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Relationship between Loneliness and Acculturation Strategies among Venezuelans Residing  
in Ireland.

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## Abstract

Migration refers to the process of leaving one's country to live in another, and is motivated by factors such as search for better living conditions, educational/employment opportunities, safety and security. It is estimated that more than 200 million people worldwide currently live outside their birth country. From a psychological perspective, migration may lead to a loss of social relationships requiring migrants to adjust and adapt to a new environment and culture. Previous literature suggests that these experiences may induce feelings of loneliness. The current study aimed to investigate relationships between acculturation strategies, gender, length of residency in the host country and loneliness among a specific group of migrants: Venezuelans living in Ireland, as by 2017 their immigration has increased by 259%. A quantitative cross-sectional design was implemented. A convenience sample of 108 participants (66.7% female; mean age = 32.19 years) completed an online questionnaire which contained demographic items along with the ICESY Acculturation Scale and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale. Results showed that marginalisation strategy had the lower mean ( $M = 10.72$ ), and the proposed model explained 83.6% of variance in loneliness levels, where marginalisation was significantly correlated with loneliness ( $r = .91, p < .001$ ); there was not found a difference between female and male loneliness scores ( $t(106) = -.817, p = .13$ ), and length of residency did not predict better integration. Despite the limitations of female predominance, self-reporting measures and participants obtained via online, findings have important potential implications for understanding migration and experiences of loneliness.

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### **Introduction**

The persistent search for better life conditions and opportunities is a fundamental trait of the human being; this process has been associated with migration (Pericin, 2015), which consists in leaving one's birth country, moving across borders, in order to reside in a permanent or temporarily manner in a different country (United Nations [UN], 2015) with the purpose to find those better life conditions and opportunities (Kalra & Sharma, 2014). The moment individuals leave their birth country, they are referred as emigrants, and when they arrive to the new country they are known as immigrants (Racoma, 2018).

Migration is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, which involves people from different backgrounds and different life conditions (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017) and has become a crucial factor in reforming the social, economic and cultural aspects in both host and origin countries (Pericin, 2015); increasing the exchange of skills, knowledge and technologies; increasing the labour supply and generating economic benefits (IOM, 2017). Migration is shaping the features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it has been established that around more than 200 million people, which accounts as the 3% of world's population, currently live outside their birth country, and that by the year 2050 this number will increase to 230 million people (Esses, Deaux, Lalonde, & Brown, 2010).

There are many reasons why people choose to migrate, but most of researchers have proposed that those reasons are influenced by "pull factors", which are the individual's own motivations; and "push factors" which are conditions that force individuals to leave their country (Kalra & Sharma, 2014). Thus, the primary factors that have been shown to influence migration, from developing to developed countries, are economic factors (such as wage

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difference on potential employment opportunities), social factors (such as getting enrolled in better schools and universities), conflict (less crime), persecution (political issues), environmental threats and great lack of basic services, security and opportunities (Guédez & Neto, 2014; IOM, 2017; Kalra & Sharma, 2014; Kerr & Kerr, 2011).

A country which has developed a moderately high level of economic freedom and stability, is Ireland (Gwartney, Lawson, & Hall, 2016), making it a desirable country for migrants because of this economic development and employment opportunities, which has increased across the past two decades (Pericin, 2015). As a result of this, Ireland then became an immigration country, which means receiving migrants, where it has been estimated that more than 100.000 non-European citizens have moved into the country since the year 2000 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005); making Ireland be part of the list of the top 20 European migrant countries during 2015 (IOM, 2017).

Ireland has demonstrated an interest of integrating migrants into their society, this is reflected in a recent and relevant document named “Migrant Integration Strategy - A Blueprint for the Future” which acknowledges that Ireland has increased in its diversity; explaining that migrants play a full role in the Irish society so many social inclusion measures have been implemented (Fitzgerald, 2017). Additionally, this document explains that integration is the fundamental principle of Irish life and that the Irish society and its institutions work towards promoting integration (Fitzgerald, 2017). This country has also been referred as “A land of a hundred thousand welcomes”, thanks to its image of hospitable country (Loyal, 2011).

From a psychological point of view, migration involves individuals going through a process of loss and separation from their country, family members and friends; a change in

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their social status (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012) and adjustment to a new environment (Virupaksha, Kumar, & Nirmala, 2014). This mean changes in language, behaviour, culture, and social relations in order to fit into the new society they are encountering (Stillman, McKenzie, & Gibson, 2009). This can transform migrant's life into a difficult and challenging daily basis (Perkins, Palmer, & García-Ramírez, 2011), becoming a stressful process and having potential negative outcomes (Virupaksha et al., 2014), such as anxiety, confusion (McIntyre, Barowsky, & Tong, 2011), depression, PTSD, substance abuse and suicidal ideation (APA, 2012).

Additional difficult experiences during migrant's integration process are homesickness, discrimination, violent hostility, difficult employment accessibility and lack of social support or housing (Barrett & Mosca, 2013). One study in Italy determined that discrimination in migrant adolescents was associated with depressive symptoms, but interestingly they found that teacher's support played a role as a protective factor against those depressive symptoms (Perkins et al., 2011). Other study found that experiencing affective loss impacts individual's mental health increasing the risk of developing disorders such as depression and anxiety (Stillman et al., 2009). On the other hand, research have found that some other experiences can improve mental health in migrants, for example, a study in New Zealand found out that a permanent residence status, better employment opportunities, joining family members and having better health services improved the mental health of migrants (Virupakaha et al., 2014).

Other psychological consequence that migrant groups are at high risk to experience is loneliness, as individuals leave behind family interactions and friendships; being forced to create new social networks in the host country where their previous culture, norms and values

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are less important (Dolberg, Shiovitz-Ezra, & Ayalon, 2016). Facing these new network of social interactions can trigger psychological disturbance, as it has been found that dissatisfaction in those social interactions and social integration can precipitate loneliness (Guédez & Neto, 2014; Ponizovsky & Ritsner, 2004); Research have found that these feelings might arise during the first years of the migration process as is the most difficult period to build new social networks, as is a period involved in language acquisition, employment, housing and homesickness (Dolberg et al., 2016).

Loneliness is known as a state of mind characterised by numerous cognitions and emotions that arise when a person feels a lack of social support and affective bonds (Neto, Oliveira, & Neto, 2017). It is a subjective feeling related with perceived isolation, or the result of a mismatch between the individual's desire and actual social relationships (Dolberg et al., 2016); additionally, it can be related with a lack of social ties or do not feeling part of a community, and the absences of an intimate relationships like having a partner (Hardeep, 2016). Furthermore, loneliness is generally associated with consequences such as depression, sleeping problems, eating disorders, personality disorders, increase in alcohol consumption, loss of self-esteem, stress and anxiety (Gierveld, 1998).

Being introduced into a different culture increases the risk for loneliness among migrant populations, because this promotes long-term inner changes in order to develop a socio-cultural adaptation (Pericin, 2015). The individual changes in terms of attitudes, behaviours and cultural identity after encountering that new culture (Birman & Addae, 2015), involving then modifications in language, values, food and music inclinations, social relations and social customs (APA, 2012). In psychology, this process is referred as acculturation

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(Birman & Addae, 2015), which takes place when a constant interaction exists between individuals from different cultures (Caplan, 2007).

In 1997, Berry stated that acculturation is defined by two dimensions: the maintenance of original cultural identity and the maintenance of relationships with other groups (Lahey, 2003). Proposing that people possesses the freedom to engage in different strategies towards intercultural relations (Berry, 2001). These strategies are: Assimilation (denying own culture to fit into the host culture), Separation (maintaining own culture avoiding interactions with host culture), Integration (open involvement in both cultures), and Marginalisation (no interest of involvement in any culture) (Pericin, 2015). It has been found that integration strategy is negatively associated with loneliness, meaning the more integrated the migrant is to the new culture, the less likely to develop high levels of loneliness; while a positive association has been found between loneliness and separation, assimilation and marginalisation strategies (Neto et al., 2017).

During the last decades, acculturation research has become a major focus of interest within cross-cultural and multicultural psychology (Kuo, 2014); for instance, it has been found that assimilation in Korean immigrants is associated with lower acculturative stress and depression, while assimilation has been found to be related with poorer mental health in Latino immigrants (APA, 2012). Across research, integration strategy has figured as the one bringing positive outcomes into the adaptation process (Neto et al., 2017); for example, a study in Hong Kong found that Mainland students are likely to use both integration and separation strategies (Lian & Tsang, 2010). This has also been noticed in the workplace environment, a study made in the UK with Polish migrants found that work engagement is significantly related with the integration strategy (Turska & Mochnacka, 2016).

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Even though across research integration seems to be the most commonly preferred strategy, a study made in Germany with a Chinese sample suggested that this preference can be due different factors prior the acculturation process; these factors can be how close the two cultures are, cultural variety in the origin country, level of education, cultural identity, language, age, gender (Yu & Wang, 2011), socioeconomic status and the ability to acquire a new language (Dow, 2010).

Moreover, studies have determined that the length of residency in a country is positively correlated with the integration strategy (Lee & Green, 2010); meaning it plays a role within the acculturation process, as the longer immigrants stay in the new country the more likely they are to engage in the new country's activities, language, norms and behaviours (Wu & Penning, 2013). It has been determined that individuals living for a long time in the host country tend to adopt the country's lifestyle while maintaining strong identification with their own culture (APA, 2012).

It is important to recognise the role of acculturation on migrant populations in order to understand their psychological well-being as it can be a very stressful experience (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, & Sirin, 2014). This can affect individuals' social relationships and networks, and the sense of community belongingness; these negative social exchanges have an impact on the individual's psychological distress (Zhang, 2012). Migrants are likely to present a need for a supportive network of social interactions in order for them to feel aid in coping with the stress associated with adapting to the challenging changes and different conditions when encountering a new culture (van den Broek & Grundy, 2017). In Canada, a study found that when those needs are not met, acculturation becomes a significant predictor of loneliness

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(Garcia, Savundranayagam, Kloseck, & Fitzsimmons, 2017); and loneliness has been determined has a negative factor in psychological adaptation (Neto et al., 2017).

Gender is a the demographic factors that should be considered when studying migrants; different studies across time appear to contradict each other when presenting results about gender difference in terms of loneliness (Borys & Perlman, 1985). Some studies have concluded that there is no significant gender difference on levels of loneliness (Guédez & Neto, 2014; Neto F. , 2014), other studies found that when implementing the UCLA Loneliness Scale, males reported higher levels of loneliness (Borys & Perlman, 1985); and other studies have found that female's levels of loneliness are higher than male's (Al Khatib, 2012). In terms of acculturation strategies, females are more likely to prefer integration strategy against males who have shown a preference for separation strategy, this might be related on how they cope with rejection or discrimination; but seems that females are more likely to be involved in cultural events (Yu & Wang, 2011). This might also be related with women's treatment in each culture, allowing them or not to adopt different roles in the new country (Dow, 2010).

Although migration has been studied for years, research has not been able to address the manifestation of loneliness across the migrant experience (Neto, 2002). Previous research in acculturation around Europe, have studied the biggest groups of migrants: English, Bangladeshis, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Pakistanis, Indians (Brown, Zagefka, & Tip, 2016) and Polish migrants (O'Brien & Tribe, 2013). In terms of loneliness and acculturation, research has been done with migrant families in Portugal (Neto, 2002). In the U.S. Latino migrants have been studied in research relating acculturation with stress (Caplan, 2007), Latino health (Lara, Gamboa, Iya, Morales, & Hayes, 2005) and acculturation with prevalence

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of depression (González, Hann, & Hinton, 2001). Recently, the most specific Latino sample studied has been made with Brazilians living in Portugal (Neto et al., 2017).

For the purpose of this study, a sample of Venezuelan immigrants living in Ireland will be studied, as previous researchers have stated that Venezuelan immigration is rapidly increasing, nonetheless, it is a population that has not been studied in depth but it is worthy of scientific investment to facilitate information about these immigrants and thus assists in the implementation of interventions if appropriate (Guédez & Neto, 2014). It is important to note that Venezuelan immigration to Ireland has increased by 259%, with 1.729 individuals residing in the country (Central Statistics Office, 2017). This increase in migration is due the Venezuela's crisis which has worsened since 2016 mainly because of food shortages, lacking basic goods and services, hospitals lacking basic resources, insecurity by armed groups, deficit of income and fear of being persecute for having a different political belief (ACAPS, 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017).

### **Aims**

As mentioned before, research has not been addressing the manifestation of loneliness across the migrant experience, the present study aims to fill that gap and contribute to the literature. Consequently, and based on previous studies, the research question of the present study is: Among Venezuelan migrants, is it loneliness affected by gender, length of residency and acculturation?

The aim of the present study is to examine the association between loneliness and the four different acculturation strategies (assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation), moreover, looking for a gender difference in terms of loneliness levels

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among the immigrant sample. One last aim is to explore whether the length of residency in the host country enhances the implementation of the integration strategy. This research is different to previous studies as it attempts to fill a gap in the literature regarding the experience of loneliness among the acculturations process in a sample that has not been largely studied before; this sample can have an important impact as its migration to Ireland had increased in the past decades.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on previous research and theoretical findings, this study hypothesizes that (H1) loneliness will be negatively associated with the integration strategy; while on the other hand loneliness will be positively associated with assimilation, separation and marginalisation strategies. It is also hypothesised that (H2) a non-significant gender difference will be found in terms of levels of loneliness among the sample, and finally is hypothesised that (H3) the longer the duration of residency in Ireland will be associated with higher scores for integration strategy.

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### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

The present study collected a mixed sample of participants which were recruited through the convenience sampling methods due their specific characteristics (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015), in this case being Venezuelan immigrants, over 18 years old and residing in Ireland. In order to ensure that participants meet these criteria, a snowball sampling method was used where existing participants were asked to refer more participants who share the same criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The total amount of participants who took part in the study was  $N= 108$ , with a majority of female participation (66.7%,  $N= 72$ ). Among participants, age ranged from 21 to 65 years old; and in terms of length of residency, 2.8% of participants reported living in Ireland for less than 1 year, 14.8% between 1 and 3 years, 58.3% between 3 and 6 years, 13.9% between 6 and 9 years and 10.2% for more than 9 years.

#### **Measures/materials**

##### **Loneliness**

The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale was implemented (See Appendix A), it is a 20-item self-report measure design to assess the individual's subjective feelings of loneliness and feelings of social isolation. It contains 10 items worded in a positive way, and the other 10 worded in a negative way, where items 1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19 and 20 should be reversed before scoring. An example of an item is: "There are people I feel close to". The scale is measured in a four-point scale from 1 (never) to 4 (often), and high scores are associated with high levels of loneliness. This scale holds a high internal consistency ( $\alpha= .96$ ); other studies

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have revised this scale and found high consistency as well ( $\alpha = .94$ ) (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). The internal reliability for the current sample was  $\alpha = .91$ .

### **Acculturation strategies**

The ICESY Acculturation Scale (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) was implemented (See Appendix B). This 20-items scale assesses four acculturation attitudes: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation, where each item is measured in a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in five domains: traditions, marriage, language, social activities and friends. This scale is one measure that produces four subscales, which represents a particular acculturation strategy i.e. integration, assimilation, separation, marginalisation, for each participant.

This scale is confirmed to be comparable across countries and ethnical groups and to provide four different scores for the four different acculturation strategies (Neto et al., 2017). The internal consistency for integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation are  $\alpha = .48$ ,  $\alpha = .58$ ,  $\alpha = .64$  and  $\alpha = .55$  respectively (Berry et al., 2006); the internal reliability for the current sample was  $\alpha = .23$ ,  $\alpha = .49$ ,  $\alpha = .54$  and  $\alpha = .47$  respectively. These lower values of Cronbach's alpha compared to previous studies might be due to a low number of questions in the questionnaire, as there are only five questions for each strategy. An example of items measuring each strategy is as follows:

Assimilation: "I feel that [ethnic group] should adapt to [national] cultural traditions and not maintain those of their own".

Integration: "I would be just as willing to marry a [national] as a [ethnic]."

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Separation: “It is more important to me to be fluent in [ethnic] than in [national lang.]”

Marginalisation: “I don’t want to attend either [national] or [ethnic] social activities.”

### **Demographic information**

A short questionnaire which included questions about the participant’s age, gender and the length of residency in Ireland was implemented (see Appendix C).

All information from these questionnaires was gathered through the use of Google Forms and all data was safely stored following ethical guidelines.

### **Design**

A quantitative non-experimental correlational design was implemented, as variables were not manipulated but instead observed to study the relationship between loneliness, acculturation strategies, gender and length of residency; aiming to measure the direction of the relationship, the strength of the relationship and the amount of variance shared between the variables. In addition, a cross-sectional design was performed. It is important to mention that a real cause-and-effect relationship will not be determined, because results obtained are pulled from a single point in time and not along different points in time, meaning that the relationship found can be temporal (Prot & Anderson, 2013).

Through the use of SPSS software the data was analysed. Descriptive statistics were run in order to obtain means, standard deviations, standard error means, medians and ranges for all the variables; additionally, inferential statistics were run to obtain a deeper analysis of the data. A standard multiple regression was conducted in order to examine the effect of four predictor variables (acculturation strategies) on the criterion variable (loneliness). An

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independent t-test analysis was conducted in order to compare the difference in loneliness scores between female and male participants. Finally, a one way ANOVA was conducted to examine the extent in which length of residency is associated with integration scores.

Because of the implementation of a multiple regression analysis, sample size was determined according to Stevens's (1996) formula, which states that the study should hold up to 15 participants per predictor variable, thus this study should have at least 60 participants ( $15 \times 4$ ). Additionally, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) proposed their formula  $N > 50 + 8m$  (where "m" makes reference to the numbers of predictor variables), which in this case gives as a result  $N > 82$ . The current number of participants is  $N = 108$ ; consequently it can be assumed that the sample is sufficient for the present study.

The present study is an independent research project based in Ireland following the Code of Professional Ethics of the PSI (Psychological Society of Ireland), and the National College of Ireland (NCI) Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research involving Human Participants. Ethics Committee gave approval to the researcher to carry on the study for her final dissertation, as NCI is the college entity where the researcher attends to.

### **Procedure**

Data for this study was collected using an online questionnaire through Google Forms. Participants were reached out through social media, where the researcher shared the link to the online questionnaires within the post (in Facebook groups: "Venezolanos en Dublin" and "Venezuelan Community in Ireland" - and Instagram) so participants could click the link in order to take part in the study, additionally, they could also re-post the link so other participants could take part.

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At the beginning of the questionnaires, participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study, possible risks and benefits for taking part, and stating their right to withdraw from study at any moment without penalty. Furthermore, there was explanation regarding no compensation or reimbursement was going to be given after participation, highlighting their anonymity. A brief description of the researcher was given along with her contact details in case participants wanted to have more information. Moreover, contact details from the researcher's thesis supervisor were also stated, alongside psychological support services contact details in case participants felt distressed (see Appendix D).

Participants had to tick an empty circle to accept their voluntary participation and to testify they were over eighteen years old (see Appendix E); this was a required item in the questionnaire, meaning that participants could not proceed to take part in the study without indicating their consent. The majority of the sample were likely to be Spanish speakers (due to their Venezuelan origin), but for the purposes of the study and for being based in Ireland (an English speaker country), all information and questionnaires were presented in English. The questionnaires took between 5-10 minutes to be completed; the R-UCLA Loneliness Scale was presented first, followed by the Acculturation Strategies Scale; both consisted in 20 questions each with a brief description of what was measured. At the end of the study, debriefing information was displayed (see Appendix F).

The Acculturation Scale was modified in other to adapt it into the Venezuelan sample within the Irish context. The aim was to integrate both cultures into the questionnaire. For example, "I prefer to have both [ethnic] and [national] friends" was changed into "I prefer to have both Venezuelan and Irish friends" (see Appendix G). Because of these modifications, a pilot study was carried out where a small sample of 4 participants took the modified

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questionnaire in order to verify if it was understandable and to check the time participants take to complete them.

Based on this pilot study no subsequent changes were required to the questionnaire as participants gave good feedback about the good understanding of the questionnaire in terms of its framing and simple words, moreover, they also reported it was friendly user and easy to answer in less than 8 minutes. Additionally, as these participants met the criteria to take part in the study, they were added up to the total sample.

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**Results**

An overall of 108 participants who were Venezuelan citizens residing in Ireland, took part on the study by answering two online questionnaires; the first one assessed the individual's subjective feelings of loneliness and feelings of social isolation; and the second one assessed the individual's feelings about traditions, marriage, language, social activities and friends between ethnic and national culture. This sample was composed largely by females (66.7%,  $N=72$ ) and most participants reported been living in Ireland between 3 to 6 years (58.3%,  $N= 63$ ), while only 2.8% ( $N= 3$ ) of the sample have been living in Ireland for less than 1 year (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Frequencies for the current sample of Venezuelans residing in Ireland (N = 108).*

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	36	33.3
Female	72	66.7
<b>Length of residency</b>		
< 1 year	3	2.8
Between 1-3 years	16	14.8
Between 3-6 years	63	58.3
Between 6-9 years	15	13.9
> 9 years	11	10.2

Table 2 indicates that participants had a mean age of 32.16 ( $SD= 6$ ), ranging from 21 to 65 years old (age contained 1 outlier). Furthermore, the table also presents mean scores for loneliness and the four acculturation strategies. Among these strategies, the one with the

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highest mean was the integration strategy ( $M=20.63$ ,  $SD= 2.05$ ), while the lowest mean comes from the separation strategy ( $M= 8.62$ ,  $SD= 2.83$ ) (see Table 2 for more information).

Additionally assimilation, separation and integration contained 1, 2 and 1 outliers respectively.  $P$  values for Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test of normality for all continuous variables were under .05.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of all continuous variables.*

	Mean (95% Confidence Intervals)	Std. Error Mean	Median	SD	Range
Age	32.19 (31.04-33.34)	.58	32	6	21-65
Loneliness	40.87 (38.81-42.93)	1.04	39	10.81	24-69
Assimilation	11.36 (10.74-11.98)	.31	11	3.24	5-23
Separation	8.62 (8.08-9.16)	.27	8	2.83	5-18
Integration	20.63 (20.24-21.02)	.20	21	2.05	14-25
Marginalisation	10.72 (10.10-11.34)	.31	10.5	3.25	5-19

Note: all variables are total scores (except for age).

In order to determine how well loneliness levels could be explained by four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation (H1), a standard multiple regression analysis was performed. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity; noticing that histograms showed that data was slightly skewed to the left. Additionally, the correlations between the predictor variables and the criterion variable included in the study were examined (see Table 3 for full details).

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One of the four predictor variables was found to be significantly correlated with the criterion variable ( $r = .91, p < .001$ ), this variable was the marginalisation strategy. The correlations between the predictor variables were also assessed with  $r$  values ranging from  $-.047$  to  $.213$ . These results, alongside collinearity Tolerance and VIF (variation inflation factor) values, indicated that there was no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity and that the data was suitable for examination through multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 3. *Correlations between all continuous variables.*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Loneliness	1				
2. Assimilation	-.04	1			
3. Separation	.10	.16	1		
4. Integration	.11	-.11	.21	1	
5. Marginalisation	.91***	-.05	.07*	.11	1

Note. Statistical significance: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Since no *a priori* hypotheses had been made to determine the order of entry of the predictor variables, a direct method was used for the analysis. The proposed model explained 83.6% of variance in loneliness levels ( $F(4,103) = 131.61, p < .001$ ), being a statistically significant model as a whole, where all predictor variables explained loneliness levels in some degree, but just one of those predictors was found to uniquely predict levels of loneliness to a statistically significant level: marginalisation ( $\beta = .91, p < .001$ ) (see Table 4 for full details); being then the strongest predictor of loneliness.

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Table 4. *Multiple regression model predicting loneliness scores.*

	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>	β	B	SE	CI 95% (B)
<b>Model</b>	.84***	.83				
Assimilation			-.00	-.01	.14	-.28, .26
Separation			.04	.15	.16	-.17, .46
Integration			-.00	-.02	.22	-.45, .41
Marginalisation			.91***	3.03	.13	2.77, 3.30

Note. R<sup>2</sup> = R-squared; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N = 398; Statistical significance: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

The second hypothesis (H2) was tested by conducting an independent samples t-test in order to compare levels of loneliness between males and females. Analysis of results showed that the difference in scores between female and male groups was not statistically significant for this sample ( $t(106) = -.817, p = .13$ ); and even though females scored slightly higher than males, it was not a significant outcome (see Table 5 for more information). Additionally, the magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.81, 95% CI: -6.19 – 2.58) was found to be small (Cohen's  $d = .16$ ); therefore, the difference between females and males was not significant as the effect size was found to be small.

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Table 5. *Group differences between males and females in levels of loneliness.*

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	t	d
<b>Loneliness</b>	Males	36	39.67	9.96	-.82*	0.16
	Females	72	41.47	11.23		

*Note.* d = Cohen's d; Non-Statistical significance: \* $p > .001$

A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a difference between the length of residency and integration scores (H3). Participants were divided into five groups according to their length of residency in the country (<1 year, between 1-3 years, between 3-6 years, between 6-9 years and >9 years). There was no statistically significant difference in levels of integration scores for five groups  $F(4, 103) = .976, p = .424$ ). The effect size indicated a very small difference in integration scores (eta squared = .037). Thus, it can be assumed that a 3.7% of variance in integration strategy is due to the individual's length of residency. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there was a statistically non-significant difference in integration strategy between any of the residency groups. Moreover, the test for homogeneity of variance showed that there was non-significant difference between length of residency groups (.77), determined by a 77% of variance.

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### **Discussion**

The drive from the present study was to examine if among immigrants loneliness was affected by the different acculturation strategies and length of residency in the host country, while also looking for a gender difference in terms of loneliness levels within the sample. This was examined through the testing of three main hypotheses studying a mixed sample of immigrants. Following analysis procedures, one hypothesis was found to be partially confirmed (H1), another one was confirmed (H2), and the last one was rejected (H3).

The first hypothesis proposed that loneliness will be negatively associated with the integration strategy and positively associates with the other three strategies. This hypothesis was partially confirmed as, interestingly, loneliness was found to be negatively correlated with assimilation and positively correlated with integration, separation and marginalisation. Oppositely, in previous studies integration was the strategy found to be negatively correlated with loneliness, meaning a favourable psychological adaptation for the individual, as the more chances to maintain own culture while interacting with the new society, the less likely the individual to present high levels of loneliness (Neto et al., 2017). By definition, assimilation and integration strategy significantly differ in how much individuals maintain their heritage culture; and it has been established that denying one's culture can indicate negative psychological outcomes (Ryabichenko & Lebedeva, 2016). Thus, it was not expected to find that rejecting one's culture will be negatively associated with feelings of loneliness.

Across research, the acculturation strategy mostly preferred by migrants is the integration one (Neto et al., 2005; Neto et al., 2017; Yu & Wang, 2011), as an inclination or desire to be actively involved in both cultures and not to be stuck between them; this may imply an importance for those individuals to stay close to their heritage culture (Neto et al.,

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2005). Acculturation studies have implied that the selection of a particular strategy has considerable effects on the adaptation process of the individual, where frequently marginalisation is the less favourable strategy to engage with (Turska & Mochacka, 2016). This relates with past research that has suggested that the fact of being acculturated to the host country can reduce the likelihood of displaying loneliness (Garcia, 2015), therefore, if there is no interaction between immigrants and native individuals, the first ones will not be able to adapt to the host culture (Erten, van den Berg, & Weissing, 2018). Nevertheless, not all individuals will engage in the same strategy, and not all of them have the same psychological repercussions (Neto, Barros, & Schmitz, 2005); acculturation will develop depending on the cultural or ethnic background of the individual (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2013), level of education, language, age and gender (Yu & Wang, 2011).

The present study found that acculturation is a significant predictor of loneliness, since the regression model of acculturation strategies as predictors, explained 83.6% of variance in levels of loneliness. These results are supported by a study in Canada which found similar findings (Garcia et al., 2017). In the present sample, marginalisation strategy had the lower mean ( $M= 10.72$ ), and the mean for loneliness levels was 40.87 (below the midpoint), thus it can be suggested that this sample appeared to be better integrated and did not present high levels of loneliness.

Furthermore, the second hypothesis was that a non-significant gender difference will be found in terms of levels of loneliness among the sample. This hypothesis was confirmed; as even though females scored slightly higher than males it was not a statistical significant outcome, thus a gender difference was not found. These results were similar to a previous study made with a Venezuelan sample in Portugal where results did not show a gender

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difference; study that also implemented the UCLA Loneliness scale (Guédez & Neto, 2014). A study with a Portuguese sample also found that loneliness was not affected by gender differences, and authors explained that when assessing loneliness indirectly (such as implementing the UCLA Loneliness Scale) results will normally be non-significant (Neto, 2014). This might be one of the explanations about the results obtained in the present study, along with the gender bias as there were more female individuals in the sample; this might be related with the assumption that females are more likely to agree to participate in research studies (Dickinson, Adelson, & Owen, 2012).

Additionally, several other studies conducted in different countries, have found similar results regarding gender difference in levels of loneliness, for example, a study made with Brazilians did not found a gender difference in their results (Neto et al., 2017); a study in Great Britain determined that gender alone has limited utility in terms of loneliness levels, as results showed minor or not difference at all in gender difference (Victor, Scambler, Bowling, & Bond, 2005); and a study with Dutch participants neither found a gender difference in loneliness levels (van Geel, 2016).

Lastly, the third hypothesis was that longer duration of residency in Ireland will be positively correlated with higher scores for integration strategy. This hypothesis was rejected as the present study did not found a statistical significant difference in integration scores among the five groups of length of residency; this might be associated with the absence of longitudinal data in the study. Oppositely, research has proposed that a significant factor influencing social integration is the length of residency, most of all at a neighbourhood level (Keene, Bader, & Ailshire, 2013). It has also being determined that individuals with longer

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residency length in the host country tend to adapt and engage in the host culture in a more favourable way (APA, 2012; Wu & Penning, 2013).

As an overall conclusion, acculturation is a complex phenomenon which can be a very stressful process and therefore result in different mental health consequences; one of those consequences is loneliness. The present study provided results to the literature that acculturation strategies are significant predictors of loneliness, where marginalisation had the strongest effect, meaning that the less interaction with the host culture the less adapted the individual is and the more prone to develop loneliness. In this case, Venezuelan immigrants in Ireland appeared to be considerably well integrated to the host culture, as this sample had higher mean scores for integration strategy; and did not present high levels of loneliness or a gender difference in those scores. The length of residency of these immigrants was not related with a better integration, this might be related with the fact that this was a cross-sectional study.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

The present study encountered some limitations that must be taken into account when discussing the present findings. Firstly, there were more female than male participants, this could display a gender bias as males were under-represented. Secondly, the non-probability sampling strategy used as participants were obtained by convenience and snowball sampling method through the Internet and via network of acquaintances, this can make the outcomes of the study non-reliable, as this sample is not random and is a strategy likely to be biased (Etikan, et al., 2016). Moreover, by being an online survey has disadvantages such as representativeness of the sample, low response rate, the dependency of internet connection in order to answer the survey, and the impersonality of no human contact (Evans & Mathur,

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2005). These techniques were implemented because of limited time frame for the researcher, and the low availability of funds.

Furthermore, there was a low amount of questionnaires implemented, that is why internal reliability for the questionnaires was lower than in previous studies; maybe different findings were obtained if different factors were taken into account. The application of a cross-sectional design is also a limitation as findings are obtained from a single point in time, meaning that the relationship found can be temporal (Prot & Anderson, 2013). Another limitation was the implementation of self-reporting measures which makes difficult to ensure validity in responses as this measures assess the individual's perceptions and can lead to different bias in responses (Demetriou, Ozer, & Essau, 2016). Again, these techniques were implemented because of limited time frame for the researcher, and the low availability of funds.

Despite these limitations, findings have important potential implications for understanding migration and experiences of loneliness, as a Venezuelan sample has not been largely studied in previous research; and the importance that nowadays Venezuelan migration has increased massively and many have entered Ireland, resulting in the possibility to identify individuals struggling with the adaptation process and loneliness. This study then, provides a unique approach to the literature. Nevertheless, further research is recommended with a bigger sample size and including other factors (such as language proficiency, marital status, cultural identity, perceived discrimination, self-esteem, acculturative stress, etc.). It is also recommended to compare results to other migrant nationalities; and to implement a longitudinal approach in order to obtain more accurate results and understand its variations across time.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

## THE REVISED UCLA LONELINESS SCALE

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Table 1  
*The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale*

Directions: Indicate how often you feel the way described in each of the following statements. Circle one number for each.

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1. I feel in tune with the people around me <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
2. I lack companionship	1	2	3	4
3. There is no one I can turn to	1	2	3	4
4. I do not feel alone <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
5. I feel part of a group of friends <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
6. I have a lot in common with the people around me <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
7. I am no longer close to anyone	1	2	3	4
8. My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me	1	2	3	4
9. I am an outgoing person <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
10. There are people I feel close to <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
11. I feel left out	1	2	3	4
12. My social relationships are superficial	1	2	3	4
13. No one really knows me well	1	2	3	4
14. I feel isolated from others	1	2	3	4
15. I can find companionship when I want it <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
16. There are people who really understand me <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
17. I am unhappy being so withdrawn	1	2	3	4
18. People are around me but not with me	1	2	3	4
19. There are people I can talk to <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4
20. There are people I can turn to <sup>a</sup>	1	2	3	4

*Note.* The total score is the sum of all 20 items.

<sup>a</sup> Item should be reversed (i.e., 1 = 4, 2 = 3, 3 = 2, 4 = 1) before scoring.

Source: Russell, D., Peplau, L. & Cutrona, C. (1980). The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Current and Discriminant Validity Evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39:3, 472-480.

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix B

## ICESY Acculturation Scale.

**E. Here are some statements about language, cultural traditions, friends etc. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by checking the answer that applies best to you.**

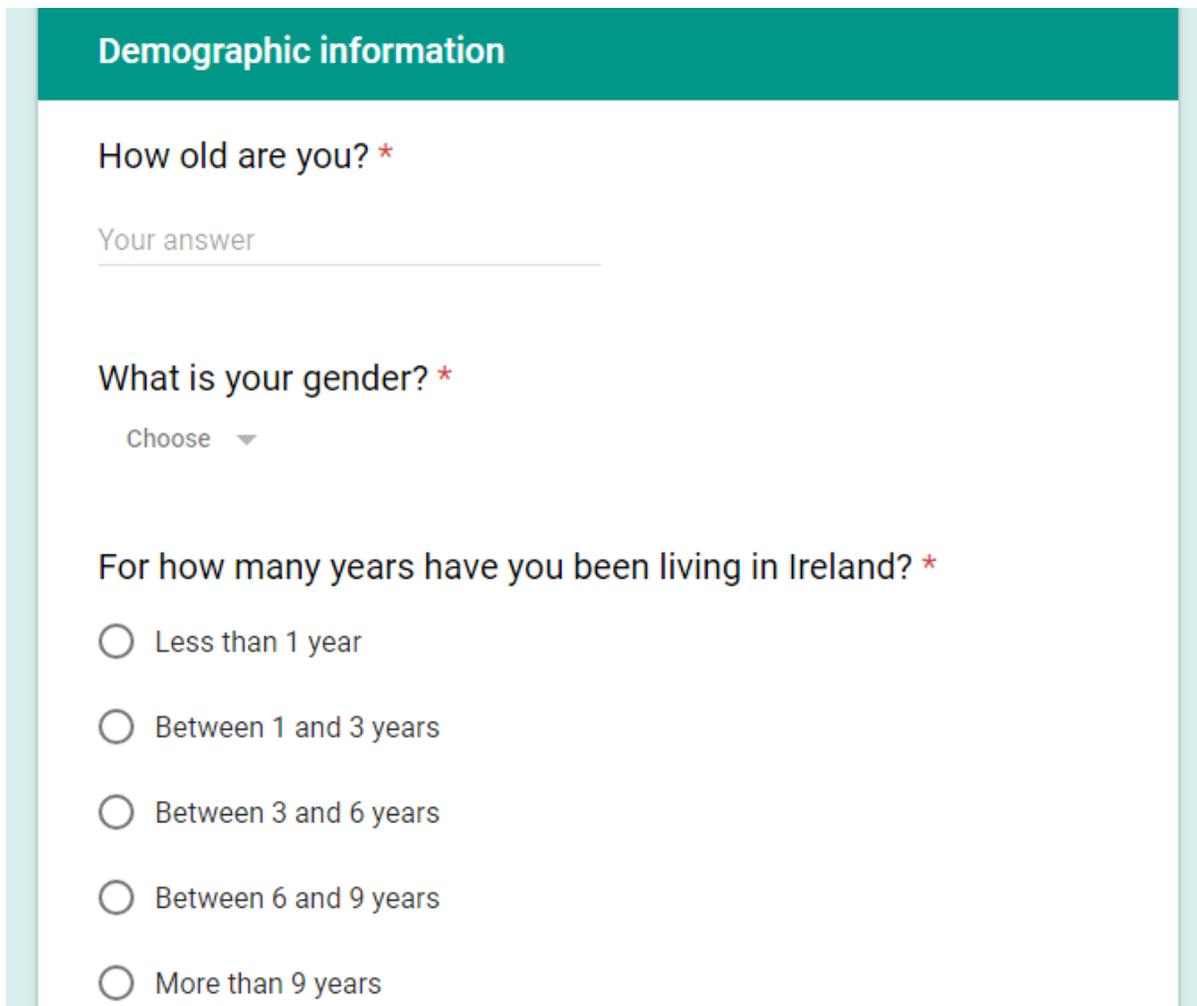
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Not sure /neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel that [ethnic group] should adapt to [national] cultural traditions and not maintain those of their own.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. I would rather marry a [ethnic] than a [national].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. I feel that [ethnic group] should maintain their own cultural traditions but also adapt to those of [national].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. I would rather marry a [national] than a [ethnic].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. I would be just as willing to marry a [national] as a [ethnic].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. I feel that it is not important for [ethnic group] either to maintain their own cultural traditions or to adapt to those of [national].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. I feel that [ethnic group] should maintain their own cultural traditions and not adapt to those of [national].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. I would not like to marry either a [national] or a [ethnic].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9. It is more important to me to be fluent in [ethnic] than in [national lang.].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. It is more important to me to be fluent in [national lang.] than in [ethnic lang.].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
11. It is important to me to be fluent in both [national lang.] and in [ethnic language.].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
12. It is not important to me to be fluent either in [ethnic language] or [national language].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
13. I prefer social activities that involve both [national members] and [ethnic members].	<input type="checkbox"/>				
14. I prefer to have only [national] friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
15. I prefer to have only [ethnic] friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
16. I prefer social activities that involve [nationals] only.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
17. I prefer to have both [ethnic] and [national] friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
18. I don't want to attend either [national] or [ethnic] social activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
19. I prefer social activities that involve [ethnic group members] only.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
20. I don't want to have either [national] or [ethnic] friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Source: Berry, J., Phinney, J., Sam, D., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 55(3), 303-332.

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix C

## Demographic questionnaire.



**Demographic information**

How old are you? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender? \*

Choose ▼

For how many years have you been living in Ireland? \*

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 and 3 years
- Between 3 and 6 years
- Between 6 and 9 years
- More than 9 years

Source: Study's Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5UNpwSWhhpYQOJ1K3hMQnaB9XF4dIPFI-ZSSxQNfKigdUXpQ/formResponse>

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix D

## Study Information.

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION

### STUDY INFORMATION

My name is Maria Montilla, and I am a final year Psychology student at the School of Business, National College of Ireland. As part of my degree, I need to conduct an independent research project. I am conducting a study to investigate the relationship between Loneliness and Acculturation Strategies among Venezuelans residing in Ireland, for this final year project. My research is being supervised by Dr Caoimhe Hannigan, Lecturer in Psychology at National College of Ireland. Please read information below before taking part in the study.

### WHO CAN TAKE PART?

You can take part in this online questionnaire if you are a Venezuelan residing in Ireland, and you are aged over 18 years.

### PROCEDURE:

In order to gather the necessary information, participants are asked to complete this online questionnaire. First, you will be asked to provide information about your age, gender and length of residency in the country. After this, you will be asked to complete a series of questions related to your experiences of moving to a new culture, and also your experiences related to loneliness. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

### BENEFITS OR COMPENSATION:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The present study does not offer any direct benefits or compensation/reimbursement to participants. However, this study can provide an important contribution to the literature in the area.

### RISK:

There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study. However, if at any point you become distressed or feel uncomfortable because of the sensitive topic that might evoke emotional feelings on you, you can withdraw at any moment from the study without penalty by closing the survey window. You can also contact the support services listed below.

### CONFIDENTIALITY:

The data collected for this study is anonymous, and you will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information. This means that your data will not be able to be linked to your identity. Because the data is being collected anonymously, it will not be possible to remove your data from the study once you have submitted your responses. All data will be analysed at a group level and will be only used for the present study.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Maria's email address: [x15016706@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:x15016706@student.ncirl.ie)  
Supervisor's email address: [caoimhe.hannigan@ncirl.ie](mailto:caoimhe.hannigan@ncirl.ie)

### EMERGENCY HELPLINE CONTACT

Samaritans: 116 123 or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)  
NiteLine: 1800 793 793  
Aware: 1800 80 48 48 or [supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)

Source: Study's Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5UNpwSWhhpYQOJ1K3hMQnaB9XF4dIPF1>

ZSSxQNfKigdUXpQ/formResponse

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix E

## Study's Consent.

**\*Required**

I confirm I am over 18 years old \*

YES

I confirm I have read and understood information given, and I consent to voluntary participate on the study \*

YES

**NEXT**

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Source: Study's Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5UNpwSWhhpYQOJ1K3hMQnaB9XF4dIPFI-ZSSxQNfKigdUXpQ/formResponse>

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix F

## Debriefing Information.

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION

### End of the Study

You have just participated in the research study: Relationship between Loneliness and Acculturation Strategies among Venezuelans residing in Ireland. Thank you for participating in this study! I hope you have enjoyed the experience. Please remember that once you submit your answers on this online survey, you will not be able to withdraw your data. If you do not want to submit your responses, please exit the survey now. You will not be penalized if you withdraw.

If you feel any discomfort or stress, do not hesitate in contacting the helplines provided:

Samaritans: 116 123 or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)  
NiteLine: 1800 793 793  
Aware: 1800 80 48 48 or [supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
Maria's email address: [x15016706@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:x15016706@student.ncirl.ie)  
Supervisor's email address: [caoimhe.hannigan@ncirl.ie](mailto:caoimhe.hannigan@ncirl.ie)

BACKSUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Source: Study's Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5UNpwSWhhpYQOJ1K3hMQnaB9XF4dIPFI-ZSSxQNfKigdUXpQ/formResponse>

## LONELINESS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

## Appendix G

Example of the Acculturation Scale's Modification.

17. I prefer to have both [ethnic] and [national] friends.      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]      [ ]

Source: Berry, J., Phinney, J., Sam, D., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant Youth: Acculturation, Identity and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 55(3), 303-332.

17. I prefer to have both Venezuelans and Irish friends. \*

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Not sure/Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

Source: Study's Questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5UNpwSWhhpYQOJ1K3hMQnaB9XF4dIPFI ZSSxQNfKigdUXpQ/formResponse>