Towards Immigrant integration & Cultural Identities

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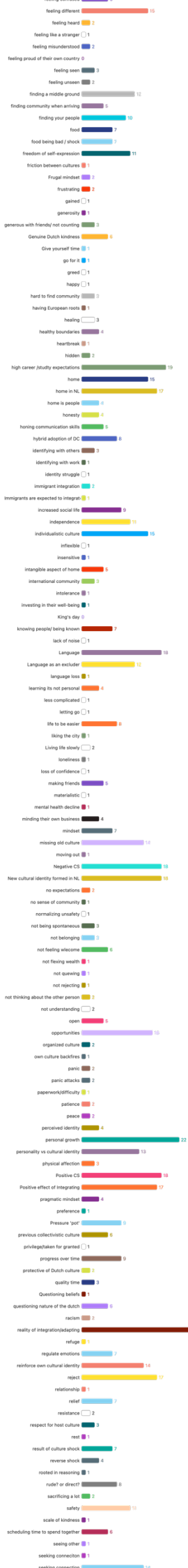

“I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference”

The road not taken

- Robert Frost-

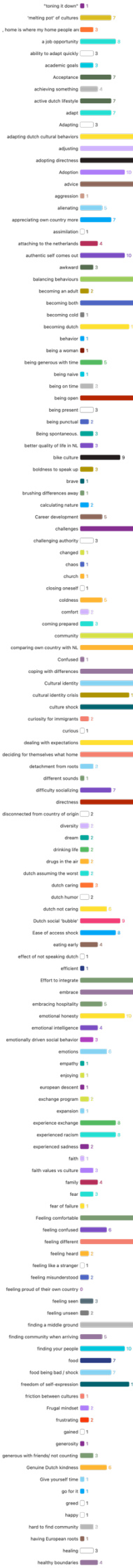

Table of Contents

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Abstract

Keywords: Acculturation, Integration, Culture Shock, Deculturation, Cultural Identity

This master thesis project delves into the intricate effects of culture shock in immigrant integration and cultural identities. The main research aims to develop an analysis of the main effects of culture shock in immigrants towards their decisions to adopt, reject or include a hybridlike addition of the host culture into their own cultural identity. The concept of culture shock given by Oberg (1960) and Berry's (1997) acculturation model provide a lens through which the thesis is approached, and immigrants' experiences are dissected. I argue that there is an effect on immigrants' integration process from the time arrival towards the present, where their cultural identities are affected by the cultural shocks that they have come across. This study tries to illustrate the underlying reasons behind their integration process that have not been as investigated in the Netherlands. The different accounts of experiences and perception of the Dutch social circles and culture, are given through their own personal lens and point of view. A sample of n=(22) immigrants were extracted through a survey and semi-formal qualitative interviews. Findings help put a different perspective towards immigrant integration through culture shock, and provides a detailed analysis of individual's personal, emotional and cultural process in the Netherlands.

This is accompanied by personal accounts of the individuals and testimonies of the coping mechanisms. These have helped them to seemingly become part of the Dutch social fabric, and the genesis of new cultural identities. The adoption, rejection and hybrid integration of aspects of the Dutch culture are also connected to the progressive transformation that they have undergone because of the effects of culture shock. The interpretation of the interviews could make use of investigating the Dutch perspective into account to obtain a balanced outlook on immigrant integration, and the culture shock they experience as locals. The findings suggest that acculturation strategies between immigrants to be tied to their emotional reactions to shock, their own cultural identity re-building and social networking.

Introduction

Facing adversity and seeking the promise of a better life has often moved individuals to leave their own home country. In 2023 alone, the Dutch Government recorded that approximately 322,863 immigrants migrated to the Netherlands for the purposes of either work or personal relationships (GON, 2024). Their integration into the Dutch workplace and social circles is often met with different modes of communication approaches and behavioral patterns. The focus of this master thesis is to research further into the social integration process of immigrants, and the changes they have experienced through culture shock. The effects, outcomes and integrational responses from cultural shock may vary, and these can lean towards a negative, positive or hybrid response to abrupt social and cultural environment stressors (Berry, 1997, p.13). A sense of loss of identity, or 'psychology of loss' may come from grieving or mourning a strong attachment to one's own country of origin.

The methodology presented entails mixed methods approach via a survey and semi-structured interviews with immigrants from Rotterdam who have gone through different integration paths. The analysis of their responses illustrates individuals' personal accounts of what they have experienced, as well as how certain changes regarding their own cultural identity took place. The research intent is also paired with getting to the bottom of how culture shock has affected their integration process and emotional responses to acculturation. The research question proposed aims to answer; ***How do immigrants respond to culture shocks during their integration process in the Netherlands?*** Such a study can give individuals an awareness to their own immigrant experiences and reveal the evolution of their cultural identities have gone through (Berry et al., 2006, p.306). The study of these "paths" to adopt, partially accept, or reject the host culture could lead to a new and revised literature of immigrants in the Netherlands. The latter could contain an underdeveloped area of the subject and "guide the development of policies and programs that will enhance the experience of acculturation" for upcoming young immigrants (Berry et al., 2006, p.305).

The environmental shifts, loss of self, and cultural identities are formational aspects of an immigrants' process of adapting and inserting themselves in a new and foreign context. Along with the effect on their integration, this study also researches ***How are immigrant cultural identities affected by cultural shock?*** This thesis delves into the effects of culture shock on the individuals themselves and makes their coping mechanisms with socio cultural

differences salient. Because individuals are immersed in a new and foreign culture, their own is put into question (Landis et al., 2004, p.156). The shifts that may occur in our own cultural identity can be diverse, but being ‘multicultural’ has been noted to be a way to “integrate, feel welcomed and feel at home”(van Hove, 2024, p.31). The interviews offer a unique perspective from immigrants’ point of view, as to how they have perceived themselves as welcomed, and how their own cultural identity has changed over time.

1. Theoretical Framework

Key words: Culture shock, cultural identity, acculturation, integration, cultural intelligence.

Within the cultural shock theoretical framework, a definition of acculturation is due. It entails a "variety of processes and outcomes; groups and individuals within groups" that can "have different responses to their changing experiences" (Sam & Berry, 2010, p.473; Berry et al., 2006, p.18). The analysis developed focuses on the changes in cultural identity and varying integration processes that appeared through semi-structures interviews. Key concepts like acculturation, deculturation and separation will be the frame through which the thesis is comprised. Previous studies that have looked cultural shock and cultural identity were the guide of this study. Berry's (1997) acculturation model accounts for the main theoretical frame in which the research will be focusing on as a compass. Berry's (1997) model was used as the 'skeleton' or backbone, with which the analysis of the responses to culture shock shaped immigrants' experience and helped filter the small nuances in social interactions that they have faced.

1.2 Culture Shock

The concept of culture shock has been attached to a negative outlook throughout its research span along the years. Oberg (1960) paints an accurate, but not entirely complete picture of culture shock. He stated that "For a long time the individual will understand what the national is saying but he is not always sure what the national means" (Oberg, 1960, p.143). Others refer to culture shock as the 'disintegration of the self' to find a new self, inserted an unfamiliar environment or culture, as well as an "unconscious programming" of our own culture inserted into another (Dabrowski, 1964 as in Moufakkir, 2013, p.323; Koçak, 2014, p.66). A sense of loss, or the 'psychology of loss' that comes from grieving or mourning a strong attachment to one's own country of origin has also been used to describe what culture shock might look like (Furnham & Bochner, 1986 as in Furnham, 2019, p.1840). The author does not use culture shock as a conceptualization of the phenomenon but makes a useful description of "acculturative stress". It illustrates that conflicts that arise interculturally, sustaining that they come from 'a response to environmental stressors', the 'presence of only negative experiences and outcomes of intercultural contact' and that the issues that arise are

mainly intercultural (Berry, 1997, p.13). Responses to intercultural exchange can be the catalyst for the generation of new meanings (Mead, 1964,p.210; Oberg, 1960, p.145). Going a step further, the study tries to illustrate a wider understanding of how they cope with outside stressors, initial culture shocks, etc.

Immigrants often face the "disorientating experience of suddenly finding that the perspectives, behaviors and experience of an individual or group or whole society are not shared by others" (Furnham, 2019, p.1838). The sudden realization that previous social cues and behaviors are no longer useful for social survival often throws people who migrate into a state of confusion or even feeling loss. The 'psychology of loss' through culture shock has mainly negative effects, especially on mental health. However, this does not mean that all effects are negative or polarizing, given that with intercultural exchange, new meanings are also formed (Berry, 1997; Winkelman, 1994; Mead, 1964). M. Winkelman (1994), states that social interaction helps with adaptation, and improves integration while entering a new culture. For immigrants to survive, adapt and thrive, new skills are required, and they are not only social. Entering a new cultural setting is more than learning about a new way of life, it entails acquiring a new set of 'cognitive skills' that imply 'rewiring' or recoding one's mindset into the host culture (Bochner, 2003, p.9). Adler (1975) adds on to this notion, describing culture shock as a culture 'transition', and focuses more on the positive outcomes of intercultural exchange rather than a pessimistic focus on loss, shock, confoundment and other pejorative responses. He insists that the "the greatest shock may be the encounter with one's own cultural heritage and the degree to which one is a product of it" (Adler, 1975, p. 22). The adjustments, cognitive skills will also be addressed as the coping mechanisms that develop during the acculturation process in immigrants.

Oberg (1960) describes the four stages of culture shock, and how the different phases that immigrants go through in their adaptation process leads either to a successful integration or a nervous breakdown. However, this seems to be is a rather polarized view of how sojourners may respond to these cognitive and social recoding processes. These stages are homologous to the concepts that act as an invisible thread with which the analysis will reveal their responses and mindset adjustments. Together with Berry's (1997) acculturation model, I believe there is a third hybrid stance where Immigrants experience a middle ground during their integration, rather than just rejecting or integrating successfully. His dissection of the four stages of the acculturation process is in alignment with the research analysis. There is an interconnection between the responses and the phases of culture shock themselves between Oberg (1960) and

Berry's (1997) model. Analogous to acculturation and deculturation are the 'honeymoon', 'adjustment' and 'recovery' phases. From the first few months, individuals are blinded by novelty, fascinated, and makes superficial friendships with individuals from the host society (Furnham, 2019,p.1846). Following the honeymoon phase, separation and marginalization would be directly connected to the 'regression phase', where individuals start to question their own set of skills, their own behavioral patterns and ability to cope with the new environment. The phases affect how individuals choose to withdraw or further integrate within their previous social structure and patterns. Experts on the subject have stated that there are both adverse and positive results from experiencing culture shock as an immigrant (Berry, 1997, p.9; Anderson, 1994, p.309; van Tilburg & Vingerhoets, 1997, p.10; Bughra & Becker, 2005, p.21). Aside from previous polarizing outcomes, or responses, there is another response that may affect sojourners. In addition to the different acculturation processes that individuals go through, there was an expectation that there may be a fourth response or dimension that will emerge from the semi-structured interviews. This fourth 'response' or answer could uncover overlooked or unknown aspects of integration and cultural identity development for immigrants, perhaps illustrating a new approach or stance towards cultural identity formation and even new possibilities in migration policies.

1.3 Immigration in the Dutch Context

In the Netherlands, there is a commonly widespread negative perception of immigrants from the Dutch population. The current political status quo leaves immigrants at a disadvantage point, with an unclear and uncertain future of how policies will affect newcomers, especially for those who are outside of the European Union. Historical context would also suggest that there is a slight aversion towards immigrants, especially present the older Dutch generations (Pascoe, 2025). However, this perception can be influenced by intercultural contact, which is known to lower negative opinions and friction that may occur (Heath et al.,2020, p.478; Bos et al., 2016, p.106). Previous studies across Europe compare and analyze how immigrants are perceived in their host societies and consider that most countries would rather have immigrants that are "most like them" (E.g., Sixtus et al , 2019, p.506; Bloom et al., 2015, p.1772). The perceived intercultural encounters embedded in this friction can " affect how the participants see each other and themselves, and whether either party will change their views as a consequence of the contact"(Bochner, 2003, p.9). How culture shock affects immigrants'

response to acculturation has been previously noted as a negative, pessimistic and polarized view in previous studies (e.g., Oberg, 1960; Berry, 1997). Counter to what previous studies have stated and other surveys that assessed immigrant perception from host societies, this study proposes to provide another viewpoint to acculturation and integration. The findings in this study are attempting to add to the already extensive list of studies of international sojourners in the Netherlands, exposing the defense or coping mechanisms from interviewees. The responses retrieved are expected to have behaved as a either bridge or a barrier between locals and immigrants. The scientific and social relevance of the study can further inform upcoming immigrants on their newfound strategies to minimize and navigate culture shocks. Culture shock has been assessed through a negative lens, where the outcome from acculturative stress and other psychological effects mainly are to be avoided (Ward et al., 2001, p.34). Counterintuitively, the research purpose of this thesis also aims to view culture shock not as something to avoid, but an inevitable process through which immigrants construct their own new cultural identity, build new meanings and question old beliefs that no longer serve them in their new country of settlement (Kim, 2008, p.366). The influx of new immigrant communities in the Netherlands may cause the Dutch ingroups to draw closer to each other, causing the opposite effect of inclusion and integration. Immigration integration exams like the *inburgering* exam that includes language programs and community service initiatives aim to include immigrants, but somehow the general feeling is that there is still very much a feeling of animosity between locals and internationals. Duyvendak (2025) only very recently put into words how the relationship between societies of settlement and diversity can affect their interactions. He states:

> "The recent rise of nativism shows that a future of ever-increasing (super-)diversity is not exactly what the 'native' majority is longing for—and **actually pushes them to draw more and thicker boundaries between 'natives' and 'non-natives'**, strongly impacting everyday interactions" (Duyvendak, 2025, p.7).

1.4 Social Integration

The results of previously studied cases of cultural shock, acculturation strategies and adaptation have had negative effects on immigrants, these resulting in health issues like stress, confusion, bewilderment, clinical depression or 'debilitating anxiety' (Berry & Kim, 1988 as

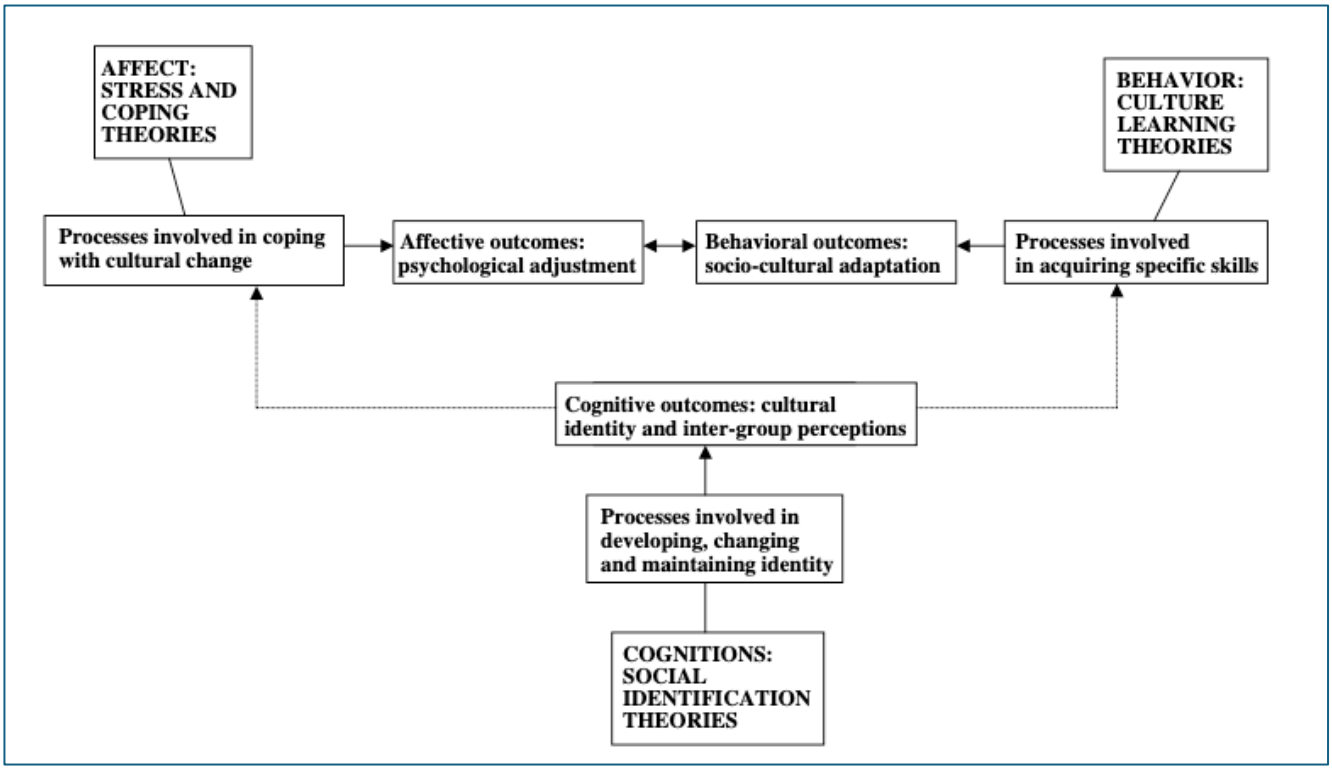
in Berry 1997, p.13; Bochner,1982 as in Dow, 2011, p.221). In her study of cross-cultural adaptation, Anderson (1994) expresses how the core of cultural adaptation happens through 'intercultural communication'. According to Anderson (1994), 'cross cultural adaptation' and 'intercultural communication' are cyclical processes, that require continuity over time and interaction in between the subjects to reap the effects of cross-culture communities. However, following the positive results that may result from the interaction, a high cultural 'learning' curve usually follows. In that learning process, they are influenced by the host culture 'in return' (Bowers, 1973 as in Anderson, 1994, p.307). This learning curve can produce several reactions and emotions from the individuals who are submerged in a society that is very different from their own. As well, the responses toward social integration are interlinked with their cultural identities, because they are 'grieving' the "loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support networks", resulting in a gradual sensation of losing of their own cultural identity (Bugra & Becker, 2005, p.19). However, it remains to be seen as to why individuals respond towards a certain direction regarding social integration, and if the effect of culture shock is the main cause for their response of choice. Individuals' previous socioeconomic, intercultural experiences and beliefs may also affect how the integration process takes place. According to studies between students in the USA, they surveyed students who were under stress and who had parents with difficult socioeconomic and educational situations. The most successful students that kept their heads above the water, contrary to common belief, were those who sought out a support system in their communities (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p.722).

1.4.1 ABC'S of culture shock & culture learning

In seeking support networks and communities, immigrants must undergo a process of unlearning past cultural habits, norms, and behaviors. In their book *The Psychology of Culture Shock,* authors Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) describe the ABC's of culture shock. They rightly define culture shock in opposition to Oberg's (1960) definition, by reinforce its dynamic and transformative nature. Within the acculturation process, the authors recognize three veins of outcomes: Affective, cognitive and behavioral (Ward et al., 2001, p.267). These outcomes reflect how we feel, think and act in other cultural environments. These concepts are aligned with the thematic analysis and research purpose, together with cultural learning, can elucidate the underlying motivations and strategies to adapt to new social 'ecologies or ecosystems.

Cultural learning has been defined as “the ability to “fit in” or negotiate effective interactions in a new cultural milieu” (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p.60).

Figure 1.4.2



1. Figure 1.4.2 The ABC model of culture contact. Ward, Bochner & Furnham (2001).

Figure 1.4.2 shows an expanded view of the ABC model, that divides each of the outcomes and interlinks them respectively. Fundamentally, the three theories that pertain to the acculturative and adaptation journey in immigrants can display itself in individuals in different degrees. Hence, all theories are the application of coping mechanisms, or outcomes that reflect the contact experienced between internationals and locals. The acculturation responses that Berry (1997) describes are intertwined with the ABC model, given that the outcomes are product of individuals who are part of cross-cultural encounters. In Figure 1.4.2, for the purpose of this thesis and specific research goals, a table with the associated concepts between Berry’s (1997) acculturation strategies and the outcomes was made to illustrate how immigrants may or may not choose to integrate. The outcomes or responses, are behaviorally based, and this has been known to be also linked to CQ, or cultural intelligence (Masgoret & Ward, 2006,p.69; Early & Ang, 2003, p.171) Although the cultural shocks may be mainly psychological, their outcomes are affective and behavioral in how they manifest in diverse individuals.

Figure 1.4.3

Berry (1997)	**Outcomes**
Assimilation → Low maintenance of their cultural heritage and identity	Identifying with the host culture
Separation → High maintenance, low involvement	Hybrid integration
Marginalization → Low cultural maintenance and low interaction	Rejection of host culture
Integration → High Cultural Maintenance and high involvement	Integration with host nationals

1.5 Cultural Identity

The aftereffects of culture shock and social interaction in a foreign culture may or may not individuals' sense of cultural identity (Furnham et al., 2001, p.43). In her MA thesis for Utrecht University, Sanne van Hove made a study on Latin American students and how they experienced a sense belonging to The Netherlands. Respondents frequently replied that they either 'felt at home' or 'didn't feel welcomed by the host culture' (Van Hove, 2024, p.34). In relation to my previous argument, a hybrid answer related to the acculturation and deculturation processes were also found. The notion of hybridity in respondents' answers showed that feeling integrated or 'welcomed' into the Dutch culture revealed a 'hybrid' flexibility to identify as 'partly Dutch' and 'partly' from where they were originally from. This phenomenon can take on various forms and outcomes in the integration process and cultural identity transformation, usually related to the adoption, hybrid stance and or rejection of the host culture (Amit-Talai, 1995b, p.227 as in Vertovec, 2010, p.7). The study interviewed mainly exchange students and immigrants who attended Utrecht University. A remarkable find was that these students had a 'selective identity' or a flexibility, that gave them more agency as to how they felt and behaved regarding a specific context, where it suited them best to 'be more Dutch' or 'more Chilean' (Van Hove, 2024, p.36). There is no 'single truth' nor two-sided 'response' that comes from how culture shock can affect individuals' integration and cultural identity. When individuals

become immigrants, there is loss involved, 'loss of self', of 'everyday life things' that conform their cultural identity, but there is also much to be gained from new environments, intercultural interaction and communication (Anderson, 1994, p.300; Bughra & Becker, 2005, p.21). Flexibility, selective identity and hybridity all point towards a new cognitive and behavioral skill that develops in individuals who must adapt to a foreign cultural environment. Kim (2008) in her study of 'intercultural personhood', depicted the same term and called it 'plasticity'. The study pondered how the cultural environments that individuals may be immersed in gives them the capacity to build their own identities, and that in doing so it did not signify a surrender of ones' own identity, but a mutual respect for cultural differences (Kim, 2008, p.366). The outcomes, or responses, become a part of the re-building or construction of a new hybrid cultural identity in immigrants.

1.5.2 Social Identity Theory

Within social interactions in multicultural settings, it was fitting to also refer to Tajfel's (1974) Social identity theory. Social identity theory states that "individuals define the sense of self in terms" of bigger social groups and their "emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p.69; Guan & So, 2016, p. 499). This line of thought infers that individuals will be drawn to others most like themselves, and if they identify themselves with the group, they will emulate the behaviors from the group. In relation to how immigrants may or may not identify with the host cultural society, it will affect how their integration and adaptation to behaviors progresses. Upon arrival, immigrants face the challenge to "find, create and define his place in these networks" which inevitably put their own social self is put into question (Tajfel, 1974, p.67; Mead, 1954, p.207). It could be argued as well that immigrants can also integrate with other in and out groups that do not necessarily align with their affective, cognitive and behavioral patterns (Adler, 1974, p.14; Furnham et al., 2001, p. 247). The alternative reasons that these individuals find themselves like their host society or not does not seem to deter them from forming significant social connections, regardless of cultural or language barriers. Studies have confirmed and registered how a strong sense of identity through the acculturation process can reinforce their own cultural identity and allows individuals to feel cared for by the 'perceived social support' from the host culture (Guan & So, 2016, p.592; Lam, 2017, p. 60).

1.5.2 Flexibility & CQ

In line with this flexibility to be 'more or less Dutch', culture shock can also provide the social tools to cope, demonstrating immigrants 'cultural intelligence' or CQ, to be able to psychologically and socially adapt more easily into new social circles and their host countries (Presbitero, 2016, p.30). The focus and research question lies in finding the why of the turning point, or crossroad, where immigrants float towards adapting, partially taking or fully separating themselves from the host culture. The CQ that they acquire during the adaptation process in the Netherlands is part of a coping mechanisms that allow immigrants to generate social tools to generate a new cultural understanding of the host culture. To expand on the coping mechanisms stemming from culture shock, Presbitero & Bernardo (2018) presented a study of CQ, or cultural intelligence, that shows positive outcomes in individuals as they navigate culturally diverse environments. Like Oberg's (1960) social cues and Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies, this thesis will also address two of the three veins of CQ: metacognitive and behavioral CQ that accompany the social identity theory previously mentioned. These are in relation with the expected hybrid response to acculturation. Metacognitive CQ is described as the "ability to take perspective and develop mental schemas that can guide cross-cultural interactions", while motivational CQ refers to "the ability to adjust both verbal and non-verbal actions to suit the requirements of various cultural contexts" (Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.13). Cultural identities are deeply connected to integration given that the relational aspect of it must involve both the immigrants and the 'societies of settlement' (Verkuyten et al., 2019, p.8; Berry et al., 2006, p.305). There are more aspects to social integration than the 'two-way relationship' between the host culture and immigrants, that speak of the integration process itself (Klarenbeek, 2021, p.908).

The effect of culture shock on their own cultural identities could also result in a transformation called deculturation. Kim (2008) describes a concept known as 'the 'shedding' of one's own cultural habits that no longer serve them in their society of settlement, while coping or adapting to new surroundings (Kim, 2008, p.363; Berry, 1997, p.18). Other studies add onto the notion that in time, CQ and its diverse components moderate the negative effects of culture shock (Juràzek & Wawrosz, 2023, p.12). In addition, metacognitive CQ and previous knowledge of the cultures of settlement has proven to be beneficial for a successful integration and cross-cultural adjustment. The ability to take perspectives from the host culture and generate new mental "schemas" has proven to be causal to having a better adaptation process, and it can be trained over time (Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.13). All the effects mentioned

like loss of self, hybrid integration, deculturation, or rejection of the host culture are linked to the social interactions that individuals have over time in a new setting. Oberg (1960) stresses the importance of 'social cues', and how the loss of these is what usually causes 'acculturation stress', bewilderment, confusion, etc. However, when individuals commence to slowly integrate and exchange social cues, the shocks start to dissipate, and the immigrants starts to feel more comfortable (Oberg, 1960, p.143).

2 Methods

2.1 Data Collection: Survey

The approach of the thesis is focused on a qualitative study via semi-structured interviews, by sampling and collecting personal accounts, experiences and perspectives that otherwise numbers on a quantitative scale might be otherwise generalized (Patton, 2002, p. 267). For the sourcing and identification of the respondents, a survey was drawn to filter the candidates for the semi-interviews. The criteria used in the survey included demographic details such as a) Age; b) Nationality; c) Gender; d) Occupation, e) Number of years living in the Netherlands; f) If they have experienced culture shock; g) If their parents had come from an immigrant background as well, and h) If their own cultural identity had been affected. This quantitative methodological approach through a short survey enabled a more faithful and purposive sample of individuals that participated in the study, narrowing down the pool of individuals to specific conditions that served the research question (Grønmo, 2020, p.147).

2.2 General Overview of Respondents

The tables shown demonstrate the demographical details that the respondents presented after filling in the form. The survey sent served to obtain respondents, helped to filter between individuals who had a previous experience with culture shock and to ensure sample diversity, especially in the geographical distribution (See Table 1.4). For the realization of the study, (n=23) respondents were selected from various nationalities, degrees of culture shock, age range, and time spent in the Netherlands. Among the countries represented, the following were part of the study:

2.2.3 Nationalities represented in the sample:

- Argentina (3)
- China (2)
- Germany (1)
- Greece (1)
- Indonesia (1)
- Italy (2)
- Latvia (1)
- Morroco (1)
- Norway (1)
- Poland (2)
- Portugal (1)
- Romania (1)
- South Africa (1)
- South Korea (1)
- Uruguay (2)
- Zimbabwe (1)

2.2.4 Participant Demographics

Table 1.0 Age range

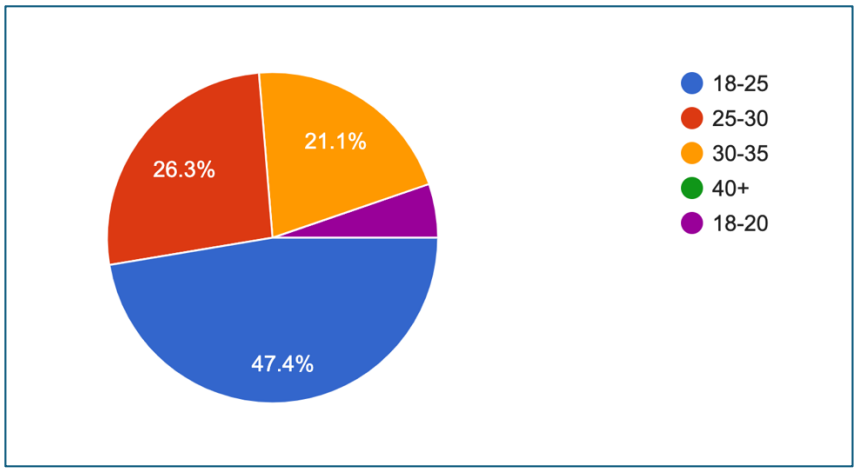


Figure 1.0: Displays the percentages of ages that participated in the study. 47.4% ranged from ages 18-25, 26.3% ranged from ages 25-30 and 21.1% of respondents were between 30-35+.

Table 1.2 Gender distribution

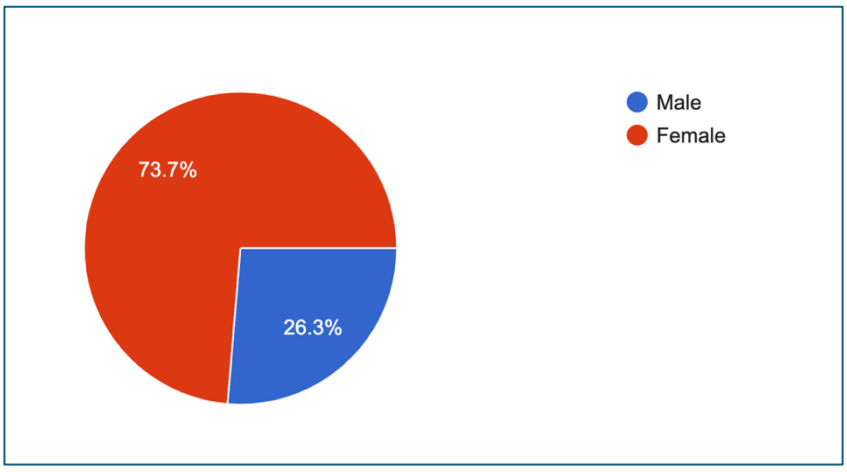
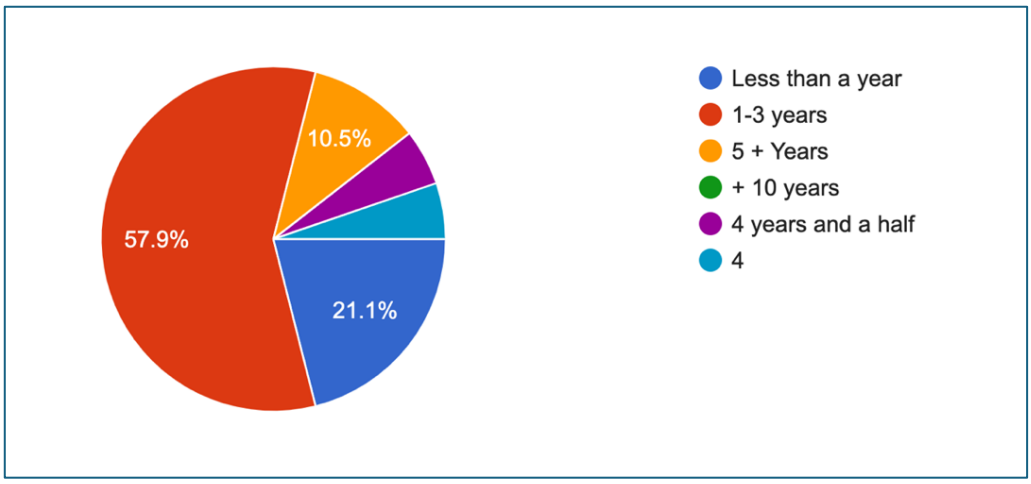


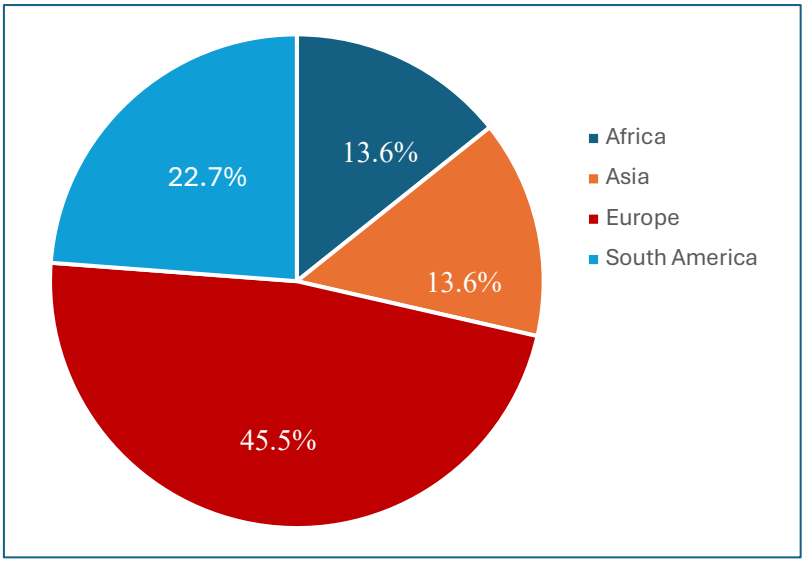
Figure1.2: Shows the percentage of gender distribution used in the study. 73.7% of respondents were female and 26.3% were male.

Table 1.3 Time in the Netherlands



3 *Figure 1.3: Shows the amount of time that the respondents have been in the Netherlands. 10.5% have lived in the country for more than five years. 21.1% has been here for less than a year, and 57.9% has resided for three years.*

Table 1.4 Geographical distribution



4. Figure 1.4: The geographical distribution of the respondents was varied. 13.6% where from countries in Asia and Africa. 22.7% of the respondents accounted for Latin America, mainly Uruguay and Argentina. Lastly. 45.5% of respondents were Europeans.

2.3 Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews provided a personal account, subjective and transformed point of view from the participants. As a researcher, the formulation of the interviews relied on being objective about subjective accounts and experiences to understand how culture shock affected them from various angles (Brickman, 2013, p. 138). Different respondents with similar characteristics could have still given different accounts on how culture shock has influenced their integration and cultural identity (Cobern 2007, as in Mogashoa, 2014, p.57). The building of the questionnaire rendered insights to analyze and understand how each individual constructed meaning around their own experiences and decisions (Mead, 1965, p.210). This aided in guiding and structuring the conversation, allowing the dialogue to be led by the 'flow' and the respondents' data (Patton, 2002, p.274). The questionnaire was written out with a depth progression in mind. The questions ranged from the more personal details of the respondents, towards more specific and questions related to their integration process and emotional responses to cultural shock. Towards the middle section and end of the interview, the questions pondered the following items:

a) Behavioral and emotional points of view from the respondents.
b) Changes in their own cultural identity.
c) Which factors affect their decision to remain in the country long term.
d) Perception and definition of home.

2.3.2 Ethical Measures

In line with Erasmus University regulations and protocol, all respondents were told their rights and were given authority over the space before the interview started (Flick, 2009, p.40). As some of the questions in the guide required that respondents touch upon sensitive and personal experiences, they were informed that the interview was:

a) A space for them to tell their story.

b) Respondents had complete autonomy to stop and withdraw from the interview if any triggers were activated and did not wish to continue.

c) They could choose not to reply to any questions they did not feel comfortable with and continue with the following one. (For examples of respondent privacy statement and questions, please see questionnaire guide).

As well, the consent forms were sent, signed and especially emphasized that their answers would be anonymized and protected. Majority of respondents did not have an issue with disclosing their names, but the decision to keep them anonymous was in favor of a minority that did not want to be identified in the thesis. After concluding the interviews, I asked each respondent if they had feedback on the questions and on the interview experience. Most respondents stated they felt like it was a safe space. Respondent 19, noted:

"And like and I don't know, you were very, like, respectful at the beginning. Like, hey, if there's anything you don't want to share… like very mindful. Like if there's a question or something that you don't want to say or like that triggers something that's also nice because like I had a nice migration process, but maybe and not a forced one, but maybe someone that is a refugee or I don't know, needed escape their country" (Respondent 19, female, 27).

2.4 Operationalization

To compare and report the different patterns from the interviews, the concepts of adoption, hybrid response and rejection are operationalized into a) positive response; b) hybrid and c) negative responses. These three concepts identified and categorized the responses regarding the effect of culture shock in their integration journey. The interviewees responses were results of their own subjective and personal interpretation of their experiences (Bryman, 2016, p.28).

a) Acculturation→ Observable patterns for positive response: Cross cultural integration and social interaction has been also seen to have positive effects where the host culture can also positively affect those who are influenced by it (Bowers, 1973 as in Anderson, 1994, p.307).

b) Deculturation→ Hybrid response: There is a hybrid stance, or in-between stance that individuals might experience or identify themselves with when fully adapting or

readjusting to the new or absorbed way of being and doing things in regard to their cultural identities. There is a chance that their perspective is not a singular response to their experiences (Patton, 2002, p.267).

c) Rejection/separation→ Observable patterns for negative response: Acculturation stress, or culture shock, is mainly known for negative effects, but the patterns found in the choice to exclude themselves can enlighten the reasons as to why some immigrants are averse to integrating fully into the host culture (Berry, 1997, p.13).

2.5 Units of Analysis & Sampling

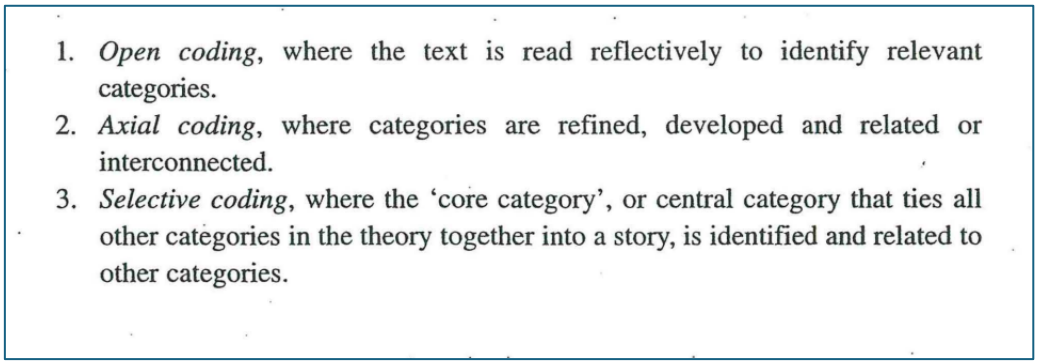
A sample of (n=23) international immigrants that have been living in the Netherlands for 1-3 years, 2-5 years, 5 or more years were considered. This method of non-probability, self-selection and purposive sampling allowed effective comparison between interviewees, increasing validity and relevant pattern findings (Grønmo, 2020, p.157; Boeije, 2002, p.397; Patton, 2002, p.276). The patterns that arose from the interviews helped illustrate the reasons for adoption, partial adoption, or rejection of the host culture. These patterns were dissected and proceeded by a thorough exploration of the responses that revealed insights about culture shock and how it affected their integration. Purposive (or purposeful) sampling was employed to carefully select the individuals who offer a rich and fruitful outpour of data related to the research question at hand (Patton, 2002,p.273). The research period for the study took place between the months of February to May of 2025. Respondents were mostly sourced and contacted via WhatsApp, Facebook, and social media platforms like Instagram. Once the sample of (n=23) respondents was retrieved, the interviews scheduled were held solely online via the Microsoft team's app with 45-60' minute sessions for each participant. During the progression of the interviews, the questionnaire was subject to changes and certain questions evolved in their formulation and aim (Rupp, 1994, p.198).

2.6 Coding Process

Through deductive coding, the three responses belonging to the theoretical framework from Berry's acculturation model have been used as a guide in the coding process. The three responses, to adopt, reject or hybridly adapt to the Dutch culture and mannerisms were sought

after in a systematic manner. Given the previous literature presented and the operationalized concept, the transcripts were analyzed with concept-driven coding (Gibbs, 2007, p. 44-45). After the transcripts of the interviews were finalized, a thematic analysis was conducted with the use of Atlas.ti software. With the initial concepts in mind (Acculturation, Deculturation, Rejection and Hybrid responses), the transcripts provided new themes and codes that evolved and changed (Gibbs, 2007, p.45; Berry, 1997, p. 24; Berry et al., 2006, p.327). In this manner, the ordering of the overarching concepts, new findings and relevant themes assisted in answering how the individuals' integration process and cultural identities were affected. The initial pre-meditated concepts from the literature behaved as a filter in deducing the motives behind responses regarding their integration (E.g., if it was connected to social environments or the like). The interview excerpts revealed as well why they were rejecting the host culture and if there was a specific reason behind a hybrid effect that took place. The patterns found were set up into different compounds or sections, that connect respondents' answers to causal relationships between cultural identity, culture shock and integration. Emerging themes and other 'responses' provided new insights and helped categorize the study of their answers more systematic manner (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.6). The qualitative coding process involved the following steps and structure given by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Figure 2.6.1


1. *Open coding*, where the text is read reflectively to identify relevant categories.
2. *Axial coding*, where categories are refined, developed and related or interconnected.
3. *Selective coding*, where the 'core category', or central category that ties all other categories in the theory together into a story, is identified and related to other categories.

5.Figure 2.6.1 Thematic coding process (Straus & Corbin, 1990 as in Gibbs, 2007, p. 50)

The patterns allowed labeling and identifying relevant concepts that pertain to the research questions and concepts. The coding process built the "story of the data retrieved from the interviews" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.4). In the filtering of codes and open themes, the comparison between the respondent's culture and the host culture were almost inevitable, and

this contrast became a spotlight in the data. To understand the variations in the outcomes and responses from the respondents, the comparison between cultures proved useful (Berry, 1997, p.26). To identify the comparison, most of the transcripts showed a common pattern where respondents were inevitably comparing their own culture with the Dutch to explain how the culture shocks affected them psychologically, emotionally and socially.

Figure 2.6.2

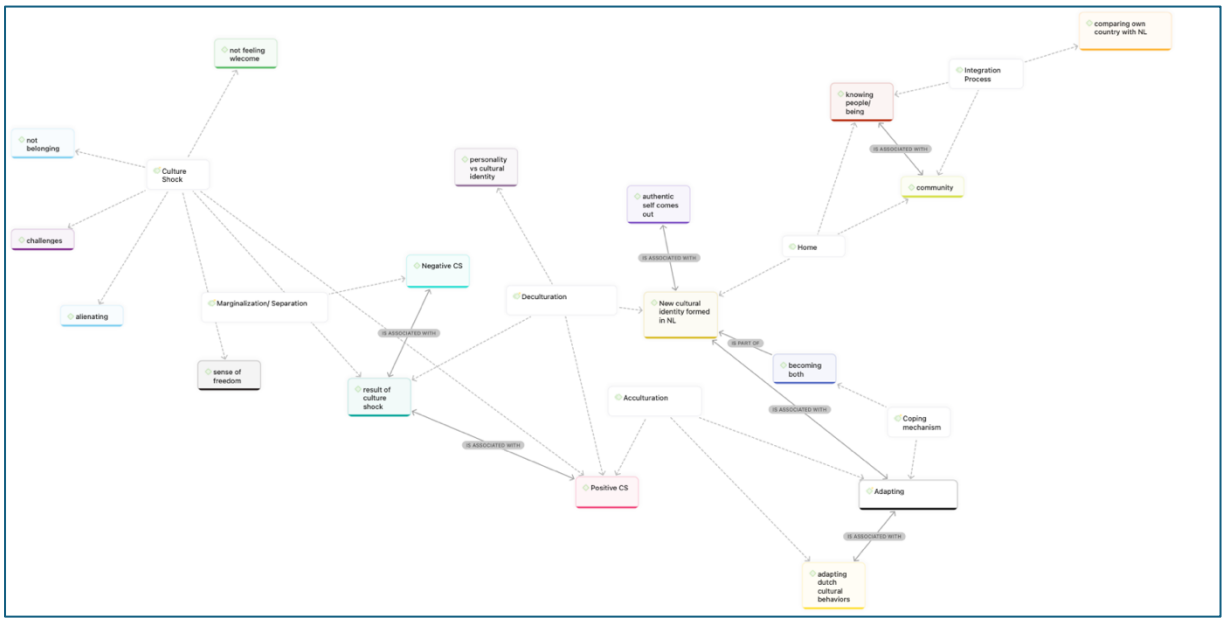
Table 7.1 *Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87)*

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising oneself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

6.*Figure 2.6.2 Shows the diagram of phases of thematic analysis. (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87 as in Karatsareas, 2022, p.106)*

As an example, *Figure 2.6.2 above* demonstrates how the initial themes were extracted from the transcripts using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The themes that were salient in the twenty-three semi structured interviews were later drawn up in a thematic map for a clearer overview of interlinking concepts and patterns. *Figure 2.6.3* below illustrates a network of themes and concepts that helped to build the analysis of the data and further link it to previous literature as well.

Figure 2.6.3



7. 2.6.3. After initial themes were drawn out, the core and key concepts were redistributed to properly reflect the research purpose and the patterns emerging from the transcripts.

2.7 Example of coding progression

An initial web of interrelated concepts and codes were drawn up. To organize the coding process and draw out data that would help the research purpose, the three main concepts served as a starting point to develop new connections between the main themes. To provide an example of the coding process made throughout reading the transcripts, Table 2.7.1 demonstrates the adjustments made to the codes belonging to the concept of Acculturation.

Table 2.7.1

Open codes	**Axial**	**Selective**
Adapting	Adapting to NL culture	Acculturation
Adopting	Adopting Dutch directness	Adopting Dutch cultural behaviors
Embrace	Embracing differences	Embracing change in CI (Cultural Identity).

Becoming Dutch	Being both	Selective CI
Hybrid	Merging cultures	Expansion of CI (Cultural Identity).
Open	Openness, being willing to be openminded	Open mentality

8. Figure 2.7.1 Shows the sample progression of the codes related Acculturation.

The codes were organized in broader categories (i.e., acculturation, Culture Shock, etc.) and subsequent subcodes were assigned to those themes. Table 2.7.1 shows the first initial open codes that were refined with more specified and targeted code names that encompassed data pertaining to acculturation. Since it was a big concept, it garnered an increasingly large number of codes that had similar terms like embrace for example. Each fine tuning of the codes was approached in the same manner across the 22 transcripts.

2.8.2 Saturation of codes

The saturation of codes emerged after the fifth interview. However, that did not impede new data from emerging (Saunders et al., 2018, p.1899). Similar codes and responses from the respondents came around the topics of the culture shocks they had, and the main coping mechanisms that they employed. The new themes and concepts that came from the three main concepts applied from Berry's (1997) model were refined and the connections between them evolved as well. In the following chapter, a diagram is displayed that shows how the themes in the transcripts were preconceived and the different ramifications of codes that stemmed out of the main concepts. During the building, editing and restructuring of the coding scheme, acculturation and deculturation became consistently intertwined with each other, and it became a slight challenge to keep them separate. As the concepts are also within each other, the answers from respondents also often linked both concepts together in the analysis. Saturation inside the interviews played out somewhat differently than expected. The interview aimed to draw out the responses for the cultural shocks and changes participants encountered in their time here. In the beginning, they were asked about their motivations for migrating, and towards the end,

they were asked if they considered staying in the country for a long term. In most cases, respondents turned back to the original question around their motivations and this response created a stopping point when coding for integration.

2.8.3 Interview Questionnaire

The questionnaire formulated for the interviews followed a chronological order of events in the respondents experience from their time of arrival into the Netherlands. The semi-structured interviews were comprised of sixteen questions that explored different aspects of the literature framework used to guide the study. The structure and theoretical links to a few of the key concepts are shown below:

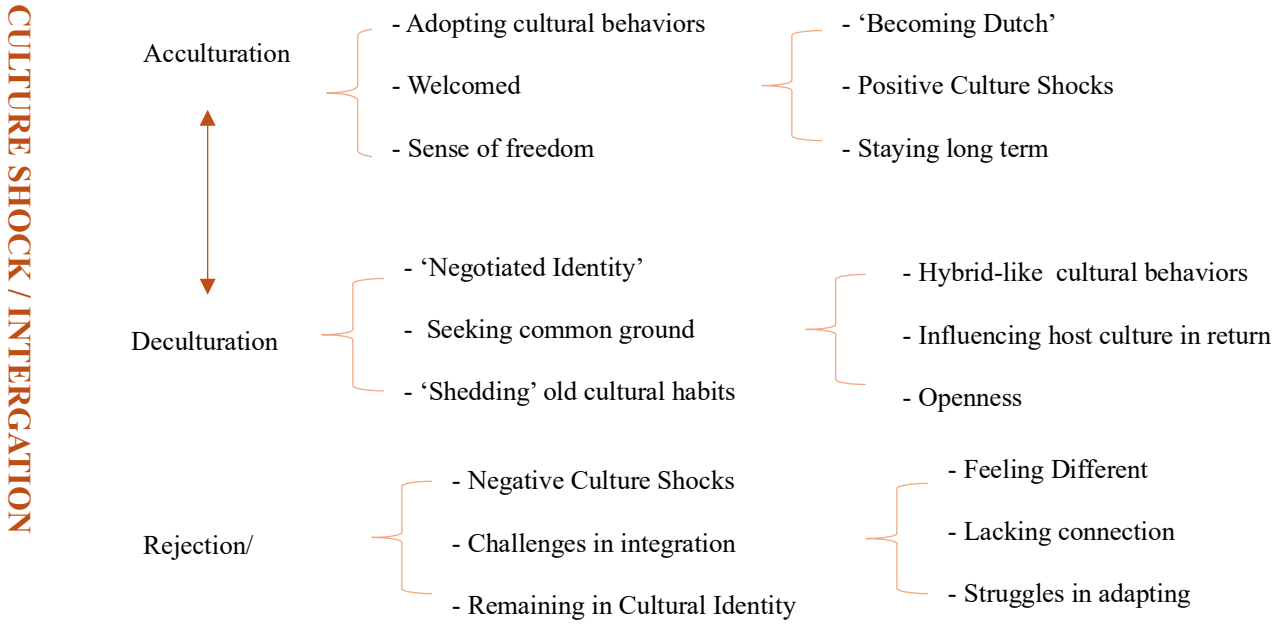
- Questions 1 through 4 ponder the honeymoon and crises phase of culture shock according to Winkelman (1994), along with the set of expectations that respondents had before and after they arrived in the Netherlands (Furnham et al., 2001, p.77)
- **5-9:** Questions 5 through 9 are targeted towards the different shocks and adjustment strategies of either adoption, rejection or hybrid integration of the host culture into their own cultural identity (Berry, 1997). They also explore the different coping mechanisms used to deal with socio-cultural differences.
- **10 & 11:** These two questions delve into the effects of their experience around culture shock and acculturation into their own cultural identity (Kim, 2008).
- **12-15:** Questions 12 through 15 research deeper into the settlement, adaptation, acculturation phase into the Dutch host society and what thought or event processes led them to believe that they have overcome culture shock and feel settled into the social surroundings.
- **16:** The last question invited the respondents to reflect upon their whole timeline of events until the present, where they provide advice for other individuals that will go or are going through the process of integrating in the Netherlands.

3. Analysis

3.1 Thematic Map

Figure 3.1 below shows a general overview of how the initial themes were separated into different categories, and the outcomes that came from their integration process. The culture shocks that participants mentioned, explained and went through, opened a series of different coping mechanisms to deal with them. Berry (1997) describes the process of integration and acculturation as a voluntary and lengthy process, recognizing that in some cases these responses are necessary for survival.

Figure 3.1



re 3.1 Table of themes that led the analysis in the separation of different aspects/phases of the integration process.

The findings presented from the thematic analysis provided new insights that exceeded expected answers and showed diverse reasoning and retelling of their experiences as immigrants. Results were presented in the same order progression that the interview questionnaire was held, however, interpretation of the same were organized by the pre-

conceived concepts that informed the research question. The following findings are presented in an objective point of view, disclosing the immigrants' process through their integration journey. Brinkmann (2013) describes an efficient style of presenting results in qualitative interviewing, stating that interviews disclosed as a "realistic tale" have the virtues of "objectivity and reliability", and "render the account authentic and objective" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 122). At the best of my ability, as a researcher who has been in their seat and become acculturated to the Dutch culture, seeing both perspectives from the respondents' points of view, allowed a wider interpretation of their experiences. The cultural shocks they faced, as well as the slow progression of choices made throughout their time in the Netherlands revealed a small glimpse of their learning curves, behavior changes and relationship building skills while interacting with the Dutch host culture.

3.2 Acculturation

Respondents described both feeling like they were in an 'international bubble' and 'feeling welcomed' or 'at home' in their interactions with the host culture. Emotional responses to culture shock were reoccurring in all interviews. There is also distinction between emotional and sociocultural adaptation, that fed into the retroactive loop of social relationships formed between immigrants and locals (Berry et al., 2007, p.35; Sam & Berry, 2010, p.475). Embracing, being comfortable or known where directly associated with feeling at home, freedom of expression, and being able to be fully themselves inside their specific social environments. Acculturation strategies often "comprehend those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Herskovitz, 1936, p.149 as in Berry, 1997, p.7).

3.2.1 Integrating

Berry's (1997) model is widely focused on a sense of loss of self, and predominantly negative psychological outcomes from culture shock. However, surprisingly so, a salient factor in the interview was not about loss, but the opposite. Andersons' perspective of intercultural communication and a two-way interaction is accurate, given that individuals addressed and identified new sense of self, a sense of relief, freedom and contentment in their current state

(Anderson, 1994, p. 307; Klarenbeek, 2021, p.908). This is not to say that some respondents are "not there yet" regarding feeling at home in the Netherlands, but there are nonetheless unexpected and refreshing intakes to cultural shock given by immigrants firsthand (Respondent 5, male, 30). Showing a sense of curiosity and openness, the adaptation into the host culture proved to result in a less negative outcome after culture shocks were described and proved attuned to metacognitive and behavioral cultural intelligence skills (Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.13). These showed how respondents' willingness to handle intercultural interactions while pushing through shocks rewarded them with the renewal of their mindsets and social subtleties or 'cues'. In the bigger context of immigrants inside multicultural settings in the Dutch soil, culture shocks provided alternatives as to how they could adjust and feel both valued and valuable in their specific workplace or study environments (Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.18). Even though some interactions with the Dutch were not amicable for some respondents, they were able to experience the "real Dutch society". Respondent 5 communicated that he found himself immersed in mostly Dutch environment and felt more of an immigrant than before. Nevertheless, this supports the idea that avoiding interaction with only other like-minded people can deprive themselves from truly integrating into the "real Dutch society" versus being influenced by the locals in return (Respondent 5, male, 30; Anderson, 1994, p.307). A common perception that some immigrants shared, was that the locals had no interest in creating or fostering a bond with them. This perception was called a Dutch "bubble" (Respondent 5, male, 27). Nevertheless, it is notable that the internationals did not always emulate the behaviors of the locals, given that aspects that did not resonate with them personally, which contradicts the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974, p.69; Guan & So, 2016, p. 499). Respondents demonstrated that they were able to integrate regardless of if they felt identified with the Dutch behavioral, affective or cognitive habits.

3.2.2 Community

One point of convergence where respondents concurred on, was the need to seek a community. The importance of finding a like-minded community as an immigrant helped shape their initial points of contact. The struggles facing integration were frequently present in the data, usually around the first initial approaches to Dutch society. There are two opposing views and perceptions of the Dutch, and both outlooks were under the culture shock category. For a positive review of their encounter with the Dutch, they were described as: Open minded,

carefree, kind, unpresumptuous of their wealth and positively healthy/active. On the other side of the spectrum, the negative aspects of the Dutch left internationals trying to reach them, but being unable to establish deep, meaningful bonds. The negative side of the Dutch coin portrayed them as: Cold, indifferent, too direct, superficial, closed off, unable to show their emotions and efficient with people as they are with their financial assets. Findings suggest that the specific context in which they are immersed affects how they're integrating. "Finding your people" and creating new relationships as an adult proves easier in a university context versus the workplace, for "that's where the real Dutch society is" (Respondent 5, male, 30). In relation to a wider context, the Dutch have "no need" to find more friends, or relationships, because they do not have the same needs. This does not mean that they are completely oblivious to immigrants, but it does present a bigger challenge when paths are crossed and not understood. Anderson's (1997) theory of intercultural interaction relates to this theme, confirming that the two cultures are inevitably intertwined, but not completely immersed into one another. Respondent 22 had a clear vision of how the Dutch relate to internationals in her own University setting. She said: "…I think people sometimes have like this pre assumptions that Dutch people don't want to be friends with them. So that's also why they wouldn't put the effort to be friends with them" (Respondent 22, female, 24).

An analogy to illustrate this aligns to oil and water in a container, unless shaken and forced to mix, they somehow stay separate and manage to coexist simultaneously. Moving in deeper into conversation with respondents, their coping mechanism for social survival lied in building an intercultural *ecosystem* (Berry et al., 2006, p.324). The advantage that immigrants have, which can normally be regarded as a liability, is that they have the chance to choose their new community of settlement. In their country of provenance, they were already inserted in one that was not of their choice entirely. Their response to acculturating in the Netherlands provided them with new skills to blend into workplaces, church communities and other social circles. Additionally, their advice to find like-minded communities ties back to their own story of how they found their own belonging groups. Environments like church or sports associations where there are internationals and Dutch alike, forced them out of their own comfort zone and allowed them to create meaningful connections. Mentally, emotionally, socially and economically, they were challenged within their small communities of choice in their own cosmovision. Their struggles to integrate later became the same weapons they used to try and make connections. The findings in this section revealed more than one coping mechanism towards their integration, and partially supports the theory that immigrants have a more

successful socio-cultural adaptation with like-minded communities rather than with the locals (Berry et al., 2006, p. 325). Encountering like-minded community that welcome young immigrants lessened the negative effects of culture shock and finding other individuals that "are in the same boat" encouraged them to integrate further (Respondent 18, female, 23).

3.2.3 Competence in Coping

Frequently, immigrants refer to their integration as a struggle or a challenge. A theme identified is that of competence, that of being able to manage quotidian situations independently. Getting through the first months in the Netherlands proved a fast-learning curve and dyed with frustration, to which Respondent 11 stated that "…every immigrant lives a moment like that" eventually (Respondent 11, female, 30). Cultural shock and its different phases have a temporary effect, and it eventually fades away gradually over time. The adaptation process truly starts to present itself when their hard learned emotional, linguistic, vocational and social skills begin to appear. Existing research has emphasized that one of the effects of culture shock is 'loss of self' and have focused largely on the competence about the frequency of intercultural contact. Instead, the results support the notion that the focus should rather be on the "quality of such contact and the psychological mechanisms" behind behaviors adapted by immigrants (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p.60). The findings challenge this notion of loss and recode into one of gain (Bughra & Becker, 2005, p.21).

"I think also having sort of openness into what's happening here. Helps you to cope because if you're flexible enough to experience all these things right, it's kind of...It can be very enriching because you suddenly you start facing all these new approaches to life, right? Which is also it can be very amazing. And of course, I felt all the things I was leaving behind. ***But then how much you had to gain in here?*** If you put, if you set your mind to saying, OK, now I'm here, what can I do with what I have?" (Respondent 16, female, 30).

Previous experiences in their own or other countries had shaped they behavioral patterns related to their home culture. In foreign ground, the respondents gave the impression that they had let go of previous social pressures that did not align with their current environment. The Dutch independent spirit together with their "minding their own business" mindset, was welcomed by immigrants from collectivist societies. Relief was noticeable in their expressions while they described how they did not have to worry if "everyone has an

opinion about how you look", or "what would people think" about them (Respondent 23, male, 27; Respondent 9, male, 25). Fear of failure and judgement were predominant in 50% of the interviews. It was a natural response to starting a life again as an adult but made them even more determined to succeed in their goals. Having a guiding help is necessary to understand the bureaucratic paperwork procedures in Dutch, and some coincided that having someone to guide you took a lot of stress of their shoulders. Satisfaction after having overcome these bureaucratic, linguistic and social barriers, respondents reflected that if they had not come, they "would not be where I am now" (Respondent 14, female, 30). Coping or responding to outward stressors aligns with the concept deculturation, which materialized frequently, in individuals' response by learning a new culture by unlearning certain aspects of their own (Kim, 2008, p. 364).

Hybridly integrating is not solely a road of social connections, but of the renewal of preconceived mindsets related to our previous cultural patterns. The theme of competence factors into cognitive and behavioral resolution when facing pressure to adapt, perform in the workplace or create new approaches to social surroundings. The fusion between cultures opened a curiosity to question previous patterns, and from a new point of view of their own personality, cultural identity and their social self (Mead, 1964, p.207). In the following theme, cultural identity and the self will be discussed more in depth in relation to cultural maintenance. Respondent 8 suggested that through the five years she lived in the Netherlands until now, she discovered the number of things she could do and advised to "…give yourself the chance to explore others through exploring yourself"(Respondent 8, female, 27).

4. Cultural Identity & the Self

Respondents had certain elements that they integrated, but did not feel as if their cultural identity had been completely won over by the new expanded one. Expanding cultural habits is not equal to losing their native culture when it comes to acculturation and deculturation. The distinction between their personality and cultural identity was mentioned, and the interviews revealed how respondents had either a) elements from their own home culture that they did not align with them, or b) elements from the Dutch culture that resonated with them. During the interviews, the idea of identifying with the host culture or not was also presented. This is supported by the social identity theory and Adler's (1974) active definition of transitional culture shocks. Immigrants rather responded that they were personally not

aligned with previous cultural patterns, but that they welcomed the Dutch behavioral adjustments (e.g., being on time, directness). This also directly bled onto the collectivist versus individualist culture debate, that allowed participants to welcome new ways of "speaking up for themselves" and acknowledging how maybe their cultural patterns of collectivism might have been slightly invasive and close-minded (Early & Ang, 2003, p.171).

On the other hand, nationalism and sentiments of patriotism also enveloped respondents, as these were reinforced when encountering different aspects of the Dutch culture that did not resonate with them. Contrary to Berry's (1997) definition of separation, these responses or outcomes showed a slightly higher cultural identity maintenance, but did not necessarily blot out integration with the Dutch nationals. Finding balance between their "heightened sense of self" surfaced in their time in the Netherlands and their own culturally inherited behaviors proved to be an evolving process and not a static one (Sam & Berry, 2010, p.476; Kim, 2001, p.6). The concept of cultural maintenance explained through sentiments of exacerbated national feelings. Respondents felt "more Latvian" or "Sardinian" than before, probably related to the fact that they are no longer close to home (Respondent 5, male, 30; Respondent 23, male, 30). This, however, did not indirectly make them "resist" or "fight back" against the Dutch culture scene, but it did reinforce their own cultural identity.

Towards the middle of the semi-structured interview questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they also found that they identified with certain aspects of the Dutch culture. Multicultural individuals like immigrants develop a sense of not being enough of one culture or being a mixture of many. Verkuyten et al., (2019) describe why immigrants believe they do not fully belong to the host culture. They state: "…dual identities have psychological advantages. Incompatibility by previously formed and new social identities is probably common and unavoidable for most immigrants, and the result can be of "feeling neither" rather than a feeling of "being both" (Verkuyten et al., 2019, p.403).

4.1 Being "Both"

Partially or hybridly adopting the Dutch cultural habits and behaviors is not a direct causal relationship for no longer identifying as Moroccan, Argentinian, Italian, or Latvian anymore. The effects of culture shock added layers of complexity into the immigrant's chain of reactions while encountering frustrating, stressful and unfamiliar environments. There is no straight line in the way that culture shock affects their response, and how they choose to

integrate separate, or partially welcome Dutch behaviors. Diving deeper into the subject, the matter of identifying with the Dutch culture also brought topics of dual identification in their responses to integrate more seamlessly, but they were always somehow reminded that they were not entirely Dutch, either by language barriers or socio-cultural differences that were evident through interaction (Anderson, 1997, p.308). An invisible barrier still remained present and is drawn between the Dutch and immigrant international that speaks the language fluently, but that still is not accepted as a native.

In the results section, there are references toward a feigned tolerance towards immigrants and people that are second generations of Turkish and Moroccan descent. There are slight nuances in treatment while in interaction between the Dutch and internationals. In the study, the culture shocks, cultural identity crises and readjustments have shown how individuals respond to 'acculturative stress' (Berry, 1997, p.30). It was a challenge to portray an evenly distributed image of how immigrant's perception of the Dutch and their real-life interactions shaped their responses toward adapting. The aim is to produce a less polarizing and dichotomous view on integration, given that their outcomes in social settings were largely determined by the effort they had to put in. The perception of feigned tolerance from the Dutch created friction between the two sides and created a lack of trust between cultures (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015, p. 150). Regardless, there are genuine, transparent relationships that have emerged form out of intercultural exchange. Respondent 10 showed a bridge strategy that included both standing points.

"So well, I first of all, I try to be as flexible as possible cause **I was the one in their country**, so I'm trying to be like empathy, have a lot of empathy. Because I knew there were a lot of immigrants that were not willing to adapt into that culture or learn the Dutch language…"
(Respondent 10, female, 19)

Showing curiosity for the Dutch culture and recognizing the counter resistance that the Dutch may have towards immigrants, proved useful as a coping tool to reach a middle ground (Verkuyten et al., 2019, p.404). The outcomes of previously having researched about the Dutch culture and integrated accompanies the concept of metacognitive cultural intelligence. Respondent 10 revealed how the very behaviors that should isolate or make her feel unwelcome would be there very mechanism or 'mental schema' that guided her in her interactions

(Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p. 13). Of course, these adjustments or tweaks of their affective, cognitive and behavioral habits were not immediate, but started developing after repeated interaction and in building quality relationship with the Dutch and other internationals (Ward et al., 2001, p.267; Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p.60) contrasting view that emerged from the interviews, is that the overall majority of respondents tried to learn the language and adopt other Dutch traditions somehow it also seemed insufficient (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015, p.157). It proved not be entirely enough, because outsiders are "simply not Dutch" (Respondent 15, female, 35; Respondent 5, male, 30).

4.2 Feeling at Home

Emotional or affective responses to culture shock were commonly found in both female and male respondents. However, when asked about their definition of home and if they felt settled, answered differed. Male respondents attested to not being entirely sure if they were home already in the Netherlands. They spoke of being in the middle, and that home for them was "whatever is in between" (Respondent 11, male, 30). Another male respondent explained that his stay in the Netherlands was not seeking for a home to settle down in, but more a purposeful advancement of his work career. For women, these answers played out differently. Their feeling of being at home surrounded time spent in their homes, safety and independence not only related to their economic status, but also self-image and self-esteem. Even though the perception of feeling integrated, welcomed or at home may vary per individual, particularly the women addressed independence and freedom. Sentiments of self-expression, freedom and contentment ensued for the female respondents that recognized the Netherlands as their current homestead.

5. Deculturation or Hybrid response

Looking back at the literature, the ability to adapt certain cognitive, behavioral and socio-cultural aspects of the Dutch culture are signs of high Cultural Intelligence. This ability that immigrants have developed in their time in the Netherlands has lessened the negative effects of the culture shock that they have faced (Presbitero, 2016, p.30). The hybrid adoption of the host culture has resulted in a merging of both their native and new host cultural identities together. However, it was not an entirely direct indication that respondents considered

themselves as less or more Dutch than before. Respondents displayed similar cultural shocks in their individual experiences explaining that the shocks encountered later became an integral part of their coping mechanisms. In Acculturation and deculturation responses to culture shock, respondents displayed old habits that they let go of in favor of new capabilities to cope in the new host culture (Kim, 2008, p.363). They coped by a 'becoming that' and being "…able to find something in between our two cultures that is practical for us…" (Participant 11,female, 30). Out of 21 participants, 14 conveyed that directness was a shock to them, and their response resulted in adopting this directness in a hybrid like manner (Berry, 1997, p.9). While their own initial behaviors and cultural traits may have contrasted or clashed with this aspect of the Dutch, they maintained or balanced their own cultural identity while including the host culture's behavior. This coping mechanism to "find middle ground" helped them not be completely out of tune with their Dutch surroundings, all the while responding to the demands of the new environment. A constant skill that came through was the beforementioned flexibility, that demonstrates how walking between cultures can form a "dialectic between permanence and change" (Dubos, 1965 as in Kim, 2008, p.364; Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.13).

The hybrid stance also demonstrated different emotional and social connections between newcomers and the host nation. In the beginning stages, immigrants tend to seek deep, meaningful and helpful social connections. Within the society of settlement, the locals remain 'in the same place' and do not have the same social needs as immigrants have. Partially integrating into the Dutch society also implied for respondents that their initial encounters with the Dutch were "superficial" and did not entail a profound connection. The need for contact draws internationals towards other internationals for symbiotic and culturally similar relationships. Whereas with the Dutch locals, internationals may feel like their relationships are more elemental or 'instrumental' (Verkuyten et al., 2019, p.398). Managing to hybridly include Dutch cultural behaviors into their own cultural identities as well results in a dichotomous relationship. The codes for adaptation, adoption and hybrid integration showed signs of "being both", which leaves immigrants in an awkward middle ground, which does not necessarily encompass them in a negative box. Intersecting identities are usually a result of a rich exchange of cultures, where individuals are differentiated by their home culture, but achieve to relate to locals if they somehow manage to learn the language. Respondent 15 insisted on the importance of mixing in with both Dutch and Internationals saying: "With a mix of actual Dutch people and internationals, don't just look for people who come from the same country as yourself, because then you will never integrate" (Respondent 15, female, 35).

6. Rejecting the host culture

What Berry (1997) mentions as separation and marginalization, they been operationalized into the concept of rejecting the host culture. Culture shock produces psychological and emotional responses in individuals when exposed to a foreign culture. Some participants showed signs confusion, lack of will, and found it difficult to comprehend the Dutch sense of humor, food habits and directness. One respondent stated: “I just can’t understand it!” (Respondent 22, 27, male). Their lack of comprehension made integration difficult for them, and a sense of apprehensive and negative defense mechanisms ensued. This caused participants to ‘shut off’, ‘avoid’ or distance themselves inside social interactions with the Dutch. Aside from the fact that the two cultures are constantly colliding, and social cues are completely different, their choices to keep to their previous behavior or cultural habits are connected to themselves as a person, together with their cultural identity. In Latin American and Asian respondents, the shock was mainly shown around their friends sending a link to pay them back and seen as a “stingy” move. However, it would seem from the point of view of respondents, that their own need to be welcomed received when they arrive is also displayed later in these types of habits. The small resistance to the Dutch for the respondents is just “taking care of each other” (Respondent, male, 23). These reparative and cultural maintenance behaviors are “made to aid in reestablishing familiar cultural patterns of behavior or provide insultation from the foreign culture (Winkelman, 1994, p.122; Berry, 1997, p.9). Other patterns of rejection were found within the workplace, connected to immigrants’ language proficiency. Perceptions of unfair expectations from the locals towards immigrants in the workplace made them feel uncomfortable and as if they are “not doing enough to integrate” if they had not mastered the language quickly enough (Respondent 17, female, 27). This produced counter frustration from both sides and creates a strain within the workplace. Not speaking Dutch well enough caused immigrants to feel singled out and strained, even more on top of everything they were enduring behind the scenes. Other respondents gave the impression that Dutch speaking coworkers got job opportunities that they were perfectly qualified for but were reserved “for Dutch only” candidates.

7. Value & Socioeconomic Differences

Respondents maintained that their expectations and motivations to migrate were connected to an educational or career goal that they wanted to achieve. It is pertinent to point out that respondents that participated in this study belong to an upper middle-class setting, who had the economic and educational means to be able to migrate to the Netherlands. If the respondents would have entered the Netherlands in different conditions (e.g., refugees), their responses to integration might have differed greatly from the ones that were shared. Whereas as refugees, the acculturation process is not voluntary, possibly resulting in a more negative outcome of their integration (Berry, 1997, p.9). Because the process of acculturation in immigrants is voluntary, their responses towards culture shock tended toward seeking deeper connections with their Dutch peers. According to previous studies, immigrants tend to integrate and acculturate better than other nationals who may have a higher socioeconomic position (Berry & Sam, 2016, p.322). In the results shown, this notion was not as present as the literature previously points out. The socioeconomic position of the respondents remained at a normal level throughout their time in the Netherlands. And lastly, there were respondents who shared a common opinion on how the Dutch nationals take how their lives are for granted. Differences is value and appreciation for a better lifestyle were present in those respondents who were students. Student respondents agreed that there was a carelessness factor among their fellow Dutch peers in not showing up to class, not caring about their grades and taking opportunities for granted. Within the in group of students, internationals felt an aversion to this attitude, and contrary to the Social Identity Theory, they did not emulate these behaviors, but rather reinforced their efforts in their academic performance (Tajfel, 1974, p.69; Guan & So, 2016, p. 499).

A potential side note to mention during the examination of the interview transcripts, were the things that weren't mentioned. Among them, family relationships and previous immigration or intercultural experiences were seldom discussed the interviews (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p.70). Absent topics of conversations surrounding homesickness, previous intercultural experiences and encounters with other cultures before arriving to the Netherlands. In the integration phase, after a certain amount of time, the individuals felt like they were feeling welcomed, at home and content with their current social relationships and study/work status-quo. However, integration is not a straight line. Berry (1997), Anderson (1994) and Oberg (1960) all address different stages that are inherently on the pathway of individuals' integration in foreign host cultures. A final and fundamental insight that the twenty-two

interviews had pertained to the transformation and non-linearity of culture shock effects in their integration and cultural identities alike. No conclusive answer was a hundred percent integrated nor unchanged by their experiences, and their outcomes were interlinked with emotional, relational and social cues that underwent different transformations. Duality, or the concept of a dichotomous effect into their emotional, social and relational habits became the norm. Some integrated and learned things out of "no choice", while others welcomed a balance between past and present habits.

8. Creative Emotional Resilience

Findings suggest that one of the salient themes was correlated with emotional resilience. Observing the responses to culture shock provided a larger view of how emotions played a role in immigrant's' cross-cultural understanding. The mindset shifts, and cognitive appraisal of a new environment were correlated with their emotional response to their shocks. Oberg's (1960) model of four phases helped dissect and retrieve the different stages that respondents found themselves in at the moment of describing their adjustments (Ward et al, 2001, p.81). Until this point, the participants told of how their emotions played a part in their experiences, and it revealed the weight that they had in transitioning from one culture to another. Although the negative and positive aspects have been previously addressed, a transformative one has yet to be addressed properly (Berry, 1997, p.13). Majority of the emotions related to 'acculturative stress' led respondents to act upon their stressors. In addition to the positive and negative experiences, a mindset shift or 'rewiring' produced in them the drive to question, adjust and use those shifts in their current and future interactions with the Dutch nationals (Kim, 2008, p.366; Presbitero & Bernardo, 2018, p.13).

The emotional progression that respondents identified throughout the interviews revealed another insight that is connected with CQ and psychological well-being. Respondents unconsciously drew a line that revealed their emotional trajectory from their point of arrival until their present state (Adler, 1975, p.15). Aligning with the previously mentioned concepts of metacognitive CQ, respondents that exhibited higher levels of CQ were able to adapt more easily, once having gone through culture shocks (Lin et al., 2012, p.549; Juràzek & Wawrosz, 2023, p.12). Respondent 8 brought about a reflection of how she perceived her own emotions and those of the Dutch host culture saying: "There is no in between. When you develop emotion and you develop like how to be intelligent about your emotions" (Respondents 8, female, 27).

Another account for resilience and metacognitive CQ was supported by unanimous sentiments of growth in terms of mindset and building a stronger character out of the interactions of the Dutch. Respondent 6 mentioned a comfort zone, explaining that the experiences in her workplace had mentally challenged her own beliefs, and drove her to not only challenge them, but shift them. She said: “Moving abroad into cultural differences, because without experiencing those moments, you don't really know. The differences and what you're gonna like and what you're not gonna like. And what's gonna work with for you and what's not gonna work?” (Respondent 6, female,21). In addition, feelings of independence were also found frequently within the interviews. In his paper , *The transational experience*, Adler (1975) explains how the internalized behaviors and the absorbing of exogenous ones through our emotions can influence our responses in interactions. He states:

“The individual learns that behavior rises out of a complex of motivations and intentions that stem predominately from his or her cultural vocabulary. Feelings, and the ways in which the world is experienced, are reflected in the abilities to communicate, to enter interpersonal relationships, to perceive and deal with differences, and to behave in new situations for which there is no personal precedent” (Adler, 1975, p. 20)

Echoing Anderson’s review of cross cultural adaptation, the emotional responses in the findings support her claim that acculturation can have multiple, complex, and non-linear outcomes from interaction (Anderson, 1994, p. 308). Especially in the affective and cognitive levels, through interaction have proven to “enhance self-esteem and cultural identity” as well (Sam & Berry, 259).

4. Findings

The following section is an objective reproduction of the (n=23) semi structured interviews held together with young immigrants from varying nationalities.

4.1 Culture Shocks: Individualistic Mindset vs Collective mindset

Many participants expressed that one of the first cultural shocks they had gone through was how individualistic the Dutch people are. Coming from a collectivistic society or mindset, where consideration of a larger array of individuals would be the norm, individuals saw this as a big culture shock. A repeated pattern was set inside the context of the workplace where internationals are among Dutch coworkers. One of the interviewees pointed out that "I am missing a bit of that collectivistic sense of working together in a team and that kind of unity. It feels a bit less united here, I would say" (Participant 16, female, 21). The comparison between their own preexisting collectivist mindset and the individualistic culture appeared in (out of 20). Additionally, there were shared thoughts on how the Dutch have a knack for questioning authority, for being very vocal with their opinions and that "They're not afraid to voice their opinion, but that doesn't also mean that you can just run people over. Regardless of who they are" (Participant 11, female, 38). This initially shocked participants in the sense that they came from cultures where being straightforward or sharing their opinion was considered selfish, rude or bothersome. Four out of the twenty participants, two from Hong Kong, one from Romania, and one from Indonesia, said that they felt somewhat surprised or confronted with being asked individually what they wanted out of a workplace meeting, or what their individual thoughts were about a specific topic. This confronted them with a new mindset, that enabled them to consider or question their previous beliefs and habits regarding giving your own opinion. Adding on to the individualistic culture, it had positive and negative insights on the matter. Criticism or a negative impact of this shock showed that because the culture is individualistic, the Dutch remain "in their own bubble", keeping to themselves rather than mixing or integrating with internationals (Participant 7, male, 23).

4.2 Shockingly direct? Or just rude?

Tying in from the individualistic behaviors that the respondents perceived as a shock, another pattern had prominence when asking about shocks. Number out of 22 respondents

concurred to the characteristic 'Dutch directness' was evident in their social circles and workplaces. Comments arose as to whether this was a virtue or just "an excuse to be rude". Other respondents answered that they perceived it as disguise for stating their opinions unapologetically. Two sentiments arose, that of it being a positive influence on their own mindset or behavior, and the other of taking offense and being bewildered by how bluntly they were addressed by other individuals. The first allowed individuals to obtain a newfound sense of empowerment to express themselves without fear, and the latter resulting in not feeling welcome or included in their circles. Much of the reactions, or emotional responses, to these interactions gave way to feelings like frustration, confusion and alertness, all signs of 'acculturative stress' (Berry 1997, p.30). When comparing the two cultures, foreign and local, the participants identified the contrast between social approaches in directness, and the answers had different outcomes. Participant 6 admitted that she had to "…adapt to that mindset of being able to say; this is what I want" , adding that the process "was a learning curve of kind of understanding how to fit into a team with individualistic mindset" (Participant 6, female, 21). In addition, the blunt form of communication clashed with the respondents, because they felt that their emotions were not being considered. Reflections as to why are the Dutch so good at thinking ahead regarding planning, but not very good at thinking ahead about feelings were discussed by respondent 11 saying; "Dutch culture don't have… doesn't have this aspect of thinking ahead what the other person is going to feel" (Respondent 11, female, 30). The dual outcome from this culture shock resulted in the steep learning curve of understanding a few insights of this culture shock. The first, is that "it's not personal", the Dutch are not "out to offend you", but rather efficiently communicate while taking emotion out of the equation. The second insight pertains to understanding their logic led thinking patterns, and that sometimes much like they plan with a lot of preparation and anticipation, they also 'get ahead' by cutting corners in social conversations, especially present in respondents that mentioned the workplace.

4.3 Seeking connection

The food, weather and spending culture were other shocks that came with underwhelming reactions. Lack of focus on food being a social excuse for connection, was another pattern that came from the interviews, leaving participants feeling as if there was a lack of consideration, time investment, and care. Observations were made that the Dutch go for simplicity, rather than making the effort to make a full meal. Different dials of generosity, kindness and time investment around food and social relationships bewildered respondents.

Disappointment, frustration and a mismatch in expectations when socializing where attached to how the Dutch schedule appointments to spend time with others. For the respondents, allocating a specific time frame for social connection made them feel like others did not want to spend more than a certain amount of time with them than necessary. The need for social investment and lack of spontaneity was another salient factor in the findings. Excessive planning, unavailability and inelastic willingness to change already made plans gave the impression that the Dutch were "just not interested" in mixing in with the internationals. A "lack of effort" resulted in respondents feeling unwelcome or not taken into consideration when scarce food arrangements surrounded the table. The retelling of respondents' experiences around Dutch tables and gatherings between coworkers or friends, left them feeling disconnected, and expressed that they would "like to see some effort" (Respondent 22, male, 27). A lot of the cultural habits that immigrants are still attached to come from social behaviors that translate into intentionality. With time, food and economic behaviors, respondents revealed feelings both related to frustration and confusion when dealing with accountability for money spending or splitting rather small amounts equally. Respondents replied that they felt that this area was an integrational aspect that opens when becoming closer to the Dutch. Respondent 19 put it in the following manner: "… like here you need to crack them up a bit and get into...Their inner thing. And then yes, they will be warm and generous et cetera, but you need to get in" (Respondent 19, female, 27). A position that became reiterated was the difficulty in reaching and connecting with the Dutch. Immigrants felt like the Dutch do not share the same need to make social connections as they do.

4.4 Coping Mechanisms facing cultural differences

After mentioning the first initial cultural shocks and biggest confrontations with the Dutch culture, I asked the participants how they delt with this intercultural exchange when they arrived. Different coping mechanisms were unveiled, varying in approach and emotional processing. The respondents asked what the question meant, and I proceeded to describe that coping meant navigating those cultural differences, and that those mechanisms resembled "how one chooses to cope with the differences"(Ward & Searle, 1991, p.219). The coping mechanisms were set apart in two veins. The first, they resorted to respond with shifting their own mindset and a willingness to try to "accept the Dutch way" into their own behavior (Participant 4, male, 34). They made efforts to understand the behaviors of the host culture, expressing their need to "have a lot of empathy", to "respect the culture" and "adopt" those behaviors. As a result of these choices, I could observe that the respondents had a common

desire. With a few exceptions, most respondents made the effort to blend into the Dutch social life in the Netherlands by "being able to embrace" those differences they faced (Participant 9, male, 25).

And in the second vein of coping with socio-cultural differences, participants were focused on how "we can also affect each other, influence each other in a positive way. And sometimes change what we think about each other" and "learn to adapt and embrace it" (Respondent 20, female, 45; Respondent 18, female, 23). Whether the responses related to their integration were acculturative, deculturation or marginalization, a common response to these was implementing coping mechanisms deal with the socio-cultural differences. A progression and evolution of these coping mechanisms was detected as the interview questionnaire delved deeper into the reasons why and how the respondents thought of a time where they felt truly integrated and at ease in the Netherlands. The learning curves drove individuals to seek the middle ground where they could meet the Dutch halfway. Even though there was a palpable "friction" between not only themselves and the Dutch, but inside a multicultural city like Rotterdam, they learned to "embrace the friction" (Respondent 9, male, 25). After some time of being in the Netherlands, they also identified that they themselves had to eventually "become that" to an extent.

4.5 Acculturation: Adopting 'The Dutch way'

Respondents identified in themselves the need or obligation to integrate by assimilating their own mindset and habits with those of the host culture. This conscious or unconscious decision helped them integrate well into their workplace environments and social circles. However, it was not a unanimous sentiment across all respondents. Some stated that there is also a 'social international bubble' that doesn't require nor force them to either learn the language, or 'reach out' to individuals from the host society. This was the case for the respondents who were still attending university. Within the workplace, a similar yet distinctive dynamic took place, where Dutch individuals spoke their native language, and on the other hand forcing newcoming foreigners to learn the language because they were left no choice. As well, another identified pattern was that the host society lives within their 'own bubble', and don't seek to initiate or deepen social bonds with immigrants. Going further, there is a superficial 'curiosity' that resembles more an interrogation rather than an intention to really get to know immigrants. The process of integration for immigrants has a bigger emotional and social load, which is connected to the high expectations for achievements in career and

education while living in the Netherlands. They could also identify pretty quickly that the Dutch don't have the need to make deep relationships with immigrants, because they already have their own social circle formed, so starting from scratch "is not a reality for them" (Participant 11, female, 30). And on the other hand, immigrants starting their lives again in a new setting, feel the need to make meaningful connections and finding a like-minded community. This caused a feeling of estrangement or detachment from the respondents towards making the effort to integrate. Even if respondents were already in the country for a while, they said that they had difficulties in integrating, saying that immigrants are "expected to integrate by themselves" and that in that process they started to identify themselves as such, as immigrants, without realizing it (Participant 14, female, 30; Participant 5, male, 30). This point of view is taken from the respondents, taking into consideration that these are the experiences that they have. It would be also intuitive to reflect on how the Dutch locals live these scenarios in their daily lives.

4.5.1 Communities of Faith

More than 50% of respondents mentioned that as soon as they arrived, they looked for a church community to seek out new connections. Thirteen out of twenty-three respondents were part of the Christian faith and asserted that they were welcomed by finding church families. In the beginning stages especially, one respondent claimed that she was "going through some difficult times in those few months and I think kind of having that caring environment" had made a big difference, even though she did not know anyone (Respondent 6, female, 21). Interviewees explained how finding a community that aligned with their values helped them feel supported and connected to others who were like-minded. Among the thirteen respondents, a common pattern was the feeling of church being like a family, a safe place where they could have support and comfort as soon as they had arrived in the Netherlands. They spoke of how they had found "a real connection, a genuine one that people are willing to really accept you, support you and similar to a family member" (Respondent 7, male, 24). While not knowing people directly, respondents had similar expectations of finding community within church circles. Their expectations were also professed in terms of not only finding community and support, but "to have friends, and you know, have a social circle" (Respondent 15, female, 35). Another respondent proceeded to articulate that one of her culture shocks had been "lack of God and faith in this country" and that it had affected her in her workplace relationships (Respondent 1, female, 42). In the workplace, often respondents were the minority that believed in the Christian faith, while their colleagues showed contempt, made fun of or diminished their

beliefs, making them feel like the odd one out. Two aspects were salient in the results related to faith-based communities. On the one hand, respondents sensed a lack of belief in their Dutch surroundings, and on the other, they spoke about the benefits and positive integrational aspects that the church had had for them. Especially in university and in workplace contexts, some of the respondents found it difficult to find other young adults that shared their same values. Respondent 2 painted the picture in the following manner: "You're out here and maybe you are a uni and nine out of 10 people you speak with will not have a religion" (Respondent 2, male, 27).

4.6 Biggest excluder and includer: Language

Among the participants, out of 22 interviews, 90% of respondents mentioned that language was simultaneously the biggest barrier and integrator. Asking them what advice they would give to immigrants, a common and recurring warning was to "not underestimate the language" (Participant 5, male, 30). It was also pointed out that within social circles, the Dutch were prone to use language "as an exclusionary mechanism", purposefully speaking Dutch in front of other international colleagues in the office (Participant, female, 30). Others denoted the opposite attitude, saying that "even if they hear that you're struggling with Dutch, they will switch to English" , to which interviewees felt grateful for (Participant 1, female, 42). In lieu of not generalizing nor negatively portraying the language barrier, other participants did express that there was a convenient advantage that most Dutch people speak English and that were willing to meet them half-way. Other aspects that came to the surface were the unfair expectations that foreigners should learn Dutch in a matter of a few months fluently. Some experienced backlash from Dutch individuals in their workplaces for not doing so. Being linguistically fluent as an immigrant was often described as an advantage, where a "majority culture may seem less threatening and more inviting as the individual becomes more linguistically and socially fluent in this new culture" (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p.21). The language barrier kept respondents at a distance and further frustrated their efforts to integrate, despite learning the language and achieving a reasonable level of fluency in the Dutch language.

4.7 Separation: "I'm keeping that"

A lot of the responses related to rejecting certain behaviors from the host culture were psychological, relational and economical (Berry, 1997, p.6; Phinney, 2003 as in Berry et al.,

2006, p.305). Immigrants found it hard to relate to behaviors around social life, food and money. They mentioned a 'lack of effort' in social settings where the attitudes of the immigrants in contrast with the Dutch clashed. This deduction was not only common among south European and south American respondents, but also from Northern Europe. They described this resistance as perceived coldness, individualistic and calculating nature of the Dutch. These behavioral aspects of the Dutch culture, in their opinion, took away y took away the warmth and spontaneity in social relationships. Other patterns of refusal to adapt were related to the food culture. Refusing to eat at 6PM, eating at their work desks and simply "having a sandwich" for lunch were not culturally enticing behaviors. They were addressed as foreign and unappealing. The different behaviors surrounding food especially roused an emotional reaction from respondents and a strong resistance to acculturating Dutch food habits.

To illustrate this image further, three respondents are compared against each other, all having the same mindset in regard to sharing meals, time, and money with friends or acquaintances. Different dials of kindness and generosity were identified and perhaps overlooked because they were not similar to their own. Respondents 7, 11 and 22 all coincided that the food culture was something that they were not going to be adopting. Expressions like "That's a little too much for me", or " I could never do that" usually surrounded the topic of food (Respondent 7, male, 25; Respondent 11, female, 30 ; Respondent 22, female, 24). They all seemed to recognize a lack of effort from the Dutch locals. They also expressed that taking care of their friends, being hospitable and open to others in their home were characteristic of their home culture. However, they did acknowledge that the Dutch had healthier boundaries in regard to who they let in their houses, and that the kindness and generosity is shown differently.

4.7.1 Feigning Tolerance & Racism

Racism, discrimination, and feigned tolerance became a pattern in a few of the respondents' interviews. Five out of twenty-three respondents had uncomfortable encounters with the Dutch. These encounters where described as situations of great discomfort, along with discrimination and harassment for either not speaking the language, nationality or appearance. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, there is a well-known animosity towards individuals from Moroccan-Turkish descent, immigrants, and asylum seekers. A few of the participants of this study, ranging from younger ages 27-35, indicated that they had seen how the Dutch could feel threatened by a greater population of immigrants, but treated them

differently (Respondent 4, male, 34). Assumptions based on appearances, anger outbursts from elderly Dutch people within their workplace, doctors' appointments and other social environments left respondents feeling stressed, with panic attacks, unwelcomed and frustrated. A feigned tolerance from the Dutch towards other nationalities was described by respondent 2 in the following manner:

"And then people come, and they feel a lot of intolerance. Then there's a mismatch of expectation there. So, I can imagine, maybe Moroccan and Turkish people already know this, that when they come here, they know, ah, local, Dutch people are going to view them very different. Not everyone. But there is that sentiment." (Respondent 2, male, 27).

4.8 Cultural Identity

In the span of the interviews, while going through the initial codes, a few participants portrayed a common rejection and adoption pattern. They showed an exchange or 'two-way integration' process, that allowed them to seemingly "become Dutch" , thus altering their own cultural identity to a certain degree (Participant 1,female, 45). As mentioned previously, resistance to adopt new behaviors, traditions and culture may come from unconsciously trying to avoid the 'loss of self' in an unknown or new setting. Kim (2008) describes a concept known as 'deculturation', which pertains to the 'shedding' of one's own cultural habits that no longer serve them in their society of settlement (Kim, 2008, p.363; Berry, 1997,p.18). Listening to the respondents talk about the attitudes that they have chosen to leave behind, they spoke without disdain or sadness, but emanated a certain sureness, knowing that change needed to happen in order "to survive" (Respondent 8, female, 27). Only one respondent out of the twenty-two interviewed, showed a sincere desire to leave her previous cultural identity behind. She explained : "I actively try my best to have no connection with my culture" (Respondent 21, female, 35). When digging further, she didn't necessarily want to cut off her cultural heritage, but a lot of the connection that she no longer wanted remained engrained in it. However, she insisted that the Persian culture is beautiful, something to be passed on to her children. On the other hand, residing in the Netherlands also made their identification with their home country stronger, looking and comparing between the Netherlands and what they missed from their own environments. "As I said before, I definitely started appreciating me being Polish" (Respondent 12, female, 22). The culture shocks encountered highlighted aspects of their own culture that they may have previously taken for granted or inevitably compared next to the Dutch way of

life. As well, when inquiring about the parts of the Dutch culture that made them change or rearrange their own habits. respondents with a longer period of permanence in the country displayed a particular ability. That of being able "locate points of consent and complementarity beyond the points of difference and contention" (Kim, 2008, p.364). This process of 'shedding' or 'deculturation' allowed them to have a bigger flexibility, leaving old customs that were no longer useful in Dutch culture, while keeping some of their original cultural identity and traditions. A hybrid response to integrating into the Dutch social fabric showed signs of 'shedding' but also expanding. Participant 14 stated the following: "I do not feel that I have erased parts of me or left behind parts of me, parts of my cultural identity. But rather they have transformed or like grew, and expanded into new ones" (Participant 14 , female, 30). It is difficult for immigrants or individuals not to be affected by the host culture, and vice versa (Berry et al., 2006, p.306; Sam & Berry, 2010, p.475). In this affected stance, individuals develop a flexibility in their cultural identity. In addition, other participants stressed that they also developed a knack to adjust their cultural identity depending on which group of individuals they were surrounded by. Participant 19 stated: "So, if I am meeting up with other like Northern European friends, I kind of like adjust to their style, which is more like a Dutch. But then if I if I meet up with Spanish friends, then it's like the same, you know, as us" (Participant 19, female, 27). The adjustment or tailoring of their cultural identity depending on the context was not unanimous, but did present itself in various interviews.

4.8.1 Personality vs. Cultural identity

To add to the flexibility, a slight nuance or glimpse of their integration proved to show a distinction between their own personalities and their cultural identity. Oftentimes there were shared thoughts of cultivating their best self, and that a new personal, cultural identity was being forged during their experience in the Netherlands. The distinction between personality and cultural identity had blurry lines in the sense that the two were tied together, and at the same time, individuals referred to this newfound identity as being able to be "unapologetically themselves, and I feel like that's something that I've integrated in my life to be myself more and be the odd one out once in a while"(Participant 17, 27, female). The idea that the transformation of the self is not only tied to the sense of loss of self previously mentioned, but also gives way to a new cultural identity with "new cultural aesthetic and emotional sensibilities" are forged (Gooney, 2005 as in Kim, 2008, p.363). This newfound sense of self

was described in conjunction with a sense of freedom, independence and sense of realization. The participants recognized this shift in themselves, and Participant 9 explained: "…how free I was to be myself, whether that was with religious identity, with my cultural identity, they allowed me to kind of be like that. I found a circle" (Participant 9, male, 25). The responses regarding this emerging data proved to hold insights regarding culture shock and cultural identities. However, it strayed slightly outside the boundaries of this thesis. There is great intricate value about the unseen and underexplored nuances of cultural identity in immigrants, like the distinction between shedding one's own personality traits that no longer serve a new context, versus leaving cultural habits behind. This vein of research could become a rich and fruitful topic to explore further.

4.9 Integration & feeling 'at home'

As the semi-structured interviews ended, the participants were asked if they considered that the Netherlands was now inside their definition of home. Together with that final reflection, they also were asked to ponder an interaction, moment or event that made them feel welcomed and truly integrated. Factors that influenced positive answers where centered around being more knowledgeable in the Dutch language, personal growth and rediscovering who they are outside of their comfort zones. Female respondents gave impressions of feeling at home or settled that were connected around a sense of freedom, independence and physical safety. Especially among South American women (mainly Argentina and Uruguay) where both physical and economic safety are not the norm, the sudden contrast made them feel safe, and at peace. Being and feeling safe made the notion of 'home' a lot more tangible and palpable. For the male respondents, feeling at home was more related or connected to the amount of time spent here in the Netherlands, along with economic stability and work life satisfaction. These factors mentioned also influenced respondents wanting to stay in the Netherlands long term. Only a few respondents expressed that they were "open to whatever opportunities arise" abroad, or that their motivations for staying were connected to a temporal goal to improve their careers. 10% of respondents have moved more than twice in their lives, and so their definition of home was not tied to a physical space, but the individuals and relationships around them.

"I think I was also able to kind of understand myself as an individual. My needs and kind of gravitate towards the people that were like me or helped me grow as a person, so I think that

really does build a home for me. I think, like I said, it's still the people, but it looks different than what it used to be like" (Respondent 6, female, 21).

Personal, spiritual and professional growth were tied together with the feeling of home. A vast majority of the respondents came to the Netherlands with the idea of building a future and noted that their experiences here turned them into adults. Without the support of their own family or community, they were forced to choose and find their own. When they did, they related the connection with people of their choosing to be equal to a home. Respondent 6 said that "to decide for myself what my community is here rather than back home, what my community was for my parents" (Respondent 6, female, 21). There was one last distinctive note that came towards the end of the interview, where individuals reflected on the relationships they have formed in their time so far in the Netherlands. Even though they shared rooms, had different groups of friends that they frequently got together with, some respondents included their Dutch friends as part of their definition of home. Despite cultural differences that they addressed, they insisted on relaying that "even if they're Dutch, yes, they're my people" (Respondent 2, male, 27).

4.9.2 Back home, we do it like this...

Together with the accounts of how the participants integrated into the Dutch culture, they inevitably recurred to comparing their own previous culture, going back and forth between their previous lifestyle dynamics and cultural behaviors. This comparison also brought an opportunity for respondents to question why they mainained or no longer idenitified with certain aspects of their home culture. A triple outlook on this particular comparison arised. One was of questioning their own beliefs and cultural behavior, and the other was of critically observing how and why the Dutch operate. The third outlook became an interesting counter tool that repsondents showcased a need to share their own way of operating, showing affection and flexibility in their interactions with the Dutch. Respondent 12 intuitively discerned that the Dutch held a much healthier work/life balance than in her previous country. She confessed that she had not had particularly strong culture shocks, but that the contrast between Poland and Dutch working culture was a welcome addition. Together with Northern Europeans, the Italian and Greek respondents also resonated with this balance, comparing it to the unhealthy, rigorous and dreary working conditions they had at home. They noticed that the Dutch culture had embedded the habit of taking care of themselves, and not defining themselves through work.

"All of these have good connotations.... While here, because there is a certain work life balance and very strict boundaries in like, overworking and overcompensating is often regarded as a bad trait of not taking care of oneself and not knowing not only when to stop but having bad management skills" (Respondent 14, female, 30)

Echoing the sense of relief in comparing the working and self-care culture, respondent 5 stated that he found this "fascinating", and led him to question previous thoughts patterns around self-care being selfish (Respondent 5, male, 30). Respondent 3 observed that it was "cool to learn about, like people who operate through completely different, let's say, rules" that were much in contrast to his Italian upbringing (Respondent 3, male, 23). Another expression of the same sentiment came across in teaching her Dutch colleagues about her Argentinean way of living. She asked them: "how do you not know about this kind of way of living, you know? I felt it was kind of my duty…" (Respondent 10, female, 19). Other feelings like frustration and bewilderment were mentioned as well, and she spoke of how her colleagues showed her a different way of living as well.

4.9.3 Advice to newcomers

In the final stages of the interview, once the respondents had spoken about their own story, they were asked to give aspiring or newcoming immigrants some advice. The answers spanned through emotional intelligence, social and more technical aspects of being an immigrant and their integration. Respondents gravitated towards the information regarding the Netherlands that they wished someone had told them before arriving. Others contributed in a more personalized manner, encouraging new immigrants to "not replicate their previous dynamic" that they might have had at home, to "embrace the Dutch culture" despite feeling lost (Respondent 8, female, 27; Respondent 4, male, 34). "Don't take things personally" and "have an open mind", were the other two most common suggestions between respondents, that (Respondent 3, male, 22; Respondent 22, female, 24). The most prominent advice that was to find a community "that suits you well" as soon as they arrive. They insisted that it had helped them to deal with cultural shocks and allowed them to share experiences with other peers (Respondent 10, female, 19). The advice offered was mostly surrounded by things they wished someone would have told them before arriving. Finding like-minded or culturally similar social circles was a strategy that made them feel accompanied, safe and less like they did not belong

in the Netherlands. After the more technical aspects were shared, respondents also spoke about emotional and cultural intelligence. They recognized that how they processed and communicated was emotionally led, and it caused them a lot of distress in the beginning. Respondents shared that they perceived the Dutch to struggle to show their emotions, or that they were not as evident as theirs were. The topics of embracing, respecting the host culture and openness were salient as well. Navigating international communities inside Rotterdam and balancing friendships with the Dutch gave them the tools to understand their surroundings and themselves more. A former student explained: “So I think the idea that embracing different cultures and there's gonna be some conflicts or some maybe points of friction, let's say, and being able to embrace that and understand that…that doesn't mean that it's all completely personal, right?” (Respondent 9, male, 25). A big common shock, previously mentioned, was that of directness. And in order to arm newcomers against shocks and distress, a word against taking offense, learning the language, finding community and embracing different cultures became the most prominent pieces of advice. Together with the accounts of how the participants integrated into the Dutch culture, they inevitably recurred to comparing their own previous culture, going back and forth between their previous lifestyle dynamics and cultural behaviors. This comparison also brought forth another reflection as to why they mainained certain aspects of their home culture.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The study of (n=23) immigrants interviews revealed how culture shock influenced their decisions in their acculturation process in the Netherlands. Part of the acculturation model described by Berry (1997), entails that the encounter of differing cultures can cause feelings of bereavement, feeling unsettled and other emotional reactions. What was salient in the results, is that the same cultural shocks that participants had a difficult time adjusting to, where the same things that they ended up adapting into their own cognitive and behavioral habits. The amount of time that the respondents resided in the country was not completely related to the way they had adapted certain coping mechanisms as part of their integration process. Students or individuals coming to the Netherlands for work opportunities from a South American background, showed signs of a boundary, or showed more resistance, by not allowing themselves to adopt certain traits or behaviors. Furthermore, the culture shocks experienced by immigrants varied in degrees of impact, and their answers proved to have more than one facet to their responses. Contrary to previous studies, immigrants had more than one answer towards their acculturation and how their cultural identities were affected (e.g., Berry et al., 2006).

The responses linked to acculturation strategies, revealed the different social coping mechanisms the respondents had when encountering friction with the host culture. Capturing their personal accounts of their experiences exhumed an intrinsic truth about immigrant integration: what to some may have come across as a shock, to others was a means to build a bridge. Regardless of the acculturation strategies they clung to, or the culture shock phase that they found themselves in, both immigrants and locals were embedded in a retroactive loop between friction and accommodation. A "mutual accommodation" needed to take place for this retroactive loop to work, creating an expansion of cultural identity, flexibility in the nuances of social culture and a richer integration process for both parties involved (Berry, 1997, p.10).

In retrospect, looking at the initial shock of the respondents towards how individualist the Dutch are in and out of the workplace, their assessments are not far away from previous studies comparing individualism and collectivism in cross-culture contact (Furnham et al.,

2001, p. 11). On both sides, between the immigrants and the locals, there can be concessions made, given that individuals process information differently (Furnham et al., 2001, p.75).

Differences in perceptions of locals and immigrants also played a part in how the respondents built new social connections inside their universities and the workplace. Immigrants from South America, Eastern Europe, South Africa and Asia prominently would concur that a more collectivist approach to socializing, working and behaving is considered the preferred over the individualist Dutch society. However, being met with the complete opposite side of the coin can cause a minor culture identity crisis and the disarray of immigrant's 'normal' behavior. This proved not to be the case in majority of the interviews that were conducted, the changes in cultural identity had a hybrid nature that characterized them. Feelings of empathy, curiosity and genuine efforts to acculturate to the Dutch culture were captured in the responses retrieved from the participants. In connection with their cultural identity, they were resistant to identify as Dutch but demonstrated signs of meeting in the middle.

Other perceptions from the Dutch towards immigrants also proved to show how the immigrants feel perceived by their host culture, especially in the language proficiency areas. There can be a common ground where the immigrant feels seen and the Dutchman doesn't feel as if their culture is being threatened. In a study made by Slootman and Duyvendak (2015), they quoted anthropologist Peter Geschiere, who he spoke about why the Dutch feel threatened by outsiders, and how the policy strategies from the government meant to be inclusive, have caused the opposite effect in immigrants in the Netherlands. He stated, "The idea seems to be, indeed, that Dutch identity must 'cannibalize' other identities to turn immigrants into reliable citizens" (Geschiere, as in Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015, p.153).

Immigrants may feel like the Dutch don't care or are indifferent to their situations and adaptation into society. However, Oberg (1960) rightly states that the distance may be bigger because we have "not bothered to find out" enough about the host culture, and perceive their indifference (Oberg, 1960, p. 145). Being bothered to find out also relates to what Klarenbeek (2021) and Anderson (1994) have called the 'two-way integration' and 'intercultural communication' between immigrants and the host culture. Of course, this is a statement that relied on this specific study of second-generation Moroccans and Turkish individuals, in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. After ten years, in 2025, the younger generation might feel differently than the older one. High expectations for immigrants to 'integrate by themselves' and to learn the language as soon as they arrived revealed signs of acculturative stress and touched upon their self-esteem.

Following the first culture shocks, the motivations for moving were also discussed. Most of the respondents came to the Netherlands because their previous living and socioeconomic conditions in their own countries were not helping them thrive. Other motivations lied with the desire to build a life again, pursue a degree in higher education or higher career steppingstones. From a Dutch perspective, preexisting assumptions about cultural stereotypes allotted to newcomers did not significantly hinder their integration process. Other notions like feigned tolerance, cultural identity shifts and cultural maintenance illustrated how respondents either separated themselves, integrated or hybridly tried to insert themselves into their Dutch circles. Immigrants' perception of how the Dutch view immigrants made them choose different coping mechanisms that pertained to learning the language, adopting certain behaviors out of curiosity, respect and fascination with the Dutch culture. A smaller percentage could not comprehend certain aspects of the Dutch society, which mostly included social conventions around food, blunt directness and other relationship "unspoken" rules regarding money and putting in the effort.

Additionally, findings revealed that the use of metacognitive and behavioral CQ to be present in the acculturation journey that the respondents shared. The multiple experiences narrated and dissected coincided with the beneficial learning curves that CQ is described to have in minimizing and moderating the effects of culture shock (Lin et al., 2012, p.549; Juràzek & Wawrosz, 2023, p.12). Often, the themes of competence and finding a middle ground between the two cultures proved the most effective tool to cope in the Netherlands.

5.2 Limitations

5.2.1 Research Limitations & Researcher positionality

This thesis was specifically designed to understand the effect of culture shock in immigrants' responses to integration and their cultural identity. After (n=23) individuals were interviewed, the coding process allowed a bigger filtering of themes through which a positive, negative or hybrid response toward integration took place. Limitations to this research lie in the sample representation bias in gender, where a prevalence of the female was bigger than the male participants, this was due to a time and availability limitation (Flick, 2009, p. 122). As a researcher, an emic research positionality allowed me to have better connection with respondents, having gone through culture shock process as well. However, it does not guarantee that the outcome of the analysis could be considered completely bias free (Holmes, 2020, p.6). For the realization of the analysis, my personal experience as an immigrant, but also from the

standing point as a researcher, the process of drawing the conclusions from the thematic analysis may have a different outlook than from an individual who has never migrated (Gibbs, 2007, p.45-46). Holmes (2020) describes how either being an 'insider' or 'outsider' both have its advantages and disadvantages, depending on the research purpose and circumstances. Those advantages range from creating a more meaningful questionnaire, more transparent answers and an overall ability to "produce a more truthful, authentic or "thick description" of the accounts of respondents" (Geertz, 1973 as in Holmes, 2020, p.6). For a future study, the demographic data drawn from the survey could also be used as independent variables, to compare how their time, age, gender and nationality have a causal relationship regarding their integration satisfaction as the dependent variable. In doing so, it would strengthen the argument, and the quantitative data would help reinforce what the qualitative interviews have revealed (Bryman, 1991 as in Flick, 2009, p.31). Given time limitations, the qualitative study of the accounts remained more prominent in focus. Previous socioeconomic conditions might also play a part in their integration. With a few exceptions, most participants came from countries where political corruption, economic deficit and reduced work opportunities. These factors also influence how open they are to adapt, and if their attitudes as well as their cultural intelligence levels will allow them to thrive in new countries.

5.3 Future research recommendations

The purpose of the study also served to generate an impartial and balanced rendition of the effects of culture shock in immigrants, from their perspective and experiences immersed in the Dutch culture. For future research efforts, it should be taken into consideration how the Dutch host culture perceive immigrants from their point of view as locals, since each party can influence and change the other (Bugra & Becker, 2005, p.21). It would be interesting to forego a deeper study of the dichotomous relationship between the immigrants and the locals, as well as the distinction between cultural identity and personality in immigrants. Researching how locals perceive, appreciate and improve their connections with immigrants could prove enriching and complimentary to the study (Matera et al., 2013, p.13; Dow, 2010, p.224). An anthropological approach to migration should emphasize both structure and agency; it should look at macro-social contextual issues, micro-level strategies and decision-making, and the meso- level relational structure within which individuals operate. It needs to articulate both people and process (Brettell, 2003, p. 7).

5.4 Research Implications

5.4.1 Open minded = Open borders?

The findings of the thesis could be used in the implementation of future integration plans like the New Civic Integration Act made in 2021. It features volunteer and language programs for migrant families and individuals who are looking for work opportunities and studies. However, the programs are only aimed at language courses and community work. After interviewing several immigrants, the need for community was evident in. Finding middle ground, including both cultures in environments where they would be less prone to pressure could ensure a safety net for them to land in. To add to the program, the study of deculturation in immigrants could be useful to build new modules where the expansion of their cultural identity is considered. In addition, trainings in cultural intelligence together with the different coping mechanisms could help immigrants adapt in a smoother manner. The current political context in the Netherlands finds itself in a delicate state, and immigrants with a strong sense of cultural identity may perceive resistance from the Dutch host culture. In a previous study made by Slootman and Duyvendak (2015), second generation individuals were interviewed regarding how they were perceived by the Dutch. "The idea seems to be , indeed, that Dutch identity must 'cannibalize' other identities to turn immigrants into reliable citizens" (Geschiere, as in Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015, p.153).

It remains to be seen and is of current relevance, how we choose to both place in the effort to embrace the Dutch life in the Netherlands, along with having them embrace us in return. With the current collapse of the governmental coalitions, right wing Politician Geert Wilders (ex-leader of the PVV party) stepped down from the cabinet because he proposed new and stricter policies around immigration and asylum seekers. The importance of integration is not solely on a social level, but a generational one. Politically involved immigrants that come to build and help the country succeed and grow should not be seen as a threat but rather as an asset. It could be a thoughtful consideration to integrate trainings in CQ and deculturation in policy and governmental programs in the future. Not addressing these topics about immigrants' integration and local's perception of their inclusion to the bigger Dutch population could prove to be "empirically questionable but also politically risky" if immigrants are locals alike do not get involved in the process (Duyvendak, 2025, p. 6).

5.4 Conclusion

A great part of what Berry's model helped to illustrate, was shown in the analysis of the interviews pertains to the psychological aspect of acculturation in immigrants. There are different degrees to culture shock and diverse effects that can take place. Part of the solution to culture shock is not completely letting go of previous cultural identity, but in embracing the friction between cultures, without sacrificing or eliminating your own. As Oberg (1960) put it, we are being 'transplanted' abroad, but it doesn't necessarily erase our roots. "Often in response to 'acculturation stress', the effects of culture shock may have positive outcomes for the development of the individuals as well" (Schaefer & Simon, 2017, p.961). Part of the solution to culture shock is not completely letting go of previous cultural identity, but in embracing the friction between cultures, without sacrificing or eliminating your own. The effects of culture shock on immigrant integration are twofold. On the one hand, the emotional impact drives individuals forward to take behaviors into action. These were identified as coping mechanisms, which can be either shifting old beliefs and in their own behavior, which were related to CQ. On the other hand, delving into the effect on their cultural identities, it would be fair to state that the effect is not unanimous throughout every area of their own home culture. The effects of culture shock render an "imprint" that allows them to develop their competence and flexibility in response to diverse social contexts when needed (Smith, 1996, p.565 as in Anderson, 1994, p.322).

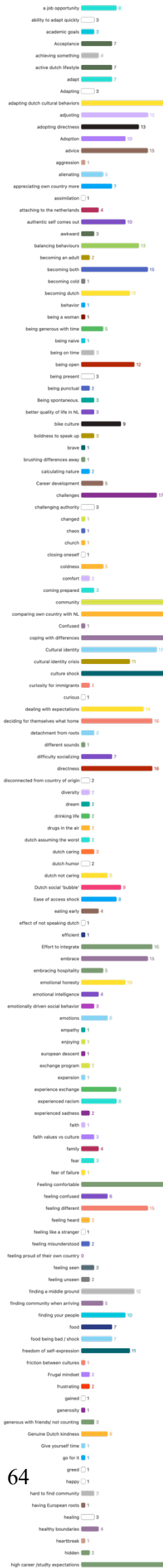
To conclude, the responses to culture shock from the immigrant perspective held a twofold alternative solution in the acculturation model. The hybrid response and outcome produced in immigrants coping tools to combine their own cultural identity with that of the Dutch culture. In addition, the effects on their cultural identities were directly outpoured from their experiences and exchanges, specifically through interaction. Metacognitive CQ proved to help individuals navigate their integration journeys, giving them the coping tools to adapt more successfully despite language, bureaucratic and cultural differences. Not every respondent that participated in the study professed to have had a great alteration to their own cultural identity. However, they did admit to having felt "neither" nor "both"(Verkuyten et al., 2019, p.8; Berry et al., 2006, p.305). They were challenged in their own emotional and personal convictions connected to their previous culture of settlement, and partly adopted the Dutch behaviors that best suited their own "intercultural personhood" (Kim, 2008, p.366). Consequently, in light of the findings, I would like to introduce a new concept for future research projects around integration, called *preventive hybrid adaptiveness*. The full combination of the revised

literature and current findings reflected a possible new way of integrating immigrants in the Netherlands. The three concepts are connected, Preventive, given that immigrants who are more acquainted with the culture or have had previous experiences abroad have a smoother integration (Ward et al, 2001, p.165; Koçak, 2014, p.68). Secondly, hybrid, because it implies that there will be a deculturation or 'shedding' effect when the two cultures are merged and influence each other in return (Klarenbeek, 2021, p.908; Kim, 2008, p.363; Berry, 1997, p.18). And lastly, adaptiveness, because it emphasizes that their transformation in their affective, cognitive and behavioral patterns is not a static endeavor, but an ongoing process (Adler ,1974, p.14). Finally, to add a personal perspective to the study, an alternative to bridging the gap between locals and international can be further explored though the idea of the *ecosystem* (Berry et al., 2006, p.324). Previous studies and research made on cross-cultural interaction, integration, culture shock and cultural identities all explore the dichotomous relationship between the host society and the incoming immigrants. However, studying these from the point of view of a collective whole rather than two opposing facets in integrations could prove an innovative approach.

The extensiveness of the participants' encounters with the locals in the Netherlands with the Dutch go through a wide spectrum of emotions. As an immigrant, holder of two passports and a multicultural background, it was a challenge to not pour too much of my own personal experiences on to the analysis. However, a few take aways from the twenty-three interviews are the following. A hundred percent of the respondents needed and wanted to feel seen, heard, connected to and are genuinely building a life in the Netherlands, even if just temporarily. Some emphasized that they just naturally gravitated to some individuals, and in some cases, they just happened to be Dutch. They stopped looking at their nationality and rather focused on how they could meet them in the middle. And lastly, the need for a shared community and a shared value system often brought them into a greater in-group of people that allowed them to grow personally, professionally and made them better intercultural navigators.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone.”

Ephesians 2:19-20 (NIV, 2011)



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Appendix A : Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire

Master Thesis: ***Towards Immigrant Integration & Cultural Identities***

Erasmus University of Rotterdam

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Foreword: This thesis is mostly focused on finding out how the patterns of acculturation through culture shock affect immigrants' cultural identity and integration into the Dutch culture.

To the participant:

Thank you for participating in this research project. This questionnaire is part of my master thesis, exploring how immigrants experience culture shock and adapt their sense of identity while living in the Netherlands. There are **no right or wrong answers** —this is a space for you. Your personal story, feelings, and reflections are incredibly valuable.

A few notes before we begin:

- Take your time. Some questions are reflective and may bring up emotions. You don't need to answer every question — feel free to skip any that don't resonate with them or feel they may be too personal for you.
- All responses are confidential and will be used only for academic purposes, anonymized in any final thesis work.
- Please feel free to read through the questions and write some thoughts down to share in the interview. Any insights or feedback are also welcome.

Theoretical links with questions

- **1-4:** Questions 1 through 4 ponder the honeymoon and crises phase of culture shock according to Winkelman (1994), along with the set of expectations that respondents had before and after they arrived in the Netherlands (Ward et al., 2001, p.77)
- **5-9:** Questions 5 through 9 are targeted towards the different shocks and adjustment strategies of either adoption, rejection or hybrid integration of the host culture into their own cultural identity (Berry, 1997). They also explore the different coping mechanisms used to deal with socio-cultural differences.
- **10 & 11:** These two questions delve into the effects of their experience around culture shock and acculturation into their own cultural identity (Kim, 2008).
- **12-15:** Questions 12 through 15 research deeper into the settlement, adaptation, acculturation phase into the Dutch host society and what thought or event processes led them to believe that they have overcome culture shock and feel settled into the social surroundings.
- **16:** The last question invited the respondents to reflect upon their whole timeline of events until the present, where they provide advice for other individuals that will go or are going through the process of integrating in the Netherlands.

Questionnaire Guide

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself? (Name, age, nationality, etc).
2. How long have you been here in the Netherlands for? Do you plan to stay?
3. What motivated you choose to come to the Netherlands?
4. What were your expectations of life before arriving, and how did they match your first impressions?
5. What has been your biggest cultural shock since arriving in the Netherlands? How did this shock make you feel?
6. How have you coped with these socio-cultural differences as an immigrant?
7. What aspects of the Dutch culture have you found the most difficult to identify with? Why?
8. Are there any Dutch values, habits, or customs that you have embraced? What made them resonate with you?
9. Are there aspects of the Dutch culture that you have consciously chosen not to adopt? Why do you think that is?

10. In what ways has living in the Netherlands impacted your sense of cultural identity? Are there any cultural aspects of your home culture that you've left behind?
11. Can you share a moment where your background and Dutch cultural elements worked together in a positive way?

→ Transition: Follow up question if needed.

12. How would you currently define 'home'? Do you see the Netherlands as part of that definition now?
13. Do you see yourself staying in the Netherlands long-term? What factors are influencing this decision?
14. Is there a moment when you began to feel truly accepted or 'at home' here? What happened?
15. What advice or insight would you offer to someone who's just moved to the Netherlands?

Ending note

Dear participant,

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences here in the Netherlands with me. Your personal story can help many more people in their integration process in the future. Please feel free to share any feedback from the interview experience and questions.

Thank you,

Stephanie. S.

Towards Immigrant integration & Cultural Identities

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