

# **Constructing Socio-Cultural Belonging in Narrative and Questionnaire Data**

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This batch of papers has been presented at the Third Conference “Diversity in cities: Visible and invisible walls”

# Constructing Socio-Cultural Belonging in Narrative and Questionnaire Data

## Summary

In this paper I will examine how socio-cultural belonging is constructed by four immigrant participants living in Finland in a narrative life story data and in acculturation questionnaire data obtained by the same four individuals. The topic of socio-cultural belonging is approached by focusing on the issues of acculturation orientations and cultural identity. The individual acculturation and identity profiles defined on the bases of each participant's questionnaire answers are compared on the individual level with the identity and acculturation talk in the life stories. In the narrative data, as opposed to the pre-structured questionnaire data, socio-cultural belonging is negotiated for example, on the basis of religious affiliations or by using several ethnic or geographically based group labels in addition to the ethnic group – host culture group dichotomy employed in the questionnaire. The narrative data also provides information on the development of identity as perceived by the participants and the potential reasons for specific identity related choices made regarding acculturation strategies.

**Keywords:** Immigrants, Socio-cultural belonging, Narratives, Acculturation, Methodology

**JEL:** Y80, Y90

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Foreword

I am currently preparing a doctoral thesis on the life and acculturation of immigrants in Finland. Acculturation refers to individual and group level changes resulting from cultures meeting (e.g. Liebkind, 2001). I am interested in the subjective experiences of intergroup encounters that immigrants bring forth regarding their acculturation and life in Finland and the ways they make sense, interpret and narrate these experiences.

In this paper I will examine how socio-cultural belonging is constructed by four immigrant participants living in Finland in a narrative life story data and in questionnaire data obtained by the same four individuals. The questionnaire was designed to measure acculturation with multiple choice questions that cover several background variables and aspects of acculturation, such as ethnic and national identity, acculturation attitudes, discrimination and social relationships.

I will approach the topic of socio-cultural belonging by focusing on the issues of acculturation orientations and cultural identity.

## 1.2 Acculturation

Acculturation can be defined as individual and group level changes resulting from groups of individual from different cultures coming to contact with each other (Redfield et al. 1936; Liebkind, 2001, 386).

Acculturation has originally been viewed as a group level phenomenon; later the concept of psychological acculturation was also introduced. Psychological acculturation refers to the changes in individual's values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, identity and behaviour, which are rooted in the encounter with a new culture. (See Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2002; Liebkind, 2001).

The numerous acculturation theories can be divided in two main approaches: unidimensional and two-dimensional theories. The first ones are based on the idea of a one-way process of an immigrant gradually assimilating into the host society by adopting the host society's culture and getting rid of the ethnic culture and identity. Criticism of this model has led to the development of two-dimensional models, which acknowledge the immigrant heritage culture and the host society culture as separate and independent dimensions. This conceptualization of acculturation has now become the mainstream model in acculturation research. (Bourhis et al., 1997; Liebkind, 2001; Snauwaert et al., 2003.)

Berry's (2003) psychological acculturation model is one of the best known two-dimensional models. In his model a distinction is made between the preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity and a preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along other groups. When immigrant individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek interaction with other cultural groups, they are using the *assimilation* strategy. When they want to maintain their own

culture and interact with others, they are using the *integration* strategy. When they wish to hold on to their original culture and avoid interacting with others, the *separation* strategy is used. *Marginalisation* strategy is used when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in relationships with others. (Berry 2003, 22–23.) Sometimes these strategies are referred to as acculturation attitudes (Berry, 2001) or acculturation orientations (e.g., Bourhis et al., 1997; Snauwaert et al., 2003).

Bourhis et al. (1997, 378) have suggested that some immigrants, whose acculturation strategy would be categorised as marginalised in Berry's model may actually "prefer to identify themselves as individuals rather than as members of either an immigrant group of the host majority". Therefore they propose that "individualist" should be added as a fifth category in the reformulation of Berry's acculturation model. (Bourhis et al. 1997).

Most of the acculturation research has been carried out by using quantitative research methods both in Finland and internationally. Recently there have been some indications of an increase in multidisciplinary and multi-method research. One example of this is a recent Finnish study which charts life, living conditions, social exclusion, discrimination, well-being and acculturation of Russian and Estonian immigrants and Ethnic Finns from abroad, from many different angles (Liebkind et al., 2004).

### **1.3 Cultural identity**

According to Berry (2001, 620) there is now a consensus that, similar to the notion of two-dimensional acculturation models, "how one thinks of oneself is also constructed along two dimensions", the first dimension being identification with one's own ethnocultural group, while the other dimension is the identification with the host society. These two aspects of cultural identity are referred to in many different ways such as ethnic identity (identification with the immigrating group for example) and national identity (identification with the host society).

Ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of self in terms of membership in a particular ethnic group, although the concept is used in several ways and lacks a widely agreed-on specific definition (Liebkind, 2006). Phinney (2003, 63) uses the following definition:

"Ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group. Ethnic groups are subgroups within a larger context that claim a common ancestry and share one or more of the following elements: culture, phenotype, religion, language, kinship, or place of origin. Ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization but rather is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background. Ethnic identity is constructed and modified as individuals become aware of differences among ethnic groups and attempt to understand the meaning of their ethnicity within the larger setting."

Ethnic identity change has been noted to be strongly related to maintaining ethnic cultural involvement and fairly independent of orientation toward the dominant culture. The change of self-label is unlikely, for the first-generation immigrants. (Phinney, 2003.) The willingness to maintain heritage culture and/or adoption of host culture

should, however, not be confused with the actual involvement, as these don't always go hand in hand. In conclusion it can be said that the relationship between constructs of acculturation and ethnic/cultural identity is ambiguous and not thoroughly explored. (Liebkind, 2001; Liebkind, 2006.)

## 2. Data

My narrative research data is longitudinal and consists of 8 autobiographical narratives by 4 immigrants (2 narratives each) as presented in table 1. I have also questionnaire data regarding acculturation related information from all four participants. They filled in the questionnaire after writing their second story.

Table 1.  
Research participants: pseudonyms, countries of origin, time of participation, reason for immigration.

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Years of narrating 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> story	Reason for immigration as stated in the questionnaire answer
Vladimir	Former USSR	2000, 2005	As minor with family
Benjamin	Israel	2000, 2005	"Israel was too hot"
Vera	Russia	1997, 2005	Return migrant status
Renata	Russia	1997, 2005	Return migrant status

When collecting the first stories (1997 or 2000 depending on the participant), the participants were encouraged to write (or tell) about their own life experiences in their own words, the way they wished. In 1997 data was collected through a writing contest and participants could choose to use their native tongue. Writings were later translated into Finnish. In 2000 only Finnish and English could be used. In 2005 the same participants were contacted again and invited to produce a follow-up story for their first story. The choice of language options was similar compared to earlier collection (in 1997 / 2000).<sup>1</sup>

At the time of narrating their first story the participants had lived in Finland from 1 to 9 years and at the time of the second story from 6 to 14 years. The length of the stories varied from 3 to 11 pages and remained approximately the same in the follow-up stories except for Renata, whose second story was considerably shorter than the first one.

<sup>1</sup> The non-English extracts used in this paper were translated by me from Finnish into English.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 On the operationalization of acculturation orientations and ethnic/cultural identity**

Acculturation has been studied and measured using a wide range of indicators and instruments, Berry's model being one of the most well-known, but not without its problems. For instance, the two dimensions of Berry's model are not orthogonal (Liebkind, 2001, 394). Bourhis et al. (1997) have produced an alternative bidimensional model of acculturation by reformulating the second dimension of Berry's model to provide a better match between the types of attitudes measured on the two dimensions. Thus in the refined bidimensional model of immigrant acculturation orientations the dimensions are represented by the following two questions: 1. Is it considered to be of value to maintain the immigrant cultural identity? 2. Is it considered to be of value to adopt the cultural identity of the host community?

Snauwaert and his colleagues (2003) designed a series of studies to compare three conceptualizations of acculturation orientations: Berry's model (1980), which they label the *contact conceptualization*, the model of Bourhis et al. (1997), labelled the *adoption conceptualization* and a model based on Hutnik's (1986, 1991) bidimensional identification model, which they call the *identification conceptualization* of acculturation orientation<sup>2</sup>. The results of Snauwaert et al. (ibid.) showed that the relative preference for the four acculturation orientations (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) varied considerably depending on the conceptualization used.

According to Phinney (2003, 65) ethnic identity can be examined as one aspect of the acculturation process. This aspect focuses on the subjective sense of belonging to a group or culture (Phinney, 1990; Phinney et al., 2001). The measurable aspects of ethnic identity according to Phinney (2003, 65), are: "a) the ethnic self-identification, or self-label, b) the subjective sense that people have of belonging to an ethnic group and their feelings about their group membership (i.e. strength and valence of their ethnic identity) and c) their level of ethnic identity development." Out of these, especially the first one will be discussed in this paper.

#### **3.2 How I measured acculturation and identification orientations with my questionnaire**

##### **3.2.1 The cultural dimension of acculturation**

In order to examine the cultural aspect of acculturation, the two-dimensional idea of acculturation was adopted and separate items were used to measure the participants' attitudes towards maintaining their heritage culture and adopting Finnish culture. This approach resembles the adoption conceptualization of acculturation (Snauwaert et al.,

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<sup>2</sup> This classification of Hutnik's identity model as an acculturation model is criticized by Liebkind (2006, 5).

2003) but I prefer to call it simply the *cultural dimension of acculturation*<sup>3</sup>, since it is not only about adopting Finnish culture but also about maintaining one's heritage culture. This aspect of acculturation was measured by using two items: "How important is it to you to maintain Israeli/Russian culture and traditions?" "How important is it to you to adopt Finnish culture at least to some degree?"

### **3.2.2 The contact dimension of acculturation**

Inspired by Bourhis et al. (1997) I also wanted to measure separately participants' attitudes towards contacts with members of their own ethnocultural group and Finns, members of the host group. Therefore, instead of relying directly on Berry's model, (labelled the contact conceptualization by Snauwaert et al. 2003) I used two symmetrical items: "How important is it to you to maintain good and regular relations with other Israelis/Russians?" and "How important is it to you to maintain good and regular relations with Finns?" I call this social aspect of acculturation the *contact dimension of acculturation*.

In all the acculturation items participants had to choose their answer on a 5-point scale (1=not at all important, 5=very important). Participants acculturation orientations both on the culture and contact dimension were then defined either as integration (scores on both ethnic group and host population dimensions > 3), separation (score on the ethnic group dimension > 3, but on the host population dimension ≤ 3) assimilation (score on the ethnic group dimension ≤ 3, but on the host population dimension > 3) or marginalisation (scores on both dimensions ≤ 3).

### **3.2.3 Cultural identity**

The questions used in mapping identity in my questionnaire are based on the two-dimensional notion of cultural identity (See Hutnik, 1991; Phinney, 1990; Phinney et al., 2001). Cultural identity was measured on the dimensions of heritage culture (ethnic identity) and Finnish culture (national identity), independently of each other.

Self-categorization was established with measures of departure culture (Peruvian, Russian, Israeli) identification and host culture (Finnish) identification. Participants had to indicate on 5-point scales (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) to what extent they agreed with two statements: e.g. "I consider myself as Peruvian", "I consider myself as Finnish". Participants who identified strongly as members of their ethnic group (e.g. Peruvian) and Finnish (both scores > 3) were categorized as having an integrated identity. Participants who identified strongly as members of the ethnic group but not as

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between the cultural dimension of acculturation described in section 3.2.1 and the contact dimension of acculturation introduced in section 3.2.2 should not be confused with the concept of two-dimensional acculturation model introduced earlier. The former dimensions refer to the particular domains of acculturation (culture and contacts), whereas the latter refers to the general idea that regardless of the particular aspects of acculturation under study, the process itself should be approached looking separately at the ethnic/minority culture and host/majority culture dimensions.

Finnish (score  $\leq 3$ ) were identified as having a separated identity. Participants who identified strongly as Finnish but not as members of the ethnic group were categorized as having an assimilative identity. Finally, if a participant identified with neither group, s/he was categorized as having a marginalised identity.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding Phinney's (2003) distinction of the measurable aspects of ethnic identity (see section 3.1) the items of the questionnaire described above cover at least the first aspect of self-identification both in relation to the ethnic group and in relation to the majority group. As the self-categorisation of the respondents was measured using identity statements and the Likert-scale type answering options, the answers may be considered to be indicative of the strength of their ethnic/national identity as well.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the groups representing the culture and the Finnish culture the participants were offered a 3<sup>rd</sup> choice of group affiliation: "I consider myself as part of another ethnic group. What group?"

### **3.3 Socio-cultural belonging and the narrative data**

Concerning ethnic and cultural identities in general, Verkuyten (2004, 162) sees the current focus of research as problematic: "Often it is tacitly assumed that the degree of identification is crucial, and little attention is paid to the divergent meanings that identification can have for individuals and groups." Qualitative data analysis provides a chance to examine these individual meanings attached to the identities and memberships as discussed in the life stories.

When analysing the narrative data, I have looked for the different themes, social and cultural categories and distinctions the participants are using to make sense of their changing lives, to position themselves and to negotiate their identities and belonging. In practise I have coded utterances dealing with social groups (e.g. ethnic or cultural groups or other more general groups such as "foreigners" or "immigrants") and group membership. Depending on the chosen approach almost any utterances in the life stories could be interpreted as related to issues of acculturation and identity. For the purposes of this paper, however, I have focused on the utterances that comment on identity, group memberships and acculturation in a fairly explicit manner.

## **4. Examining results**

I will now proceed by looking at (1) the individual acculturation and identity profiles (cultural and contact dimension of acculturation and self-categorization) and (2) the identity and acculturation talk in each individual's life stories, one participant at the time. The acculturation and identity profiles are defined on the bases of their answers to

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<sup>4</sup> I have adopted the identity terminology (4 categories mentioned) from Phinney et al. (2001), although the design of the identity items in my questionnaire differ somewhat from to the one used by them.

<sup>5</sup> Participants were also asked about the experienced importance and their feelings regarding their group membership but due to limited space, these aspects of ethnic/national identities are not discussed in this paper.

the questionnaire as described above. In the final section of this paper I will consider the commonalities and differences between the questionnaire data and the narrative data on a more general level and make some conclusions.

## **Vladimir**

Acculturation orientation

Cultural dimension of acculturation: integration

Contact dimension of acculturation: marginalisation

Cultural identity: assimilated

Where group identity was inquired regarding “another ethnic group” in the questionnaire Vladimir stated he considers himself as European, thus choosing to use a pan ethnic label instead of an ethnic one (Russian), side by side with the national one (Finnish).

According to Phinney (2003, 66) the original identification by the country of origin is unlikely to disappear during the lifetime of an immigrant, but one may begin to use the host country identity label *as well*. This doesn't seem to be the case with Vladimir, whose cultural identity counts as assimilative, (with a clear emphasis on the Finnish identity, as calculated on the basis of his questionnaire answers in a way described in chapter 3.2.3) Vladimir was only 12 when he immigrated, which might be one explanation for this relatively rare identity change. However, it probably should be noted that Vladimir's response to the ethnic identity statement “I consider myself as Russian” was in fact “somewhat disagree”, and not “strongly disagree”, which would imply that he does, after all, consider himself as Russian too, to some moderate extent, although his Finnish identity seems to be stronger.

It is not only in the questionnaire that Vladimir expresses his Finnish identity. In his first story Vladimir describes how he became Finnish:

*I became Finnish in the reserve officers' school, in the hard training, an officer, in the pedagogy classes of the backbone of the Finnish army. I don't think that I will ever be patriotic, especially not in the event of war, especially with Russia. I have however my own principles and they coincide nicely with the old officer values – a human being has to be respected, needless violence has to be avoided, one has got to hang onto what is right and a clear conscience is the most important thing. As long as Finland sticks to these values, I'm in, doesn't matter where.*

Further in his story he describes the content of his Finnish identity in more detail. On the basis of his personal qualities and socially shared goals Vladimir defines himself on the one hand as “an ordinary” and on the other hand as “a different kind” of Finn:

*I am a different kind of Finn – when I see a white elephant I don't think “wonder what he thinks about me?”, I can not be quiet and I'm bad at listening to other people, I speak several languages and almost without an*

*accent, I find it easy to take off... Yet I believe that my goals are close to those of many “ordinary Finnish youth”:*

*I want to behave in a way that I respect myself, I want a loving wife that I love, a family and a one-family house by a lake, surrounded by pine trees, a certainty of things being right and that they will also remain so, I want to create something with my work, something that will last – an ordinary one, that is, isn't it?*

In his second story Vladimir talks about identity and acculturation only in relation to his family, referring to his foreign wife:

*I guess she accepted my view; one has to come to Finland in Finnish<sup>6</sup> respecting the local customs, but being proud of one's own mother tongue and culture.*

This expressed view on preferred acculturation strategy would seem to rule out at least assimilation and marginalisation.

## **Benjamin**

Acculturation orientation

Cultural dimension of acculturation: assimilation

Contact dimension of acculturation: assimilation

Cultural identity: separated

Benjamin's identity and acculturation profile is similar to the pattern scheduled in many research reports. As Verkuyten (2004, 162) puts it: “Ethnic self-identification may be resistant to change and relatively independent of styles of cultural adaptation and social contacts”.

In his first story Benjamin describes his feelings about living in Finland in a positive way which suggests a feeling of belonging in Finland, perhaps even more than in Israel:

*Socially I find Finland very comfortable. Seems like people usually mind their own business, yet provide assistance if required. I'm not all that social myself (in Israeli standard at least) and I have more friends in Helsinki area than in Israel.*

At the end of his story the expressions of belonging are accompanied by an expression of bewilderment over the possible causes of this feeling:

*God only knows how come I feel so homely and convenient here in a country I don't even speak the language.*

In the end of the questionnaire there was space for the participants to comment on the questions if they so wished. Benjamin had written: “No questions about religion – I was

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<sup>6</sup> Refers to using Finnish language. (S.V.)

more of an outsider in Israel than [it] seems by this questionnaire.” In his second story Benjamin discusses the role of religion as a separating element in the otherwise more unproblematic ingroup of Israelis in Finland:

*In my faith I am actually Christian, as most Christians and Jews usually consider messianic-Jews.*

*[--]*

*I guess it would be good to keep some connection with my roots, but I'm not all that sure about the best way to do it.*

*Belonging to a group considered Christian I find the gap between me and other Israelis deeper as they lean more on the Jewish-orthodox identity.*

The above comment illustrates nicely one example of the possible limitations of maintaining one's ethnocultural traditions: there might not be people around with whom to share the culture. Even the same country of origin is not always a guarantee of a shared background.

## **Vera**

Acculturation orientation

Cultural dimension of acculturation: integration

Contact dimension of acculturation: assimilation

Cultural identity: separated

An immigrant may feel that he or she loses personal control when other people apply a particular categorisation to them. Thus it's not surprising that many people want to choose themselves when to present and not to present themselves as a member of particular group. (Branscombe et al., 1999.) In her second story Vera writes:

*I still rather not tell where I'm from. The opinion about Russians is often one-sided and usually not objective in Finland. Jokingly I say that I'm a foreigner from a foreign country, but that is not always enough. And when we gradually come to the topic of where I'm from, I'm instantly regarded differently and the label they want to put on me with feels on my skin.*

As Kraus (2006, 109) points out “People do not simply choose affiliations, they have to negotiate them with others and are positioned within them by others. [- -] belonging must be negotiated, tested, confirmed, rejected or qualified again and again and not simply shown.” In her first story Vera is doing this negotiating of belonging, not just in relation to Finland but with regard to her native country as well:

*I hope that my home country will forgive me for not wanting to return there. I will definitely visit my relatives' graves [- -] in the small village where I was born. I do not want to live a lie like before, and not in a chaos, like these days. [- -] I think the lives of my grandchildren will be easier than mine. I will definitely teach them Russian.*

The hierarchical structure of ethnic groups in the Finnish society is visible in Vera's second story. Immigrants in general are not valued as much as native Finns, and out of all immigrants, Russians are among the few least welcomed immigrant groups in Finland. Vera seems to be well aware of this as she comments the interethnic interactions, sometimes with a hint of sarcasm, as I'm tempted to read it:

*I did not dream of a real job, because I know that there is not enough work even for the Finns.*

*[- -]*

*Maybe the fact that I'm a foreigner, and even a Russian one, had a role in me not getting employed?*

*[- -]*

*Many people advised us to buy our own residence. We didn't believe in that, we were foreigners after all. But despite of that we went to a bank. [- -] they told us that it is possible to get a mortgage, if we have a regular place of employment and a guarantor. But who would come and be the guarantor of us, the Russians? Luckily we found one.*

*[- -]*

*All our friends and acquaintances who came to see our new house always said the same words: "Not even all Finns have got a house like this". We were not able to answer that. We would like to think that it is not our fault.*

The way she describes the life of her family as immigrants in contrast to some other immigrants suggests a preference for assimilation as an acculturation orientation:

*It is not the same here as it is in Russia. But one has to choose either or. Luckily, in our family, no one is in doubt. We have begun to feel at home quickly, we have trusted in our own strength and moved forward.*

Approaching the end of her second story Vera seems to claim her right to live in Finland as a part of the Finnish society expressing her belonging by listing important personal experiences that connect her to Finland and by showing her commitment not just to live but also die in this country:

*Sometimes I do feel a bit ashamed, feeling so good in this foreign country. But Finland is not anymore foreign to me. Here I saw swans for the first time and a rainbow; here I got my own apartment, I met a lot of good people, [- -] here I became a grandmother. I also want to die in this country. I even know my future place in the graveyard; it's next to my mother-in-law. There bright red begonias grow on a green background next to the grave stones and at Christmas there are many candles.*

Vera finishes her second story with an explicit expression of identity:

*I am now half Finnish!*

The word "now" makes the dynamic nature of identity visible, suggesting that her identity might also continue to change in the future.

## Renata

Acculturation orientation

Cultural dimension of acculturation: integration

Contact dimension of acculturation: assimilation

Cultural identity: assimilated

In Renata's stories there is hardly any talk that would involve explicitly mentioning ethnic or cultural groups. Work is an important theme in both of her stories. In the first story Renata describes her work as a medical doctor with her colleagues in a hospital where there was a strong sense of belonging: "We were successful, because we were united, together, one family."

When describing her life in Finland she is contemplating the idea of taking the required exams and returning to her profession in Finland after years of working in a position for which she is highly overqualified, but she is doubtful:

*I am afraid that my colleagues would not understand me, why I visit my patients on my days off, even when there is a doctor on duty on the ward. Or that I spend more time next to the beds of the patients than in the doctors' room. And I don't do it because I'd like to be better than them, but because we were taught to do that, we can not act differently.*

I consider this extract to convey an idea of strong cultural belonging that she is not free to choose or break away from: being socialised in one (work-)culture seems to make it almost impossible to change one's learned behaviour.

Renata also writes about her son, who has been bullied at school because of his immigrant background:

*Everything is fine but they don't know at work that he is from Russia. In public he does not speak Russian with me, and even Finnish he only speaks very quietly. If he has Russians as his customers, who speak Finnish poorly, he understands everything but replies to them in Finnish. This kind of mark remains in his heart. He has a girlfriend. [- -] The girl is Finnish. She and her family love [name of the son]. They know who we are.*

Research has shown that among immigrants who have moved to Finland from the neighbouring countries of Russia or Estonia, those who speak Russian as their mother tongue are faced with more discrimination than those whose mother tongue is Estonian or Finnish (Liebkind et al. 2004, 208). According to Kyntäjä (2005) avoiding the use of mother tongue is one of the ways in which Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland try to avoid being discriminated against. Based on Renata's description, her son's acculturation strategy seems to be assimilation, at least in public. However, in the private sphere it seems possible to be "who they are", without changing.

Immigrants are often not free to choose their acculturation strategies. In addition to the very important role of the host society, only briefly touched upon in this paper, also language skills could limit the actual choice of acculturation strategies. Renata writes:

*It's not always easy these days, either. We will never be able to speak perfect Finnish.*

## **5. Conclusions**

Even though two-dimensional models offer a more elaborate approach than unidimensional models to the identification of the immigrants and ethnic minorities, they are still limited in the sense that there seems to be an underlying assumption that ethnic minorities define their identity in relation to two groups only (Verkuyten 2004, 160).

In reality, as seen in my data, instead of and in addition to the dualistic categories of an ethnic group – host population group the negotiations about identities and belongings often involve several other groups. The boundaries of these groups are drawn, for example, on the basis of religious affiliations (Christians – Jews) or by using several, sometimes nested (pan)ethnic or geographically based group labels (Finnish - European) to mark group memberships.

I have created acculturation and ethnic identity orientation profiles for the research participants based on their questionnaire answers. This enables us to make comparisons between different aspects of acculturation and identity orientations on an individual level as well as between different individuals. It is however clear that the varied meanings of, for example, group memberships are not easily grasped by quantitative research methods. As Verkuyten (2004, 232–233) states: "To understand questions and issues related to ethnic identity, I have always found it necessary to use more than one perspective and theory, and more than one method." By using the life story data in addition to the questionnaire data obtained from the respondents studied we can add onto and deepen the understanding of their socio-cultural belonging and of acculturation and identity orientations more generally.

After analysing the life stories of Benjamin, we can assume that the reason for his choice of assimilation strategy expressed in the questionnaire probably lies in the fact that for him, a shared nationality and language is not enough to provide a sense of common roots with other Israelis in Finland. Also, the analysis of Vladimir's story provides us information of the nature and development of his "ordinary" and "different kind of" Finnish identity. As for Renata, her story asks an important question relating to identity and immigration: What are the premises for maintaining one's professional identity in a new cultural context? Finally, Vera's story sheds light on the reasons why she might rather call herself a "foreigner from a foreign country" or half Finnish than Russian.

Identity and acculturation patterns are not fixed; they are likely to change in time and even situationally (see e.g. Liebkind, 2001). Furthermore, expressing one's preferred acculturation and identity orientation in a given research context is one thing, living them out is another matter. There are many limitations an immigrant might face when exploring different acculturation and identity paths - discrimination and prejudice being one of the most urgent ones. This major issue was only briefly referred to in this paper. It is nevertheless important to note that negotiations of belonging are always done contextually and the host culture and its members may limit or increase the options that

are available for immigrants. It is all about interaction: The very act of writing one's life story can be seen as an active negotiation process of identity and belonging. As Verkuyten (2004, 55) puts it, "Social categories can be questioned, behavioural expectations can be challenged, and existential definitions can be rejected."

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