CHALLENGES OF MULTICULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Finnish males' perspective

Ewa Hirvonen

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Diaconia University of Applied Sciences,

Diak-South, Järvenpää Unit

Degree Programme in Social Services

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ABSTRACT

Hirvonen, Ewa

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This qualitative research aims at describing the challenges of multicultural relationships from the Finnish males' perspective. Another objective was to study a topic on which there is not much research carried out yet and to provide Finnish men with an opportunity to express their views.

The data was collected in southern Finland in 2011. Five Finnish males living in multicultural relationships were interviewed. Both Finnish and international studies were used.

The results indicate a variety of challenges the Finns experienced in their multicultural relationships. There was a large scope of challenges from petty difficulties in expressing oneself in English up to taking advantage of the fact that a person's partner does not speak their native language.

In conclusion, the challenges were caused not merely by different cultural backgrounds of the partners, but by numerous other factors. Moreover, it was underlined that despite the challenges, multiculturalism may also enrich the relationship. Basing on the results of this research it is recommended to conduct further studies involving Swedish Finns living in multicultural relationships.

Key words: multicultural relationships, challenges, Finns, Finnish men

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis describes the issue of multicultural relationships and their challenges related to religious diversity, gender roles, language and communication as well as social attitude towards the couples.

I studied close romantic multicultural relationships consisting of Finnish males and immigrant females. A special emphasis was laid on the challenges experienced by the Finnish males. Therefore, my research question was: what challenges are experienced by Finns living in multicultural relationships?

It is significant to emphasize that there are both positive and negative sides of intercultural relationships. Since my aim was to study merely the challenges, I did not focus on the positive experiences to a great extent. However, by that I do not mean that multicultural relationships consist merely of challenges, or that monocultural relationships are free from difficulties.

There were three main aims of my research. Firstly, my objective was to describe challenges experienced by Finnish males living in multicultural relationships. Secondly, I aimed at providing Finnish males with an opportunity to express their opinions. Some researchers argue that there are more studies conducted on the immigrants' experiences of relationships with Finns than the other way around (for instance, Sirkkilä 2005, 16). Therefore, I considered it useful to focus on the Finnish perspective. Moreover, my aim was also to provide social work practitioners with valuable information as I believed that this research is relevant in social work. Besides service providers meant mostly for couples and families (such as Multicultural Association Familia Club RY, Kataja RY or Väestöliitto – The Family Federation), it is vital to remember that multicultural couples might be met in numerous branches of social work, such as child protection, crisis work and many others. Therefore, I considered this research useful for social work practitioners. What is more, the issue is also related to community work, since there is a

growth in the immigration rate to Finland (Helsingin kaupunki 2012). Moreover, there is also a visible growth in contracting multicultural marriages in Finland (Moisio 2009). This might be a future challenge of social- and community work practitioners.

I chose this topic because of two reasons. Firstly, the number of multicultural married couples in Finland increases. Nowadays, every fourth marriage in Helsinki is contracted between a Finn and a foreigner. (Moisio 2009.) Therefore, the topic seemed up-to-date and significant. Secondly, the issue of multicultural relationships is related to my personal life. Thus, my personal interest was also an important issue while choosing the topic of my thesis.

Instead of conducting my study project from the perspective of immigrant women, I decided to focus on the perspective of their Finnish partners. This is due to the fact that the perspective of Finnish males was less imaginable to me – a female with immigrant background – and, therefore, more interesting. Furthermore, there are more marriages contracted between Finnish males and immigrant females than Finnish females and immigrant males (Statistics Finland 2010). That is why I expected that it might be easier to find Finnish male participants than, for example, Finnish females living in multicultural relationships. As I already mentioned, I was also inspired by Sirkkilä (2005, 16), who argues that there is less research conducted in Finland on the experiences of Finns from multicultural marriages than on the experiences of immigrants from marriages with Finns. Therefore, my aim was to provide Finnish males with an opportunity to express their opinions.

There are six main chapters in the thesis. The first chapter introduces my study in a broad outline. The second chapter describes the issue of multicultural relationships. The third chapter describes the previous studies and challenges of multicultural relationships considered in them. In the fourth chapter, there is a description of methodology used in my research process. The fifth chapter contains my main findings, whereas the sixth chapter is a conclusion of my research.

2. MULTICULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

In Finland, there were 60.500 married couples with at least one spouse of foreign origin in 2009. There were more marriages contracted between a Finnish man and a woman of foreign origin than a man of foreign origin and a Finnish woman. Number of marriages contracted between Finnish males and females of foreign origin came to more than 19.000 (see Appendix 1). (Statistics Finland 2010.) It is also estimated that nowadays every fourth marriage in Helsinki is contracted between a Finn and a foreigner (Moisio 2009).

In the end of 2010, most Finnish males married to females of foreign origin had found their soul mates in Russian women. Then, there were almost 4000 such married couples. The second most popular nationality was Thai with 3062 married couples. The third place belonged to Estonian women with 2446 contracted marriages. Other nationalities that had a wide appeal among Finnish males were Swedish (1314 married couples), Chinese (677) and American (383). (Statistics Finland 2011.)

Multicultural relationships were studied both in Finland and worldwide by various researchers (such as László 1998; Vesalainen 1999; Rybicki 2001; Sirkkilä 2005; Toivonen 2006; Kuusisto 2007; Remennick 2009; Inman, Abbyaltman, Anjukaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr & Walker 2011 and others). Despite the fact that there are already relatively many studies conducted on the topic, some authors (such as Tuomi-Nikula 1997, 271) mention the paucity of Finnish research describing the issue. However, it is also pointed out that studying multicultural relationships became more popular in Finland as the number of such couples increased. It is also noticed that the most common target group of Finnish researchers are immigrant females married to Finns, instead of the Finnish males. (Sirkkilä 2005, 16.)

What is more, the issue of multicultural couples and families was taken into consideration not only in academic research, but also in belle-lettres. There are even

works of art which describe multicultural relationships between Finns and people representing other nationalities (for example, Ranya ElRamly's "The position of the sun" describing a Finnish-Egyptian relationship seen from the child's perspective).

Moreover, the topic provokes also a discussion in social media, such as a newspaper called Metro. In the newspaper, there is a separate column for the readers' opinions. At some stage, relationships of Finnish males and immigrant females – particularly Asians – provoked a stormy discussion. Some readers threatened even to disinherit their own sons if they create relationships with women of foreign origin (Metro 22.08.2011). This discussion proves that the topic is significant, up-to-date and somewhat controversial in the Finnish society. At times, multicultural couples become also popular in the public broadcasting. For instance, a Finnish public broadcaster YLE made a documentary about ten multicultural couples living in Finland, called "Rakkauden tähden" ("For the sake of love") (YLE TV 1, n.d.).

But what is actually meant by a multicultural relationship? There are numerous definitions. Precisely, there are numerous terms used to describe the same or similar phenomenon. Such terms are, for instance, the Finnish term *seka-avioliitto* and its German equivalent *Mischehe*, which would refer to a mixed marriage. However, there are also numerous other terms. Tuomi-Nikula (1997, 269) points out that their relevancy is mostly determined by the factor which differentiates the partners from each other. Therefore, a binational marriage *(kaksikansallinen avioliitto)* would refer to a marriage between citizens of two different countries. In turn, bilingual marriage *(kakskielinen avioliitto)* is related to the linguistic diversity and so on. (Tuomi-Nikula 1997, 269.)

The same author points out the features of multicultural relationships. She argues that such relationships are exogamic, what basically means that a person's partner does not belong to their own group, be the group based on religion, language and/or citizenship. Moreover, the author refers to the heterogenic character of multicultural relationships in the aspect of language, ethnicity, religion and culture. (Tuomi-Nikula 1997, 269.)

Regardless of the way I refer to a multicultural relationship in this work, I always mean a non-homogeneous close relationship (in case of this research, a relationship between a

Finn and a citizen of any other country). Therefore, my idea of multicultural relationship might be understood similarly to Minna Toivonen's concept. In her study, Toivonen (2006) focuses on the everyday life of multicultural families from the perspective of the relationship between the partners and bringing up children. She defines multicultural marriage as

a legalized relationship between a Finnish spouse and a spouse of foreign origin.

Since my aim was to study not necessarily married couples, I simply modified Toivonen's definition by omitting the words "married" and "legalized" and replacing "a spouse" by "a partner". Therefore, my modified definition of a multicultural relationship in this research refers to a relationship between a Finnish male and a partner of foreign origin.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES

As already mentioned, the issue of multicultural couples has been taken into consideration by researchers both worldwide and in Finland. However, the research was conducted from relatively different angles. According to Tuomi-Nikula (1997, 273), most researchers pay attention to three main topics related to multicultural relationships, which are acculturation, problems in such relationships and reasons for choosing a partner with a different cultural background. My research belongs to the second category and describes the challenges related to four areas, which are language and communication, gender roles, different religious views and social reaction to the participants' multicultural relationships. These themes were selected as they tended to appear relatively often both in the interviews I conducted and in the previous studies.

There are both similarities and differences between my research and previous studies. For instance, both Vesalainen (1999) and Toivonen (2006) discuss whether multiculturalism in relationships is rather a challenging or an enriching factor. In turn, I focus merely on the challenging aspect (by which I obviously do not mean that multiculturalism must not be enriching). Another important difference is the diversity of the partners of Finns involved in certain studies. For instance, Sirkkilä (2005) focuses merely on Finnish men married to women from Thailand. Similarly, Kuusisto (2007) studies the relationships of Finnish women and Italian men. In turn, my study includes females from different countries and even continents. I decided not to limit the nationalities of the interviewees' partners as my aim was to obtain possibly diverse results (by which I do not mean that a research conducted on one nationality must not bring diverse results) and to gain more knowledge about different cultures.

However, there are also certain similarities between my project and previous studies, such as the methodological ones. For instance, both Sirkkilä (2005) and I collected the data by interviewing Finnish males.

The third chapter describes the challenges of multicultural couples in four aspects, such as social reaction, language and communication, different religious views and gender roles.

3.1 Social reaction as a challenge

Social reaction means in this research the way other people (both known by the couple and strangers) react to the couple. It may contain a lot of different behaviors, such as, for example, spiteful comments and disturbing staring. The social reaction was recognized as a challenge by many authors (for example, Tuomi-Nikula 1997; Sirkkilä 2005; Jaynes 2010; Inman, Abbyaltman, Anjukaduvettoor-Davidson, Carr & Walker, 2011). The scope of challenges varies. Sometimes, the negative social attitude is aimed merely towards the immigrant females. However, a negative "social label" might be put not only on women of foreign origin, but also on their Finnish husbands, as it is described by Sirkkilä (2005).

However, Finnish female interviewees of Taru Kuusisto point out that negative social reactions to their relationships with Italian men were related both to the partners as citizens of Italy and as individuals (Kuusisto 2007, 63-64). Moreover, it turns out in Kuusisto's study that there were also other issues causing negative social reactions to Finnish-Italian relationships, such as large age differences between the partners (ibid., p. 65). Therefore, it would be a generalization to state that a negative social attitude towards multicultural couples is always caused by the multicultural aspect. There are many possible reasons for a negative social reaction. Kuusisto's (2007) study shows that people might have a negative attitude towards someone not only due to their nationality, but also other factors, such as personality and age.

It is vital to mention that the social attitude might be so negative that it may cause further difficulties, such as parents' disapproval for marriage (Inman et al. 2011, 253).

3.2 Language and communication

Generally, people communicate by using verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication happens through words. It may be spoken or written. Spoken communication occurs in such situations, as a face-to-face conversation, public speech, interview and many more. In turn, letters, reports and others are forms of written communication. People use language, a common symbol system, in order to share their experiences with each other. (Rai & Rai 2009, 18-21.)

Non-verbal communication is also called "communication by implication". It includes all messages that are not expressed in words, be spoken or written. (Rayudu 2010, 189.) Therefore, it may include, for example, pictures and graphs. However, also gesture, facial expressions and tone of voice are forms of non-verbal communication. They are called body language. What is more, non-verbal communication occurs even without verbal communication. Moreover, it always accompanies verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is also more difficult to control. There is even a saying that "non-verbal communication speaks lauder than words". (Rai & Rai 2009, 22.)

While studying numerous research projects about challenges of multicultural relationships I noticed that communication and language are a relatively common challenge. Problems related to language and communication in multicultural relationships are mentioned in many academic publications (for instance, Toivonen 2006; Arteva 2000; Tuomi-Nikula 1997; Remennick 2009) as well as in articles written by people living in multicultural relationships themselves (for example, Himmelrich 2010). On one hand, a Finnish author Arteva (2000, 17) argues that lack of a common language between partners leads into misunderstandings. On the other hand, she points out that misunderstandings are also possible even if there is a common language spoken by both of the partners. (Arteva 2000, 17.)

As it was already mentioned, language is not the only form of communication between people. A person may argue that they can do fine without the possibility of communicating with help of language. Partly, it might be true. There are non-verbal forms of communication, such as artifacts, haptics, chronemics, proxemics and kenesics (Rai & Panna 2010, 35). Moreover, non-verbal forms of communication are also

considered as significant by some authors, such as already mentioned Arteva (2000, 17-18). However, communication lying beyond the language is not free from challenges, either. Such challenges may be related to, for example, reading cultural codes in multicultural relationships as it happened in Russian-Israelis marriages (Remennick 2009, 727).

One could ask why I pay so much attention to language and its significance. The answer is relatively simple. When a person comes from a certain country and their beloved one from another one, the possibility that they know a common language fluently enough to communicate with no difficulties may decrease remarkably. Therefore, it could have been the case that the participants of my study experienced the challenge of not sufficient language skills. Furthermore, this issue could have caused further challenges, such as inability to explain some issues to the partner and, therefore, frustration and disappointment. Putting it in other words, let us use a quotation of Arteva (2000, 30):

> *When partners do not speak perfectly a common language, they may misunderstand, flare up and shout: "Shut up when you don't understand!"*

3.3 Different religious views

The word "religion" comes from Latin, but even in the classical Rome, there were many ways to interpret it. Some of the meanings were "to re-read" and "to bind together". Among numerous definitions of religion, there are substantive and functional theories. Substantive theories are mostly related to defining the object of people's faith. One of the substantive definitions was created by Edward Tylor, described as the founder of British social anthropology. He defined religion as "a belief in spiritual beings". This theory was later criticized as naively evolutionary and ethnocentric. Similarly to many other substantive definitions, Tylor's theory excluded certain traditions from the religious spheres, such as parts of Buddhism and Hinduism. (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 15-20.)

In turn, functional theories define religion from the perspective of the utility or effects that religion has on the individual and/or societal level. Several functional theories are

based on a statement that "religion is a human attempt to create meaning and identity". For example Yinger (1970, 7) defines religion as "a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life". The author made a list of questions that find their attempted solutions in religion. Such questions were, for example, whether there is meaning of life despite suffering and how we are relevant to death. However, this theory was also criticized. For instance, it was questioned whether religion always deals with "the deepest questions". (Furseth & Repstad 2006, 20-21.)

Regardless of how religion is defined, it might have a great impact on relationships. As an example, Markman, Stanley and Blumberg (1997, 230) argue that people who follow some religion legalize their relationships more often than the others. In order to support their statement, the authors refer to the research of Bernard Spilka who points out two reasons for that: "uniting" role of religion and lack of interest in marriage as such of those who do not follow any religion. As another example of significance of religion in a relationship, the authors point out that it is indicated in many studies that religion has a positive influence on a relationship. The authors argue that there is less divorces among believers and that they are stronger committed to their marriages. (Markman, Stanley & Blumberg 1997, 230-231.) If this is the case, then a serious question arises: what about those partners, who follow different religions? Do they have a chance to create happy relationships, or is the challenge of different beliefs too crucial?

Not surprisingly, different religious views turn to be a challenge in some cases. For instance, Arteva (2000, 70-73) describes the case of Lutheran Timo from Finland and Catholic Rita from Peru. In their story, Rita is a strong believer, whereas Timo is not. For Rita, it was difficult to marry a non-Catholic. She used to be threatened that if her husband does not convert to Catholicism, she will end up in hell. There were also differences in celebrating Christian holidays. For Rita, Easter was more significant than Christmas. Moreover, Rita was also disturbed by a small number of Catholic churches in Finland. Sometimes, she was unable to attend a Catholic mass and felt very miserable about it. (Arteva 2000, 70-73.)

Beside such stories, statistics are also merciless: in the United States, four out of ten marriages contracted between people following different religions end in a divorce (Heikkilä 2004, 10).

Moreover, some authors point out further challenges deriving from different religious views of both partners. For instance, use of contraception might be seriously restricted in a relationship with a Catholic. Pork meat may vanish from the couple's menu, if one of the partners is a Muslim and so on. (Oksi-Walter, Roos & Viertola-Cavallari 2009, 176.)

Thus, it is pointed out that two religions can be an enriching experience, but also a collision (Heikkilä 2004, 18). In this research, it was examined whether the religious diversity is experienced as a challenge by the interviewees.

3.4 Gender roles

Terms gender role and gender identity are relatively new. They did not exist before the Second World War. Other similar expressions – such as "gender-bender" – appeared not before than in the beginning of 1980's. (Glover 2000, 10.)

There are many ways to define these concepts. For example Glover (2000, 9) relates the gender role to something that constrains. According to him, the term gender role suggests "a part we have to play" (ibid., p. 9). In turn, Vesalainen (1999, 34) relates role models to the division of work, duties and rights as well as decision making process on the common issues in the family. According to her, roles of men and women are learnt in a person's childhood family and associated with the culture (ibid., p. 34). Therefore, traditional roles of men and women may vary a lot in different cultures.

According to Timo Keskitalo who used to lead discussion clubs for people living in intercultural relationships in Helsinki, many problems in Finnish-foreigner relationships arise due to the strong position of Finnish women. In turn, multicultural partners of Finnish women usually come from countries where the man's position is strong. According to Keskitalo, this "position conflict" may cause numerous problems up to

domestic violence. (Arteva 2000, 15-16.) Tuomi-Nikula (1997, 280) takes a similar stand by arguing that

problems grow stronger if the role expectations differ from each other in fundamental aspects.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains a description of my research process. Therefore, it describes how the data was collected, analyzed and who were involved.

4.1 Data collection

This is a qualitative study. I decided to choose the qualitative approach because it aims at understanding people's experiences and interpretations (Mathie & Carnozzi 2005, 25; Dan & Kalof 2008, 79-80). As I was interested in Finnish males' experiences of challenges of multicultural relationships, I considered the qualitative approach suitable. In turn, I was not interested in measuring and verifying the reality objectively, what the quantitative research aims at (Mathie & Carnozzi 2005, 25).

As my sample was relatively small, I decided that conducting individual, in-person, semi-structured interviews is an adequate way to collect data. Dan and Kalof (2008, 119) define an interview as a situation where the questions are asked from an interview guide and the responses are recorded. I basically carried out what the authors call "an interview". However, I conducted semi-structured interviews. It means that my interviewing was not only based on reading questions prepared in advance, but also on responding to what the interviewee is saying and asking additional questions if needed.

Although I found in-person interviews suitable for my research, this way of data collection is also being criticized. For instance, Dan and Kalof (2008, 126) point out that interviews conducted face-to-face may be expensive and time-consuming. Knowing that, I still decided to interview in-person as there was a relatively small number of interviewees. However, it was not the only reason to choose individual interviews as my way of data collection. I actually found many other advantages of such interviews, such as those mentioned by Haralambos and Holborn (2004, 905). According to them, lack of other interviewees ensures that the respondent will not be disturbed or influenced by

them (ibid., p. 905). That is how I wanted to ensure the validity and reliability of my research. What is more, my aim was to make sure that the rules of confidentiality will apply, what is not obvious while conducting group interviews.

I conducted five interviews. The reason for conducting five and not more interviews is that the saturation point was reached after interviewing five participants. Glaser and Strauss (1967 in Francis et al. 2010, 1230) relate the saturation point to a situation in which the researcher does not obtain any new information while collecting the data. Therefore, I noticed that after conducting five interviews, the answers tend to repeat and not much new information is received.

All of the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the participants' native language. One of the interviewees was a Swedish Finn, however, he was able to communicate in Finnish fluently. Three of the interviews took place in the interviewees' private homes. The two other interviews were conducted in the participants' working places. A voice recording device was used while conducting the interviews. I decided to do that as my goal was to ensure that I will be able to obtain the whole interview. I personally believed that making notes is not sufficient comparing to audio taping and transcribing the data in the case of my topic. Moreover, my wish was to make sure that there will be a possibility to listen to the interview again and possibly correct and supplement the notes I took. Silverman (2006, 204) points out that the possibility of replying the tape and improving the transcript is a clear advantage of this kind of qualitative data. Therefore, I did not wish to deprive myself from this benefit as I believed that it can help me conduct my research.

What is more, I was convinced by the statement of Ely (1991, 82), who argues that numerous researchers consider audio and/or videotaping a useful tool for documentation. Also Ruusuvuori and Tiittula (2005, 14) point out that audiotaping the interviews usually causes more benefit than harm.

4.2 Participants

Possible participants of my study were Finnish males living in close romantic heterosexual relationships with women of foreign origin. Certain organization was contacted in order to find the participants. However, some participants were found in another way (for example, through indirect personal contacts).

I used random sampling in order to find my interviewees. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2004, 895), random sampling lets the researcher ensure that every potential participant has an equal possibility to participate. That is why I decided to use this sampling method as providing every suitable person with an equal opportunity to be involved was my wish.

It is significant to mention that in my sampling process, there were no requirements regarding, for example, the participants' age, their partners' nationality (besides that the partners must not be Finnish), length of the relationships and civil status (therefore, studied relationships did not need to be legalized). However, I did not include persons who used to be in multicultural relationships but split up later on. I decided to do that after reading a book of Sinikka Arteva in which she describes Finns' experiences from their multicultural relationships. Arteva (2000) conducted interviews both with people living in such relationships while the interview took place and those ones who had already broken up or divorced. Some of those participants, who were not in multicultural relationships anymore, tended to share their stories with some dose of bitterness and disappointment. It might be the case that such feelings could have influenced their stories (for example, the story of Helena and her Chinese ex-husband – see Arteva 2000, 23-28). Therefore, I did not wish to obtain a "distorted" picture of a relationship. That is why I did not take into consideration participants who used to be in a multicultural relationship, but were not anymore, as my aim was to ensure the reliability and validity of my research project.

There were five participants in my research. In order to make my work clearer for the reader, I decided to present their situations (at the moment of conducting the interviews) in the following table.

TABLE 1. Interviewees.

case	partner's nationality	case's religion	partner's religion	language spoken by the partners
A	American	none	Catholic	English, basic Finnish
B	Romanian	Evangelical Lutheran	Eastern Orthodox	English, basic Finnish
C	Polish	none	Catholic	English, Finnish
D	Vietnamese	none	Buddhist	Finnish, Swedish; case spoke Swedish and his partner Vietnamese to their children
E	Russian	none	Eastern Orthodox	Finnish, English; partner spoke Russian to their children

Thus, there was a national diversity among the interviewees' partners. Two of them were citizens of European countries, one of an Asian country, one of a North-American country and one of a Eurasian country. There were also religious differences. The majority of the partners followed some Christian denomination: either Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. Only one of the females followed a non-Christian religion (as long as Buddhism is considered as a religion – see the chapter 3.3). By this point it is important to mention that although a person belongs to certain church, it does not necessarily mean that they are strongly committed to their religion. For instance, A's and C's partners were Catholics, but they were described by the interviewees as non-strong believers. Moreover, although interviewee B claimed to be Lutheran, he described himself and his Eastern Orthodox wife rather as "*tapakristityt*" than as strong believers; that means, as people belonging to the church who do not obey certain religious rules and visit the church relatively rarely (Pakanatieto-yhdistys ry n.d.).

Furthermore, there was also certain diversity in the linguistic aspect. In three cases, English was the mostly used language. The other two couples spoke mostly Finnish to each other. In one case, Swedish was used, too. Moreover, there were two couples that

had children. In case of these couples, the partners tended to speak their own native languages to the children.

4.3 Data analysis

I used thematic analysis in order to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method that comprises the main issues arising in a body of evidence. Thematic analysis is primarily qualitative in origin, although it is also possible to count and tabulate the themes. (Pope, Mays & Popay 2007, 96.)

Morgan (2011, 34) argues that thematizing is preceded by a careful re-reading of all interview transcripts or texts. During re-reading, a researcher should notice significant experiential elements that repeat throughout the text with some variation. Such elements can be called preliminary themes. Thematic analysis continues as additional themes and subthemes are recognized. This process may lead to new understandings that might either demand re-thematization or support the existing thematizations. In order to decide whether a theme should be modified or retained, the researcher should re-examine all the texts. (Morgan 2011, 34-35.)

Thus, I carried out what is described as thematic analysis. All the interview transcripts were printed out and read carefully. Expressions that tended to repeat were underlined and preliminary themes were created. Thematic analysis continued with considering new themes and subthemes. Then, the interview transcripts were re-read in order to decide whether existing themes need to be changed.

There were four main themes in this research, such as language and communication, religion, social reaction as well as gender roles, masculinity and femininity. Among the themes, certain subthemes were also recognized.

4.4 Ethical consideration

Oliver (2003, 9) argues that taking ethics into consideration from the beginning of the research process is essential. Therefore, I paid a lot of attention to the ethical issues from the very beginning of my process. There are many examples.

Numerous researchers (such as Oliver 2003, 2 and Heaton 2004, 77) underline the significance of informed consent, which basically means informing the potential participants fully about the study before they even assent to participate. I actually followed this rule. Potential participants were provided with a lot of information about this research. Moreover, before the voice recorder was switched on, the respondents were asked if there is anything they are still uncertain about.

I also took care of the mental comfort of the interviewees. I told all of the participants that if, for example, any of the questions is too personal, they are free to refuse to answer or stop the interview without any consequences.

Another example is already described in the chapter 4.1. It is related to choosing individual instead of group interviews. I decided to conduct individual interviews as my wish was to ensure the confidentiality.

After the process was completed, recording tapes and transcripts were destroyed. This is how I ensured that they will not be found accidentally and used inappropriately.

4.5 Limitations

Some of the interviews remained relatively short. The answers provided by some participants were rather scarce despite the fact that the interviewees were asked open-ended questions. This was certain limitation of my research process.

As it was already mentioned, all of the interviews were conducted in Finnish. Personally, I would not consider language as the cause of scarcity of the answers provided by some interviewees. Although Finnish is not my native language, the

interviewees seemed to understand the questions well, because their answers – even though scarce in some cases – were still pertinent and reasonable. Moreover, the participants were answering in their native language, so insufficient language skills could not prevent them from providing longer answers, either. Furthermore, there could not be any shyness related to speaking a foreign language while being interviewed, because the language used was the interviewees' mother tongue. One of the participants, D, was a Swedish Finn; however, he was also able to communicate in Finnish fluently.

Moreover, I asked all the interviewees relatively similar questions. Since the same or similar questions made most of the interviewees provide me with relatively long and expansive answers and only one or two remained rather limited, I would not consider the questions faulty. By this point, it is important to underline that I do not blame anyone for the situation that occurred; instead, I try to reflect on what happened and consider what could have caused it.

So what could have been the reason of the scarcity of some interviews? Personally, I could see at least three different factors.

Firstly, the personality may matter. Not everyone is a talkative storyteller. Some people might prefer providing short and precise answers instead of chatting for a long time.

Secondly, the Finnish culture of communication might be one of the reasons. Lewis (2004, 67-68) describes the Finnish communication style as modest and introvert. According to him, Finns often feel a very little pressure to participate actively in the discussion and are "reluctant to communicate", even though they are excellent listeners (ibid. p. 69). Therefore, it might be the case that on one hand, some of the interviewees simply acted in accordance to their cultural communication style. On the other hand, however, it is vital to avoid unnecessary generalizing and reproducing stereotypes. Obviously, I do not mean that some of the interviewees were less talkative simply because they are Finns; however, the cultural factor could also matter.

Moreover, Ruusuvuori and Tiittula (2005, 87) point out that the meaning of gender of the examiner and the examinee was underlined especially in the feministic research.

According to them it is justifiable to presume that it might be easier for men or similarly women to speak about some issues merely with each other. (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 87-88.) Therefore, it might be the case that gender was an influencing factor. As I already mentioned, all of my participants were males, interviewed by a female researcher. Perhaps, some of the interviewees considered it difficult to speak about challenging issues in their relationships with a female interviewer. Similarly to the other two factors, this could also explain the scarcity of some of the answers.

It is important to mention that even though some of the interviews remained relatively short, I was still able to use the data I gained from them. The information was provided in a less expansive way, however, it was still valuable and meaningful for my research.

5. FINDINGS

This chapter presents my findings. Therefore, it describes what challenges were experienced by the interviewed Finns in their multicultural relationships and what they were like.

5.1 Social attitude

Magdalena Jaakkola studied Finns' attitudes towards foreigners. According to her, in 2003 more than half of her respondents claimed that "Finnish women fall too easily for men of foreign origin". Jaakkola interprets this as a part of the whole, prejudiced Finnish attitude towards immigrants. Moreover, the author argues that her respondents' attitude towards contracting a marriage with a foreigner was more cautious than towards immigration as such. (Jaakkola 2005, 81-83.) This is confirmed by other authors. For instance, Martikainen and Tiilikainen (2007, 27) state that Russian and Estonian wives of Finns are easily labeled as sex workers.

Despite that, not many of my interviewees claimed that they have experienced negative social attitude towards them and their partners – and if so, then the reactions were usually not expressed very directly. The negative attitude was mostly aimed towards the women of foreign origin, not their Finnish partners or the couples as a whole. For instance, interviewee E married to a Russian woman claimed that his wife used to come across some unpleasant comments due to her clothing style and lack of Finnish language skills. He stated that

sometimes, when she was travelling alone by bus and couldn't speak Finnish yet… and then her clothes were more distinctive… then someone could comment on that.

Therefore, this kind of a negative reaction of other people was related to the woman's distinctive clothes and lack of Finnish language skills and not to the fact that she was married to a Finn.

It also turns out in this research that those women who differed physically from Finns to a relatively great extent, such as D's Vietnamese wife, tended to experience a negative social reaction more often, especially this of strangers. This is already described by some authors, such as Heiskanen (2012), who argues that accepting an immigrant who resembles Finns in some way seems to be easier for Finns.

How about the attitude towards the Finnish males, partners of immigrant women? The negative social reaction to them is recognized by some authors. For instance, Hannu Sirkkilä (2005) focuses in his research on Finnish men living in close relationships with Thai women. Sirkkilä lays a special emphasis on a particular challenge of such relationships, which is sticking a social label on Finnish partners of Thai women. According to him, such men are often considered as sex-tourists who did not manage to find a Finnish partner. (Sirkkilä 2005.) In my research, the negative social reaction was usually aimed at the immigrant females, not the Finnish males. However, interviewee D, married to a Vietnamese woman, was actually asked by strangers where he bought his wife. Therefore, the case is relatively similar to what Sirkkilä describes.

However, it was pleasant to discover that a negative social attitude (be towards the female, the male or the couple in general) was not a very challenging matter to my respondents. For instance E, who mentioned people commenting his wife's clothing style on the bus, claimed that

> *…but even then, she didn't come back home in tears.*

Also D, who described people staring at him and his Vietnamese wife (see the chapter 5.1.1), pointed out that

> *we don't care about it. If they look at us, we look back at them.*

Summing up, the immigrant women, partners of the interviewed Finns, were most likely to experience a negative social attitude. Negative social reactions to Finnish males, related to women of foreign origin, or the couples as a whole, were relatively rare. Although there were certain challenges related to people's attitude, they did not seem to be extremely disturbing issues to the respondents.

5.1.1 Regional differences

Regional differences in people's attitudes towards multicultural couples were noticed by some authors. For example, Sinikka Arteva describes the case of her Finnish interviewee Olli, married to a Chinese woman. Olli claims that although people do not usually take a negative stand about her, he would not dare to take her to certain relatively small town located in eastern Finland (Arteva 2000, 30). Furthermore, such regional differences in people's attitude towards multicultural couples and immigrants in general are also recognized in quantitative studies. In one of the projects conducted by Magdalena Jaakkola, the respondents were asked whether Finnish women fall in love too easily with men of foreign origin. The results indicate that especially respondents living in Finnish countrysides as well as small and middle-sized towns provided an affirmative reply. (Jaakkola 2005, 82.) In another research conducted by Jaakkola, it is pointed out that in 2007, in the metropolitan area of Finland (consisting of the capital Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa), people's attitude towards migrants from Estonia, Poland, Russia and China was more positive than averagely in the whole country. Furthermore, the results indicate that in Helsinki, people's attitude towards Polish and Estonian immigrants was more sympathetic than in other parts of Finland. (Jaakkola 2008, 54.) Therefore, there are regional differences in people's reactions and attitudes towards both multicultural couples and immigrants in general. It seems that the inhabitants of large cities are less critical about the issue than people living in countrysides and small towns.

Besides the results obtained by Jaakkola and Arteva, this theory might be supported by my research. Participant D stated that

> *not in Helsinki, but if we go a bit outside of Helsinki then you can feel people staring at us.*
> - *Do they also come to ask something?*
> - *No, they just stare. There hasn't been anybody to dare to come and ask. I'm still waiting for this day.*

Rai and Rai (2009, 27) describe eye contact as a "difficult and disconcerting communicative factor". According to them, a comfortable eye contact lasts no longer than three seconds. A prolonged eye contact might be a sign of invasion of another's space. Therefore, staring is a behavior by which aggressive people try to fix the others. (Rai & Rai 2009, 27.) Thus, it does not surprise that staring was experienced as a disturbing issue.

Let us come back to the regional differences. Also participant B underlined that people in Helsinki are used to hear different languages. Therefore, nobody really reacts to the couple speaking English with each other or his wife speaking Finnish with a foreign accent. He stated that

> *in Helsinki, it is quite common after all that people speak different languages.*

Thus, it seems to be the case that in large Finnish cities, multicultural couples are less likely to experience a negative social attitude towards them than in smaller towns or villages.

5.2 Language and communication

This chapter presents the challenges related to language and communication that were mentioned by my interviewees.

Language, one form of communication, may be defined as a system of symbols with standard meanings (Rai & Panna 2010, 33). Language is also considered as an inseparable part of culture (ibid., p. 33). As Rusanen (1993, 31 in László 1998, 16) puts it,

> *a person's cultural background is disclosed in their way of communicating.*

Language and communication turned out to be certain challenge in nearly all of the cases. However, the challenges related to language and communication were relatively diverse.

One of the challenges was related to the meaning of silence in different cultures. Namely, participant A, dating an American woman, stated that

in Finland you can be quiet. But not in the Unites States.

Considering this difference as a challenge might not surprise, if we take a look at publications that describe the culture of speech in different countries. For instance, Lewis (2004, 67-68) argues that silence in Finland does not mean a person's inability to communicate. Instead, it is considered as a necessary part of social integration (ibid., p. 67-68). Also Rai and Rai (2009, 21) argue that silence may be a very effective form of communication. Despite that, Lewis (2004, 67-68) points out that in the United States, speech has a great importance as a tool to get to know other people and set up relationships. The American communication style is, thus, lively and extrovert. The author claims that the style dislikes silence and is full of interruptions and thinking aloud. Instead, the Finnish communication style is described as introvert. It also allows the person to be quiet. (Lewis 2004, 67-68.) Therefore, the Finnish and American communication styles differ a lot. As a result, they might turn challenging while tackling each other, just as it happened in A's relationship. For a more detailed comparison between different communication styles, have a look at Appendix 2.

Also the speed of communication and finding strength to cope with it were mentioned as a challenge. Participant A, who spoke mostly English and only sometimes basic Finnish with his partner, claimed that

it's a very simple Finnish, and very slow, I don't always cope with it.

The problem of an "inappropriate" speed of speech was mentioned in other sources, too. A Finnish-Japanese couple Hannu and Hiro, described by Arteva (2000, 53), is one of the examples. The partners experienced the challenge of the way they speak. Hannu did not like the quiet way his wife spoke. In turn, Hiro blamed her husband for speaking

Finnish so fast that she was unable to understand him. (Arteva 2000, 53.) In case of A, it was the Finnish male who experienced the challenge of a speed of speech which does not suite him, but otherwise the challenge – related to the way the other person speaks and to finding strength to cope with it – is similar.

Another challenge, maybe a slightly surprising one, was related to certain taking advantage of the fact that a person's partner does not know their native language. That happened for instance in case of D, married to a Vietnamese woman. Their children were asking the respondent for something in Swedish and if he answered "no", they asked their mother for the same thing in Vietnamese, so that the father could not understand. Therefore, it was challenging for the couple that the children were aware of the fact that their father does not speak Vietnamese and were able to take advantage of it. Similar case was mentioned by the interviewee E. Namely, he claimed that his Russian wife tends to start speaking angrily in Russian while arguing with her husband so that he cannot understand what she is saying. The interviewee stated that

she tends to speak Russian when she is bad-tempered. And then, when she is really angry, she might invent some expressions in Russian that I don't understand (…), but I can guess. Probably, she doesn't mean "I love you".

It turned out in this research that communication not only between the partners, but also between other people important to them might be challenging. For instance, it was challenging for B's parents to communicate with his Romanian wife due to a language barrier. B stated that

of course, communication is difficult for them, because they speak only very little English.

Also E came across difficulties while, for instance, participating in a sightseeing tour with his wife and her Russian friend, who did not speak English. E described the situation as follows:

not long ago, we had a sightseeing tour in Helsinki with a friend.
-   *And?*
-   *She didn't speak English and I don't speak Russian, so it was slightly difficult.*

There were also other linguistic problems, such as these related to expressing various people's hierarchy in different languages. A strong hierarchy is typical for Vietnamese culture. It is pointed out that recognizing rank while greeting someone is a vital issue. Age and gender are regarded as factors that matter while addressing people. (World Trade Press 2010, 2.) Also Lewis (2004, 68) describes hierarchy as one of the values in the Asian culture (see Appendix 2). This cultural difference turned challenging in the case of D, a husband of a Vietnamese female. D claimed that it is not polite to answer "mhm" to an adult person in Vietnam. Instead, the answer should be a clear "yes" or "no". D's statement supports the description of the Vietnamese culture of greetings and courtesies presented above. However, D was not aware of that and had therefore answered his mother-in-law in an impolite way.

Moreover, there was a challenge of interpreting the words in a different way than the speaker means, both due to linguistic factors and gender differences. E stated that

> *it was a bit challenging that I don't speak perfect English and she doesn't speak, either, so there were problems with interpretation... In my opinion, I mean what I say. But she interprets it in different way. It gets highlighted here because when I talk to Finnish women, they are able to understand me.*

Therefore, problems related to language and communication were relatively common among the interviewees. There were numerous factors causing difficulties, such as language barrier, misinterpretations, tackling different styles of communication and lack of knowledge how to address people properly in certain language. Some of the challenges occurred not only between the partners, but also between other people (for instance, the language barrier between the Finnish male and his partner's friends).

5.3 Religious diversity

It is estimated that in the United States, 40% of married couples consisting of spouses following different religions or Christian denominations divorce at some stage (Heikkilä 2004, 10). Despite this relatively high percentage of divorces, my interviewees did not experience many challenges related to the religious diversity. However, it was proved that Markman's, Stanley's and Blumberg's (1997, 232) statement that not the religious

diversity as such, but a person's level of commitment into religious activities is crucial, is true in this research. According to the authors, relationships between people following different religions tend to split up more often than if there is the same religion followed by both of the partners. However, the commitment to a person's religion plays a great role – people, whose partners follow different religions than themselves, but who are not strongly committed to their beliefs, may have a better possibility to create happy relationships. (Markman et al. 1997, 232.) In turn, the chance of success decreases in case of strong believers whose partners follow different religions and pay a lot of attention to religious activities (ibid., p. 237; Arteva 2000, 187). Many of my interviewees mentioned their low level of commitment to religion as the reason for lack of challenges related to that issue. For instance, interviewee A argued that

well, in religion there's nothing, there are no problems because neither of us is religious.

Therefore, even though there was certain religious diversity between A and his partner, there were no problems deriving from that as neither of them was religious. The case was especially similar with C and his Polish partner and E and his Russian wife. Summing up, nearly all of the interviewees underlined the relatively low level of commitment to religion as a reason for lack of challenges deriving from following different religions.

As another reason, B mentioned similarity of his religion (Lutheranism) and his wife's religion (Eastern Orthodoxy). The participant stated that

well, there hasn't been many problems related to the religion (…). This Eastern Orthodoxy isn't that different from Lutheranism.

Therefore, it might be the case that not only the low commitment to a person's religion, but also the similarity of religions might remarkably mitigate the challenge of different religious views. After all, both Lutheranism and Eastern Orthodoxy are Christian denominations. Therefore, these religions may not differ as much as beliefs belonging to different religious groups.

5.4 Gender roles, masculinity and femininity

The concept of masculinity and femininity is relatively universal. Some researchers argue that it appears in most or even all cultures (see Hofstede 1998, 107). Also Sirkkilä (2005, 27) points out that masculinity and femininity have a meaning in every culture and social situation. What is meant by these concepts? There are numerous interpretations. For instance Jokinen (2000, 228) points out that masculinity is constructed both by internal (the man's own relation to his body and mind) and external factors. By external factors, the author means cultural and social expectations, directed at the individuals (ibid., p. 228). Similarly to masculinity, also the term femininity has numerous interpretations. Although femininity can be defined as "set of attributes ascribed to biologically sexed females", what those attributes are has been long under debate (Glover 2000, 35).

However, masculinity and femininity may be considered not only on the individualistic, but also on the societal level. For example, Geert Hofstede (1998, 7) relates masculinity to a society in which assertiveness and toughness are desired characteristics for men and tenderness and modesty for women. In turn, feminine societies are such societies, in which both genders are supposed to act tenderly and modestly (ibid., p. 7).

However, not only the masculinity and femininity, but also the gender roles might be a challenge for some multicultural couples. In fact, they turned to be in this research. Surprisingly, the challenges mentioned by my interviewees did not occur merely between the partners, but also other people, such as the mothers-in-law of the interviewed Finns. For instance, B described his mother's-in-law behavior as challenging by stating as follows:

sometimes my mother-in-law comes here and wants to do everything in here, do the laundry, wax the floors and vacuum-clean… everything. It is so annoying (…).
- Is it common in Romania?
- Yes, I believe it is. (…) Romanian women are brought up in a way which tells them to take care of the men and so on.

According to Kaski, Manninen and Pihko (2009, 233), community and family play a much smaller role in the Nordic, individual-centered culture than in many South

European, African, Asian and Latin American cultures. Therefore, it is possible that the behavior of B's mother-in-law was caused not only by the traditional role of a Romanian woman, which tells her to take care of the men, but also by other factors, such as a greater role of a family in Romania than in Finland (which does not obviously mean that family as such is unimportant in Finland). A similar challenge, related to the role and importance of the family, was actually mentioned by D, who considered it difficult that his Vietnamese mother-in-law never notifies in advance that she is actually coming to visit the couple. Interviewee D described her behavior as follows:

she just rings the doorbell and hey, here we are!

There were also challenges related to the Finnish men's and their partners' role in the family. For instance, E stated that he believes he is the head of the family, whereas – according to him – it is the woman in Russia. The strong role of a Russian woman in the family is actually mentioned by some authors, such as Korhonen (2007, 19), who describes the Russian family model as "a broadened motherhood". Therefore, the differences in roles of men and women in different cultures, as well as the differences in the role and importance of one's family were recognized as a challenge by my interviewees.

Let us take a look at the femininity. Winterich (2007) points out the relation of femininity and appearance. Moreover, it turns out in her research that some women themselves relate femininity to appearance and attractiveness. For instance, women studied by her described facial hair not only as unattractive, but also as unfeminine. (Winterich 2007, 56.) Femininity understood in a similar way (as an issue related to attractiveness and physical appearance) was also recognized as a challenge by my interviewees. The main challenging areas were the amount of clothes and the need for putting a make-up in every situation the woman has to leave the house, even to take the rubbish out. For example, E stated that

for me, it is difficult to understand that a woman needs so many clothes in a cottage house while I don't. (…) If a Finnish woman throws out rubbish, she doesn't put any make-up, and a Russian woman does.

Finnish men's difficulties in understanding a woman's need for underlining their femininity may be explained by many studies. For example, Apo (1999, 23) points out that

> *Finnish women do not dress in a feminine way in everyday-life. Hair-styles, make-up and feminine style are typical for parties.*

Moreover, men of foreign origin mention naturalness, independence and high educational level as typical features of Finnish women (Tuomi-Nikula 1989, 88). Therefore – although this may seem to be an excessively generalized statement – it might be the case that Finnish men are simply not used to this "amount" of femininity and, as a result, find it difficult to understand why their partners of foreign origin put a make-up before throwing out rubbish. By this point it is once more vital to underline that my aim is not to reproduce stereotypes; instead, I try to ponder what could have caused certain challenge.

Furthermore, it is significant to mention that the constant need of underlining a person's femininity and having a make-up resulted in further challenges. E was actually annoyed that every time he is going somewhere with his wife, it takes a long time before she is ready to leave. There were several reasons for that, but putting a make-up was one of them. As a result, the couple was constantly late for meetings and other occasions. E stated that

> *if we go to meet our friends at 3 p.m., it would be nice to be there at 3, or a few minutes later, and not at, say, 5 or 6 p.m. If our friends want to invite us an hour earlier than the other guests, so that we can make it on time, then there's really something to work on.*

What is more, there were certain challenges deriving from different expectations. Oksi-Walter, Roos and Viertola-Cavallari (2009, 177) point out that such different expectations about roles of both partners in their relationships might cause arguments. They claim that men from so called Western countries expect from women coming from other countries certain services they would not obtain from women from their countries. In turn, women from other than Western countries expect a lot of independency and freedom. Arguments may develop from such – usually not realistic – expectations.

(Oksi-Walter, Roos & Viertola-Cavallari 2009, 177.) Moreover, Sinikka Arteva (2000, 16) describes the situation of women from Latin America married to Finnish men, who do not treat their wives as kindly as they would be treated back in their home countries. For instance, she mentions that the Finnish men do not open doors for their wives. As a result, the Latin American women have to do it themselves. (Arteva 2000, 16.)

An extremely similar case was described by E. The couple had different expectations about each other's roles and patterns of behavior. The Russian wife expected the same treatment as women from Latin America, described by Arteva. E stated that

> *my wife was groaning at me at some stage that I don't remember to open the door for her.*

Thus, different expectations mentioned by many authors, such as Oksi-Walter, Roos and Viertola-Cavallari as well as Arteva, turned out to be challenging in this case. The expectations of E's wife seem to be strongly related to the pattern of a man's behavior in the Russian culture. Namely, Korhonen (2007, 10) describes the obligations of a Russian man towards a woman, such as carrying her bag and arriving on a date with a bouquet of flowers. The author argues that such romantic, "chivalrous" habits are still highly rated by Russian youngsters (ibid., p. 10). Therefore, E's wife expected that even though her husband is not Russian, he would still treat her in a romantic, Russian way, whereas in Finland it may be not that typical to do that. A challenge developed from such contradictory expectations and patterns of behavior.

6. CONCLUSION

There was a large scope of various challenges mentioned by my interviewees. Most of them were related to four main areas, such as language and communication, gender roles, religious diversity as well as other people's attitude towards the multicultural couples. Some of the challenges, such as occasional linguistic difficulties, tended to appear in nearly every studied relationship. Thus, the challenges were relatively universal despite the fact that there was a great cultural diversity among the interviewees' partners. Moreover, some of the challenges appeared not only between the partners themselves, but also between the Finnish males and their partners' relatives and friends. For instance, such challenges were mentioned by B whose Romanian mother-in-law intended to do all the housework in the couple's house as well as D whose Vietnamese mother-in-law tended to visit the couple unexpectedly.

The challenges described in this study had many different reasons. It would be a generalization to state that they were caused merely by different cultural backgrounds of the partners. Instead, there were other factors causing the challenges, such as large age differences between the partners (which were already recognized as a challenge in the Finnish literature – see Kuusisto 2007), certain personal characteristics (such as stubbornness) as well as psychological, social and behavioral differences between men and women.

The challenges might be also categorized in other ways. Namely, there were, for example, cultural, psychological and social challenges. Many of the described challenges seemed to be culture-based. These were, for instance, the Russian woman's expectations to be treated in a romantic, chivalrous way as it is common in the Russian culture. As an example of a psychological challenge, one woman's loneliness in Finland and jealousy about her partner can be used. Such psychological issues caused further challenges, because the woman expected her partner to spend much more time with her than he was able to.

Having read my research project a reader might consider that it is only the multicultural couples who experience challenges, but this is actually a faulty conclusion. Problems of a relationship might increase if there are different cultures involved, however, a monocultural relationship is not free from challenges, either (Arteva 2000, 191). Moreover, some authors point out that living in a multicultural relationship may be rather an enriching experience (Arteva 2000, 191; Toivonen 2006). This was also underlined by many of my interviewees who argued that they try to take the positive issues from their own and their partner's cultures and enrich their relationships with them.

What is more, it is important to underline that even challenges themselves are not a merely negative issue. Some researchers argue that family ties might grow stronger due to challenges the partners went through (Siim in Martikainen & Tiilikainen 2007, 225).

It is also vital to mention that many of the described challenges – if not all – might be also experienced by monocultural couples. Partners coming from the same country might still have different expectations about each other and if the father of their children refuses to do something, they can still ask their mother to do it when the father is not at home. Other people might have prejudices towards the couple and communication might be challenging if one of the partners is, for instance, a bad listener. This is due to much more factors than simply different nationalities. Therefore, it would be faulty to conclude that the challenges described in this project might be experienced only by multicultural couples. In addition, it would be also wrong to state that multicultural couples experience merely challenges and there is nothing positive in their life, or that monocultural couples do not experience any challenges.

6.1 Professional development

This research process had a positive influence on my professional development. Firstly, I practiced my interviewing skills. I was able to reflect on the interviews I conducted and notice my strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer. Secondly, I expanded my knowledge about research methodology, methods of data analyzing and many others.

Moreover, I learnt a lot about different cultures and customs. For instance, the large importance of hierarchy while addressing people in Vietnamese was only partly known to me. Thus, conducting interviews with partners of women coming from different countries improved my awareness of cultural values. What is more, I familiarized myself with the current situation of multicultural couples living in Finland. For example, I became knowledgeable about the number of such married couples and their challenges described in previous studies. Last but not least, I gained a lot of knowledge about using English for academic purposes. Therefore, I also improved my language skills.

Summing up, conducting this research was a valuable experience that had a positive impact on my professional development.

6.2 Further research

The results obtained in certain research might provoke further questions. Therefore, a new study might be born out of a previous research. (Alasuutari 2011, 277.) My aim is that this study will be a source of inspiration and ideas for other researchers, too. I could recommend at least one topic that should be taken into consideration in further research.

In my opinion, it would be useful to study such multicultural couples in Finland, in which one of the partners is a foreigner and the other a Swedish Finn. One of my interviewees was actually a Swedish Finn and claimed that he considers himself rather as a foreigner in Finland than a Finn. Therefore, he stated that he does not notice certain challenges a Finn might experience with a partner of foreign origin. Thus, it would be interesting to give voice to Swedish Finns who live in Finland and have partners of foreign origin. It might be the case that the results of such study would differ from studies conducted on Finnish Finns due to, for instance, a possible "foreigner identity" of Swedish Finns.

Naturally, everyone might decide by themselves, whether there is any interesting topic deriving from this research to be investigated, and if there is – what is it like? As a researcher I hope that someone will find this study inspiring for further research.

Researching the issue of love and describing it from different angles is extremely pleasant, although not free from challenges.

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APPENDIX 1: Statistical data about multicultural families in Finland

source: Statistics Finland 2010

http://www.stat.fi/til/perh/2009/02/perh_2009_02_2010-11-30_tie_001_fi.html
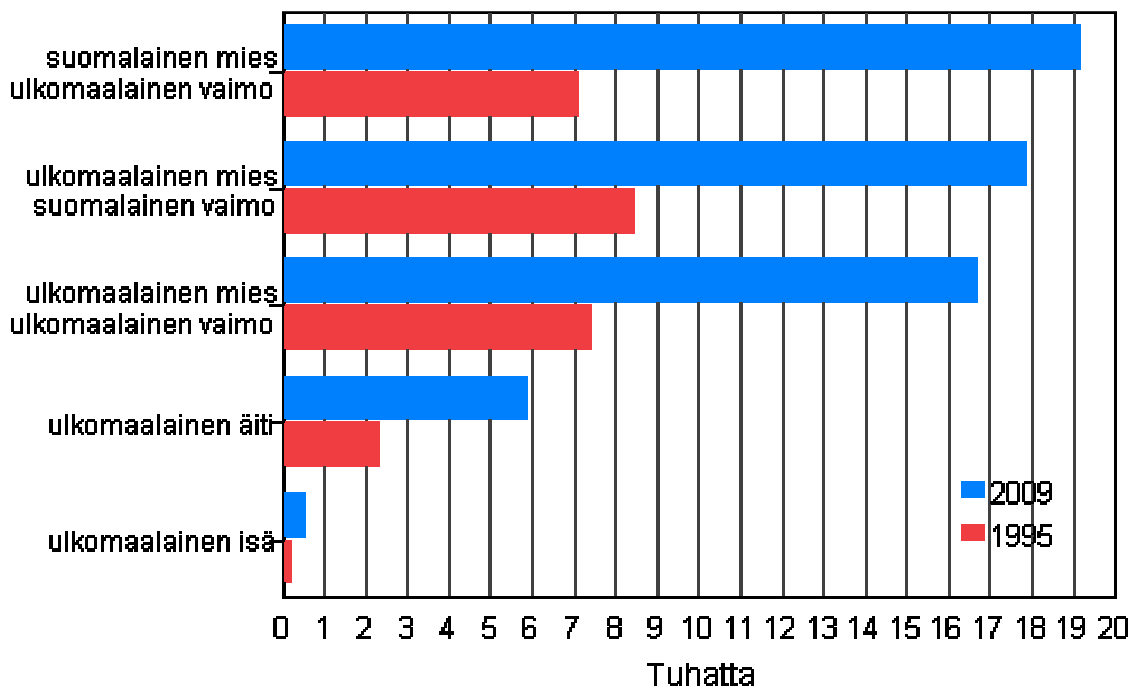
Author's translations:

Suomalainen mies, ulkomaalainen vaimo – Finnish husband, wife of foreign origin

Ulkomaalainen mies, suomalainen vaimo – husband of foreign origin, Finnish wife

Ulkomaalainen mies, ulkomaalainen vaimo – husband of foreign origin, wife of foreign origin

Ulkomaalainen äiti – mother of foreign origin

Ulkomaalainen isä – father of foreign origin

Tuhatta – thousands

APPENDIX 2: Difference between values and communication styles

source: Lewis, Richard D. 2004. Finland, cultural lone wolf. Yarmouth, Nicholas Brealey Publishing. Page 68.

USA /West Europeans	FINNS	ASIANS
VALUES	**VALUES**	**VALUES**
democracy	democracy	hierarchies
self-determinism	self-determinism	fatalism
equality for women	equality for women	males dominate
work ethic	work ethic	work ethic
human rights	human rights	inequality
ecology	ecology	exploit environment
COMMUNICATION STYLE	**COMMUNICATION STYLE**	**COMMUNICATION STYLE**
extrovert	introvert	introvert
forceful	modest	modest
lively	quiet	quiet
thinks aloud	thinks in silence	thinks in silence
interrupts	doesn't interrupt	doesn't interrupt
talkative	distrusts big talkers	distrusts big talkers
dislikes silence	uses silence	uses silence
truth before diplomacy	truth before diplomacy	diplomacy before truth
overt body language	little body language	little body language