of this chapter, I provided a focused review of the research literature, identifying, and critically analyzing relevant research studies. In the course of this critical analysis, I identified deficiencies in the knowledge base, providing relevance to the current research. Specifically, I argued that a qualitative study on acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships was needed at this stage of knowledge: There is a need to hear the voices of the refugee adolescents, as they describe and assign meaning to their lived experience of acculturation in the domain of peer relationships. The next chapter describes the methodology applied in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Inquiry

The overall purpose of this study was to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships. The rationale behind my choice of qualitative inquiry to achieve this goal was partially based on the following key factors suggested by Creswell (1998): (a) the need to explore the topic, (b) the nature of the research question, and (c) the fact that “the writer brings himself or herself into the study” (p. 18) in order to become deeply involved in the entire qualitative research process. Other salient factors influencing my choice of qualitative over quantitative inquiry are seen through a comparison of these two approaches.

This qualitative study addressed the need for exploratory, descriptive research on the chosen phenomenon in order to expand knowledge in the following ways: (a) The study focused on a highly under-researched topic; (b) it studied a highly under-researched population; (c) in exploring the topic provided in-depth description, shed additional light on controversial findings of existing research on the problem, resulting in identifying and describing an essence of the phenomenon; and (d) this study was the first one of its kind to be conducted in Colorado or any of the other Rocky Mountain states.

The study’s research question, supporting its purpose, asked, What is the meaning of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer

relationships? The very nature of this question requires an exploration of the meanings that persons attach to a particular phenomenon in order to understand it in depth. Inherent in the qualitative design is the opportunity to explore the topic, as well as to “present a detailed view” (Creswell, 1998, p. 17), and gain “a complex, holistic picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) of the topic—all of which are essential to an understanding of the fundamental structure or meaning of the phenomenon, which was the goal of my study.

This research was conducted in a natural setting which embraced the role of context (e.g., social, political, and/or historical) in data collection. These characteristics of qualitative inquiry were seen as of particular value to me, as the researcher: In my study, context played a critical role in exploring the research question, in line with Miles and Huberman’s (1994) description of qualitative data as “nested in a real context” (p. 10). Overall, I recognized that the qualitative approach, which by its very nature is interpretive (Creswell, 2003), would allow me to explore the multiple realities of the phenomenon that emerged from the study—subjective realities actually experienced by the selected participants.

The Phenomenological Tradition

Among the numerous traditions associated with the qualitative research approach, Creswell (1998) discussed five: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and the case study. Of these, I chose the phenomenological approach, because it best suits the purpose of my study, based on the following discussion.

A phenomenological study deals directly with the essence and meaning of the phenomenon. The goal is to grasp comprehensively the nature and meaning of the lived

experiences for several individuals about a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1984). Van Manen suggested that by a sincere attempt of the researcher to understand the subjective meaning of a lived experience of each person in a group of people who have experienced the same phenomenon, the “very nature of the phenomenon” (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 484), in all its complexity and richness, might be grasped.

Phenomenology began in Germany, with Edmund Husserl’s two works, *Logical Investigations* (1900) and *Ideas* (1913) (Grigori & Grigori, 2003). Husserl’s ideas were further developed by Heidegger (1927/1962), Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), and Sartre (1943/1956) (Grigori & Grigori, 2003). Husserl argued for the inductive nature of phenomenological analysis and the priority of thick description of the phenomenon as the first step before explanation, as well as such main pillars of phenomenological analysis as epoche, bracketing, and phenomenological reduction (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 2003). Heidegger proposed the application of phenomenology for analysis of existential issues (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 2003). Merleau-Ponty’s contribution to phenomenology is the emphasis on the importance of lived experience and the role of context in understanding the meaning of the phenomenon (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 2003). Sartre “provided philosophical articulations of the phenomenological method” (Grigori & Grigori, 2003, p. 245). For more than 100 years, phenomenology has been a well-known method of analysis, widely used by researchers (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology,

2003). Its systematic and methodic protocol of data analysis makes phenomenology a solid scientific method.

Similar to the factors influencing my choice of qualitative over quantitative inquiry, my choice of the phenomenological tradition as the framework for this study was based on (a) the current state of knowledge of the phenomenon as experienced by the targeted population and (b) the nature of my research question. The very limited state of current knowledge of the phenomenon under scrutiny, as mentioned earlier, points to the strong need for descriptive research in this area. Also, my research question required the use of personal interviews in order to elicit individual descriptions of the participants' lived experiences, both negative and positive. Thick description of the lived experience of individuals is the foundation on which phenomenology rests (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 2003). To go a step further, the phenomenological tradition suggests using such individual descriptions of lived experiences in order to derive general meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, based on such descriptions, I was able to derive major themes and general, underlying meanings of the phenomenon of acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the life domain of peer relationships, according to the phenomenological tradition. Overall, the use of phenomenological methods to explore and analyze this particular topic and population allowed me the opportunity to capture the essence of the unique lived experience of the participants, as embedded in a particular historical, cultural, and situational context.

The Role of the Researcher

It was my desire to bring myself into the study, particularly in regard to active participation as the main data-collecting instrument. Nevertheless, my involvement carried with it critical implications for the study in terms of biases and presuppositions that I held as a result of my personal experience and knowledge of relevant literature. Regarding my own personal experience, I came to this country from Russia at the age of 14, and consequently was acutely aware of my own experience as a Russian refugee adolescent. Moreover, the acculturation process represented a major part of that experience, greatly influencing my formative years. Further, having worked on the topic under study for the past 8 years, I was aware that this research would force me back into my own experience of the phenomenon.

To address this problem, I conscientiously reflected on my personal experience and pre-existing knowledge of the phenomenon to determine my subsequent biases and presuppositions. I then engaged in the ongoing, crucial strategy of the epoche—the process of “bracketing” or separating my own experience, values, and prejudgments in order to be able to listen with an open mind and give voice to the study participants (Creswell, 1998). These two strategies--being acutely aware of my own experiences, biases, and presuppositions, plus being able to bracket them in a very conscious way—contributed significantly to the study’s validity. Overall, my intent in the use of the epoche was to capture the essence of the participants’ experience, from their perspective (Moustakas, 1994). My presuppositions and the strategy of the epoche are discussed in more detail below.

Presuppositions

Based on my own experience and acquired knowledge, as well as knowledge of the literature, I presupposed that

- The participants would describe their experience with different peers as positive or negative. Positive experience would be associated with acceptance by peers, and peer relationships would become an arena of comfort. Those who evaluated their experience with peers as negative would indicate anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003), depression (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Prinstein, Borelli, Cheah, Simon, & Atkins, 2005; Sabatelli & Anderson, 1991), and loneliness (Storch et al., 2003).
- In the domain of relationships with American peers, participants would describe their experiences of cultural differences in the meaning of friendship (Kartalova, 1996; Orlek, 1999), love/dating, humor, and money/possessions (Kartalova, 1996); intensified concerns about fitting in or making friends (Orlek, 1999); lack of background cultural knowledge (Orlek, 1999); negative stereotyping towards Russians in the Western world, based on historical reasons (Jassinskja-Lahti & Liebkind, 2001); and language discrimination (Vinokurov et al., 2002).
- Participants would vary in their use of acculturation strategies in their peer relationships domain. For example, some would attempt to acculturate to the American culture and assimilate at the cost of shedding their ethnic culture; others would try to integrate and acculturate to both cultures.
- Female participants would be more likely to acculturate faster to the American culture than the male participants.
- Female participants would acquire English language skills sooner than the male participants.
- Female participants would be more likely to have American friends than male participants.
- Female participants would be more likely to have romantic relationships with their American peers rather than with Russian peers.
- Female participants would be less likely to miss their home country.
- Female participants would experience more parental restraints (e.g., strict curfew) than they had experienced in the home country.

- Male participants would have difficulties in developing romantic relationships (with either Russian or American peers).
- Male participants would be more likely to be engaged in antisocial/deviant behaviors than female participants.
- Most of the participants would have a part-time job while attending school.
- Most of the participants that worked would be financially contributing to their family (e.g., pay rent and bills, buy groceries).
- Participant-parental contact would be less than it had been in the home country due to parents working at several jobs or several shifts.
- Most of the participants of legal driving age would not have their own cars.
- Most of the participants would experience lack of finances to buy goods and participate in activities with their American peers.
- Most of the participants would be engaged in language brokering on behalf of their family.
- Most of the participants would miss their friends in Russia.
- Most of the participants would miss certain activities they had been doing in Russia (e.g., playing certain sports).

Epoche.

Being aware that I held presuppositions that were grounded in personal experience and knowledge of the relevant literature, and at the same time aware that participants' experience and the meaning they assigned to it were unique, whether similar or different from mine, I made every effort to "bracket" my own experience and prior knowledge—a special procedure called the *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). *Epoche* is Greek in origin and means "to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from everyday, ordinary ways of perceiving things" (Moustakas as cited in Patton, 2002, p.

484). According to the process of epoche, no position is taken and nothing is determined in advance (Moustakas, 1994). It is an essential strategy in the conducting of phenomenological research in order to give voice to the participants toward the goal of arriving at the essence of the phenomenon.

The process of epoche involves two steps: (a) the researcher's awareness of his or her preconceptions and biases regarding the phenomenon under scrutiny, and (b) bracketing--an active attempt of the researcher to put them aside (Patton, 2002). In addition to continuous, informal self-reflection throughout the study, I used formal systematic strategies to bracket my own experiences, feelings, and perspectives. One strategy was to undertake self-reflection in order to bring my presuppositions and biases into consciousness, and subsequently label them and put them in writing. Another strategy I used to achieve bracketing, as recommended by Moustakas (1994), was in the taking of special field notes (memos to self): In addition to taking the standard type of field notes to facilitate data collection, I took notes that reflected my own experiences as they revisited me, particularly during the interviews.

The use of the epoche gave me, as the researcher, an opportunity to "examine the phenomenon from a fresh and open viewpoint without prejudgment, [and prevented me from] imposing meaning too soon" (Katz as cited in Patton, p. 484). As predicted by Creswell (1998), by minimizing the strong influence of personal experience and biases through the epoche, I felt that I became more open to reliance on "intuition, imagination, and universal structures" (p. 52) as a means of gaining an understanding of the phenomenon. Grigori and Grigori (2002) have suggested that, as a result of such efforts,

“new dimensions of the total experience are likely to appear” (p. 258). In addition to the researcher’s repeated scrutiny of the data, Miles and Huberman (1994) pointed out, “Through vigilance over one’s presuppositions one can...capture the ‘essence’ of the account—what is constant in the person’s life across its manifold variations. This approach [epoche] leads to a ‘practical understanding’ of meanings and actions” (p. 8).

The Sampling Process

The term *sampling*, as used in qualitative research, is misleading, according to Polkinghorne (2005), because it implies that the persons chosen for participation in a study will be representative of some larger population. However, potential participants for a qualitative study such as mine are selected because they can contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon under study. Hence, for the purposes of my study, the sampling process represented more of a selection process wherein individuals were chosen for the purpose of providing a first-hand description of experiences pertaining to the research question.

Purposeful sampling.

Prior to selecting participants for the study, I determined that there were specific criteria that must be met in order to explore the topic of interest appropriately. To this end, I utilized a purposeful sampling strategy, and more specifically, criterion sampling. This is in line with Creswell’s (1998) position that, in a phenomenological study, all participants should be purposely selected in order to meet the criterion of having experienced the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, the participants purposefully selected for this study met the primary criterion of being Russian refugee adolescents

who had experienced the acculturation phenomenon. All had experienced the phenomenon of acculturation first hand, and their experiences were diverse--they experienced the phenomenon in its richness (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Narrowing the selection process even further, participants were also purposefully selected on the basis of the following criteria: (a) current age: 14 to 18 years, (b) age at the time of immigration: 12 to 18 years), (c) time in the United States: 6 months to 6 years, (d) refugee status, (e) same country of origin--Russia, and (f) current residency in Denver.

Adherence to these criteria ensured that all participants were living in the United States as refugees during their adolescent years, are currently high school students, came from Russia, had been experiencing acculturation within a specific time frame, and currently live in the same geographic acculturation environment (Denver). The criteria of refugee status and age are important for two reasons: Refugees experience acculturation differently than other immigrant groups; and adolescents experience acculturation differently than other age groups, such as adults or children. The criteria of the same country of origin and the same geographical area where acculturation is taking place (Denver) are important in terms of cultural difference.

The sample size had originally been established at 12 to 15 participants, based on recommendations for sample size in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). However, in accordance with the circular process of qualitative design and its emergent nature, the size of the sample was also dependent on the fact that I continued purposefully selecting participants until data reached redundancy. As a result, the actual number of participants that emerged totaled 12.

Recruitment.

The participants were recruited through advertisement in the local Russian newspaper. The advertisement for recruitment of potential participants stipulated that those under 18 years of age must first discuss the possibility of their participation with their parents or legal guardians, after which they were to contact me to arrange a joint preliminary meeting. Russian adolescents do read these local papers; consequently I received 19 responses to my ad.

The pre-interview appointment was held at the place of each participant's choosing. If the participant did not have a specific place of preference, I suggested several interview sites: their place of residence, their local library, Penrose Library at the University of Denver, or the Glendale Public Library--most of the Russian families know this library and live in that area. Most of the participants (10) chose the Glendale Public Library, 2 chose their place of residence.

At this meeting, I further discussed the study, type of questions I would be asking, the approximate duration of the interviews (60 to 90 minutes), the informed consent issues, the location of the interviews, and the number of interviews (two). During this meeting, I began the process of building rapport with the participant in order to develop the trust and comfort level necessary to obtain at the interview a detailed description of the participant's experience of the phenomenon. At the end of this preliminary meeting, each participant (and for those under 18 years old, their parent or legal guardian) was asked to sign an assent/consent form.

Sample demographics.

The sample consisted of 12 Russian refugee adolescents, 5 girls and 7 boys. Of the 12 participants, 9 self-identified as Meskhetian Turks, and 3 self-identified as ethnic Russians. Of the 9 Meskhetian Turks, 2 were of mixed ethnicity (only one of the parents was a Meskhetian Turk). Eight of the Meskhetian Turks lived in small towns in Krasnodarsky Kray, and 1 lived in the neighboring region of Stavropolsky Kray in Russia. The participants' families, together with other Meskhetian Turks, were resettled by the Soviet government in this region of Russia after pogroms against them in Uzbekistan in 1989. All of the participants were born in Russia after these events. Despite the fact that all were born in Russia, the Meskhetian Turk participants experienced discrimination in Russia on the basis of their ethnicity and language. In the peer relationships domain, discrimination often took the form of physical violence from their Russian peers. The Meskhetian Turks were admitted to the United States as refugees based on their experience of discrimination in the country of origin.

Regarding the ethnic Russian participants, two lived in Moscow and one lived in St. Petersburg prior to immigration. One of each of the ethnic Russian participants' parents/step-parents belonged to a discriminated group in Russia. This served as a basis for each of these families' immigration to the United States as refugees. However, according to these ethnic Russian participants, none personally experienced discrimination in the country of origin. In contrast to the Meskhetian Turk participants who self-identified as members of this minority group and were easily identifiable as non-Slavs due to the difference in their phenotype and language (and were persecuted on

this basis), the ethnic Russian participants self-identified as members of the majority group and were indistinguishable from the rest of the ethnic Russian/Slavic adolescents.

Meskhethian Turks belong to a minority group of “persons of Caucasus ethnicity” (“лица кавказской национальности,” in the Russian language), who are phenotypically and linguistically different from the majority Slavic population. The war in Chechnya is used by the Russian nationalists as a basis for discrimination of persons of Caucasus ethnicity. (In addition to Meskhethian Turks, this group includes Armenians, Georgians, Azeris, and many other smaller ethnic groups who historically have lived in the Caucasus.)

At the time of the interviews, the youngest participant was 15 years old and the oldest was 18 years old. The participants’ length of time in the United States upon immigration ranged from 0.5 to 4.5 years. The participants’ age at the time of immigration varied from 13 to 16 years. (Please see Table 1, *Demographics*.)

Table 1

Demographics

Participants	Gender	Current age	Years in the USA	Age at the time of immigration	Ethnicity	Place of residence in Russia
A	M	16	1.5	14.5	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
B	M	18	2	16	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
C	F	16	2	14	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
D	M	17	1.5	15.5	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
E	M	16.5	1	15.5	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
F	F	17	1.5	15.5	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
G	M	17.5	4.5	13	Russian	Moscow
H	F	15	2	13	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
I	F	17	2	15	Meskhethian Turk	Stavropolsky Kray
J	F	17	2	15	Russian	St.Petersburg
K	M	16	.5	15.5	Meskhethian Turk	Krasnodarsky Kray
L	M	17	4	13	Russian	Moscow

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the intent of data gathering is to uncover evidence of the phenomenon under study (Polkinghorne, 2005). Data collection activities for this purpose

included in-depth personal interviews, supplemented by observation and the creation of field notes.

The interview.

In choosing a specific method of data collection, I was influenced by Creswell's (1998) words: "There is an essential structure of [the phenomenon under study] that can be extracted from the client's verbal description of this experience" (p. 278).

Polkinghorne (2005) also pointed out that the purpose of an interview is "to produce alternative perspectives on the experience under study, creating new aspects of the phenomenon and enriching the data" (p. 10). Accordingly, I chose the face-to-face interview as the primary source of data collection; it offered the best way of obtaining thick, rich description from the participants.

Interviewing by phone as a primary data collection strategy was less desirable because, as researcher, I would not be able to observe the body language and natural setting of the participants. For this reason, the opportunity for observation during the face-to-face interview represented a significant advantage over both the phone interview as well as the focus group. The focus group as an interview strategy was ruled out primarily because of the possible effects of group dynamics (e.g., peer pressure) in addition to my need for diverse, in-depth description, which would be less forthcoming from a group.

Each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview, which lasted approximately 90 minutes, served for initial data collection purposes. The second, follow-up interview was conducted by phone as a member-checking strategy, after I had begun

to analyze the data, to help verify my analysis and interpretation of the data. In accordance with the philosophy of conducting qualitative research, I was careful during the interviews not to assume “the role of the expert researcher with the ‘best’ questions” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19). Rather, I tried to assume the role of learner and therefore, listener.

The interview guide.

During the interview, I used an interview guide that I had developed to help elicit detailed, in-depth descriptions of the participants’ experience of acculturation in the life domain of peer relations and how this experience affected them. Rather than developing set questions, the guide was built around specific topic areas relating to the research question that I had wanted to discuss with the participants in relation to two main categories: (a) acculturation to Russian culture and (b) acculturation to American culture. The guide, for example, included such topic areas as content of peer relationships in regard to friendship, romantic relationships, and peer network affiliation; the nature of Russian (or American) relationships as positive or negative; and coping skills. (Please refer to the Appendix.) Based on this guide, I composed open-ended questions during each interview, which were adapted to the particular individual being interviewed in terms of both wording and content. As a result, consistent with the study’s emergent design, the questions changed during the course of the interviews to reflect a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The flexibility and open-ended nature of this informal interview format allowed the participants to bring in ways of thinking about their acculturative experience other than those I had introduced.

Observation and field notes.

Observation proved to be a critical data collection procedure. This held true particularly for those who chose to be interviewed at home, where I had an opportunity to observe and subsequently describe in my field notes the home setting and social interactions that were taking place there. In addition to these notes, I took reflective notes based on the participants' responses, as well as brief descriptive notes as a backup strategy in case there were technical difficulties with the tape recording process.

Other data collection strategies.

The interviews were tape-recorded, based on the prior consent of the participants. This was invaluable to me, because it allowed me to concentrate more on my impressions and reflections of what was being described than on the content of the descriptive experiences that were being voiced by the participants. Based on the participants' choice, all the interviews were conducted in Russian. I am competent in the Russian language, Russian being my native language. The tape recordings of the interviews were then transcribed verbatim and translated by me into English. An outside expert in the Russian and English languages verified my translation. Computer files were created to store the data, with measures taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Data Analysis

In a phenomenological study such as this one, data analysis is an emerging, ongoing process at all stages of the research. Informal analysis informed my decisions regarding sampling (e.g., the seeking of more diverse data, and the sample size) as well as the evolving of interview questions, as mentioned earlier. In this way, the qualitative

design of my study represented a circular process of sampling, data collection, data analysis, description, sampling, and so on, until the sampling was terminated due to redundancy.

After the data collection regarding the interviews was completed, I began a more formal analysis of the data, using Moustakas's modification of van Kaam's method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). The initial steps of this method are horizontalization, the clustering of horizons into invariant constituents, and then the grouping of invariant constituents into themes. In accordance with Moustakas, these analytical steps were applied to the data collected from each participant.

At the horizontalization stage, I listed all expressions relevant to the phenomenon, called *horizons*. According to Moustakas (1994), it is very important to give each horizon an equal value because "each horizon of the researcher interview adds meaning and provides an increasingly clear portrayal" (p. 125) of the phenomenon as it was lived, felt, and thought of by the participant.

Next, by means of procedures of phenomenological reduction and elimination, I discarded the horizons that were repetitive and irrelevant to the experience of the phenomenon, leaving only those horizons that added a sufficient feature or quality to the experience and revealed meaning. These remaining horizons were determined by me and then grouped into themes, as recommended by Moustakas (1994).

In the intermediate steps of this phenomenological method of analysis, I began to develop a textural description of each participant's lived experience, followed by individual structural descriptions. By textural description is understood "what was

experienced” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55), and by structural description is understood “how it was experienced” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55), or what was the meaning of the experience. In order to better understand the meaning of the experience, the procedure of *imaginative variation* was used. This procedure required my searching for all possible meanings of the experience “by approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The structural description was constructed based on the textural description and application of the imaginative variation.

The last step of this analytical method was integration of the individual textural descriptions and individual structural descriptions into composite textural and structural descriptions to represent the group as a whole. In this way, I arrived at the essence of the phenomenon, or such core aspects of the phenomenon that constitute its very heart, or quintessence. The essence of the phenomenon, as it was experienced by the participants and captured and interpreted by the researcher, was the end product of the data analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

“What is trustworthiness? The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of the inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In other words, the question is whether the findings of the research are credible. On the other hand, “credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on three distinct but related inquiry elements: rigorous methods of doing fieldwork...[and data analysis], the credibility of the researcher,..[and the researcher’s] philosophical belief in the value of

qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 552). Therefore, trustworthiness depends on the credibility of the qualitative inquiry, which, in its turn, depends on (a) the rigor of the fieldwork and data analysis, (b) credibility of the researcher and (c) her/his deep understanding of the philosophy of qualitative methodology and belief in the value of qualitative research. Below I describe in detail each of the above-discussed ways of enhancing credibility as they were applied in this study.

Rigor: Strategies enhancing credibility as used in this study.

In order to enhance credibility of the study, I, in accordance with recommendations of experts in qualitative research, applied several procedures: (a) epoche, (b) use of direct citations, (c) member-checking, (d) triangulation, and (e) transparency of the research decisions (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As was discussed earlier, epoche is crucial for enhancing credibility. I was aware of my presuppositions and biases and was actively engaged in bracketing, or putting my presuppositions and biases aside, in an ongoing way. In particular, I was constantly undertaking self-reflection and listed my presuppositions and biases in writing as a way of putting aside my own experiences when I was reminded of them during interviews or later, when I was reading and re-reading the interviews.

Next, in regard to direct citations, I strongly believe that they are the very heart of a qualitative research, both in terms of credibility and in terms of richness of the description. Thick description enriches the research by (a) allowing the reader to feel the flavor of the experience and (b) in terms of credibility, allowing the reader to follow the logic of the structural description as being based on the textural description and direct citations. In other words, the structural description of the experience is rooted in the

direct citations of the participants. More, in order to make the logic of the research transparent and easier for the reader to follow, I described the meaning of the participants' experience in the structural description, following the same order as in the textual description. Creswell (1998), referring to Polkinghorne, suggests that a researcher ask him or herself, "Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contexts and connections in the original examples of the experience?" (p. 208). Thus, any idea in the structural analysis in this study is "well grounded and well supported" (p. 208) by direct citations, in accordance with the standards for establishing credibility suggested by Polkinghorne in regards to phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1998).

Further, I engaged in member-checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Member-checking "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study, so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). This strategy was used during the data collection process, in the analysis phase, and at the end of the study. During each interview, I clarified the meaning of the participant's statements as needed; later, to further clarify or verify the accuracy of my interpretation related to each participant's experience, I conducted a followed-up interview by phone.

Furthermore, transparency of the research decisions was addressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In terms of transparency of the research decisions, I endeavored throughout the research study to disclose, rather than conceal, the logic of my research decisions

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was careful not to ignore contradictory cases, because, importantly, my goal was not to “prove” a theory but rather describe and understand the phenomenon. Hence, contradictory cases represented information that I looked forward to, when conducting this research. This is in line with Miles and Huberman’s (1994) explanation that contradictory cases enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon in its richness and breadth.

Pointing to the value of triangulation in regard to credibility, Creswell (2003) explained how to accomplish this strategy: “Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes” (p. 196). In particular, in this study, triangulation between the interview data and observational data was applied. In addition, member-checking was also used for triangulation purposes. These procedures, each in a different manner, contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Credibility of the researcher.

I have been deeply immersed in the phenomenon both personally and professionally. As was discussed earlier, many of the experiences described by the participants were experienced by me firsthand, due to the fact that I came to the United States as a refugee adolescent, at the age of 14 and graduated from an American high school. I am also very familiar with the phenomenon of acculturation of Russian refugee families, including Meskhetian Turks, due to my professional experience as a lead case manager at a refugee resettlement agency. As the researcher, I have been working on this topic for the past 8 years. In addition, as a bilingual and bicultural individual, I have the

necessary cultural knowledge and understanding of the nuances, which can be revealed only to an insider.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to the start of my study, an informed consent form was obtained from each participant 18 years of age. Regarding those under 18, a consent form was obtained in combination with a parental informed consent form from their parent(s) or legal guardian(s). These consent forms present in detail the risks and benefits of the study, the participants' rights, and issues of confidentiality. My request to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), based on a proposal submitted to them, reflecting adherence to all ethical requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described and provided the rationale for applying qualitative research and phenomenology as a methodological approach for this study. The chapter described the role of the researcher, including necessary steps needed to be taken in order to set aside the researcher's presuppositions or preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under scrutiny. The chapter described the sampling process, data collection strategies, and data analysis steps. Trustworthiness and credibility of the study and protection of human subjects were also discussed. In the next chapter, the findings are presented.

Chapter 4: Findings

There are various styles of presenting findings of a qualitative research. The range of the styles includes an analytic or a narrative approach. The findings of this qualitative research are presented in an analytic format. I chose an analytic format because “analytic procedures dismantle things, and this is an important aspect of understanding them” (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987, p. 292). The data of this research was analyzed—taken apart, dismantled—and this helped to understand the meaning. The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter, beginning with the themes and supporting themes, followed by the composite textural and structural description, and concluding with the essence of the phenomenon.

Themes and Supporting Themes

The following main and supporting themes emerged and were identified in the course of the data analysis:

- Theme 1. Perception of pre-migration experience
 - Perceived discrimination and peer victimization in the country of origin
 - Nostalgia
- Theme 2. Acculturation and road to maturity
 - Loss of the adult status: Culture discrepancy
 - “Being treated as a child after you were an adult”: Being restricted and deprived of your rights

- From adult to underage minor: Social control and legal consequences - increased parental monitoring
- Refugee experience and emotional maturity
- Theme 3. Language as a salient factor of acculturation in the peer relationships domain
 - English language competence as a key factor in building relationships with American peers
 - English language use, peer victimization, and acculturative stress
 - Language preference, linguistic acculturation strategies, and acculturation
- Theme 4. Culture discrepancy in understanding friendship
 - “Everything is completely different” (Participant L, p. 98)
 - Difference in understanding the meaning of friendship
 - Conceptual difference: *Друг* versus *знакомый* (friend vs. acquaintance)
 - Aspects of the cultural difference in understanding friendship
- Theme 5. Acculturation to American culture in the domain of friendship with American peers
 - Limited number of potential settings for interaction with American peers – narrowed pool of potential friends
 - Perceived peer victimization in the form of being ignored: “Yes, you don’t speak English, but you can still feel tension around you” (Participant L, p. 103)
 - American peers’ lack of cultural knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice, based on the participants’ country of origin (Russia)
 - Russian participants’ lack of cultural knowledge and stereotyping of their American counterparts

- Participants' individual acculturation strategies in regards to American culture; agency and coping strategies.
- Theme 6. Acculturation to the Russian culture in the domain of building friendships
 - Behavioral participation in the Russian culture in the domain of peer relationships
 - “We all are in the same boat”: Different aspects of friendship among Russian refugees
 - Difference between relationships with Russian friends in the United States and in Russia
 - Divisions among Russian refugees along the lines of acculturation to American culture
 - Russians versus Russian-speakers: Divisions along the lines of ethnicity within the Russian peer group
- Theme 7. Acculturation in the domain of peer relationships with other immigrants
- Theme 8. Romantic relationships and acculturation

Perception of pre-migration experience.

Perceived discrimination and peer victimization in the country of origin.

As members of the ethnic group of Meskhetian Turks, these participants and their families experienced discrimination in Russia. For the participants, discrimination was perceived as being unprotected by law: “Here in America they have very strict laws. [It reflects on me] in rather good ways. I mean... I don't know how to say it... In Russia, nobody observed laws, and here people observe laws” (Participant B, p. 13). This experience of discrimination in the country of origin took the form of peer victimization (including being ignored and physical violence), based on the participants' ethnicity

(Meskhetian Turks) and language (Turkish): “In Russia, they called me Turk. They used to tell me that I am ‘Black’” (Participant D, p. 9). Another participant explained, “When I was going to school in Russia, nobody understood us [Turkish students]. We were always kicked out or beaten” (Participant A, p. 10). Discrimination became an important motivator for emigration from Russia to the United States, where they expected to start a new, happy life: “In Russia, I didn’t have a very happy life....I came here as a refugee” (Participant I, p. 79).

Upon immigration, pre-migration experience moderated the participants’ acculturation to the American culture. Constantly comparing their pre-migration experience to the current situation allowed for positive expectations and appreciation of tolerance and acceptance by the American society, including in the domain of peer relationships: “This country [the United States] accepted me well. Here I am not called a Turk. I am able to study” (Participant D, p. 40). Similarly, Participant A stated,

I like it better here....Here it doesn’t take place [school peer violence based on language and ethnicity]. They treat you with respect, “Please do this, please do that.” It is really nice here....Frankly, I was surprised because I haven’t seen such a school in Russia, where they treat you so well....But here [in the United States], it is normal. (p. 10)

Nostalgia.

In spite of their experience of discrimination, many participants reminisced of their life in Russia with nostalgia: “I still feel nostalgic for Russia--upon 2 years” (Participant B, p. 17).

At their current stage of acculturation, the participants experienced much acculturative stress due to the losses associated with immigration (first of all, abrupt

separation from long-term friends and romantic partners). Participant B commented, “I have many friends left there. My childhood friends. I call them every week” (p. 15).

Acculturative stress, associated with abrupt losses of cherished, long-term friendships and romantic relationships in the country of origin as well as with difficulties related to building new relationships with peers upon immigration, is manifested as nostalgia. Altogether it added to participants’ idealization of their life in Russia, as voiced by Participant A: “I don’t know. It was better in Russia...the entertainment, and when we were going out....There were more places to go and things to do” (p. 5). Also reflecting nostalgia, Participant B said, “I liked it more in Russia...I grew up there” (p. 19). Thus, perceived discrimination in the country of origin, coupled with participants' nostalgia and idealization of their life in Russia, constituted mixed motivation towards acculturation to American culture.

Acculturation and road to maturity.

Russian refugee adolescents’ pathway to maturity is unique and powerfully impacted by their experience of being refugees. On the one hand, their road to maturity can be characterized by losses and moving backwards in their development (e.g., loss of their adult status due to the different legal environment in the United States and in Russia) and delays (e.g., postponement in education and career due to inadequate knowledge of the English language). On the other hand, refugee experience boosted and expedited—sometimes untimely—their maturity (e.g., role reversal with parents, accepting responsibility for the parents and family, and a more serious attitude towards life).

Loss of the adult status: Culture discrepancy.

“There [in Russia] you were an adult, and here [in the United States] they treat you like a child” (Participant K, pp. 81-82), this is how one of the participants described his experience in relation to loss of his adult status upon immigration, after leading an adult life in Russia and having been treated by his parents, other people, and the society as an adult. This happened due to the culture discrepancy between the United States and Russia in regard to age of legal adulthood in each country. In the United States, students graduate from high school at the age of 18 and are considered legal adults at the age of 21. In Russia, individuals graduate from school at the age of 17 and achieve the status of legal adulthood at the age of 18.

In Russia, 17-year-old high school graduates either enter college or start full-time employment. In many cases, Russian high school graduates leave their parents’ home and move to a different city or town to attend college or, in some cases, to start full-time employment. Therefore, for Russian adolescents, the age of 17 signals an important developmental turning point from childhood to adulthood.

Further, the age of 18 is another important landmark in terms of maturity: It is the age of becoming a legal adult in Russia and is technically associated with access to adult privileges (e.g., consuming alcohol) and responsibilities (e.g., serving in the military) of the adult status. There is a mandatory military draft for all those males age 18 in Russia who do not attend college. Getting into college is competitive, and the consequences of losing the student status are more serious in Russia: For Russian 18-year-old males, this means that it is mandatory that they be drafted into the military as soldiers.

In addition, in Russia, nightclubs and bars do not deny access to youth (IDs are not checked), unless they pose some kind of a threat to the establishment; and correspondingly, alcohol consumption and smoking are not closely monitored. Hence, Russian teenagers of a younger age—but who can pass as legal adults—often enjoy adult-status privileges.

“Being treated as a child after you were an adult”: Being restricted and deprived of adult-status privileges.

The participants constantly compared their current situation in the United States with their situation when they lived in Russia, as well as with the situation of their friends who did not emigrate and continue living in Russia: “Here [in the United States] you cannot do everything you [persons of my age] are used to do in Russia” (Participant A, p. 9).

The experience of being deprived of an adult status was identified by some of the participants as the most severe challenge upon immigration: “Of course, I encountered it here [been treated as a child after I was an adult]...I feel, it has created the biggest problem for me” (Participant L, p. 104). It was perceived by the participants as being deprived of freedom, after being used to being free and enjoying freedom: “The Russian teenagers are used to be like free birds! Over there, I could have done everything! And here they don’t let you into a regular nightclub if you are younger than 21!” (Participant A, p. 6).

Being deprived of an adult status was experienced as a serious blow to the participants’ self-esteem; the participants described their experience as being forced to move backwards in their development, from an adult to a child. Participant K described it

as “being treated as a child after you were an adult.” The status of a child assumes dependency, limited freedom, restricted agency, and diminished efficacy. Deprived of the adult status, the participants felt belittled and perceived the situation as illogical and absurd: “I think this [being treated like a child after I was an adult] is all BS, and a product of a sick mind” (Participant L, p. 104).

From adult to underage minor: Social control and legal consequences - increased parental monitoring.

The participants admitted that they had to adjust to being deprived of their rights to adult behaviors: “I stepped over it [being deprived of adult behaviors]. I am already used to it” (Participant L, p. 104). As explained above, these behaviors (e.g., staying late in public places, attending nightclubs, purchasing cigarettes and smoking, purchasing and consuming alcohol) were desirable and habitual for them, and were socially acceptable in Russia. Attending clubs, bars, as well as certain bowling alleys and billiard clubs was part of the culturally normative social life of the participants and other young persons of their age in Russia. Upon immigration, restrictions in access to participation in adult social life diminished the participants’ already limited opportunities to build relationships with peers.

Both the participants and their parents were aware of the dangers associated with the participants’ desire to return to these patterns of social life in the United States; the legal system is unknown and is perceived as punitive regarding teenagers’ status-offences. Participant A explained, “[The Russian teenagers] were able to do whatever they wanted. And here [in the United States], if you do something wrong, they punish

you immediately...they call the cops immediately” (p. 5). Another participant added, “There [in Russia] they [parents] were less worried about us (Participant L, p. 89).

The participants’ parents have good grounds to be worried. What was considered acceptable behavior in Russia is qualified in the United States as a teenager’s status offence, an age-linked crime (e.g., attending nightclubs, bars, as well as certain bowling alleys and billiard places; staying out late in public places; smoking; consuming alcohol). Certain age-linked deviant behaviors (e.g., underage drinking) can lead to arrest. The fact of being arrested—even for an age-linked minor violation—can have severe long-term consequences and can literally destroy the participants’ future by limiting their opportunities as professionals in the fields of state and government employment.

The parents’ fear of the punitive legal system, compounded with their fear of the unknown environment, is translated into increased monitoring of their children’s behavior. This increased parental monitoring is in sharp contrast with the level of monitoring in Russia, as illustrated by the following 2 participants: “In Russia, there was no such things [as parents being strict]....But now my parents became very strict....In Russia, I was allowed to go out till twelve at night” (Participant F, p. 44). “They [the parents] started to worry of us more because this is a foreign country” (Participant L, p. 105). Participant F gave this explanation:

[There, in Russia,] they [the parents] did not worry because they knew: With these guys and girls I grew up with. They even allowed me to go to the school discotheque....[There, in Russia, they knew] that if an outsider would approach a girl from our neighborhood, the guys would immediately defend her. And here I am the only Turkish girl in the neighborhood. [Here, in the United States] I am not allowed to go anywhere. (p. 45)

Some participants admitted that the level of parental monitoring increased in the United States, though it was already high in Russia. (High parental monitoring is a cultural norm for Meskhetian Turks):

There we were able to hang out more....And here they [the parents] are worried about us more. They let us go out, but still worry about us....In general, I was restricted both here and there. I think it is part of our culture and religion. (Participant C, p. 25)

Increased social control, compounded with increased parental monitoring of their behavior sends the message to the participants that they are perceived by the American society as potential criminals or a social problem. Such an image is in sharp contrast with the participants' self-perception and the perception of them by their Russian peers.

Refugee experience and emotional maturity.

Refugee experience promoted emotional maturity of the participants in terms of accepting more responsibilities as family members, acting as adults, and developing a more serious attitude towards life. Some participants expressed pride in their increased help to their parents upon immigration. In the words of one participant, "My relationships with my parents improved here. What do I mean? In Russia...I was little and practically could not help my parents with anything....Here I am helping them with this and that, and everything is going well" (Participant L, p. 89).

Due to their ability to learn the English language more quickly, the adolescents were expected by their families to provide translation for them: "I had a situation. I had to buy airline tickets for my grandmother because she wanted to go to Turkey. I talked with an adult woman, and she explained everything. I asked her to speak slower" (Participant F, p. 51). Providing translation for the parents creates a role reversal situation. The

participants perceived the change in relationship with their parents as making that relationship more comprehensive. In role reversal situations, some of the participants were reluctant to take on any additional responsibility in the adult role of family translator. This was explained by Participant B as follows:

My relationship with my parents became more comprehensive... for example, when it comes to the [English] language... We receive letters. Not always I can understand all of the words there, and not always I am able to translate them. And my parents started to demand me to translate [these letters] for them. (p. 16)

Consequently, some of the participants demonstrated more compassion for their parents, and appreciated more what their parents were doing for them. For example, "I understand that they [the parents] work very hard, are underpaid, and are very tired. I understand that. Yes, sometimes we have conflicts but it is going away" (Participant C, p. 25). As a way of appreciation for their parents' sacrifice, the participants demonstrated their awareness of their parents' expectations in terms of securing a good education and becoming achievers in America: "They [parents] worry for us: We must study, we should achieve something... We must study" (Participant D, p. 39).

In addition, some participants demonstrated emotional maturity in their ability to have different opinions than their parents and behave in accordance with their own understanding of life, despite facing parental disapproval. In Participant F's words,

My friend is Turkish, like myself. She was dating a Black guy. [If the parents learn about that], it would be extremely bad for her. With us, even if one dates a Muslim, he must be a Turk, and one must get an approval from the parents. (p. 56)

Some participants talked about such typical American markers of maturity as employment and the ability to earn and spend money, as in the following statement:

I work at the airport....In Russia I did not work....The parents tell me, “You could keep all the money you earn and spend it on yourself because you earned this money by working”....I plan to buy a car this summer. (Participant I, p. 79)

Their American peers were perceived by the participants as less emotionally mature due to their not having experienced such difficulties as had the refugee adolescents. According to Participant I,

Americans...Americans....they are...I think...they have never experienced something like what we experienced in Russia. They are born in the USA; their parents provide for them. It is easy for them. They have never experienced difficulties in life. (p. 80)

Language as a salient factor of acculturation in the peer relationships domain

English language competence as a key factor in building relationships with American peers.

Language was considered salient to building relationships with peers. “Based on their native language, people form groups” (Participant H, p. 73), admitted one of the participants. None of the participants knew the English language well before immigrating to the United States. All of them, together with immigrants from other countries, studied English in the English as a-Second Language (ESL) classes at school. For some of the participants, English was not their second but third, as with Participant F, who said, “I speak two languages [in addition to English]: Russian and Turkish” (p. 50). Participant I even spoke a fourth language, stating, “I learn Spanish” (p. 79).

According to the participants, at their current stage of learning the English language, their linguistic functioning allowed them to communicate with others and express themselves in everyday situations. As voiced by one participant,

I don’t know, I think my English is relatively good: I can explain things when I need something. I could also translate it into Russian....If I need to, I could mix

all three languages (Turkish, Russian, and English) and express myself to a person. (Participant F, p. 50)

Also, their current knowledge of the English language allowed them to communicate and build friendships with peers from other immigrant and minority groups (e.g., Latinos, who were born in the United States): “[When I am with my Mexican friends], we speak English (Participant I, p. 79). Participant G made a similar comment: “I have a Polish friend, and he does not speak any Russian. We communicate in English” (p. 64). However, in regards to building relationships with their American peers, the participants considered their current level of English language mastery to be inadequate, based on the attitude of their American peers. As Participant K explained, “[I prefer to be friends with anybody.] Regarding Americans...because I don’t speak the language well yet...When I learn the language well, I will have American friends” (p. 91). Similarly, a participant commented, “I had many friends there [in Russia], because I knew the language...But here I don’t speak the English language well enough....One needs the English language [knowledge] to communicate with the Americans (Participant D, p. 36). Participant D continued, less optimistically: “When you deal with other refugees and immigrants--from Mexico or Africa--we somehow understand each other, but with Americans...I don’t know, it doesn’t happen” (p. 33).

Based on the findings of this study, many participants considered an advanced level of English language mastery—at the native or close-to-native level—to be a necessary factor in order to build friendships with their American peers (in spite of the fact that their current level of English language knowledge was good enough to build friendships with peers from other immigrant/minority groups). The participants explained

this fact by saying that it was the clear intention of immigrants in the ESL class to accept other immigrants (vs. peer victimization in the form of disregard on the part of some of the Americans). One participant confided, “I feel much better in the ESL classes. There people communicate with each other, smile, et cetera” (Participant C, p. 24).

Many participants considered their functioning in the English language restricted and thought it might take years before their linguistic functioning in the English language would allow them to feel comfortable in developing friendships and romantic relationships with American peers. This sentiment was expressed by a participant as follows: “In my opinion, it will take me approximately 6 or 7 years to learn the English language to feel as comfortable as when I speak Russian” (Participant D, p. 37). Overall, overcoming the language barrier was considered of vital importance by the participants, especially in the domain of developing romantic relationships with American partners.

English language use, peer victimization, and acculturative stress.

According to the findings of this study, participants’ language competence impacted their use of the language. Based on the data, awareness of a huge discrepancy between their linguistic virtuosity in their native language and their restricted functioning in the English language was part of the participants’ acculturative experience. They were fully aware of the negative impact of this discrepancy—especially in the area of self-expression and listening comprehension—on communication outcomes, as well as on their self-respect and respect from others:

The difference...I was respected there [in Russia]...among the teachers and students...I knew the language and could communicate with everybody.... finding a common ground....And if they gave a bad grade, there I could object it and prove that I was right. And here [in America], if they give me an “F” grade, I cannot prove anything. [In Russia] I communicated well with the teachers. And

they respected me. Regarding here, they respect me too, but it is not the same as it was in Russia. (Participant D, p. 38)

As can be seen from the above description, the participant was completely aware of his inability to self-express and build an argument in the English language the way he did in the Russian language; clearly, his ability to express himself in the English language was restricted. In addition to negative outcomes in terms of a bad grade, he suffered psychologically because of unfair treatment on the part of the teacher: Being unable to prove anything, he perceived the situation as negatively impacting his self-esteem in terms of losing self-respect and respect from others.

In terms of listening comprehension, awareness of the discrepancy between Russian and English linguistic functioning was described as a stressful experience, too. The participants admitted that sometimes, a neutral phrase could be misinterpreted as an insult. The consequences would be severe; the conversations sometimes resulted in fights. The nature of such a misunderstanding is rooted in direct translation, which is typical at the early stages of foreign language learning:

[Misinterpretation] often happens when you do not understand something, and you think that they cursed you out. It makes you feel hurt; you want to stand your ground, and it results in a fight. When the person had just arrived here and he doesn't know English yet, he is making direct translation of Russian language into English. And sometimes such a direct translation would sound rather rough. My father had such a problem at work with his foreman. The foreman thought that my father was cursing him out. Sometimes, we would not understand everything what people tell us, due to the fact that we are not completely fluent in English. (Participant G, p. 63)

In order to avoid misinterpretation, one has to be constantly on guard when functioning in a foreign (English) language; this was part of the acculturative experience of the participants. This contributed to accumulation of the acculturation stress of the

participants. Situations of English language use in the domain of relationships with American peers were described by the participants as particularly stressful (compared to situations of English use in other domains). In this regard, Participant F commented, “[If you do not understand something], they [Americans] will attempt to explain things to you. For the most part, it is *adults* [but *not the teenagers*]” (p. 52).

In the school setting, the participants felt that they attracted negative attention in language use situations: “Everybody is paying attention to the way you speak the [English] language” (Participant H, p. 73). Concerning this negative attention, Participant D explained, “At school, the English language [is the biggest difficulty for immigrants]. I mean, the whole atmosphere there, the atmosphere between students...the way they talk” (p. 38).

The participants described instances where they were victimized at school, such as in the form of being ridiculed, diminished or ignored altogether by their peers, on the basis of their restricted functioning of the English language, as revealed in the following two quotes: “I had a problem in class. The teacher asked me a question. I didn’t speak the language well...and they were laughing at me, and so on. Of course it made me feel uncomfortable” (Participant D, p. 33). “They [the American peers] understand that you don’t speak the language yet, and they are not interested in interacting with you” (Participant D, p. 38).

Based on the findings, sometimes, not only Americans but other immigrants, who knew the English language better, attempted to diminish their less knowledgeable peers. This finding was confirmed as follows:

Other immigrants who know English but still have an accent told me, “You don’t speak English well,” and so on. I argue with them, without fighting, just argue, “You have just recently come here [to the United States]. When you came here, you did not speak English either, right? So why are you starting with me?” (Participant A, p. 6)

Due to the fact that most of the participants had suffered from peer victimization in Russian schools (based on their linguistic functioning in the Russian language as Meskhetian Turks), going through peer victimization at school again—this time in America, in English language use situations—re-traumatized them and made their experience of acculturation to the American culture stressful. In Russia, peer victimization, based on linguistic functioning in the dominant (Russian) language, took the form of physical violence, whereas in America, peer victimization took the form of being ignored and ridiculed by their American peers. These more subtle forms of peer victimization were considered mild in comparison to physical violence, as voiced by one participant: “I like it better here. When I was going to school in Russia, nobody understood us, and we were always kicked out or we got beaten up. And here it doesn’t take place....It is really nice here” (Participant A, p. 18). In addition to actual peer victimization, just the apprehension (sic) of being ridiculed in situations of English language use, especially in the domain of building romantic relationships with American partners, made the participants feel belittled and ashamed, losing dignity.

Language preference, linguistic acculturation strategies, and acculturation.

The participants demonstrated their awareness of unequal power relations between the dominant (American) and non-dominant cultures (Russian and Turkish), as represented through language, in the domain of peer relationships: “We do not speak their

language [English] yet, and they [American peers] are not interested in interacting with us. They do not speak our language either!” (Participant D, p. 33).

As a reaction to peer victimization, some participants stated that proficiency in the English language was not a marker of their belongingness to the American culture in general, and in the domain of peer relationships in particular. (Belongingness is used here to refer to psychological self-identification and acceptance by peers from the dominant American culture.) Participant C stated, “If I knew English *well*, then I would not have difficulties communicating with [only] *half* of the Americans in my regular [non-ESL] classes. [I will still have difficulties with the other half, due to their attitude]” (p. 24).

In accordance with the findings, non-acceptance tendencies on the part of the American peers and peer victimization of the participants, based on their restricted linguistic functioning in the English language, can be characterized as assimilative pressure: Being indistinguishable from the natives was the only way to be accepted and not victimized, according to one participant. The participants suggested that they could become indistinguishable from the natives (and thus might be accepted and “treated well”), if they knew the English language on the native level and could speak with no accent. For example, in response to the interview question, “Do you think that as your English improves, it would change something in your relationship with Americans?”

Participant F answered,

Maybe, if I speak as well as they do—perhaps. Many people consider me to be an American. They think that I would become an American. Or sometimes, when you go to a store and you meet someone who doesn’t know you, and they start talking with you--and you speak badly and with an accent... They look at you asking with surprise, “You are not an American, are you?” And I say, “No.” I

think that if I have 100% knowledge of English, they would not be able to distinguish me [from Americans]. (p. 56)

When the interviewer countered, “Is it a good or a bad thing?” the participant responded, “I don’t know. Perhaps it is good. Because if you are accepted in their circle, they would treat you well” (p. 56).

Based on an analysis of the data, it can be considered that linguistic assimilative pressure in the form of peer victimization was one of the important factors pushing some of the participants into reactive identity formation. The following participant’s comment supports this view: “Even if I know English better than Turkish (I do not know how to write in Turkish, only the spoken language mixed with the Russian words), English will never be *my* language....I am Turkish” (Participant C, p. 29).

At this stage of acculturation to the American culture, the participants believed that they would always have to be on guard and would never be able to feel at ease and belong, as illustrated in the following excerpt from one of the interviews:

[Interviewer:] In some time in the future, you will have very good friends here, just like you had in Russia.

[Participant:] I don’t think so.

[Interviewer:] Why is that?

[Participant:] Here...you are surrounded by people... you are always on guard, in doubt about them....Maybe, anything is possible in this life, but in 5 years from now, I see myself in Russia. (Participant C, p. 29)

Culture discrepancy in understanding friendship.

“Everything is completely different” (Participant L, p. 98).

The participants were aware of culture discrepancy between the Russian and American cultures. In their own words, they named it, “difference in *понятия*,” in the

Russian language. The origin of the word “*понятия*” is rooted in the word “*понимать*.” It can be translated into English as “concepts.” However, the meaning of the Russian word is broader than its English translation; it is more inclusive than “concepts.” For example, it includes the meaning of “values,” “mentality,” and “worldviews,” as well as “concepts.” Therefore, in this dissertation, difference in *понятия* is understood as discrepancy between the Russian and American cultures, and is translated into English as “difference in mentality,” to keep as close as possible to the participants’ language. Based on the data, the participants identified such aspects of culture discrepancy (or difference in mentality, in their words, as it is used in this dissertation) as a difference in the conceptual understanding of the world—a difference in values, norms and behavioral patterns in regard to relationships between people (including friendship and romantic relationships). Simply put, Participant A stated, “They [the American peers] look at everything in a different way than I do” (p. 10). Participant B pointed out, “People are completely different. The relationships between people are completely different. . . . The mentality is different as well” (p. 12). Another participant concluded, “They have completely different mentality. . . . Their way of thinking is quite different. Different mentality. . . for me, it is just a general picture of them, what they do, and how they do things” (Participant G, p. 61). The same participant added, “For some reason, I feel that the majority of Americans don’t have such a notion as friendship” (Participant G, p. 61).

Culture discrepancy was considered by some participants to be the biggest barrier in building relationships with their American peers. Confirming this, Participant C stated, “I don’t have any problems with my English. It is not the English language; the

problem is in the difference in mentality: Their mentality is completely different” (p. 29). Similarly, another participant commented, “Everything is completely different. Some things I don’t understand. And some things I would probably *never* understand. For example, they don’t have such a notion as ‘a friend’” (Participant L, p. 98).

The participants demonstrated their awareness of the impossibility of complete understanding between themselves and their American peers (vs. the possibility of such complete understanding between peers from the same culture), due to cultural discrepancy:

For example...if you tell them something, they will not understand...They are not able to understand. They will ask you, “How come it is that?” They are not able to understand my feelings, and I will not explain it to them. But if you tell Suzana (her Russian-Turkish friend), she will understand everything: what I think, and what I feel. (Participant C, p. 29)

The participants explained the difference in mentality between themselves and their American peers as being rooted in their cultures as well as in a different life experience. As one participant pointed out, “They were raised differently” (Participant F, p. 50). Participant G explained this sentiment more fully as follows:

Their mentality [is different]; it is not something that I was used to in Moscow. But everything depends on where you were born, and where you used to live, and the country of origin. All of these factors are very important. (p. 60)

Difference in understanding the meaning of friendship.

The difference in understanding the meaning of friendship was named as the most striking (“beyond understanding”) difference between the cultures. This culture discrepancy was identified by most of the participants.

Conceptual difference: Друг versus знакомый (friend vs. acquaintance).

Many participants conceptualized the difference in the meaning of friendship as a fundamental difference between the notions of друг and знакомый in the Russian language, which is understood by the participants as a “close friend” and a “casual acquaintance.” According to the findings of this study, what was understood as friendship by the American peers was classified by their Russian counterparts as the relationship between causal acquaintances. In this regard, one participant remarked, “They [the Americans] are....How to explain it...they are more like acquaintances, like colleagues at school. This is how it is here” (Participant F, p. 59). Another participant expressed this conceptual difference as follows: “After living in Moscow, I have a very clear framework of determining who is a friend and who is just an acquaintance. Most of the people that I know here, I consider to be acquaintances” (Participant G, p. 63).

The Russian participants concluded that their American counterparts (the majority of them) had never had the experience of friendship (according to the Russian meaning of friendship) and therefore were not able to understand the very notion of friendship: “In Russia, people know friendship, and here...very few people know [understand and experience] it” (Participant D, p. 32). In agreement, Participant L stated, “They don’t have such a notion as friends, an understanding of it—only acquaintances” (p. 98).

Aspects of the cultural difference in understanding friendship.

Many participants described the difference in the meaning of friendship in such aspects as (a) number of friends (few close friends vs. many acquaintances), (b) depth of emotional involvement (deep vs. superficial), (c) core of the relationship (mutual support vs. sharing a hobby), (d) loyalty (fidelity vs. infidelity), (e) length of the relationship

(lifelong vs. short-term), (f) level of intimacy (being at ease vs. being on guard), and (g) level of availability for one another (always vs. appointment-based). A detailed description follows.

The participants emphasized that the number of friends is much fewer than the number of acquaintances (or friends, in American understanding): “One’s real friends are rare: You have only one or two of them, and the rest are simply your acquaintances” (Participant C, p. 21).

At the heart of friendship, according to the participants, is deep emotional involvement, fidelity, and mutual support, especially in difficult times, whereas for their American peers, according to the participants, friendship means just a superficial relationship, at the core of which is sharing a hobby. In the words of Participant F, “They are not serious friends; just like that, ‘hello and good-by’” (p. 59). Similarly, Participant C said,

In my understanding, a friend is *not* someone to whom I just say “hello” and “good by.” There are *many* people like that to whom you say “hello, good by” and “how are you.” – But I wouldn’t count on them in case I had a problem. (p. 21)

Another participant discussed aspects of friendship as follows: “They don’t have the very notion of friendship....only the computer, video games, and so on.... [How do I see friendship?] You must help your friends in difficult times. And...that is how I see it” (Participant D, p. 35). Participant F compared her former and current experience regarding friendship in this way:

Here there is almost no help [between friends], just spending time together... and in Russia, if you are going out all together, and if somebody is talking [bad] about you, your friends will defend you. For the most part, guys would defend their girls. (p. 58)

The level of emotional involvement between Russian friends was described by the participants as very deep, equal to the emotional involvement of brothers and sisters, whereas American peers' friendship relationship, according to the Russian participants, required only superficial politeness, not sincere interest and care. Participant L explained, "A friend is someone you are constantly staying involved with" (p. 98), and "we [my Russian friends and I] were as close as brothers" (p. 100). Participant I provided this illustration:

I have a problem: I have just received a bill for my surgery. But I cannot share my concerns about it with them [my American friends]....They would just let it go through their ears, and that is all. And it is your best friend [referring to her Russian-Turkish friend] who would always give you an advice. (p. 82)

Loyalty and fidelity constituted another very important aspect of culture discrepancy regarding the meaning of friendship. The participants considered the American peers' pattern of reporting on each other to the authority figures as absolutely unacceptable. According to the participants, complete loyalty, including covering up for each other, was the cultural norm for friends in Russia: "[In Russia], even if you have done something [bad], your friends would try to cover it up for you, so your parents would not learn about it" (Participant F, p. 58). A similar participant's comment was, "It is absolutely normal for them to snitch on somebody. And with me, when I was living in Moscow, it was unacceptable" (Participant G, p. 61). Regarding the aspect of loyalty, another participant made this comparison:

How to say it. They could rat each other out at any given moment. Tell on each other. For example, if I didn't do something, they might go and report it to the teacher or somebody else. It was never the case in Russia. (Participant B, p. 13)

Conversely, infidelity was considered by the Russian participants as incompatible with the very meaning of friendship, whereas unconditional fidelity—“no matter what”—constituted the very essence of friendship in the Russian culture, as illustrated by the comment, “A friend is someone who you could rely on, someone who will not betray you” (Participant G, p. 63). Expressing what a friend meant to her, another participant conveyed the following:

As for me, a friend is a person who...*no matter what*, would *always* be there for you. For me that is a friend. And that is the type of friends I had in Russia....And this is the difference between friends and just colleagues. (Participant F, p. 59)

Another important aspect of culture discrepancy in the meaning of friendship was the length of the relationship. According to the participants, friendship is a lifelong relationship with the same person(s): “A friend is someone who is with you all your life” (Participant L, p. 98).

This aspect of culture discrepancy in the meaning of friendship is rooted in the difference in geographic mobility rates between the United States and Russia, as well as in the difference in the structure of school systems in terms of student cohorts. In Russia, the rate of geographic mobility is much lower than in the United States. Further, in Russia, the same class of students study together throughout their school years, from the first grade in elementary school until the last grade in high school. In addition to attending school together, the same children have been living in the same neighborhood, within close proximity to each other, since birth and early childhood. These conditions facilitated lifelong, regular interactions with the same group of persons in at least two settings (in school and in the neighborhood). Lifelong relationship meant a deep level of intimacy: People knew each other and were known by others very well—they knew what

to expect from each other. And, very important, they were at ease with each other; there was no need to be on guard. This experience was described by Participant L as follows: “In Moscow, I knew [my friends] since childhood, since the age of 6; we were close as brothers. And here, I have just met these people” (p. 100). Comparing earlier times in Russia with now, Participant C related,

There, my friends were, from the most part, from my class [the same group of students who attended school together for 10 years]... We knew each other from the first grade, and I knew them *much better* [than peers here]. We started attending school together, we *knew* each other. And here I just met them: I don't really know them [what to expect from them], and they do not know me. (p. 24)

Another participant observed,

The way people interact with each other here is completely different....Perhaps, the difference is...between the people you grew up with and the people you have just met. I grew up with those friends that I had in Russia....We knew each other very well....And here we just know people not as well. (Participant F, p. 50)

A deep level of intimacy—being at ease, off guard—was considered the essence of friendship by some participants:

I am an outgoing person; it is easy for me to interact with people. But when we talk about real friends, it means a completely different thing: Real friends are people that I feel at ease with—don't have *any* difficulties communicating with. (Participant C, p. 24)

Such conditions as a low geographic mobility rate created the unique Russian cultural phenomenon of courtyards, which facilitated a strong sense of belongingness to a group, where close friendships were developed, where one knew others—and was known by them very well—and where one was at ease with others. This is how the participants described their experience of courtyards:

When I lived in Moscow, we had what is called courtyards. You exit your home, and you are among people whom you know. You are walking out, and there are about 20 people out there, people whom you know. (Participant G, p. 64)

In America, it is different from the way it was in Moscow: There is no strong, cohesive group, when you are part of this group, and everyone knows you, and you interact with each other. (Participant L, p. 103)

Finally, there is a difference between Russian and American cultures in the level of availability among friends for each other:

There is a huge difference [in understanding of friendship]. In Russia, friendship was completely different. Here you have to call your friends first to find out whether they could come visit you or if you could go visit them. For the most part, Russian-speakers, they do it here as well. You need to find out first if they are busy or not. And in Russia, you just knock on their door, they open it, and you stay there as long as you want. (Participant F, p. 50)

Acculturation to American culture in the domain of friendship with American peers.

Limited number of potential settings for interaction with American peers – narrowed pool of potential friends.

One of the barriers to building relationships with American peers was the limited number of settings where the Russian participants could meet with their American peers; thus the pool of their potential American friends narrowed. The main setting for interaction with American peers was school. However, at school, many of the participants were still in the ESL class and took none or few classes together with American students, as illustrated by the remark, “[I do not have American friends]: Probably, because I don’t have classes with them. I take classes only with those learning English” (Participant H, p. 70). Therefore, at school, they could meet American students only during breaks or in the gym. But even there, according to the participants, they did not initiate interactions with their American peers, because they felt shy to approach people with whom they were not acquainted. For example, “I see them in the gym but I do not know them” (Participant H, p. 70).

After school, the participants could interact with their American peers only at the bus stop, because all except one of the Russian participants lived in a different neighborhood from that of their American peers, far from each other. Participant E pointed out, “Regarding Americans, I see them only at school. When school is over, I see them at the bus stop. They live in a different neighborhood, and I live here. It is too far” (p. 46).

On the other hand, one of the participants who lived in a predominantly American/non-immigrant neighborhood reported having only American friends whom she met in the neighborhood; she spent all of her free time with them:

My neighbor is my friend; he is an American. And I met his friends, and the friends of their friends. [The Russian friends from school] are usually busy, and they live far, and I stay in touch with them in the evenings via internet, and this is pretty much it. And I usually spend almost all of my free time with the Americans. (Participant J, p. 85)

Some of the participants were not allowed by their parents to spend time in the neighborhood due to safety concerns: “We live in a very bad neighborhood....They [my parents] tell me to stay home, do my homework, play computer games—anything but going out” (Participant F, p. 52). Only one of the participants had a car, and, therefore, all of the participants except one were dependent on other people (usually, parents, siblings or friends) for transportation, in order to spend time with their friends living in a different neighborhood (e.g., Participant F).

Another potential setting for interacting with American peers, in addition to school and neighborhood, was the work place. However, those who did not secure a job did not have this opportunity. One participant stated hopefully, “As soon as I turn 16, I will find a job somewhere, for example at McDonalds or somewhere else....I have a

friend who works after school, and he told me that I could work after school as well” (Participant E, p. 46).

Perceived peer victimization in the form of being ignored: “Yes, you don’t speak English, but you can still feel tension around you” (Participant L, p. 103).

Many participants perceived peer victimization on the part of their American peers. They reported being victimized on the basis of speaking limited English (please see the earlier section, Language as a Salient Factor of Acculturation) as well as on the basis of being immigrants and belonging to a minority group. They also reported being stereotyped on the basis of their country of origin. The participants admitted that not only Russians but also students belonging to minority (e.g., African Americans and Hispanics) and immigrant groups from different countries experienced the same attitude on the part of their American counterparts. According to the participants, the most typical form of peer victimization was being ignored, as described in this comment: “There are some [Americans] that don’t pay any attention at you” (Participant F, p. 52). Only one participant (male) reported a physical fight. Participants described their experience of being ignored by their American peers as feeling invisible, not worthy of attention:

To be honest with you, they [American students] are very strange. I have one class, Business Math [with Americans]...and when I enter the classroom and say, “Hi,” they do not even pay any attention at me. They communicate only with each other, just as if we—Mexicans, people of other nationalities, Blacks—are not present in the classroom. They don’t see us. (Participant I, p. 82)

Another participant felt absolute indifference and lack of politeness on the part of his American peers:

Sometimes they [American peers] don’t treat me well. Sometimes, when you speak with them and they don’t understand something, they would try to explain it to you. But some of them just don’t care: what you tell them, how you tell them; they would simply not even want to listen to you. (Participant F, p. 51)

Some participants considered Americans' lack of interest in others and lack of care for others to be a cultural feature, typical of the teachers (not only students) and the society as a whole. One participant offered this insight: "I think that here [in America], people don't pay any attention to anybody; nobody cares" (Participant H, p. 75). In another participant's words: "In Russia, teachers were more demanding; they were trying to help. And here, in America, if you don't show up [to school] at all, who cares" (Participant B, p. 14).

Several participants reported tendencies of segregation/separation on the part of their American peers by creating an unfriendly environment towards immigrants, building "their own circle" and excluding others—immigrants—from it. According to one participant, "Americans are friends only with Americans" (Participant B, p. 19).

Participant C gave the following opinion:

I think they [American peers] interact only with each other...in their own circle. They are not communicating much with people from other countries. Americans ignore those who are from different countries....They communicate with each other, telling stories about something and completely ignore the others. (p. 22)

American peers' lack of cultural knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice, based on the participants' country of origin (Russia).

According to the data, American peers did not know much about other countries, people, and cultures, and were not interested to learn. In relationships with the participants, their American counterparts demonstrated lack of cultural knowledge about Russia, its culture, and people; they also demonstrated stereotyping and prejudicial tendencies, based on their perceived knowledge of the participants' country of origin. This sentiment was expressed as follows: "They [Americans] completely don't

understand...They think that in Russia, there is snow everywhere, and we all wear fur coats [all year round]. This is horrible. They simply don't understand" (Participant C, p. 23). From another perspective, it was explained,

There are some Americans that simply don't like Russians, and if you tell them that you are from Russia, they give you looks. At the beginning of a conversation, they are talking with you very nicely, but when they learn that you are from Russia, they say good-bye and walk away...Many Americans don't like Russians...At school, it is the same. (Participant F, p. 57)

Russian participants' lack of cultural knowledge and stereotyping of their American counterparts.

The same as their American counterparts, some Russian participants demonstrated lack of cultural knowledge and stereotyping tendencies in regards to their American peers. For example, some of the participants perceived their American counterparts as "robots" due to their tendency to plan everything in advance (compared to more spontaneity in the Russian culture): "They [Americans] live like robots, everything is prescheduled in advance; their whole life is scheduled" (Participant C, p. 24). Some characterized the way their American peers spend their free time and celebrate their holidays as boring: "Even at their weddings...I don't know...they are not doing anything interesting. No matter what holidays they are having, it is always boring, they are just sitting and talking to each other" (Participant C, p. 24). According to another participant, "That [spending free time] is another problem here [in America]; that's why I don't like it here. It is easier to make money here than in Russia, but the way people spend their free time is somewhat bizarre" (Participant L, 103).

The American, more-democratic style of their American peers' relationships with authority figures (teachers and parents) was interpreted by some of the participants as

lack of respect for authority (and, in turn, their diminishing attitude towards their immigrant peers). (In Russian culture, there is a distinct distance between people according their rank, e.g., between teachers and students). The American peers were stereotyped as “being snobby and spoiled,” failing to treat respectfully either authority figures or peers:

They are either spoiled or snobby. I don't know but something is wrong with them....They do whatever they want....For example, during the classes, they think that they are the smartest and the best, they are screaming, et cetera. I don't know. The teacher will tell them to do one thing, and they are doing the opposite. I think they are behaving the same way with their parents. If they are treating the teachers in this way, how do you think they are treating their peers! (Participant C, p. 22)

And, finally, many participants reported “being shocked” by the way their American peers dress (“in a terrible way,” in their opinion), in spite of having resources (living “in a rich country”). The participants perceived the style of these peers as very different from the way Russian teenagers dress, and characterized it negatively, as in the following four quotes: “I don't like the way they are lowering their pants....They put some sort of earrings in their noses and ears....[I do not like] all of these things” (Participant D, p. 38). “Well, they dress differently than in Russia. When they walk, they have to hold their pants with their hands. I do not like it” (Participant K, p. 94). “When I just came here, I was completely shocked” (Participant I, p. 83). “Yes, there is a difference. The language....They dress in an American way, so to speak. For example, I personally don't like to lower my pants. And they do lower theirs” (Participant E, p. 43).

Participants' individual acculturation strategies in regards to American culture; agency and coping strategies.

Based on the data, in this particular setting, the acculturation strategies of the American peers towards their Russian counterparts can be characterized as melting pot,

and in part, segregation (using Berry's terminology). At this point in their acculturation, in this particular setting, the participants reacted by choosing either the assimilation strategy (with its promise of inclusion) or separation, based on the data.

Some of those who chose the assimilation strategy, with its promise of inclusion, internalized blame for not being acculturated well enough, and blamed themselves for being excluded from participation in the American culture. One of the participants, who chose the acculturation strategy of assimilation, reported being fully accepted by her American peers and demonstrated full sociocultural and psychological identification with the American culture. Others, who chose the assimilation strategy, being less assimilated at the present time, perceived the possibility of acceptance in the future, when they would be more assimilated.

Some of the participants who chose separation demonstrated reactive identity formation in relation to American culture and constructed a national/ethnic identity as Russian or Turk. They reported having little or no psychological identification with the American culture, both at the present stage of their acculturation and in the future, when they would be at a more advanced stage of acculturation to American culture. They reported that in the future, they saw themselves fully acculturated socioculturally and participating behaviorally in the American culture (e.g., securing education and working in the United States) but not identifying with the American culture psychologically.

At the current stage of their acculturation, many participants characterized their relationships with their American peers as stressful, "tense," "non-friendly," and wished that the American peers treated them better. According to one participant, "Many

[people] get irritated by it [the way American peers treat them]. They [these people] don't like this attitude towards them; they would [perhaps] want a friendlier attitude towards them" (Participant I, p. 82).

As a reaction to peer victimization and pressure to assimilate in order to be accepted, some participants reported feeling angry and protested, as illustrated in the following comment: "I don't want to adjust to the system, I mean, *follow the others* [American peers], do what they are doing—to become an American, so to speak" (Participant L, p. 103). Another participant reacted in a similar way by refusing to assimilate in exchange for the promise of inclusion: "I will not make up to them" (Participant C, p. 25).

Several participants saw no possibility for themselves to identify psychologically with the American culture, even at a time when they would be fully acculturated to the American culture behaviorally, in terms of English language mastery and culture learning. One participant emphatically stated, "*I will never be close with them*. It will not change even if my English is excellent" (Participant C, p. 25).

In terms of acculturation to the American culture on the level of language mastery and behavior participation, some of the participants emphasized the fact that interaction with their American counterparts was forced, not freely chosen (vs. mutually chosen and desired in a friendship relationship). One of the participants used a metaphor comparing interactions with American peers to interactions among submarine crewmen, in a closed space (no escape, no way to avoid interaction), bound by working relationships (not friendship), and having no option of discontinuing this forced interaction:

Of course, you cannot escape from the submarine [joke]. And, yes, one would have to find common grounds with them [American peers], and make compromises, especially when it comes to work....When you work, you are *forced* to communicate with those people you are working with. They [Americans, in general] don't have as many friends. You will take day by day. When the day is over, you just cross it out, and proceed with the next day. (Participant G, p. 66)

Based on the above example, interaction with the American peers was perceived by the participant as not only forced, but also deprived of joy and rather difficult: One has to be constantly on guard and diplomatic, working hard to avoid potential conflicts; one has to constantly work hard looking for common ground with the American peers. Such relationships cannot be characterized as friendship. (Please see earlier section, Differences in Understanding the Meaning of Friendship, for more detail.) Based on the data, in a friendship relationship, one has a choice in selecting friends as well as in continuing or discontinuing the relationship. Next, in accordance with the data, friendship, in the Russian understanding, is based on mutual acceptance; therefore, there is no need to be constantly on guard. In addition, people in a friendship relationship feel joy and comfort from interacting with each other versus tension and stress, as is described by Participant G. And finally, the above-described pattern of relationships between people (see comment of Participant G, p. 66) was perceived by the participants as typical of the American culture ("They [Americans, in general] don't have as many friends").

As an example of the separation strategy of acculturation, the experience can be used of a participant who, in response to peer victimization, avoided interaction with her American peers, even though there were only American and no Russian students in her classes. She preferred a non-communication mode with the American students in her classes and chose to interact with non-Americans during breaks: "I don't have any

Russian students in my classes. I cannot say that I am forced to communicate with them (American students). During the lunch and breaks between classes, I communicate with others [non-Americans], those whom I know” (Participant C, p. 22).

Another participant demonstrated an assimilation strategy, a strong desire “to pass as an American” in order to be accepted by her American peers. The participant considered the possibility of not being identifiable as an immigrant—of passing and not being distinguished from Americans—to be desirable in order to be accepted and treated well. The same participant related her attempts to hide her nationality, based on her experience of prejudice on the part of her American peers: “I don’t tell anybody that I am Russian [referring to nationality]; I tell them that I am Turkish and from Russia” (Participant F, p.57).

Based on the findings, participants assumed agency and responsibility for their acculturation to American culture in the domain of peer relationships. They demonstrated awareness that in order to become acculturated, one needs to make an effort to learn; they were aware that the acculturation process is difficult; they confirmed their eagerness to learn the English language and the American culture. According to one participant, “Everything is different here, and it is difficult to adjust” (Participant L, p. 103). Another participant confided, “I am learning the laws. I am learning the rules how to behave with people” (Participant D, p. 40).

In some ways, the participants demonstrated an open and positive perception of their American peers:

I like that they [American peers] don’t have any complexes – they are not uptight. They are more free [compared to us]....Here [in the United States], people are

more friendly. They smile more. They are more relaxed, so to speak. (Participant J, p. 85)

Being aware of cultural differences, the participants demonstrated tolerance towards cultural differences; at the same time, they resisted the pressure to assimilate by defending their right to be different. Participant E expressed this in the following way: “They tell me, “How come you are not lowering your pants?” And I tell them, “I lived in Russia, and I don’t do it this way” (p. 43).

Simultaneously, they demonstrated their ability to see themselves from the perspective of their American peers, in terms of evaluating their level of acculturation from a critical perspective: “I could always recognize a Russian on the street: Some of them are dressing up, so it grabs your attention, and some, just by the way they look [not smiling facial expressions]” (Participant J, p. 89).

In search for compromises, some participants tried to justify and normalize the negative attitude on the part of their American peers. For example, one of the participants explained why American students showed disregard towards immigrants in terms of their—American students’—normal preference of interacting with those people whom they knew versus with those whom they did not know: “For the most part, they don’t know the people from other countries, while they know each other very well” (Participant C, p. 23).

Another participant internalized blame for not being accepted by her American peers; she blamed herself for being shy and explained her having no American friends due to certain personal traits: “It is not difficult [to build friendships with Americans] but *it all depends on the person*” (Participant H, p. 70). This same participant added,

I think that it is not in the language; I think it's all in me: I am not the type of person who can approach and become friends with another person. For some people, it is easy—to become friends with other people—but not for me. (Participant H, p. 75)

Further, some of the participants demonstrated their willingness to look for common ground and compromises to build better relationships with their American peers (e.g., Participant G, p. 66, as cited earlier). Based on the findings, participants' hobbies (e.g., interest in sports, in nature, trips to mountains) served as such common ground for building relationships with their American counterparts. For example, one participant consciously chose an American versus Russian sports club in order to widen his possibilities of interacting and building relationships with American peers:

I am attending a wrestling class. Our coach is from Karachay-Cherkess Republic [Russia], his name is Jamal. But I am thinking about transferring to an American wrestling club; it is a very good and prestigious club. I want to go there: At Jamal's club everyone is Russian there. (Participant D, p. 31)

Finally, the participants emphasized that the main criteria in selecting friends is not their nationality but their personal qualities. Confirming this point, Participant D explained,

I have mostly Turkish friends, but I have many Russian and Armenian friends; I have a good friend from Poland. They are all very nice guys. Friendship doesn't have nationalities: The most important thing is to be a good person. I have a good friend from Poland, and he is living here for a year and a half as well. (p. 33)

Similarly, Participant H stated, "I would like to have more friends, but it doesn't mean that they necessarily need to be Americans. *The nationality doesn't mean anything to me; the most important thing is the personal qualities*" (p. 74).

In addition, concentrating on commonalities versus differences was considered the best approach in building friendships with American peers. In this regard, a

participant commented, “The people themselves are the same everywhere” (Participant H, p. 72). In the words of another participant, “They [American peers] are definitely different—maybe because they grew up here, and here everything is different—*but in all other aspects, they are just like us*” (Participant H, p. 70).

Acculturation to the Russian culture in the domain of building friendships.

Behavioral participation in the Russian culture in the domain of peer relationships.

All participants reported having friends among fellow refugees from Russia. All except one reported spending most of their time with their Russian friends. Some participants reported having *only* Russian-speaking friends (Turks and other fellow immigrants from Russia, e.g., Jews, ethnic Russians, and others). The following series of participant quotes support this point:

“Friends...Only those who speak Russian” (Participant A, p. 3).

“I have only Russian friends” (Participant B, p. 13).

“I don’t have English-speaking [but Russian-speaking] friends. I am hanging out with my Russian-speaking friends” (Participant C, p. 25).

“Over there [in Russia], I had Turkish friends, all good guys, and here [in the United States], I have Turkish friends, all good guys” (Participant D, p. 35).

“My friends here...I have Mehti, Seradin, Fehrudin, Ali, Eldar [Meskhetian Turks]. I have many friends here” (Participant E, p. 40).

“After school, I am hanging out with Turks and some Russian-speakers” (Participant I, p. 81).

Others reported having *mostly* Russian-speaking friends (Turks and other immigrants from Russia) as well as friends among Americans and other immigrants, as illustrated by one participant in the following the statement: “For the most part, I have

Russian-speakers as friends, but I have friends of other nationalities as well: from Iran and Mexico, other immigrants” (Participant H, p. 70). The participants reported frequent personal interaction with their Russian peers—fellow refugees: “I see my [Russian] friends every day” (Participant A, p. 5).

However, one participant reported having mostly American friends, though she had Russian friends as well; she preferred interacting and spending most of her time with her American rather than Russian friends: “[I prefer to interact with American friends]. I do not interact very much with the Russian-speakers” (Participant J, p. 85).

Only this one participant, who preferred spending her time with American friends, reported impersonal (via internet) interaction with her Russian friends (Participant J).

In terms of the content of their relationship, the participants reported spending most of their free time after school together, visiting each other at their home or going somewhere together, such as playing team sports (e.g., soccer), enjoying trips to local parks and to the mountains, watching movies, playing cards or backgammon, going for a cup of coffee to Starbucks, and just hanging out together. The following series of excerpts from interviews describe, in their own words, how participants spent time together with their Russian friends:

“Well... we drive to the mountains. Sometimes we get together and play soccer or go somewhere, for example to Starbucks, or we go to shoot some pool”
(Participant A, p. 5).

“We go to the park to play soccer, and sometimes I would watch a movie”
(Participant D, p. 34).

“Free time... I am either at home... I am also practicing Judo... Spending my time with friends” (Participant B, p. 15).

“We are going to the stores or just to a park. . . . I like to walk, just hanging out with friends—the Russian-speakers” (Participant C, p. 25).

“We are going out to Starbucks. Or we visit each other at home. We play cards, backgammon” (Participant E, p. 45).

“We go to have a cup of coffee. I don’t know. . . . Just to stay somewhere” (Participant H, p. 72).

“We all are in the same boat”: Different aspects of friendship among Russian refugees.

One of the participants used an interesting metaphor, characterizing relationships with her peers—fellow refugees from Russia: “We all are in the same boat” (Participant H, p. 74). Putting this metaphor in context, the participant continued,

All of us have been sharing the same life situation. We communicate with each other. Perhaps, some of us do not want to communicate but they do communicate out of necessity. Perhaps, in Russia we wouldn’t communicate with each other. . . .but here we are all in the same boat. (Participant H, p. 74)

Using this metaphor, the participant illustrated different aspects of the relationships between the participants and other Russian refugees: (a) easy mutual understanding as fellow refugees facing common problems in the country of resettlement; (b) easy mutual understanding as fellow compatriots and landsmen, with similar life experience, common past, culture, and language in the country of origin; (c) “forced” communication with each other due to the limited number of Russian peers in their surroundings; (d) lower quality of the relationships compared with those they had in Russia; and (e) the necessity for Russian refugees to communicate with each other. Another participant identified the common worldview mindset as a factor promoting friendship building among fellow Russian refugees; she also admitted that interaction with each other was accompanied by joy: “It is much more pleasant and interesting for

me to be friends with people who share the same mentality/worldview as I do”

(Participant B, p. 13).

Difference between relationships with Russian friends in the United States and in Russia.

All of the participants constantly compared their friendships with their Russian friends in the United States and in Russia along several dimensions: number of friends, depth of the relationships, and length of the relationship. Though all of the participants reported having friends among fellow Russian refugees, they had fewer friends in the United States than they had had in Russia. “I had many more friends in Russia,” admitted one of the participants (Participant A, p. 5). In the United States, the pool of potential Russian friends was much more limited, because there were not so many Russian refugees in the participants’ surroundings. Several participants reported having siblings as friends upon arrival, compensating for “the absence of other people,” as expressed in the following quote:

When I came, here I spent one year staying at home because there were no Russians in the middle school, only Americans. My brother and I, we didn’t speak English at the time. But because we are brothers, we have compensated for the fact of absence of people. (Participant G, p. 61)

In like manner, Participant A spoke of his experience: “[When we arrived in the United States], I didn’t know anyone. It was just the two of us [my brother and me]” (p. 2). And Participant C mentioned her sister as one of her only friends: “I have just one friend here, and my sister. I am friends with her as well. She is my younger sister and she is attending school, too. She is 15 [one year younger than I am]” (p. 21). It is interesting to note that the same participant, who described the quality of his relationship with his Russian

friends in the United States, also compared his Russian friends to brothers, “We are like brothers” (Participant A, p. 8).

Another participant used the same metaphor (“We were as close as brothers”) for characterizing his friendships not in the United States but in Russia (Participant L, p. 100). This same participant characterized his relationships here with fellow Russian refugees (not only with American peers) as being more superficial: “I don’t have friends here, only acquaintances. [They are] for the most part Russian-speakers” (Participant L, p. 99).

Many participants admitted the difference in depth between their friendships in Russia and in the United States. They considered this difference to be related to the length of the relationship and the time when those relationships were formed (in childhood vs. adolescence). In Russia, they had childhood friends with whom they grew up together and had known very well for their whole life. On the other hand, in the United States, they could not know their peers as well due to the newness of the relationships. This is how participant H described her experience: “I had friends that I knew forever, and here, everything is new” (p. 69). In addition, the Russian peers in the United States gradually became different from those in Russia due to their acculturation to the American culture: “They [Russian peers in the United States] are Americanized...more like Americans” (Participant J, p. 86).

Divisions among Russian refugees along the lines of acculturation to American culture.

Based on the data, there were divisions among Russian refugees along the lines of acculturation to the American culture. Some participants reported sorting themselves

along the lines of similarity in terms of acculturation to the American culture. They reported building friendships with those of their Russian peers who arrived in the United States around the same time as they had and, in most of the cases, were approximately at the same level of acculturation to the American culture: “My friends are Russian-speakers, those who *arrived to the USA at the same time as I*” (Participant B, p. 15).

In other cases, the participants formed mixed groups of friends in terms of their level of acculturation to American culture. Sometimes those Russian refugees who arrived earlier tried to diminish their less acculturated peers. For example, Participant A described being belittled by a fellow refugee from Russia, who had lived longer in the United States and felt superior because he knew the English language better. This same participant reported that the conflicts between them and their more acculturated Russian friends ended up in a verbal defense, in the course of an argument, but not in a physical confrontation: “I have a very good relationship with them [group of Russian peers who arrived]. In any group, there are some bastards. Sometimes we are arguing with each other (without fighting), but it happens not very often” (p. 8).

Others considered difference in acculturation levels as a positive factor, promoting the building of friendships, when more acculturated fellow Russian refugees helped their less acculturated peers: “I know many people who don’t speak the language [English] at all, and they are helped by their own [Russians], those who speak the language, and that is how they build friendships” (Participant H, p. 75). The participants described their experience of been helped by their more acculturated Russian friends in different ways: sharing information about colleges and college application, being

supportive at school, and helping them to understand the American culture. Participant D spoke of how he was helped as follows: “I want to be a dentist. Russian-speaking friends helped—I learned from them about college application process. They tell me there are some free schools here” (p. 35). This participant went on to say, “When I came to school, I didn’t know much and they were helping me with everything. And that is how it started. I have been friends with them for a year. Yes, for a year” (p. 43). In the words of Participant K, “Yes, my friends were helping me when I started to attend school. Ruslan [a Russian friend] was the first person I met at school. He approached me when I was sitting in the office” (p. 98).

Russians versus Russian-speakers: Divisions along the lines of ethnicity within the Russian peer group.

According to the data, there were divisions within the Russian peer group along the lines of ethnicity. In order to identify those who were not ethnic Russians/Slavs, in the Former Soviet Union, there was even invented a special term, “Russian-speakers.” Though the term was invented by those with xenophobic attitudes and carried a negative overtone, it became used by representatives of minority groups in the Former Soviet Union as well. The term, Russian-speakers, was widely used by the participants: both Meskhetian Turks and ethnic Russians.

The finding was not surprising, taking into consideration that Meskhetian Turks were a persecuted minority group in Russia. It was not unexpected that 1 out of the 3 ethnic Russian participants, a Muscovite, internalized such xenophobic trends towards his Meskhetian Turkish peers. In Moscow, such discriminatory attitudes were rather common and considered normal among certain ethnic Russians; this explains why the ethnic

Russian participant was open and did not even try to cover up his xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes:

When we came here [to the United States], we met some Russians here, but it is hard to call them Russians: Most of them are Russian-speakers.... With some, I have good relationships, and with some, not. Some of them, especially Turks, I cannot stand. They are obnoxious. I didn't encounter these people in Moscow, I only encountered them here. Their mentality is completely different, especially when it comes to certain things. It is okay for them to call each other names, and they feel it is some sort of a joke, and for me it is unacceptable. (Participant G, p. 61)

Of course, the Meskhetian Turks sensed the discriminatory attitudes towards them on the part of their Russian/Slav ethnic peers, even when such attitudes were not verbalized openly. For example, Participant H, a 15-year-old Meskhetian Turkish girl, admitted that not everybody of the Russian peers was happy to interact with each other; and probably in Russia, some would never interact with each other. Perceived discrimination on the part of the ethnic Russians peers can be considered a risk factor in terms of acculturation of Meskhetian Turks to the Russian culture.

Acculturation in the domain of peer relationships with other immigrants.

Immigrant adolescents sorted themselves along the lines of the country of origin/native language: "Based on their native language, people are forming groups" (Participant H, p. 72). However, those groups were more open compared to the groups of teenagers from the dominant American culture: The majority of the participants reported having good friendship relationships with peers from different immigrant and minority groups: Bosnians (Participants A and D), Mongolians (Participant A), Polish and Japanese (Participant G), Arabs (Participant D), Mexicans (Participant I), and Africans (Participant L). Nevertheless, one participant, based on his personal experience of being

victimized by Mexican adolescents, demonstrated prejudice towards his Mexican peers. He made the following comment: “The ones from Mexico, they have more aggression than the Americans. Towards everybody. To each other and everybody. They—the Mexicans, for the most part—call me names” (Participant B, p. 18).

A vast majority of the participants perceived their peers from other immigrant and minority groups in a positive light, and, being aware of differences, concentrated on commonalities as a friendship-building foundation. The participants admitted that all immigrants face similar difficulties and adjustment problems in the United States, as expressed by one participant: “I think that all immigrants are facing the same life situation, in the majority cases” (Participant H, p. 75). In this regard, Participant D agreed, “Well...Probably they [immigrant peers from other countries] face the same difficulties as I do...It doesn't matter whether they are from Africa” (p. 32). The same participant underlined a common past in Europe as a common ground: “He [a friend from Poland] is from Europe, and I am from Europe, and we understand each other” (Participant D, p. 39).

Most of the participants met their peers from other immigrant groups in the ESL class at school. They interacted with each other both in school and after school. Common interests (e.g., sports) promoted friendship: “I constantly see [my Polish friend] in school; we take the same classes. I see him during the lunch. Sometimes we go to the park, play soccer together, or exercise at the gym together. We are lifting weights” (Participant D, p. 39). Another participant remarked, “I used to have one girlfriend from Mexico, but she

left for now. We interacted very well with each other. She used to come over, in her car, and we were cruising around. She was showing us the town” (Participant I, p. 81).

For the participants and their immigrant peers from other countries, the English language became the *lingua franca*: “I communicate, for the most [part], with other people who came from different countries. We speak English” (Participant C, p. 22). Thus, though all of them were still in the early stages of learning the English language, insufficient command of English was not a barrier for understanding each other and building friendships, as reflected in the following statement: “We speak English when we interact with Arabs and Bosnians” (Participant D, p. 31).

Common acculturation problems and difficulties related to belongingness to minority group(s), mutual respect and tolerance for human diversity, common interests and hobbies—all of these factors combined, formed a solid foundation for building friendships, which helped the participants and their peers from other immigrant/minority groups “find a common language,” overcoming difficulties in communication, in spite of their insufficient command of the English language and belongingness to different nationalities/cultures (vs. the impossibility of finding a common language with their American peers from the dominant culture in situations of perceived victimization). Participant D wondered why he could interact with refugees and immigrants from Africa or Mexico and they were able to understand each other, whereas this was not the case when dealing with Americans. In this regard, he asked the interesting question, “Why is that? What is the difference? It seems like the people in Africa are completely different,

and Arabs are different too, but you find a common language with them, but not with the Americans?” (p. 32).

One of the study’s most interesting findings is that English was not the only language used in the course of communication of the Russian participants with their friends from other immigrant groups. One of the participants reported learning Spanish in the course of her interaction with her Mexican friend. The participant compared her relationships with her Meskhetian Turkish friends to her relationship with her Mexican girlfriend. She emphasized that it was easy and joyful to communicate with peers of her own group (Meskhetian Turks), because they “have everything the same,” whereas in the course of building her friendship with the Mexican girl, she had to make an effort to acculturate: to become aware and tolerant to their differences and to learn the Spanish language:

I prefer to be friends with Mexicans and Turkish speakers. I like Mexicans, because...I am learning Spanish, without taking a class, I learn it by myself, by talking with people. And I like Turks because they are my people, and we have everything the same, and I enjoy communicating with them....Mexican girls are different from us. (Participant I, p. 78)

Romantic relationships and acculturation.

The same as friendships, romantic relationships were considered of high importance to the participants. Only 2 participants (one boy and one girl) reported being currently involved in a romantic relationship; both were dating American romantic partners. Below I present separately the data on romantic relationships and acculturation for male and female participants.

Boys.

Several male participants (B, K, and L) reported they had had romantic relationships in Russia. Due to immigration, those relationships became abruptly interrupted, which caused the participants much emotional pain. One of the participants (L) named separation from his girlfriend as one of the reasons why he planned to re-emigrate to Russia in the future. In the United States, neither of the other 2 above-named participants had built new romantic relationships. One of those participants stated that being separated from his girlfriend and not being engaged in a romantic relationship constituted the biggest problem for him: “I feel that this [not being involved in a romantic relationship] creates the most [difficult] problem for me” (Participant L, 105).

The same as with friendship, the participants constantly compared their current situation regarding romantic relationships with their situation in Russia (both in the past, before immigration, and in the present, imagining what would have happened if they had not immigrated). The comparison took place along the lines of the number and accessibility of potential settings where they could meet romantic partners, the number of potential partners to choose from, and desirable characteristics of potential romantic partners. Regarding access to settings where it was possible to meet potential romantic partners, as well as the number of potential partners, the situation in Russia was considered much more favorable. Several of the male participants stated that it was easier for them to meet girls in Russia than in the United States, as illustrated in the comment, “Of course, when it comes to girls, it was better in Russia” (Participant A. p. 7). This sentiment was affirmed by Participant L: “Of course, it was better there [in Russia]” (p.

105), and again by Participant B: “In Russia, it was better with the girls. [In Russia], there were more girls there, and it was much easier to meet them” (p. 15).

Some of the male participants attributed difficulties with finding romantic partners to being deprived of the ability to attend certain settings and participate in activities in which they had been engaged, in Russia. As discussed earlier, such deprivation was due to cultural discrepancy in the legal age between the two countries—18 in Russia and 21 in the United States, as well as to the reality that in Russia, albeit frowned upon, it was possible for those of a younger age to pass as legal adults without any legal repercussions. According to Participant A, because he was not 21, he was not allowed to attend nightclubs upon immigration, whereas in Russia, the IDs were not checked, and he used to attend nightclubs where he was able to meet girls.

Further, comparing the characteristics of potential romantic partners in Russia and in the United States, the male participants admitted that the Russian girls in the United States were aware of the boys’ difficulties in building romantic relationships and used this fact to their advantage: “They [the Russian girls] are a little bit more snobby here.... In Russia, girls were more polite. And here [in the United States], they know that there are very few Russian-speaking girls here, and they become more demanding” (Participant A, p. 7). Another participant (B), in agreement with Participant A, indicated that the Russian girls residing in the United States differed from the Russian girls in Russia; he explained it in terms of their Americanization/acclimation to American culture: “They [the Russian girls in the United States] have American mentality. They have been living here for many years” (p. 18).

Some of the male participants admitted that they did not have any specific preferences regarding the ethnicity/culture of potential romantic partners (Russian, American, or other), and they would date the girls whom they found attractive, as reflected in the following remark: “[I would date] the one that is better looking [laughing]” (Participant D, p. 34). In Participant E’s opinion, “They are [American girls] beautiful, tall” (p. 44). However, only one of the interviewed boys stated that he was dating an American girl.

Regarding American girls as potential romantic partners, several factors hindering possibilities for building romantic relationships were identified by the participants, among them: perceived discrepancy in the level of maturity, differences in fashion, and stereotyping, based on a subjective understanding of sexual attractiveness. According to Participant L,

The first striking thing about the girls here is that they show off too much. Another thing is that they are not attractive at all, and too fat. The girls are not mature at all; they don’t pass as true young ladies. (p. 105)

However, among all factors, linguistic functioning was considered of vital importance in building romantic relationships. Talking about developing romantic relationships with American girls, Participant A stated, “[If I knew the English language well], everything would be well” (p. 6). In regards to building romantic relationships with American partners, Participant D explained, “The most difficult thing is the language barrier; and everything else is easy” (p. 34). Implying the importance of linguistic functioning, Participant B commented, “Here I don’t have a girlfriend.... There [in Russia] we spoke the language well” (p. 15).

Participant A stated that he was not even trying to approach American girls, because he was convinced that due to his speaking with an accent and overall limited command of the English language, this attempt would be a failure. On a much higher level of importance is the fact that just the apprehension of a situation where he might lose dignity—feeling ashamed or being ridiculed and humiliated by an American girl—represented a source of enormous emotional pain. This was expressed very clearly as follows:

[Regarding American girls], I have not even attempted...Because I know for sure that it will be a failure. Why? Because, with my language there is no way....You see, I still have an accent. Sometimes, they don't understand the words. And sometimes, they would just laugh at you. Laugh at you and your English.
(Participant A, p.6)

Girls.

During the interviews, the girls were not as open about their romantic relationships as were the male participants. Only one girl stated that she had a boyfriend and that he was an American (Participant J). The rest of the female participants stated that dating was not as important for them (e.g., participants H, I, F). The same as male participants, female participants identified several factors that served as barriers in building romantic relationships, among them: Americanization of Russian boys, cultural differences in the courtship behaviors (e.g., paying vs. not paying for the girls when they go out together, providing vs. not providing physical protection for them), levels of freedom in selecting romantic partners (freedom to select a partner from one's own vs. another culture, need for parental approval), levels of sexual freedom in romantic relationships, differences in understanding attractiveness and youth fashion (e.g., application of facial make-up by boys). Compared to the cultural norms of Meskhetian

Turks in Russia, several behaviors of boys in America were found by the female participants strikingly different and unattractive, even shocking (e.g., application of facial make-up by boys). The following series of quotes illustrate all of the above:

Also, when we were going out all together, the guys were always paying for the girls; and it is not happening here. Here it is different: The girl would pay for the guy! For example, when we go to McDonalds here, the boys would sometimes say, “Girls we don’t have any money”! And in Russia, when we went to Basking Roberts or McDonalds, they would ask, “Girls, what would you like to eat? We are paying.” And it is important! (Participant F, p. 58)

When they [American students] come to school, sometimes it is hard to tell if it is a guy or a girl. They dress terribly. Girls want to look more like guys, and guys want to look more like girls. Guys put makeup on their eyes! It is crazy for us who came from Russia, because there we haven’t seen it. When I just came here, I was completely shocked, and I thought, “This is a rich country, and it is hard to believe that people are spoiled here.” (Participant I, p. 69)

I think that they [American peers] are abusing [the parents’ permissiveness]; they go out just with anybody. Even if my parents allowed me to go out, I would be unable to do it as they do. I don’t think they really care who they are going out with. I don’t know how they could do that. I don’t...Who can...? I don’t think that I would love anybody that much to go out likes this...I think that it is part of our culture and religion. (Participant C, p. 22)

In regard to protection, the girls felt safe in Russia, if threatened when they were out together with the boys, as explained by Participant F: “Girls would hide behind guys, so nobody would bother them” (p. 58). And simply put, one participant stressed the traditional importance of selecting a dating partner of one’s own ethnocultural group (Meskhetian Turks) as well as the need for parental authority in regard to dating: “With us, even if you are about to be dating a Muslim, he must be Turkish. You must get an approval of your parents” (Participant F, p. 54).

Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

The composite textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced, what was the meaning of the experience) descriptions, followed by the description of the essence of the phenomenon, constitute a presentation of “a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience” of all participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144). In the process of composing the structural description, all possible meanings of the experience of all participants were considered and described, in accordance with methodological requirements of the phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the essence of the phenomenon of acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships was described, as it was experienced by all participants, and captured and interpreted by the researcher. The essence is understood as “the essential characteristics of the phenomenon without which it would not be the phenomenon” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 11).

Composite textural description.

Pre-migration experience as a moderating factor of acculturation.

All of the participants were refugees from Russia. All of them except 3 were Meskhetian Turks who lived in Krasnodarsky Region prior to immigration. Among the participants who self-identified as Meskhetian Turks, 2 were of mixed ethnicity (only one of the parents was a Meskhetian Turk). Three non-Meskhetian Turk participants self-identified as ethnic Russians, 2 of whom, prior to immigration, had lived in Moscow; the other had lived in St. Petersburg. The Meskhetian Turk participants experienced discrimination in Russia, based on their ethnicity and language, which often took the form of physical violence in the peer relationships domain. Regarding the 3 Russian

participants, one of the parents or stepparents belonged to a discriminated group in Russia, which constituted the basis for their immigration as refugees to the United States.

Leaving Russia, all of the participants experienced abrupt interruption in their friendship relationships, and in some cases, their romantic relationships. Such interruption was experienced as emotional pain by the participants.

Road to maturity and acculturation.

Upon immigration, the participants who were treated as adults in Russia, experienced deprivation of their adult status in the United States (due to culture discrepancy between the legal environment in Russia and in the United States), as well as increased parental monitoring and social control regarding potential status offences. On the other hand, the refugee experience boosted their maturity: They had to act as adults upon immigration (e.g., as family interpreters/translators).

Language as a salient moderating factor impacting acculturation in the peer relationships domain.

For the participants, an advanced level of English language competence was considered absolutely necessary for building relationships with their American peers—but not with peers from other immigrant/minority groups. The Meskhetian Turk participants reported being discriminated against by their peers in Russia—sometimes in the form of physical violence—due to their linguistic functioning in the Russian language. Upon immigration, they experienced negative treatment from their American peers from the dominant culture (in the form of being ignored, excluded, rejected as well as being ridiculed), this time due to their limited command of the English language. In addition, the participants were acutely aware of the discrepancy in linguistic functioning

between their native language and the English language (e.g., in the area of self-expression) as well as the consequences of such a discrepancy in terms of both the outcome of the communication and the impact on their dignity. Situations of English language use, especially in the domain of relationships with American peers, were experienced by the participants as stressful.

Culture discrepancy in understanding friendship.

In the process of culture learning, the participants became aware of the differences in understanding friendship in the two cultures, Russian and American. Culture discrepancy in understanding friendship was considered by some of them a serious barrier to building relationships with American peers.

Acculturation to American culture in the domain of friendship with American peers.

Another barrier to building relationships with American peers was the limited access of the participants to potential settings where they could interact with their American peers. As a result, the pool of potential friends was narrowed.

Perceived peer victimization represented another barrier to building relationships with American peers. A majority of the participants reported negative treatment they had received from their American peers, which took the form of being ignored, stereotyping, and rarely (once) physical violence. It was perceived that the American peers from the dominant culture used the participants' limited knowledge of the English language, their country of origin (Russia), and immigrant status as justification and a basis for victimization of the refugee adolescents, both Russian and others, according to the data.

The participants perceived their American peers as lacking cultural knowledge about Russia. Lack of cultural knowledge, according to the participants, was a fruitful ground for stereotyping and prejudice. Similarly, several of the Russian participants did not know much about American culture. Based on their limited cultural knowledge, they also were stereotyping their American peers.

The choice of acculturation strategies of the American adolescents from the dominant group, in this particular setting, was assimilation or segregation, which in part pre-determined and limited the individualized choice of acculturation strategies of the participants to either assimilation or separation, according to the data. Those of the participants who chose assimilation believed in its promise of acceptance upon full assimilation, in the future. One of the participants (a Russian girl from St. Petersburg) reported being fully assimilated and accepted by her American peers.

In order to avoid rejection and exclusion by their American peers in this particular setting, some of the participants chose separation as their individual acculturation strategy. In part due to being rejected, they did not believe in—and did not seek—acceptance of the American peers, either at the present time, or in the future, according to the data. In the future, these participants saw themselves as being at advanced levels of English language competence and American culture learning, which would allow them to secure education and/or employment in the United States. In the future, some saw themselves leaving the United States either for Turkey or for Russia, to reside there for good.

All of the participants reported currently working hard on learning the English language and American culture. They perceived themselves in control of their attitudes, behavioral choices, and outcomes. Many of them understood that positive attitudes, tolerance to differences between them and their American counterparts, and concentration on similarities is a solid foundation for building relationships with their American peers.

Acculturation to the Russian culture in the domain of building friendships.

In regard to behavioral participation in the Russian culture in the domain of peer relationships, all of the participants except one had Russian friends. They spent much time together.

Having a common background as adolescent refugees from the same country, sharing to a large degree their past and present life experience, they felt as if they were “all are in the same boat.” The participants (and their Russian friends) understood each other, were of great emotional support to each other, felt at ease in each other’s company, and perceived their interactions as joyful. On the other hand, to some degree, their choice of friends among Russian peers was determined by the necessity to seek help in understanding and learning the American ways of life from those who immigrated prior to them.

All of the participants reported that they had cherished friendships—since childhood—in Russia, which became abruptly interrupted due to immigration. The quality of their friendships in Russia was on a higher level compared to the newly-formed friendships with their peers in the United States. Regarding the quantity, all reported having more friends in Russia than in the United States.

Divisions occurred among Russian refugees along the line of acculturation to American culture. The participants reported two different patterns of relationships with their more acculturated Russian peers. The participants perceived some of their more acculturated peers as being snobby and attempting to diminish their (the participants') dignity, due to not knowing the English language or American culture well enough. On the other hand, many of the participants reported receiving help, in the form of sharing knowledge and providing emotional support, from those Russian peers who had been living in the United States longer and were thus more acculturated than they were.

There were divisions within the Russian peer group along the lines of ethnicity. Some Meskhetian Turkish participants reported peer victimization from their ethnic Russian counterparts, which they had experienced not only in Russia, before immigration, but were experiencing in the United States as well, upon immigration. One of the ethnic Russian participants demonstrated discriminatory tendencies towards his Meskhetian Turkish peers. One of the Meskhetian Turkish participants, in part due to her experience of peer victimization, reported the desire to live in Turkey (not in Russia and not in the United States) in the future.

Acculturation in the domain of peer relationships with other immigrants.

Many participants developed friendships with adolescents from immigrant and non-immigrant minority groups. The English language served as the *lingua franca* for their communication, uniting them.

Romantic relationships.

All of the male participants considered involvement in a romantic relationship desirable. However, they believed their chances to be involved in a romantic relationship

would have been much higher if they had not immigrated, but rather stayed in Russia. They also thought that the quality of a romantic relationship would be better in Russia than in the United States.

The girls, on the other hand, stated that a romantic relationship was not as important to them. They also expressed their dissatisfaction with Russian boys residing in the host country (due to a perception of cheapness) and with American boys (due to the way they dressed).

Prior to immigration, 3 of the male participants had been involved in a romantic relationship, which was abruptly interrupted due to immigration. Upon immigration, only 2 of all the participants (one girl and one boy) reported their involvement in a romantic relationship. Whereas in both of these cases, the participants' romantic partners were American, other participants reported not even considering American girls as romantic partners due to the fear of being ridiculed and humiliated by them, based on their (the participants') limited knowledge of the English language.

Composite structural description.

Pre-migration experience as a moderating factor of acculturation.

Pre-migration experience in the country of origin is considered to be a moderating factor in regards to acculturation. Pre-migration experience of the refugee adolescents was of a contradictory nature: It consisted of the experience of discrimination on the one hand, and sincere lifelong friendships (and, in some cases, romantic relationships), on the other hand.

Discrimination in the country of origin on the basis of ethnicity (Meskhetian Turks) and language (Turkish) took the form of being ignored and physical violence in

the domain of peer relationships. Discrimination served as the basis and key motivator for immigration of Meskhetian Turks to the United States as refugees. The experience of discrimination in the country of origin became a moderating factor, impacting acculturation expectations of the acculturating adolescents, and thus, influencing their acculturation to American culture upon immigration. The mere fact of being granted refugee status, within the context of having been discriminated against in the country of origin, was interpreted by the Meskhetian Turks as a promise by the host country of their acceptance and inclusion as equals in American society. America was thus idealized and perceived through the lens of this promise in relation to the host culture in general, and the domain of peer relationships in particular.

Upon immigration, acculturative stress, related to abrupt loss of lifelong friendships and romantic relationships in the country of origin, coupled with difficulties in forming new relationships with peers, contributed to participants' nostalgia and idealization of their life in Russia, especially when compared to their current situation. As a result, these two contradictory tendencies in perception of the pre-migration experience (negative, when related to discrimination, and positive when related to friendships and romantic relationships), together with idealization of either past life in Russia or America's promise in terms of inclusiveness, moderated acculturation to American culture (as well as to their heritage culture) upon immigration.

Road to maturity and acculturation.

Refugee experience seriously impacted the adolescents' development in terms of gaining maturity. Simultaneously, the developmental process impacted the acculturation process. The developmental and acculturation processes seemed to interact in this case.

Deprivation of the adult status (due to culture discrepancy between the legal environment in Russia and in the United States) contributed to acculturative stress. On the other hand, the acculturation experience expedited the developmental process of gaining emotional maturity for the refugee adolescents.

Based on the data, being deprived of an adult status was experienced by the participants as being forced to move backwards in their development, as being diminished to the status of a child, which was associated by the participants with dependency, limited freedom, restricted agency, and diminished efficacy. Further, the status of an underage minor meant increased parental monitoring as well as social control and serious legal consequences in the case of a status offence. Increased social control compounded with increased parental monitoring of their behavior sent a message to the participants that they were perceived by the American society as potential criminals or a social problem. Such an image was in sharp contrast with the participants' self-perception as well as with the perception of them held by their non-immigrant Russian peers in the country of origin; it harmed their self-esteem and added to acculturative stress.

On the other hand, refugee experience promoted emotional maturity of the participants in terms of assuming more responsibilities as family members, acting as adults, and developing a more serious attitude towards life. Further, refugee experience impacted the refugee adolescents' perception of their American peers, and thus, affected their acculturation to American culture in the domain of peer relationships. Their American peers were perceived by the participants as less emotionally mature in

comparison to themselves, due to not having experienced such difficulties in life as had the refugee adolescents.

It can be concluded that, on the one hand, deprivation of the adult status added to the acculturative stress of the participants. In addition, perceived discrepancy in the level of emotional maturity between refugee adolescents and their American counterparts widened the psychological distance between them and thus diminished the possibility of building friendships among them, which negatively affected the participants' acculturation to American culture in the domain of peer relationships. On the other hand, refugee experience expedited emotional maturity of the refugee adolescents and promoted their behavioral participation in the American culture in an adult role (though, out of necessity).

Language as a salient moderating factor impacting acculturation in the peer relationships domain.

English language competence, use, and language preference are discussed in relation to the participants' acculturation to American culture in the domain of peer relationships. The participants' English language competence in relation to peer victimization is also analyzed.

English language competence as a key factor in building relationships with American peers.

Language competence was considered salient to building relationships with peers. Based on the findings of this study, many participants considered an advanced level of English language mastery—at the native or close-to-native level—to be a necessary factor, mandatory for building friendships and romantic relationships with their American peers. They also believed that their current level of English language mastery was not yet

adequate to build relationships with American peers. However, in the case of peers from other immigrant/minority groups, the participants' current level of English language knowledge was considered adequate for mutual understanding and was not perceived as a barrier to building friendships, either by them or by their counterparts from those groups. This rather remarkable finding can be interpreted from the perspective of the acculturation strategy and acceptance/rejection tendency of each group. The immigrants/minority group(s) in the ESL class demonstrated the clear intention to accept other immigrants--Russian refugee adolescents, whereas peers from the dominant American culture manifested a tendency to reject and victimize the participants, using the refugees' insufficient knowledge of the English language as justification for rejection.

English language use, peer victimization, and acculturative stress.

Participants' English language competence impacted their use of the language. Based on the data, awareness of a vast discrepancy between their linguistic virtuosity in their native language and their restricted functioning in the English language was part of the participants' acculturation experience. They were fully aware of the negative impact of this discrepancy--especially in the area of self-expression and listening comprehension--on communication outcomes, as well as on their self-esteem.

Compared to situations of English language use with American adults, the situations of English language use with their American peers were described by the participants as particularly painful and stressful. This finding can be interpreted as being related to re-traumatization of the Russian refugee adolescents. Due to the fact that prior to immigration, the participants (Meskhetian Turks) suffered from peer victimization in Russian schools (based on their linguistic functioning in the Russian language), going

through peer victimization again—this time, in America at an American school, in English language use situations—re-traumatized the participants and made their experience of acculturation to American culture painful and stressful. In Russia, peer victimization, based on linguistic functioning in the dominant (Russian) language, took the form of physical violence. In America, peer victimization took the form of being ignored and ridiculed on the part of some of the American peers. These forms of peer victimization were considered mild in comparison to physical violence in the country of origin.

Finally, situations of English language use in the domain of romantic relationships were particularly painful and stressful and were subjectively experienced as fear of being ridiculed and ashamed. Just the mere apprehension (sic) of being ridiculed in situations of English language use in the domain of romantic relationships with American partners made the participants feel stressed. In order to avoid being ridiculed and ashamed, all except one of the participants considered romantic relationships with American partners not possible at this stage of their acculturation to American culture.

Therefore, it can be concluded that insufficient command of the English language was used by their counterparts in the dominant American group as a justification for the participants' exclusion. Exclusion seriously restricted the participants from behavioral participation in American culture in the domain of peer relationships, both in building friendships and developing romantic relationships with their American peers. Situations of English language use in the peer relationships domain added to acculturative stress.

Language preference, linguistic acculturation strategies, and acculturation.

In accordance with the findings, rejection tendencies on the part of the American peers and peer victimization by them of the Russian refugee adolescents, based on their restricted linguistic functioning in the English language, can be considered linguistic assimilative pressure: A native level of English mastery on the part of the refugee adolescents was demanded by the American peers of the dominant culture. In other words, a native level of English language mastery was considered mandatory for acceptance by the American peers.

According to the participants, being indistinguishable from the natives, including linguistic functioning—speaking English on the native level—was the only way to be accepted into the American peers’ “inner circle,” and not be victimized by them (e.g., Participant F, p. 56). The participants suggested that they could become indistinguishable from the natives (and might be accepted and “treated well”), if they knew the English language on a native level, spoke with no accent, and could function in the English language on the same level of virtuosity as they functioned in their native language. For its inherent promise of acceptance, some of the participants chose linguistic assimilation as their linguistic acculturation strategy.

The same linguistic assimilative pressure in the domain of peer relationships and rejection tendencies (justified by insufficient English language mastery) on the part of the American peers from the dominant culture, caused some of the participants to react by resisting this pressure and pushed them into developing a linguistic (and general) reactive identity formation as Russian or Turk. These participants stated that they would achieve proficiency in the English language on an advanced, near-native level, which would be

used by them to participate behaviorally in the American culture but would never (neither now nor in the future) be a marker of their (the participants') psychological self-identification and belongingness to the American culture. (By belongingness here is understood both identification of the refugee adolescents with American culture and acceptance of them by peers from the dominant American culture.)

Culture discrepancy in understanding friendship.

Culture discrepancy was a very important moderating factor impacting acculturation of the Russian refugee adolescents to the American culture. According to the data, the most salient difference between the Russian and American cultures was considered dissimilarity in understanding friendship.

Based on the data, a conceptual distinction in understanding the meaning of friendship was identified: It was the differentiation between the relationship of casual acquaintances (the American understanding of friendship, as perceived by the participants) and the relationship of close friends/siblings (the Russian understanding of friendship). The following aspects were identified, along which the two cultures differed in an understanding of friendship: number of friends (few close friends vs. many acquaintances), depth of emotional involvement (deep vs. superficial), the core of the relationship (mutual acceptance and support vs. sharing a hobby), loyalty (fidelity vs. infidelity), length of the relationship (lifelong vs. short-term), level of intimacy (at ease vs. on guard), and level of availability for one another (always vs. appointment-based).

The culture discrepancy in understanding friendship was considered striking by the participants. Based on the data, it was considered by them one of the biggest barriers in building friendships with American peers, and, thus, it was a risk factor, affecting

Russian refugee adolescents' acculturation to American culture in the domain of peer relationships.

Acculturation to American culture in the domain of friendship with American peers.

In their day-to-day interaction with the American peers, the participants' acculturation to American culture was moderated by such factors as the number of potential friends, perceived victimization, stereotyping, and prejudice on the part of the American peers, as well as the Russian participants' lack of cultural knowledge and stereotyping of their American counterparts. In addition, participants' individual acculturation strategies and issues of assuming responsibility for the acculturation process and outcomes are analyzed below.

Limited number of potential settings for interaction with American peers – narrowed pool of potential friends.

The number of potential settings for interaction with American peers was limited. As a result, the pool of potential American friends was narrowed, which constituted a barrier in building friendship relationships with American peers. Therefore, the participants' opportunities of behavioral participation in American culture as well as their possibilities of sociocultural adaptation to the American culture were diminished.

Perceived peer victimization.

Based on the data, many participants experienced victimization on the part of their American peers due to the following factors: speaking limited English, being immigrants, and belonging to a minority group. In addition, the participants reported being stereotyped by their American peers, based on country of origin (Russia). Peer victimization took the form of being ignored (the most typical form), stereotyping, and

physical violence (the rarest one). Based on the data, in this specific setting, the American peers victimized adolescents from other immigrant/minority groups (e.g., African Americans and Hispanics), in addition to the Russian refugees.

This finding can be interpreted in light of the segregation/separation acculturation strategy of the American peers in relation to immigrant/minority adolescents in this specific setting. According to the data, in this specific setting, peers from the dominant American culture were keeping “their own circle” closed, creating a hostile environment that targeted those outside of their own group, and excluding immigrants/minority adolescents.

American peers’ lack of cultural knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice, based on the participants’ country of origin (Russia).

The participants reported that their American counterparts demonstrated no interest in learning about other countries, including Russia, resulting in a lack of knowledge about Russian culture. This can partially explain the American peers’ stereotyping of and prejudice towards the participants, based on their country of origin (Russia). In addition to lack of cultural knowledge about Russia, this finding can also be interpreted in the light of the historical representation by the American mass media, for several decades, of Russia as a national enemy. These negative attitudes were internalized by American adolescents and then transferred to hostility towards Russian refugee adolescents in a culture-contact situation.

Russian participants' lack of cultural knowledge and stereotyping of their American counterparts.

Some of the Russian participants demonstrated lack of cultural knowledge about American culture. As a consequence, several participants were stereotyping their American counterparts.

Participants' individual acculturation strategies in regards to American culture; agency and coping strategies.

In their day-to-day intercultural encounters with the American adolescents, the Russian refugee participants used different individual acculturation strategies. Their individual acculturation strategies were in part determined by the acculturation strategies of the dominant group, represented by the American adolescents in the participants' surroundings. Due to the orientation of American adolescents *in that particular setting* towards exclusion and rejection of their Russian counterparts, the participants were rather constrained in their choice of their acculturation strategies. Based on the data, assimilation or separation of the Russian refugee adolescents were demanded by the dominant group, as represented by American adolescents in that particular setting. In other words, the Russian refugee adolescents' acculturation strategies were limited to assimilation or separation.

Some of the participants who used the assimilation strategy internalized blame for not being assimilated well enough and thus blamed themselves for being excluded by the American adolescents. At this stage of acculturation, only one of the participants—a girl who chose the assimilation acculturation strategy—was fully accepted by her American counterparts. She participated fully in the American culture in the domain of peer relationships, adjusted both socioculturally and psychologically to the American culture,

and identified with the American culture. Others, who also chose the assimilation strategy, perceived a possibility of acceptance in the future, when they would be fully assimilated.

To avoid being rejected, some participants chose the separation acculturation strategy and were in the process of developing reactive identity formation in relation to American culture—at least at this stage of their acculturation. They were in the process of constructing their national identity as Russian or Turk, rather than American. According to these participants, they saw themselves acculturated socioculturally and participating behaviorally in the American culture (e.g., securing education and working in the United States), but were not identifying with it, either at the current stage of their acculturation or in the future. Such an orientation can in part be explained by the relatively high level of prejudice of the American adolescents towards the participants in this particular setting.

Based on the findings, many participants with internal locus of control could be considered active agents, who took control of their acculturation process and outcomes: They chose their attitudes and acculturation strategies, took actions, and assumed responsibility for their acculturation choices and outcomes. At this stage of acculturation, they had already learned that the acculturation process is difficult, often stressful, and demands a conscious systematic effort in order to learn the English language and the American culture, as well as to establish relationships and build friendships with American peers.

In regard to acculturation outcomes, many participants considered integration possible in the future, on in more advanced stages of their acculturation. Some tried to minimize the meaning of negative treatment and normalize it by changing their perception. They established positive attitudes towards their American peers, demonstrated acceptance of cultural diversity and tolerance towards cultural differences, and were able to perceive themselves from the perspective of the American peers. Searching for commonalities instead of differences was considered a strong foundation for building friendships with American peers.

Taking into consideration the importance of the particular setting as an acculturation arena, I believe there is a great probability that these participants will become fully integrated into American culture--on the level of both behavioral participation and also identification with it--in the future, *in a different setting*, where a multicultural ideology is more fully embraced than in their current setting. A college campus with a diverse faculty and student population, located in a geographic area where immigrants comprise a high percentage of population, can become such an integrative setting for the participants of this study.

Acculturation to the Russian culture in the domain of building friendships.

Acculturation to Russian culture was moderated by commonality in the participants' background as well as their current experience. Differences in the quality of friendship between the participants and their friends in Russia and in the United States are analyzed below in relation to the participants' acculturation to the Russian culture. Finally, the divisions within the Russian group along the lines of ethnicity and the level

of acculturation to American culture are also analyzed in relation to the participants' acculturation to the Russian culture.

Behavioral participation in the Russian culture in the domain of peer relationships.

Based on the data, all but one participant had friends among their former compatriots and spent almost all of their free time with their Russian friends. This finding was expected: Russian refugee adolescents sorted themselves along the lines of similarity.

"We all are in the same boat:" Different aspects of friendship among Russian refugees.

The relationships among Russian refugee adolescents were based on the foundation of easy mutual understanding due to commonality in their background: the same age, country of origin, language, and culture; the same understanding of the meaning of friendship; a common past in the country of origin; as well as much commonality in their present life, due to going through similar developmental and acculturation processes in the same setting/acclturation area in the country of resettlement.

Therefore, the following findings regarding their relationships were not surprising: In the vast majority of cases, they felt at ease with each other (and their other Russian friends); at the core of their relationship was mutual support, and their interactions were accompanied by joy. However, based on the data, their friendships were forced (vs. freely chosen) to a certain degree due to the following factors: the limited number of Russian refugee adolescents in their surroundings, a need for building relationships out of necessity to seek help from their more acculturated Russian peers,

and difficulties in building friendships with American adolescents at this stage of the participants' acculturation to the American culture.

Difference between relationships with Russian friends in the United States and in Russia.

Many participants admitted that the quality of friendships with their Russian peers was lower compared to friendships they had had—and abruptly lost due to immigration—in Russia. All reported having had lifelong friendships in Russia (since childhood); they knew their friends and were known to them, and felt at ease with each other. Their friendships were based on mutual acceptance and support, and the level of emotional involvement and devotion can be compared to relationships between brothers, according to the data. They grew up together, spending most of their time interacting with each other in different settings (at school and in the courtyards at their place of living). Their interactions were regular, personal, and accompanied by joy. And, finally, all reported having more friends in Russia than in the United States.

Divisions among Russian refugees along the lines of acculturation to American culture.

According to the data, the participants sorted themselves along the lines of similarity regarding their level of acculturation to the American culture. Difference in the levels of acculturation to the American culture served as a moderating factor, both risk and protective, depending on the situation. In some cases, difference in the level of acculturation to American culture represented a protective factor, promoting the building of friendships among the Russian peers. In other cases, it served as a risk factor, in situations where more acculturated Russian adolescents tried to diminish their less acculturated peers, thereby increasing their acculturative stress.

Russians versus Russian-speakers: Divisions along the lines of ethnicity within the Russian peer group.

According to the data, there were divisions within the Russian peer group along the lines of ethnicity. Taking into consideration that Meskhetian Turkish adolescents suffered from discrimination based on their ethnicity in Russia, perceived discrimination in the country of resettlement from former compatriots—ethnic Russians in their surroundings—re-traumatized them and served as a strong risk factor, adding to acculturative stress. Perceived discrimination promoted reactive identity formation of Meskhetian Turkish participants in opposition to the Russian culture: Being fully acculturated to the Russian culture socioculturally, they felt rejected in cases of perceived discrimination from their Russian peers, and did not self-identify with the Russian culture psychologically. Coupled with reactive identity formation in opposition to American culture (in part due to hostile attitudes of the American peers), reactive identity formation in opposition to Russian culture (in part due to hostility of the Russian peers) pushed some of Meskhetian Turkish refugee adolescents into national, cultural, and ethnic identity formation as Turks who would prefer to live in Turkey (vs. the United States or Russia) in the future, based on the data.

Acculturation in the domain of peer relationships with other immigrants.

Based on the data, immigrant adolescents, including Russian refugees, sorted themselves along their countries of origin. A vast majority of the participants developed friendships with their counterparts from other countries much more easily than with the American adolescents, according to the data. This finding can be interpreted from the perspective of dominant/non-dominant group relationships. Though immigrant

adolescents from different countries did not compose a homogenous group, the fact that all of them belonged to non-dominant groups and received similar negative treatment from their American counterparts from the dominant group, served as a strong common ground, promoting the building of friendships based on a multicultural ideology.

Multicultural ideology and equality (no domination of any group) represented a strong foundation for mutual understanding and friendship of Russian refugee adolescents with their counterparts from different countries, as well as with non-immigrant adolescents from minority groups (e.g., Hispanics and African Americans). In addition, commonalities related to going through similar acculturation processes promoted mutual understanding and friendships among Russian refugee adolescents and their counterparts from different immigrant groups.

Hence, the building of friendships by Russian refugee adolescents with minority/immigrant adolescents promoted internalization of the belief that multicultural ideology is an American value. The possibility of acceptance and building friendships with adolescents from different non-dominant groups demonstrated to the Russian refugee adolescents that pluralism was a real alternative to assimilation. This served as a solid basis for psychological identification with American culture as a multicultural society, united by common values and ideas of multiculturalism and equality.

Further, multicultural ideology was not taken for granted but rather was learned by the participants in their day-to-day culture-contact situations with peers. For example, the finding that one of the participants perceived peer victimization and was prejudiced towards his Hispanic counterparts, can be interpreted from the perspective of the non-

homogenous nature of the immigrant/minority adolescent group and thus the occasional tensions between them, due to the non-ideal level of multicultural ideology among adolescents of different ethnic backgrounds in that particular setting.

Finally, according to the data, one of the participants was actively involved in the process of acculturation to the Hispanic culture. In the process of interactions with her Hispanic friend, she was widely exposed to Hispanic culture and started to learn the Spanish language. This finding is interesting in terms of the multidimensionality—not just bi-dimensionality—of acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents. Based on the findings, the participants were acculturating to several cultures: American, Russian, Turkish, and a minority culture(s).

Romantic relationships and acculturation.

Though the majority of the participants considered involvement in a romantic relationship desirable, only 2 (one male, one female) reported being involved in a romantic relationship at the time of their interview. Three male participants reported being involved in a romantic relationship prior to immigration; interruption of those relationships contributed to their acculturative stress. The same as with friendship, participants constantly compared their situation with the situation of their friends who had not immigrated, and stated that in Russia, their possibilities of being involved in a romantic relationship would be higher, and the quality of the relationship would be better as well. Based on the data, the following factors served as barriers to building romantic relationships upon immigration: limited access to certain settings where they could meet potential romantic partners and the limited number of potential partners among peers from the Russian culture, due to their overall limited number as well as the different

levels of acculturation to the American culture. The more acculturated Russian peers had learned the American ways of courtship, which were considered less desirable by both male and female participants.

Romantic relationships are charged emotionally. Therefore, situations where one can be treated negatively caused high levels of stress and emotional pain for the participants. Fear of being humiliated and ridiculed by an American girl, due to speaking English with an accent (and overall limited command of the English language), created an enormous amount of acculturative stress and prevented one of the participants from even considering an American romantic partner. Cultural discrepancy in the ways of courtship, perceived discrepancy in the level of maturity between themselves and potential American partners, differences in fashion, and stereotyping, based on a subjective understanding of sexual attractiveness constitute other moderating factors regarding involvement in a romantic relationship with an American partner. Based on the data, additional barriers—specific to Meskhetian Turkish girls only—were identified: the need for parental permission to date and the need for parental approval of the potential partner. These added restrictions, coupled with the cultural demand of dating only persons of one's own religion and culture (the partner should be “not only a Muslim, but a Meskhetian Turk”), all created additional challenges for the Meskhetian Turkish girls' involvement in a romantic relationship.

Therefore, based on the data, it is concluded that the participants were less likely to be involved in romantic relationships compared to their American peers—and compared to their peers in Russia. In addition, Meskhetian Turkish refugee girls had an

even smaller possibility of being involved in a romantic relationship than their refugee peers: the Meskhetian Turkish boys, the Russian boys, or the Russian girls. Altogether, the refugee adolescents' possibilities for finding romantic partners similar to themselves or for exploring the American culture in terms of building a romantic relationship were limited. Interruption of romantic relationships due to immigration, as well as not being involved in a romantic relationship upon resettlement, in addition to fear of being ridiculed due to speaking with an accent or having limited linguistic functioning, contributed to the emotional suffering and acculturative stress of the participants.

The Essence of the Phenomenon

The essence of the phenomenon of acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships can be described in terms of the refugee adolescents' need for belongingness and need for self-worth. In this study, based on the data, the need for belongingness can be understood as refugee adolescents' need for identification with, and need for—as well as expectation of—acceptance by peers, from their culture of heritage, host culture, and/or other culture(s) in a culture-contact situation, upon immigration. Based on the data, acceptance by peers is a continuum and varies from exclusion and conditional acceptance (i.e., native-level knowledge of the English language used as a condition of acceptance by American peers) to almost unconditional acceptance and inclusion.

Further, exclusion by peers—experienced as rejection and/or alienation and perceived as a threat to one's dignity—becomes a fruitful ground for refugee adolescents' reactive identity formation in relation to the culture represented by those

peers. Finally, exclusion by peers pushes refugee adolescents to search for restoration of dignity, acceptance, and identification with peers from other groups available to them.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in their relation to the literature. In light of the findings, implications of the study for the social work profession are discussed from an interdisciplinary perspective. In conclusion, the limitations of the study are presented.

Findings in the Relation to the Literature

Acculturation in the light of the complexity of the ethnocultural groups in contact.

Both the host American culture and the Russian culture of origin are not monolithic homogeneous societies but heterogeneous in nature, and consist of different dominant and non-dominant subgroups within them. According to the findings of this study, the participants were acculturating to subgroups within American culture (dominant subgroup and non-dominant immigrant/minority subgroups). Similarly, regarding acculturation to the culture of origin, the participants were going through acculturation to different subgroups within Russian culture (e.g., Russian-speakers, Meskhetian Turks). Such a view of acculturation reflects the complexity of the American and the Russian cultures. This finding is in congruence with Horenchuk's (1997) argument regarding the need to understand acculturation "in a more differentiated way" (p. 35), taking into account the complexity of contemporary society:

This assumption implicit in most acculturation frameworks (such as Berry's model), regarding a single monolithic majority society to which immigrants

acculturate and about which they develop acculturation strategies, may fail to take into account the social complexity of many modern societies. (p. 35)

Based on the findings, participants were engaged in acculturation to the American dominant culture as well as to specific non-dominant subgroups within it (e.g., Latino). In addition, they were going through acculturation to a larger unit—a *heterogeneous immigrant/minority culture*, which included different immigrant/minority subgroups (e.g., Latino, African American, immigrants from countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, as well as the subgroup of refugee adolescents from Russia). Those participants who felt rejected and excluded by part of their American peers from the majority culture built friendships based on similarity (including the shared experience of negative treatment) with members of immigrant/minority groups who were going through similar experiences and perceived negative treatment.

Finally, according to the findings, acculturation to the culture of origin included acculturation to several subgroups: a heterogeneous Russian-speaking subgroup and the Meskhetian Turkish subgroup. The Russian-speaking subgroup was divided along the lines of ethnicity, and consisted of subgroups on a smaller scale (e.g., ethnic Russians, Jews, Armenians, and other immigrants from Russia and the Former Soviet Union); the Meskhetian Turkish subgroup was part of the Russian-speaking subgroup as well.

Acculturation, cultural distance, and internalization of culture.

In the process of acculturation, “culture becomes internalized in the form of values, self-conceptions, and so on” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 335). At the individual level, the acculturating individuals balance between culture shedding and culture learning, which involves “the deliberate or accidental loss of existing cultural or behavioral

features,” and “the deliberate or accidental acquisition of novel ways to live in the new contact setting. These two processes... are selective, resulting in a variable pattern of maintenance and change” (Berry et al., 2002, p. 361). In the case of the participants of this dissertation, it means they selected certain features of the cultures in contact (the subgroups within the American and Russian cultures), internalizing them in the form of values, norms, and self-conceptions.

Cultural distance is considered a risk factor impacting the course of acculturation and psychological adaptation (Berry et al., 2002). In the case of the participants of this study, culture discrepancies (e.g., in understanding friendship, patterns of romantic relationships, and differences in relation to maturity) made their acculturation process more difficult and stressful, creating a threat to psychological well-being of these acculturating adolescents. This finding is in congruence with the literature (Berry et al., 2002; Ward, 1996).

Refugee adolescents’ perception of being accepted/rejected by different subgroups within the host culture and the culture of origin.

According to the findings, the participants experienced different levels of acceptance in different subgroups, of both the culture of origin and the host American culture, ranging from rejection and exclusion, and conditional acceptance, to almost complete unconditional acceptance and inclusion. The level of acceptance of the participants in each subgroup was, to a large degree, determined by attitudes of the subgroups within the host culture and the culture of origin—and the perception of these attitudes by the participants.

This finding is in congruence with Horenchyk's (1997) proposition regarding immigrants' perception of the attitudes of members of the subgroups of the host culture towards acculturating individuals. Horenchyk argued that it is important to pay attention to "subgroup differences in these host attitudes" (p. 35) as well as to acculturating individuals' perception of these attitudes towards them: "Immigrants may adopt distinct orientations towards the various subgroups of the society within which they are interacting" (p. 35), based on perception of their (the members' of these subgroups) attitudes towards them.

However, Horenchyk (1997) limited his argument to the immigrants' perception of the attitudes of different subgroups of *the host culture only*. Based on the findings of this study, I argue that Russian refugee adolescents perceived different attitudes in different subgroups not only within the host American culture but within their culture of origin as well. (As was discussed earlier, the Russian group was divided along the lines of ethnicity and acculturation, and the attitudes towards the participants differed in these subgroups as well.) Based on their perception, the acculturating adolescents adopted different orientations towards these subgroups, *not only within the host culture* (as proposed by Horenchyk, 1997), *but also within the culture of origin*. This finding is interesting: In the vast majority of acculturation literature, the culture of origin is assumed to be a monolithic one (e.g., Berry, 2002).

Perceived negative treatment/discrimination in the peer relationship domain.

According to the findings, some but not all participants perceived negative treatment/discrimination from part of their American counterparts, in the particular setting of their everyday interactions. This is in congruence with previous research on

other immigrant populations, acculturating in the United States, such as Arab youth: “Not all of the youth said they had experienced an incident of prejudice” (Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, & Flanagan, 2008, p. 86).

In addition, this finding has to be explained in light of the importance of “the context of the reception” (Zhou, 1997, p. 63)—the concrete setting as an acculturative arena for the refugee adolescents—and its independence from the official American multicultural ideology and national immigrant policies (Phinney, Horenchuk et al., 2001). “The local situations may be independent of the official national immigrant policies (Oriol, 1989)” (Phinney, Horenchuk et al., 2001, p. 500).

The experience of discrimination in the country of origin as well as the participants’ expectations of being accepted and included in the host country made them very sensitive to the way they were treated by their peers in America. However, upon immigration, many of the participants perceived negative treatment/discrimination from their peers in the dominant culture. This finding is in accord with existing research on Russian adolescents, acculturating in the United States (e.g., Vinokurov et al., 2002) or in other countries, such as Finland (Jassinskaja-Lahti & Leibkind, 2001). This finding is also in congruence with many studies on immigrant adolescents from other countries, acculturating in the United States (Lain, 2005; Stodolska, 2008) or in other host societies, such as Australia (Kovacev & Shute, 2004) and Israel (Ringel et al., 2005), as well as with research on minority immigrant and non-immigrant youth in the United States (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). The participants reported experiencing more subtle forms of negative treatment in the United States (e.g., being ignored, stereotyping, being ridiculed

and laughed at) rather than physical violence (reported by only one participant), which is in congruence with contemporary literature on racial microaggression (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, & Holder, 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009) and supports previous research on minority immigrant and non-immigrant youth (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Lain, 2005; Prinstein et al. as cited in La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

The term “racial microaggressions” was coined by Pierce in 1969 and referred to “ ‘offensive mechanisms’ aimed at Blacks on a daily basis....The incessant lesson the Black must hear is that he is insignificant and irrelevant’ (Pierce, 1969, p. 303)” (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009, p. 660). “Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). In addition to the concept of microaggression, the term “microinequities” is applied to describe the everyday experience of African Americans and women in the business world as their “being overlooked, underrespected, and devalued because of one’s race or gender” (Sue et. al, 2007, p. 273).

This study, similar to the research of Yosso et al. (2009) on Latina/o undergraduates, “pushes beyond Black/White binary” (p. 662) by describing and analyzing the experience of immigrant youth—refugee adolescents, the participants of this research, who perceived negative treatment/discrimination from their American counterparts from the dominant culture on the basis of being immigrants; they also

perceived negative treatment from their Russian compatriots on the basis of their ethnicity (Meskhetian Turks) and level of acculturation (being less Americanized).

The participants of this study reported the perceived experience of negative treatment/discrimination, which can be classified as microaggressions in three forms, according to Sue and his colleagues (2007): (a) microassaults (e.g., name-calling, avoidant behavior—being ignored or laughed at), (b) microinsults (e.g., stereotyping and insulting messages aimed at demeaning their cultural heritage and pressuring them to assimilate to the dominant culture), and (c) microinvalidations (e.g., communications aimed at excluding and sending a message that they are alien, foreign, second-class citizens, and do not belong).

The responses of the participants to perceived negative treatment/discrimination in the form of microaggressions varied from attempts to minimize the microaggression incident(s) by pretending that it did not bother them (“I do not care”), to non-identifying with the American culture, creating a reactive identity formation toward American culture, and actively searching for identification and acceptance in an idealized, non-American culture (e.g., Turkey). The participants were acutely aware of non-belonging, being excluded and/or ignored, and being treated negatively on an everyday basis. They were constantly on guard, expecting a potential act of a microaggression against their dignity at any time, and experiencing anxiety and stress on a daily basis, for prolonged periods of time (from several months to several years). This finding is in congruence with the research of Yosso and her colleagues (2009) on the experience of Latina/o students, who were in a state of “heightened awareness and stress associated with being the racial

Other” (p. 667) and who “do not belong on the elite campus” (p. 669). This finding also supports previous research regarding the impact of an anticipated act of negative treatment: “The possibility of expectation of confronting a racial microaggression certainly induces race-related stress (Smith, 2009; Smith et al., 2006)” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 675).

Based on the findings of this study, the refugee adolescents’ stress related to negative treatment/perceived discrimination can be considered one of the most salient aspects of acculturative stress. Due to the participants’ prolonged exposure to a hostile environment in their particular setting of everyday interactions, acculturative stress related to negative treatment/perceived discrimination produced a cumulative effect. In the literature, the concept of “racial battle fatigue” was used to examine the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions (Smith et al., 2007). For example, it was used to analyze “social-psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, non-verbally or physically fighting back and coping strategies) associated with being an African American male on historically White campuses” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 552).

I suggest it would be beneficial to expand and incorporate the microaggression and racial battle fatigue theoretical framework into the acculturative stress theoretical model. Such an approach would allow for a better understanding of that aspect of acculturative stress that is related to exposure of acculturating refugees to a psychologically hostile environment, where they become subjects of discrimination.

Racial battle fatigue explains the effects of a hostile environment and racial microaggressions by building on “the literature on combat stress syndrome...for understanding the effects of hostile environments (Pierce, 1975a, 1995; Shay, 2002; Shay & Munroe, 1999; Smith, 2004; US Department of the Army, 1994; Whille & Sanford, 1995)” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 555).

The findings of this study regarding how negative treatment/perceived discrimination was subjectively experienced supports previous research. For example, Lain (2005) reported that Vietnamese American adolescents perceived discrimination against themselves as “social and psychological isolation” (p. 4). According to the findings of this study, the participants subjectively experienced negative treatment from their American counterparts as exclusion, isolation, and alienation—both social and psychological—which supports existing research (Lain, 2005; Stodolska, 2008), as mentioned earlier. Such experience caused stress and emotional pain for the participants and frustrated their need for self-worth. In the literature, being ignored by the members of the dominant culture is described as follows:

Having to prove oneself as worthy of equal treatment is a severe disadvantage in itself, and implies that one has less control over one’s life than members of privileged groups, who are more likely to be assumed to be worthy of positive treatment even before they have the opportunity to demonstrate (or disconfirm) the validity of that assumption. (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002, p. 173).

In addition to perceived negative treatment from some of the American youth from the dominant culture, the participants reported perceived negative treatment by some peers from their country of origin, on the basis of their ethnicity (Meskhetian Turks) and/or level of acculturation to the American culture. This finding supports

Stodolska's (2008) research regarding divisions within one's ethnic group along the lines of acculturation. However, as discussed earlier, in the vast majority of acculturation literature, there is an assumption that one's culture of origin is monolithic (e.g., Berry et al., 2002), and serves as a source of positive treatment for the acculturating individuals (e.g., Phinney, 1990, 1992, 1993).

Incongruence between behavioral participation in the American culture and self-identification with it as a reaction to negative treatment/ perceived discrimination.

One of the findings of this study was the striking incongruence between some participants' behavioral acculturation and their psychological identification with the American culture. At this phase of their acculturation, these participants can be characterized as actively and successfully acculturating to the American culture behaviorally (learning the American culture and the English language): They want to achieve high levels of sociocultural adaptation to the American culture, which would, in the future, allow them to participate in the American culture, behaviorally, in the domains of education and employment. However, at this stage of their acculturation, they have not developed a sense of belongingness to the American culture. The most controversial and unexpected finding was that, according to the participants, they did not think that they would identify with the American culture in the future.

In other words, behavioral participation in the American culture, in the case of these participants, was not accompanied by a sense of belongingness to the American culture. At the current stage of their acculturation, they felt as outsiders among their American peers from the dominant culture. They did not consider the possibility of

becoming insiders in the future, in spite of their achieving advanced levels of sociocultural and economic adaptation.

This finding can be interpreted as follows: Discrimination/negative treatment served as a trigger, lowering the participants' degree of psychological identification with the culture where the negative treatment was received. Sociocultural and economic adaptation could not compensate for the emotional pain caused by the prolonged exclusion and rejection, which led to the acculturating individuals' lack of emotional attachment to the American culture and identification with it.

This finding supports Birman's (1994) Differentiated Model of Acculturation, which identifies two different aspects of the acculturation process: behavioral participation in a culture and psychological identification with it. This finding also supports Birman's proposition that the two aspects of acculturation--behavioral participation and psychological identification—are conceptually distinct from each other and vary independently.

Birman (1994) developed a typology of acculturative styles regarding behavioral participation and identification with both the culture of origin and the host culture. The finding of this study is interesting in terms of the identification by one of the participants with neither the culture of origin nor the host culture—but instead with an idealized third culture; identification with this alternative culture was accompanied by no behavioral participation in it.

Hence, this finding theoretically advances Birman's typology by adding more dimensions, such as a third-culture dimension, in addition to the culture-of-origin and

host-culture dimensions. Further, the findings of this suggest the possibility of adding additional dimensions, reflecting behavioral participation and identification with the *subgroups* within the culture of origin and the host culture. Such a modification will more accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of the acculturation process in a complex, contemporary world.

Reactive identity formation as Russians, triggered by perceived discrimination/ negative treatment in the host society.

Some Russian participants, who went through the experience of being excluded and rejected by some of their American peers, considered themselves “Russians” and planned re-migrating to Russia in the future. This finding was unexpected and can be understood as reactive identity formation as Russians, triggered by the negative treatment the participants received from some of their American peers. (As was mentioned earlier, the term, reactive identity formation, was used by Rumbaut as cited in Birman & Trickett, 2001.)

In the light of this finding, I want to discuss a similar finding in a study on acculturation of refugees (adolescents and their parents) from the Former Soviet Union, conducted by Birman and Trickett (2001). As was reported, the adolescents were identified with the Russian culture to a larger degree than were their parents, which is incongruent with existing research on other immigrant groups. Among other explanations, the researchers named perceived discrimination in an American school setting as a trigger to the adolescents’ forming a reactive identity as Russians.

The finding of this study supports existing research regarding reaction to negative treatment by strengthening members’ of minority groups identification with the culture of

origin (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

According to Schmitt and Branscombe (2002), “Attributions to prejudice encourage minority group identification” (p. 9). These researchers concluded, “Perceiving prejudice leads members of disadvantaged groups to see themselves in more group terms, and to feel greater emotional attachment to that group” (p. 10).

Identification with members of other immigrant/minority groups as a reaction to shared negative treatment.

Negative treatment received from members of the dominant group served as a basis for identification of the participants with the heterogeneous group of immigrant/minority youth from different countries who perceived similar negative treatment from their American counterparts. It is interesting to compare this finding with a similar finding of Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe’s (2003) research on international students. As a reaction to perceived discrimination from American students, the participants identified with the heterogeneous international students’ group (and not with the culture of origin). The researchers interpreted the finding in terms of shared negative treatment, serving by itself as a basis for identification with the international students’ group, despite the group’s heterogeneous nature:

Identification with a pre-existing, long-term group membership such as their national group did not suppress the costs of perceiving discrimination on self-esteem. In contrast, identification with a category relevant to the local context [of shared negative treatment/perceived discrimination] did offer psychological protection, despite being a relatively new and heterogeneous category. (p. 8)

Identification with and search for acceptance by an idealized ethnocultural group as a reaction to perceived discrimination/negative treatment.

A very interesting, unexpected, and provocative finding of this study was the finding regarding one participant’s identification with, and search for acceptance by an

idealized ethnoculture—in this case, the nation of Turkey. In spite of the fact that the participant, a Meskhetian Turkish girl, had never been there and did not know the Turkish language (just a few words mixed with Russian), she developed a strong feeling of belongingness to Turkey, based on the her image of Turkey and the meaning she made of it. In this case, belongingness to the nation of Turkey was considered a birth right by the participant (“it is in the blood”) and therefore a basis for identification with Turkey, as well as a guarantee of being unconditionally accepted there as an equal and an insider. Having actually been born in Russia and well acculturated to the Russian culture was not enough and failed to protect her from being discriminated against in her native country of Russia, based on her ethnicity (Meskhetian Turk). Having been granted refugee status by the U. S. government—*on the basis of being discriminated against in Russia*—was perceived by the girl as a promise of acceptance in a multicultural society, assured by the American government, but this also failed: In this particular setting, the participant experienced exclusion and rejection by some of her American peers. Therefore, the country of Turkey became idealized: There, in the idealized country of Turkey, the participant thought she would never be rejected—in contrast to her country of origin and country of resettlement.

Thus, this identification with, and search for acceptance in an idealized ethnocultural group was a reaction to the participant’s experience of rejection and exclusion, both in the country of origin (Russia) and in the country of resettlement (the United States). This finding was new in regard to the fact that perceived experience of

negative treatment/discrimination triggered search for identification with, and search for acceptance in the idealized—and, in reality, unknown—country of Turkey.

Perceived discrimination: risk of creating conditions for Meskhetian Turkish refugee adolescents' joining an oppositional culture.

Based on the above-discussed findings of this study, I conclude that some participants reacted to perceived negative treatment/discrimination by seeking identification with other groups, in resistance to the culture(s) wherein the negative treatment was received. Zhou (1997) wrote about immigrant adolescents' reaction to being “excluded” and socially isolated by identification with groups “in resistance to the dominant majority culture” (p. 69). Thus, exclusion from the majority culture presents the risk of creating conditions for immigrant adolescents' joining an “oppositional culture” (Zhou, 1997, p. 69) or creating reactive identity formation with the culture of origin (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Rumbaut, 2008; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). In this regard, according to research on other immigrant/minority groups, discrimination/negative treatment leads to immigrant/minority adolescents' vulnerability for identification with gang counterculture, such as African American gangs (Alonso, 2004), Vietnamese gangs (Vigil & Yun, 1990), and Filipino gangs (Kim et al., 2008) in the United States. Kim and colleagues (2008) concluded that “racial and social discrimination from peers and authority figures propel Filipino boys to seek out gang membership as a way to protect themselves from being targets of oppression” (p. 11).

In the case of the Meskhetian Turks, due to their experience of discrimination in the country of origin, identification with the country of origin (as a reaction to post-migration negative treatment in the host country) was not considered a possibility. Upon

immigration, prolonged exposure to negative treatment from part of their American and some Russian peers, in their particular setting of everyday interactions, can accumulate and add to high levels of stress. In accordance with Berry et al. (2002), “If attitudes [of the host society] are hostile, the passive coping strategies may well lead to unacceptable levels of exclusion and domination” (p. 365). Coupled with increased “Islamophobia” in the United States in a post-9/11 world (Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2007), this accumulated stress becomes unacceptable, and creates the conditions for Meskhetian Turkish youth from Russia to seek identification with an oppositional culture, including one of Islamic extremism inspiration.

Creating conditions for refugee adolescents’ identification with American culture and prevention of radicalization.

Zero tolerance for negative treatment/discrimination in all—including subtle—forms and strong commitment by representatives of the mainstream culture to the multicultural ideology, above the level of rhetoric, constitute the first necessary step to helping refugee adolescents change their perception of the mainstream culture as being monolithic in its prejudicial/discriminatory/negative orientation towards them. The acculturation process is taking place in particular settings in everyday interactions of the refugee adolescents with their American peers and adults from the mainstream culture. Therefore, setting a personal example of commitment to the multicultural ideology in day-to-day interactions with Muslim refugee adolescents in all acculturative arenas is vital:

Daily interactions with others seemed crucial to shaping the times youth felt American....Positive examples of people adhering to American democratic principles of tolerance and respect can counter negative perceptions of Arabs as enemies. (Wray-Lake et al., 2008, p. 3)

Acceptance and inclusion of acculturating individuals should be based not on dominance but on the entitlement of refugees to belonging to American culture as equals. These are the key principles for creating conditions for refugee adolescents' identification with the mainstream culture, to their—and our—American Dream of equality and belongingness. Finally, helping acculturating adolescents to understand that American society is dynamic and “permanently unfinished” in terms of possibilities for change in a democratic way will facilitate their identification with similar-minded democratic representatives of American society who believe and are strongly committed to the values of multiculturalism and democracy:

Every day we are reminded of—indeed, we are surrounded by—the myriad ways in which the United States remains a “permanently unfinished” society, a global sponge remarkable in its continuing capacity to absorb millions of people of all classes and cultures from every continent on earth....A great deal of how tomorrow's social contract between natives and newcomers is worked out, and how the commitment to democratic values of equality and inclusion is met, will hinge on the mode of political incorporation and civic engagement of newcomer youth today (Tienda, 2003; Tienda and Mitchell, 2006). (Rumbaut, 2008, p. 1)

Strengths of the acculturating adolescents should be the main focus of the empowerment-oriented social work with this population. Based on the data, the participants are active agents in their acculturation process who demonstrated resilience to stress. Next, family solidarity and collectivity in problem solving (on the family, friendships, and community levels) constitute strengths of the acculturating adolescents, and facilitate a solid foundation for their capacity to be active participants in building a multicultural, democratic American society, along similar-minded Americans.

Based on the above discussion of the study's findings in relation to the literature, recommendations for the social work profession are provided in the following section.

Recommendations for the Social Work Profession

Social work education.

It is recommended that a course on refugees and immigrant issues be included in social work education, both at the Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work levels. Such a course should be offered as mandatory and be part of the mainstream social work curricula. Further, additional specific election courses should be offered as well. It is also recommended to develop a Certificate in Refugee and Immigrant Issues Program for those social work students who would like to specialize in serving these populations in the future or are interested in international social work.

The content of the recommended course(s) could cover such topics as causes of international migration and the scope of the refugee and immigrant populations, history of the immigration of different groups from different countries to the United States, immigration and immigrant policy, and issues regarding specific types of immigrant groups (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers, illegal aliens, and victims of human trafficking). Contemporary understanding of acculturation theory, multiculturalism, relationships between dominant and non-dominant cultures, and issues of discrimination and its consequences should be salient for the course(s). In addition, issues regarding specific needs of refugees of different ages and refugee families should be discussed from the perspective of the interrelation between acculturation and human development. Topics of immigrant resettlement and the role of social workers as well as best practices on the international and national level should also be discussed. It is recommended that these

courses be taught by social workers with experience in working with immigrant populations.

In addition, it is recommended to educate school social workers who work with refugee adolescents and their families at school. This can be implemented by designing special courses for school social workers that are offered through continuing education or certificate routes. The content should include general refugee and immigrant issues and—very importantly—topics specific to refugee adolescents, such as (a) acculturation and its impact on development and formation of identity, (b) issues of relationships between dominant and non-dominant groups in the peer relationships domain, and (c) discrepancies between American and refugee cultures in regard to adolescents' emotional maturity and understanding of friendship. Strategies for preventing discrimination and creating conditions of inclusion of the refugee adolescents should be one of the most salient topics, due to its critical impact on the acculturation experience of refugee adolescents—their mental health, well-being, sense of self-worth, and belongingness to the American culture.

Further, social workers can become leaders in educating other professionals working with refugee adolescents, first of all non-social-work school personnel (e.g., teachers, nurses, guidance counselors, and coaches), as well as non-social-work resettlement agency personnel and law enforcement personnel. Taking into consideration that currently, refugee resettlement agencies are largely staffed by non social workers (e.g., persons with degrees in international studies, business, and other unrelated fields), educating this personnel is of critical importance. By helping these

professionals to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to provide better services, the quality of life of refugee adolescents would be enhanced.

For each of these non-social-work professions, a special course should be specifically designed. Such courses will help such professionals to develop a deeper understanding of the refugee adolescent's experience and the complex processes underlying it. Through these courses, non-social-work professionals will better understand the needs of the refugee adolescents and learn skills to better address those needs.

In addition, it is imperative that cultural competence be a requirement for all professionals and organizations working with refugee adolescents. It is important that all professionals working with refugee adolescents understand specific issues related to the culture, history, and experience of the particular refugee population. Resettlement agency personnel who work with specific refugee populations could educate school social workers and other professionals on these issues through short presentations.

Social work practice.

The School Mentorship Program.

Taking into consideration the salience of acceptance and inclusion (especially in the peer relationships domain) for refugee adolescents' acculturation experience and adaptation outcomes, and its crucial role in developing a sense of belongingness and identification with the American culture, creating conditions that facilitate inclusion of the refugees by their American peers is of vital importance. Based on the findings of this study, overcoming psychological distance and interpersonal rejection in the peer relationships domain is the first, the most important, and a mandatory step in creating

conditions for acceptance and inclusion. In this regard, a school mentorship program is recommended.

Under this program, it is suggested that three American student volunteers *adopt* one refugee adolescent from the same school. In order to create the interest of the American students in the program, it is recommended to discuss with them the opportunity of learning about other people and other cultures as an enriching personal experience for those who plan to study or work and live abroad in the future, and who like to travel and explore the world. In addition to this, the parents of the American students should be educated about the opportunities for their children to increase their emotional maturity in the course of interaction with their refugee counterparts and to become multicultural and multilingual persons, skilled in interpersonal communication with people of different backgrounds and cultures.

The American student volunteers who want to participate in the program, as well as their refugee adolescent mentees, should demonstrate a sincere desire to learn about each other and build friendship on the principles of multiculturalism, non-dominance, equality, reciprocity, openness and sincere interest in each other (and each other's culture), commonality of interests (e.g., sports, fine arts, and music), and personal preferences. International clubs, which exist at many schools, can be the best venue for implementation of the School Mentorship Program. Moreover, ESL teachers and social workers can be the best candidates to initiate and implement the program.

Simultaneously, through parent-teacher associations, the American students' families can adopt the refugee adolescent families, building their relationships on the

same principles as discussed above. Raising adolescents who attend the same school and share similar interests can be the common ground to start a relationship between the mentor and mentee families.

Education in multiculturalism for all volunteers (students and their family members) is a necessary part of the program, in order to create understanding and prevent incidents of assimilation pressure (e.g., invitations for Muslim families to attend church were interpreted as government-sponsored pressure for conversion to Christianity. I am familiar with such incidents due to my work in a refugee resettlement agency with a Muslim population).

In addition to eliminating interpersonal rejection, the Student Mentorship Program will facilitate culture and foreign language learning for both the American students and their refugee counterparts, turning them into multicultural and multilingual persons, ready to live and work in a contemporary, comprehensive multicultural world. Offering structured classes in the refugees' language(s) for American students as part of the program (or school curricula), complemented by learning the language(s) naturally in the course of personal interactions with the refugee adolescents can be part of the solution in terms of decreasing dominance and promoting equality. It will prevent assimilation pressure on refugee adolescents, as well as their marginalization (a less successful acculturation strategy) and at the same time will facilitate the integration of refugee adolescents (the most successful acculturation strategy, according to research) and help them develop a strong sense of self-worth and belongingness to the American culture as equals.

Finally, it is recommended to use the internet for communication between the refugee adolescents and their American peers. This form of communication can be in the form of peer-to-peer communication (e.g., in chat rooms) or can be mediated by the ESL teachers (e.g., asking an American mentor to write an essay in the form of a dialogue with her/his mentee). The topics of such essays can include descriptions of the joint activities of the mentors and mentees, culture-learning issues, or creative writing on topics proposed by adolescents themselves.

Positive involvement of law enforcement, from an empowerment perspective.

Based on the findings of this study, the legal environments of the United States and the refugees' country of origin differ greatly. Several refugee adolescents expressed fear of police as well as fear of violating regulations due to their lack of knowledge. In addition, refugee adolescents reported that their parents raised similar concerns. A law enforcement officer's school presentation regarding the rights and responsibilities as well as status regulations of American teenagers will empower the refugee adolescents and their families, help eliminate their concerns and fear of the police, and help them to better understand the new legal environment. Positive involvement of law enforcement will promote the culture learning of the refugee adolescents.

As was discussed earlier, it is recommended that law enforcement officers be educated about refugee and immigrant issues. A school social worker can initiate the positive involvement of law enforcement, from empowerment and multicultural perspectives.

Educating refugee adolescents' parents.

I suggest for school social workers, with an interpreter, to facilitate group meetings with refugee parents, where the parental responsibilities in the new society will be explained in detail. During such meetings, information should be provided and issues addressed, such as information pertaining to the American school system, legal issues concerning teenagers, as well as issues related to child abuse or neglect. It is also important to point out to refugee parents that their teenagers are experiencing double stress due to immigration and adjustment to a new society as well as going through normal developmental changes. Topics such as language brokering could be used as an example of additional stressors on refugee adolescents.

Future Research Opportunities

Future research on different aspects of acculturation of refugee adolescents in the peer relationships domain is recommended. There is a need to conduct future research on moderating factors affecting the acculturation process and its outcomes, and on interaction of acculturation in the peer relationship domain with the developmental processes of refugee adolescents. Qualitative studies are needed in order to better understand the phenomenon in its richness and depth. Quantitative studies of the phenomenon are also recommended; they are necessary for generalization purposes.

In particular, it is recommended to further research cultural discrepancy regarding maturity (deprivation of the adult status of the refugee adolescents and perceived difference in the level of emotional maturity of refugee adolescents compared to their American counterparts). In this study, it was identified as an important moderating factor, impacting acculturation and development of the Russian refugee youth in the peer

relationships domain. According to my knowledge, this is the first study where this discrepancy has been identified, described, and analyzed in depth. Most participants found the experience of deprivation of adult privileges to be frustrating and extremely unpleasant. When I was writing this dissertation I could not stop thinking about some similarities of this experience with the experience of Western women traveling and residing in certain countries of the Middle East.

Further qualitative research is needed in order to understand the discrepancy in maturity from different perspectives: acculturation, identity formation, its impact on self-esteem and psychological well-being. Deprivation of the adult status must also be further researched in its relation to deviant behavior of refugee adolescents. Moreover, it is recommended to expand this research in regard to other refugee and immigrant adolescent groups.

In regard to refugee adolescents' gained emotional maturity, I suggest further research on the challenges to parent/child role reversal when it comes to language brokering and refugee adolescents assuming an adult role and more family responsibilities than their American peers or peers left in Russia. The issues of parental dependability on their children for translation/interpretation and related to child brokering need further research, from the perspective of emotional maturity and mental health of refugee adolescents.

Next, it is recommended to conduct in-depth qualitative research on romantic relationships of refugee and immigrant adolescents. In this regard, I suggest that future research address (a) the impact of the separation from romantic partners left in the home

country on the individuals' emotional and sexual life, (b) the role of different moderating factors in effecting the formation of a romantic relationship in the host country, and (c) short- and long-term outcomes of the impediments to forming romantic relationships in the host country. In order to better understand long-term outcomes of the impeded romantic relationships in adolescence, longitudinal studies are recommended. In addition, based on this study, it is important to address gender differences in regards to forming romantic relationships by refugee adolescents. In this regard, I suggest that both a male and female researcher be utilized in gathering information of a more comprehensive nature: Adolescent boys and girls will feel less shy and share more information regarding this sensitive topic with a researcher of the same gender. Research with various refugee and immigrant groups on romantic relationships is also recommended.

Finally, as one of the most salient moderating factors impacting refugee adolescents' acculturation process and outcomes, it is recommended to further research the role of perceived negative treatment/discrimination. In particular, it is recommended to conduct research on Meskhetian Turkish youth in relation to not only their vulnerability for identification with an oppositional culture, including one of jihadist inspiration, but also the creation of conditions for prevention.

Future research on Russian refugee adolescents as well as on other refugee/immigrant groups is needed in order to better understand acculturation in the peer relationships domain and to compare the intragroup variations as well as intergroup differences and similarities. Further research on Meskhetian Turks is recommended: This group is one of the most under-researched, compared to other refugee groups from the

Former Soviet Union. In particular, it is recommended to further research and compare the acculturation experience of Meskhetian Turks with that of other refugee adolescents from the Former Soviet Union (e.g., Jews, Armenians, and Ukrainians) as well as with the experience of Muslim adolescents from other countries (e.g., from Arab countries) acculturating in the same settings in the United States. Such a comparison will shed light on the differences and similarities between and among different refugee adolescent groups.

Furthermore, it would be useful to continue study of the phenomenon as it relates to Russian refugee adolescents (and first of all, Meskhetian Turks) living and acculturating in different acculturation arenas, e.g., in the cities of the Midwest region as well as in similar-size cities on the East and West coasts. Such studies will allow for comparing acculturation in different geographical areas, settings, and contexts.

Next, it would be useful to conduct a longitudinal study on acculturation of Russian refugee adolescents (and first of all, Meskhetian Turks) in the peer relationships domain. Such a study will allow for a better understanding of the acculturation process at different stages and adaptation outcomes. It will allow for better understanding the meaning of the acculturation experience in the peer relationships domain as an ongoing, complex process.

In addition, in the light of the findings of this study, it is highly recommended to study the phenomenon from the perspective of the adolescents of the dominant American culture: their attitudes towards their refugee counterparts (from Russia and from other countries, including their Muslim peers), their acculturation expectations of the refugee

peers, and their experience and meaning-making of interpersonal relationships with refugee adolescents. In accordance with the findings, belongingness to the American culture is a two-fold concept and includes both acceptance by American peers and identification of refugee adolescents with the American culture. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to research the phenomenon from the perspective of American adolescents from the dominant culture.

Limitations of the Study

Generalization of this study is limited, as in all qualitative studies. The purpose of the study was not to generalize but to explore and determine the essence, or fundamental structure of the meaning, of acculturation as experienced by Russian refugee adolescents in the domain of peer relationships, and this was accomplished. All of the possible characteristics of the phenomenon are not (and cannot be) fully exhausted by the findings of this study.

The necessity for translation of the transcripts from Russian to English could represent a potential limitation in that some of the nuances of meaning of the phenomenon could be lost during the translation process. However, the fact that Russian is my native language, and I am fluent in English, having spoken and studied in this language since the age of 14, minimizes this potential limitation. In addition, a second translator was consulted in order to minimize this limitation.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topics I am interested to discuss with my participants:

Acculturation to the Russian culture in the life domain of peer relationships

1. Content of the relationships in the areas of
 - a. Friendship;
 - b. Romantic relationship;
 - c. Peer network affiliation.
2. Language of peer interactions (e. g., Russian or English)
3. Settings of peer interactions (e.g., school, neighborhood, community organizations).
4. Quantity of peer contact (e.g., number of peers the adolescent interacts with, amount of time spent together, and frequency of interactions).
5. Relationships with Russian peers as a positive experience (e.g., acceptance by others).
6. Hassles experienced by adolescents in relationships with Russian peers (e.g., rejection by others).
7. Coping strategies.

Acculturation to the American culture in the life domain of relationships with American peers

1. Content of the relationships in the areas of:
 - a. Friendship;

- b. Romantic relationship;
 - c. Peer network affiliation.
- 2. English as the language of peer interactions.
- 3. Settings of peer interactions (e.g., school, neighborhood, community organizations).
- 4. Quantity of peer contact (e.g., number of peers the adolescent interacts with, amount of time spent together, and frequency of interactions).
- 5. Relationships with American peers as a positive experience (e.g., acceptance by others).
- 6. Hassles experienced by adolescents in relationships with American peers (e.g., rejection by others).
- 7. Coping strategies.