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**THE CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF
FINNISH AU PAIRS IN ENGLAND**

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by

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten ryhmä suomalaisia au pareja sopeutui englantilaiseen kulttuuriin maassa viettämiensä 6–13 kuukauden kuluessa. Tutkimuksen materiaalina käytetään 22 entisen suomalaisen au parin kirjoittamia esseitä ja taustatietolomakkeita, joiden sisällöt kuvastavat heidän kulttuurikokemuksiaan ja kulttuuriin sopeutumistaan. Työssä pyritään selvittämään, millaiset tekijät edistävät ja mahdollisesti estävät au parien sopeutumista englantilaiseen kulttuuriin. Tulosten analysoinnissa käytetään laadullisen tutkimuksen menetelmiä, joten kirjoittajien esseistä kerätyt kommentit ovat merkittävässä osassa.

Au parien sopeutumisen arvioimiseksi käytetään kuutta tutkimusmateriaalista esille nousutta teemaa: 1) au parien taustatiedot, 2) työ ja suhteet isäntäperheeseen, 3) kontaktit muihin ihmisiin, 4) kulttuuriset huomiot, 5) au pair -ajan antama hyöty ja 6) arviot au pair -järjestelmän hyödyllisyydestä kulttuurin oppimisen kannalta.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että au parien sopeutumista edesauttavat hyvät ja läheiset suhteet isäntäperheeseen, asianmukaiset työolot, aktiiviset vapaa-ajan harrasteet ja matkat, tiiviit ystävyys-suhteet sekä positiiviset kontaktit paikallisiin asukkaisiin. Myös au parien hyvä kielitaito ja englantilaisen kulttuurin aiempi perustuntemus ovat eduksi sopeutumiselle. Lisäksi sitä helpottaa suomalaisen ja englantilaisen yhteiskunnan monet yhtäläisyydet.

Au parien sopeutumista heikentäviä seikkoja ovat huonot tai etäiset suhteet isäntäperheeseen, liiallinen työmäärä ja siitä johtuva vähentynyt vapaa-aika, rahanpuute ja vähäiset kontaktit paikallisiin. Myös lyhyt Englannissa vietetty aika voi vaikeuttaa maahan ja kulttuuriin tutustumista sekä sen ymmärtämistä.

Tutkimuksesta voidaan havaita, että isäntäperheellä on merkittävä rooli au parin sopeutumisen kannalta. Parhaimmillaan se voi toiminnallaan tukea ja ohjata au pairia, kohdella häntä perheenjäsenenä ja antaa hänelle riittävästi vapaa-aikaa työn ja perheen ulkopuolella. Tämän lisäksi au parin omalla aktiivisuudella ja asenteella on tärkeä osa sopeutumisessa.

Kaikki tutkimuksen au parit kohtasivat maassaolonsa aikana jossain määrin sekä sopeutumista edistäviä että niitä heikentäviä tekijöitä. Kuitenkin voidaan todeta, että sopeutumista edistävät seikat olivat merkittävämpiä, ja ne myös kompensoivat heikentäviä osa-alueita. Tutkimus osoittaa lisäksi, että au parit olivat hyvin tyytyväisiä maassa vietettyyn aikaan ja kokemuksesta saamiinsa hyötyihin.

Asiasanat: au pair. sojourner. culture. adaptation. acculturation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Foreign lands and people have for a long time been an interest of young people. In the 19th century privileged young men from wealthy and prosperous families were encouraged to take the Grand Tour, which meant travelling around Europe and getting familiar with local cultures and people. Today travelling and living in foreign cultures have become a chance not only for the rich but also for nearly all social groups in the Western world. Moreover, the variety of different options of spending time abroad is enormous. One can, for example, become an exchange student, move to a kibbutz, go interrailling, participate an international work camp, or go to work as an au pair.

Everyone who has visited foreign countries even as a tourist has noticed that the ways of life and their manifestations differ from the ones they have got used to. However, tourists can pass new customs and habits, even the most peculiar ones, with a confused smile and a shrug, as they know they will return to their safe and familiar way of living withing a short period of time. The situation is quite different for those who have chosen to live in another culture for a longer time, such as au pairs. A satisfactory life in any surroundings requires learning, accepting and following the rules of behaviour of the new society, in other words, adjusting to it. This process is not without its problems because in it some of the most natural habits, learned as a child, must be unlearned and substituted by new ones. However, although this adaptation process may be difficult, a stay abroad usually turns out to be a very rewarding, personally challenging experience.

The present work will examine the adaptation experiences of a group of Finnish girls who chose to work as an au pair in Great Britain. Au pairs are young adults, generally female, who go to a foreign country to live in a host family, and in exchange for maintenance and pocket money, they take care of the family's children and do some household duties. Typically au pairs are high school graduates who want to take a "gap year" before continuing their studies and want to spend the time by living in another culture. Often their motivations for choosing to become au pairs are related to improving language

skills and gaining new experiences, but many also want to become better acquainted with the new culture. As au pairs live with a local family, that is, representatives of the culture, one could assume that in such a situation they will inevitably get well acquainted with and adapted to the foreign culture. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Riitta Lundberg's (1999) study of Finnish au pairs in Britain suggests that those interviewed did not adjust to the British culture very successfully. Only few of them had local friends; most often there was a close-knit network of Finnish au pairs who spent free time together. Moreover, most of the au pairs participated in the life of their host families only minimally outside their working hours. They had also other types of adjustment problems. (Lundberg 1999:144-145.) The dilemma between au pairs' common hope, participation in British life, and the reality shown in Lundberg's study give interesting grounds for the present study.

The goal of this work, the examination of the adaptation possibilities and realities Finnish au pairs in Great Britain, is justified for two reasons. Firstly, Lundberg's (1999) study *Modern Maids: a study of au pairs as "gap year" domestic workers for families* touches the subject only briefly, and therefore a more theory-based analysis is needed in order to gain a deeper perspective to the phenomenon of au pairs' adaptation. Consequently, in the present work the subject is examined by using the adaptation theories in intercultural studies. The main theories employed are created by Berry (in press and 1997), Kim (1997), Ward (1996) and Gudykunst and Kim (1992).

Another motive for further studying the subject comes from the fact that au pairs adaptation has not previously gained interest among scholars in intercultural studies. Other groups like exchange students and business executives have been studied widely but their adaptation is not necessarily similar to that of au pairs who both live in a foreign family and work for it. Accordingly, the present study not only sheds light on the little studied phenomenon of au pairs but also contributes to the field of adaptation studies by bringing a new group of sojourners (ie. voluntary migrants) under examination.

The data of the present study consists of written reminiscences received from 22 Finnish young women who worked as au pairs in England in the recent past. The stories were collected from volunteers who answered an e-mail request sent to the members of Jyväskylä University. All the informants chosen had spent at least half a year in the country. In the essays, the au pairs reflect back upon their time in the country, concentrating especially on their cultural and adaptation experiences. In addition to the essay, the informants also filled out a questionnaire on background information. In the analysis of the present work, these materials were examined using the methods of qualitative study.

The initial motive for studying au pairs came from a personal experience. I worked as a mother's help, which is quite an equivalent to an au pair, in a London family for three months in summer 1999. The experience was both rewarding and personally important, regardless of the short period of time spent in the foreign country. Perhaps I felt more like a tourist than an actual sojourner, and did not feel the need to blend in. However, those au pairs who stay longer probably have different needs and ways of realising them. The original idea of studying expressly au pairs adaptation came in a phone conversation (autumn 2000) with Lundberg, who suggested that I take a closer look at the subject of au pair adaptation. This fitted my personal interests, too: I have taken studies of intercultural communication, and they have increased both my knowledge and interest in such themes.

The present study begins by giving general information on the au pair arrangement and by presenting the findings of Lundberg's study, relevant for this work. After that, the concept of culture is introduced, which is followed by a chapter involving the theories of adaptation, or adjustment. Before moving on to the analysis, the methods and the procedure of the study are explained. In the analysis, the goal is to examine au pairs adaptation, and this is done by examining seven themes, starting with the subjects' background information. The study goes on to describe the au pairs host family relations, other contacts, and free time activities. Then au pairs adaptation is examined through their notions of the British culture. The analysis ends up with their

assessment of the benefits of the stay and the au pair arrangement in general. In the final section of the thesis, the main findings are summarised, and the need for possible further studies is discussed.

This work cannot give totally valid and extensive results as the informant group is limited in size and has a rather homogeneous educational background. In a master's thesis it is also impossible to fully uncover the phenomenon of cultural adjustment, which is not only a very vast but also a highly personal matter.

2 AU PAIR PRACTISE

Au pairs have become a popular phenomenon in several Western countries during the last decades. In many families both parents have a job outside the home and childcare provided by the state or other quarters is either inflexible, too expensive or non-existent. A live-in childminder is a solution for these families, and for just as many young people the au pair arrangement offers quite an exceptional chance to leave one's home country for a while, to see and experience a new way of life abroad.

Au pair work belongs into the sphere of domestic work which has attracted few researchers lately. Therefore the theoretical background of the theme in the present work will be limited to the few studies available, supplemented by more general information received from au pair guidebooks. The most used source in this chapter is Riitta Lundberg's (1999) Ph.D, the aim of which was to uncover why the au pair arrangement is still widely used in the modern world and how it is experienced by the employers (families) and the employees (au pairs). The empirical material for Lundberg's study was collected by interviewing 22 Finnish au pair girls working in London area between 1994 and 1995. In addition, 19 of the au pairs' host mothers were interviewed as well as four au pair agencies.

This chapter will start with a definition of the term "au pair", which is followed by a short introduction to the history and legislation of the practice. After this, the focus will be on Lundberg's findings concerning au pairs' and their host mothers' motivations, and finally the problems of the arrangement will be discussed.

2.1 Definition of au pair

An au pair is defined as a young single adult of 17 to 30 years of age who goes to another country to live in a family to help them in childcare and light domestic tasks. An au pair must be provided with a pocket money (a minimum

of 45 pounds a week), full board and an opportunity to study. The work load should not exceed 30 hours per week (over six days) excluding up to three evenings of babysitting. (Griffith and Legg 1993:11, Hempshell 1995:11-12, Lundberg 1999:9, Au pair -opas, 1997:4; Finnish Youth Co-Operation Allianssi, personal contact, May 2002.) There are also other arrangements, such as nannies and mother's helps, that are quite similar to au pairs but are characterised by more working hours, responsibility, experience and/or education and a better salary.

In principal, there are three ways of getting an au pair position abroad: using an agency, through an advertisement or getting a job by word of mouth (Hempshell 1995, Griffith and Legg 1993). Agencies are generally recommended because they can and should support the au pair if the situation becomes problematic in the host family. The supply of agencies is enormous, and a Finnish person searching for a placement in Britain can use either a Finnish or British agency. While Finnish agencies usually take a fee from au pairs for finding a suitable host family, British agencies are regulated by law not to charge anything for placements in Britain (Griffith and Legg 1993:121).

Au pairs are typically girls, even though boys can apply as well. However, their possibilities for a placement are unsure as employers mostly favour girls. In Great Britain male au pairs were even banned until 1993 (Hempshell 1995:13). Qualities required of an au pair applicant include responsibility and a mature attitude, basic foreign language skills, a genuine caring for children, some experience of childcare and household duties, good health, preferably a driving licence, sociability and a positive attitude. The length of au pair placements vary usually from two to three months to one year. (Hokkanen and Siitari 1998:7; Au pair -opas 1997:5; Hempshell 1995:17-19; Griffith and Lowe 1993:12; Nuori joka ei pysy paikoillaan 1992:62.)

An au pair's duties vary according to the family, but usually include tasks such as taking care of the children (playing with them, bathing, babysitting, putting to bed, taking them to school) and doing some light housework like laundry, cleaning, cooking simple food, shopping and washing dishes. Au pair guidebooks often list the appropriate tasks that an au pair can

be asked to do but also warn about being too flexible and submissive about the duties. If an au pair feels that she is abused by too much work, guidebooks advise first to talk with the host parents, but if that does not help, she should contact the au pair agency which can alleviate the situation or help with changing families. Lundberg's (1999: 175, 183) study shows that domestic exploitation (material, social and emotional) is not rare: a fourth of the host families showed features of this.

2.2 History and legislation

The history of au pair practise started in Switzerland in the end of the 19th century. It had initially moral grounds: the church feared that girls moving to cities in search for jobs would lose their morals if left to their own devices. In order to prevent this, they were encouraged to move into families instead. Moreover, living in families would teach girls useful household skills. Later other countries started exchanging girls with Switzerland, and especially after World War II the number of participating countries rose quickly. (Griffith and Legg 1993:12). Nowadays the practice covers practically all Western European countries as well as Northern America.

The au pair arrangement is often quite impossible to supervise due to its private nature, and therefore certain recommendations and guidelines have been drawn to the practise. The Council of Europe agreed on the general conditions on au pair placements in 1969 in order to provide au pairs adequate social protection, covering moral and material benefits. In the agreement, au pair placement is referred to as causing "an important social problem with legal, moral, cultural and economic implications" in the member states. According to the agreement, au pairs create a special category of their own, not being students or workers, but possessing features of both. (European Agreement on Au Pair Placement 1969 as quoted in Au pair -opas 1997:48.)

The articles of the agreement state that au pairs come to a foreign country in order to develop their language and possibly professional skills, as well as to improve their cultural knowledge of the host country. Thus, au pairs

must be given a chance for professional and cultural improvement and also a chance to attend language courses. Au pairs are to be placed in families where they share the life of the family but also enjoy “a certain degree of independence”. The family is to arrange board, lodging, and pocket money for the exchange of an au pair’s participation in the daily duties of the family, which generally do not exceed five hours a day. (European Agreement on Au Pair Placement, 1969 as quoted in Au pair -opas 1997:49-50.)

2.3 Au pairs motivations and host mother views

The reasons for choosing to become an au pair are various. The au pairs interviewed by Lundberg (1999) gave, for example, socio-cultural, developmental and life situation- related answers to the question of why they had taken the au pair position. For many, the au pair time served as a “gap year”, that is, a time-off from studies. They had not obtained a place in higher education right after high school or did not yet know what they wanted to study. Another reason for choosing this work abroad was the lack of casual employment in Finland. Au pair time was seen as a good chance of leaving the home country for a while, and spending a gap year abroad was considered important. Going abroad was taken as a personal challenge and experienced as a popular and a “must” thing to do while young. (Lundberg 1999:115-118.)

Learning the English language, seeing and experiencing another culture and getting international contacts were also mentioned as reasons and motives for becoming an au pair. Especially the young (under 20 years old) interviewees felt that au pair time offered them a chance for gaining independence and self-growth. The older au pairs, having lived away from the parental home before departure, emphasized the cultural aspect over the developmental viewpoint. (Lundberg 1999:120-122.)

Only few of the interviewees mentioned work experience as a motive for becoming an au pair. The domestic work was not even considered as ‘real’ work but rather as ‘helping’ tasks. So, the motivations were other than the actual domestic work. One of the interviewees commented that “I didn’t come

here to take care of children and to clean, but because of the new environment, language and new experiences.” (Lundberg 1999:118-124.)

Lundberg’s interviews with host mothers revealed that their reasons for hiring an au pair differed completely from the au pairs’ motivations. The mothers hired au pairs simply because they needed a person outside the family to help them in domestic tasks. Almost half of the mothers interviewed had noticed that au pairs and families have different expectations about the arrangement, girls sometimes arriving with the idea that being an au pair equals to a holiday. The host mothers thought of au pairs as employed domestics but said that they usually treated them as members of their family or the like rather than as employees. However, Lundberg assumed that the mothers may have felt compelled to say this because of possibly feeling that this was expected from them. (Lundberg 1999:125-131.)

According to Lundberg’s findings, au pairs provided host mothers a domestic coping strategy because they enabled them to work outside home and reduced their “double workload”. Moreover, au pairs increased the family’s living standards and the quality of family life by giving mothers a chance to provide material and emotional support to their husbands and children. (Lundberg 1999:129.)

The demand for au pairs especially in Britain is great because the society does not provide a comprehensive childcare system; actually, it is almost non-existent (Palola 1998:16; Gregson and Lowe 1994:92). The attitude of the society is that the best place for a pre-school-age child is at home in the care of the mother. The Ministry of Health suggested in the 1960's that a prolonged separation from the mother is harmful to a child, and therefore should be avoided by home-based childcare provided by mothers. (Gregson and Lowe 1994:90-92.) However, as many women nowadays need and want to work outside the home in order to provide a living to their families, solutions must have been found elsewhere. Hiring au pairs and nannies has become popular and necessary for many upper-middle and middle-class families alike. The au pair arrangement (as opposed to nannies and other trained childminders) is favoured often because of its low costs and flexibility (Lundberg 1999:129-130; Gregson and Lowe 1994:118).

2.4 Problems in au pair arrangement

The au pair arrangement is not without its problems. Lundberg (1999:142-143) notes that the au pair practice has a private, personal and secret nature, because of which it is possible to treat au pairs very differently in different families, both in a social and material sense. Further, in comparison to other domestic workers, au pairs may be more vulnerable due to their young age, foreign nationality and live-in position (Lundberg 1999:151).

Au pairs are often so young that the experience is their first period living outside parental home, let alone abroad. Adjusting to another family and to new physical surroundings may cause stress, homesickness, loneliness, and even culture shock. Moreover, the work may prove to be more demanding than expected, or the family may burden the au pair with an excessive amount of tasks. The host family may also treat the au pair badly in other ways, or the life in the family does not otherwise fulfil the au pair's expectations. There are also many other possible difficulties: living in another family's house may affect one's privacy, the children may be spoiled or act in an unpleasant manner, using a foreign language is not simple, and so forth.

Although one of the basic ideas of the au pair arrangement is that they live "on equal terms" (the translation of the term "au pair") with the rest of the family, this is not always the case. They are hired as domestic help, which is reflected to all the areas of the stay. Lundberg's findings show that the communication the au pairs had with the host family (mothers) was often limited to sorting out day-to-day duties. On the other hand, some of them also developed a close relationship with the mother and the child(ren). The host fathers had a practically non-existent role in the au pairs' lives. Moreover, the au pairs rarely spent their free time with the host family. (Lundberg 1999:143-148, 179-182.)

To compensate for the absence of family-like communication, the au pairs usually created a social network with other Finnish au pairs, consisting of two to four persons (Lundberg 1999:143-148.) Many au pairs, also other than those of Lundberg's study, have commented on the importance of Finnish friends for coping when abroad (Lundberg 1999:145; Valkeakoski 1998:5,

Särkkä 1997). Only five of the 22 au pairs interviewed by Lundberg created an international network of friends (Lundberg 1999:145).

Au pair guidebooks readily admit that finding local friends may be difficult. They encourage au pairs to join a hobby group, go to bars, cafes and clubs, or ask the family to introduce them to the youth they know. Contacting au pair agencies for other au pairs contact information and joining a language class are also suggested as ways of getting social contacts, though not local. (Hokkanen and Siitari 1998:30; Hempshell 1995:133-134; Griffith and Legg 1993: 75-76.) As regards language courses, the au pairs interviewed by Lundberg had not been able to participate in them at all or at least not as much as they had expected, mostly due to the high costs. Also, travelling and visiting places became somewhat limited for the same reason. (Lundberg 1999:145.)

Lundberg noticed that cultural differences between the au pair and the host family affected communication, everyday interaction and domestic tasks. Au pairs who had imagined that they could adapt to the host culture as 'explorers' could not necessarily do so because of the host family attitudes, and had to accept the position of a 'stranger' or a 'visitor'. Based on these findings on the au pairs' social communication and other cultural contacts and activities, Lundberg makes the assumption that au pairs may have some problems in adapting to the foreign culture and the host family. (Lundberg 1999:145.)

However, the au pairs Lundberg interviewed were generally satisfied with their experience. They felt that the time helped them to gain better self-confidence, more independence and responsibility, and it also contributed to their identity. Half of them were disappointed with the relatively small improvement of their English language skills during the stay, although a third admitted that the courage to speak in English increased. They were also dissatisfied with the lack of the cross-cultural contacts achieved while in Britain. (Lundberg 1999:149-153, 189.)

This chapter has examined the au pair practise, concentrating on its definitions, legislation, au pairs' and host mothers' motivations, and problems within the arrangement. It seems that while the practise has good and purposeful grounds

e.g. from the cultural point of view (European Agreement on Au Pair Placement 1969), achieving them may prove difficult in practice (Lundberg (1999)). In the analysis of the present work, this information will be discussed, and Lundberg's (1999) findings, especially, will be utilized by comparing them to the experiences of the informant group of this study.

In addition to au pair studies, another theoretical approach is needed in order to be able to discuss the adaptation of au pairs. Therefore, in the following chapters the focus will turn to cultural issues, starting with the definitions of culture. Later, theories concerning cultural adaptation will be introduced.

3 CULTURE

As culture is a very broad concept, it has been defined in hundreds of ways by different people. In the following, the concept of culture is explained by using rather general and widely approved definitions. In addition to defining the concept, some terms related to different cultural attitudes will be discussed. The second subchapter will concentrate on cultural dimensions created by Hofstede (1997). In them, a special emphasis will be placed on the similarities and differences between the British and Finnish culture.

3.1 Concept of culture

Culture has become a very common concept in our everyday life. Terms like communication culture, organisation culture, and youth culture are often heard and widely used. However, defining the word culture is a difficult task, and putting its essence into one or two sentences is rather problematic. Here the purpose is to present different definitions that exist, and thereby show the vastness of the term.

A general conception about culture is that it involves, for example, the art, literature, music, and education of a given society. While this is true, it is only the partial truth. Hofstede (1997) calls this "culture one", culture in the narrow sense. "Culture two", on the other hand, goes to a deeper level, meaning the patterns of feeling, thinking and acting that have been acquired usually in early childhood and that are shared with the people of the same environment. (Hofstede 1997:4-5.)

In addition to Hofstede, some other researchers view culture as a two-dimensional concept. Among them is Triandis (1994:16), who makes a distinction between objective and subjective culture. Objective culture refers to the visible elements within a culture, such as food, clothing and tools. Subjective culture is the unseen part of a culture, including for example

beliefs, norms, roles, values and attitudes that are difficult to observe.

Schneider and Barsoux (1997:18-19) and Trompenaars (1993:23) manage to broaden Triandis's rather simple categorisation of objective culture. According to them, it is not only artifacts but also peoples' rituals and behaviour that are the visible elements of culture. Moreover, Schneider and Barsoux (1997) add to Hofstede's and Triandis's models by dividing the unseen part of culture into two layers. On the first layer lie values and beliefs, which explain the seen behaviour. Further down in the unseen are people's underlying assumptions, the unquestioned and unchallenged mental patterns. These assumptions are the foundation of culture, giving rise to different behaviours and artifacts in the visible part of culture.

Storti (1990) also views culture as a shared system of values and beliefs that become manifested in people's behaviour. According to him, coming to terms with culture means having to come to terms with the behaviour of people in that culture (1990:14). However, as behaviour is based on the invisible elements of culture, that is, values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions, the task is not easy. Berry (in press) reliably suggests that it is expressly the less implicit aspects of culture that cause the greatest problems in an intercultural communication situation.

Among many others, Cushner and Brislin (1996:7) state that culture is socially constructed: it is created and maintained by people and their interaction with other people. It is passed on from one generation to the next and mediated through several sources, such as schools, the media, experiences, and stories. This description includes the facts that also Hofstede (1997:5) emphasizes: culture is learned, ie. it is not passed on in genes, and it is a collective phenomenon, that is, shared with other people of the same environment. In addition to these, some other widely approved views about culture say that it changes over time and it can also be divided into subcultures (e.g. Berry, in press, Hofstede 1997, Cushner and Brislin 1996, Alho 1994, Kantokorpi 1994).

Cultures are often considered non-judgeable, ie. one culture cannot be said to be better or more noble than another. Trying to understand the

behaviour of a given group in their cultural context is called cultural relativism (Hofstede 1997:7; Gudykunst 1994:78.) However, more typical than that is the opposite attitude, ethnocentrism. It refers to the view that one's own culture is considered normal and superior to any other, the judgement being made according to the standards of one's home culture. Accordingly, the norms, values and habits of other cultures are seen as illogical and bad and the ones prevailing in the home culture the only right ones. Being ethnocentric is normal and unavoidable but the levels of ethnocentrism should be kept low. (Hofstede 1997:211, Gudykunst:1994:77, Osland 1995.)

A nation and culture are often equalised, even though members of any nation are very diverse. Still, the people of a nation possess some shared qualities that give unique features to the group, differentiating them from other cultural groups. For example, US American culture is more individualistic than that of China. (Bennet, 1998:4-5.) For the sake of clarity, equalizing of this kind is done also in the present work, ie. the terms English culture/ English society and Finnish culture/ Finnish society are used interchangeably.

3.2 Hofstede's cultural dimensions: emphasis on Great Britain and Finland

The purpose of this subsection is to discuss briefly the differences between Finnish and British societies from the cultural point of view. This discussion is considered important because cultural differences between the original and settlement society can give rise to many adjustment problems, whereas similarities found in them can significantly facilitate the adjustment process (see also 4.2.5).

Cultural (dis)similarities can be found out, for example, by using different models that researchers have created for measuring cultural dimensions. One of the most widely approved models was developed by Hofstede (1997), and it is chosen for the basis of the examination of British and Finnish societies here. It must be noted, however, that Hofstede's

dimensions were developed originally for the use of business life in the 70's and 80's.

Hofstede's model is based on four cultural dimensions (power distance, collectivism – individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance), which are used to explain the differences in communication between cultures. His study covers 53 countries and regions, including Finland and Great Britain. In the following text, the ranks that Great Britain and Finland received in Hofstede's study are referred to by numbers: number 1 shows the highest rank in a certain dimension, 53 the lowest. Sometimes the countries received two different ranks, in which case both results are shown (e.g. 6/7).

Power distance refers to the degree to which power, wealth and prestige are unequally distributed in a society, for example, at workplace and at home. In societies with high power distance, the power is in the hands of a small number of people, whereas in low power distance societies it is shared more equally. High power distance is characterised at home and at work through a clear division of labour and respect, seen e.g. in the respect for parents and older people in general. In low power distance cultures, on the other hand, employees and family members are more equal. Whereas for example several Asian countries can be rated high power distance cultures, both Great Britain (42/44) and Finland (46) are low. (Hofstede 1997:23-48.)

In the *collectivistic – individualistic* dimension Britain and Finland score quite differently. Although an individualistic society, Finland receives only rank 17, whereas Great Britain is placed third. In practice individualism means emphasising and encouraging each person's own potential, for example, young people are encouraged to get by in their studies and independent living at an early age. Collectivistic cultures, on the contrary, praise the value of a family and relatives, and children are to live with and take care of their parents until they die. One interesting detail that Hofstede mentions is that while in collectivistic cultures silence is a well-accepted behaviour in social gatherings, in individualistic cultures silence is abnormal. (Hofstede 1997:49-78.)

The *masculinity – femininity* dimension refers to the roles that a society sees appropriate for the sexes. In masculine societies, men are

supposed to be tough and competitive, while women should be caring and kind. Masculine cultures prefer hard values, for example limited social security and argument over negotiation. While in masculine societies women often become housewives when children are born, feminine societies have a large number of working mothers. Great Britain can be justly called a masculine society (9/10) whereas Finland (47) is among the most feminine societies, based on Hofstede's findings. (1997: 79-108.)

The final dimension, *uncertainty avoidance*, describes the extent to which people of a culture feel threatened in new, unknown situations. Societies with strong uncertainty avoidance are often characterised by high levels of anxiety, need for rules, avoidance of unfamiliar risks, precision and punctuality. Also the saying "What is different, is dangerous" describes such societies. Then again, people living in weak uncertainty avoidance societies have lower stress levels, feel less need for strict rules, and possess curiosity for unknown things. Hofstede's study shows that both Finland and Great Britain are societies of weak uncertainty avoidance, Finland ranking relatively low (31/32) and Great Britain even closer to the bottom (47/48). (Hofstede 1997:109-138.)

As this discussion shows, according to Hofstede's classification, the greatest cultural differences prevailing between Great Britain and Finland are in the masculinity - femininity dimension. This is easy to notice also in practice: while in Finland women most often work outside the home, British women easily become housewives after children are born. The same fact also creates the grounds for the constant need of au pairs in Britain.

The other dimension in which the two societies are apart is that of collectivism - individualism. Great Britain is more individualistic but it is difficult to say whether, for example, the early age of starting school is a sign of this dimension or possibly the consequence of the lack of childcare, resulting from the masculinity of the society.

As regards the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, the lower rank of Great Britain may indicate that the British culture is slightly more open and acceptive of new and foreign people than Finland. It must be noted, however,

that drawing conclusions like these is only tentative, and that it is difficult to find clear and practical differences between the two Western societies by using Hofstede's model.

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the concept of culture and introduce one theoretical model for comparing cultures. The discussion of culture serves mainly as a frame of reference for the examination of cultural adaptation, presented in the following chapter, and will receive only little direct attention in the analysis of this work. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, on the other hand, will be referred to when possible in the analysis of the au pairs' adaptation.

4 CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

This chapter will concentrate on the theme of cultural adjustment, which is referred to also as adaptation. It is a familiar process to most people to some extent because, for instance, moving to another town or getting a new job require similar mental modifications as adaptation, even though the scale is different. (Storti 1990:76-82.)

A well-adapted person feels at home and is content in the new environment. Moreover, s/he has developed a cultural competence (including e.g. cultural knowledge and language skills), is task effective and maintains good interpersonal relations to the hosts (Cushner and Brislin 1996:3-4; Brislin 1981). Cushner and Brislin (1996) also claim, rather unconvincingly, that successful adjustment abroad causes no greater stress or culture shock than a similar change (e.g. a change of a home town) would cause in the home culture.

Brislin (1981) reminds us that a complete adjustment involves changes in beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours. However, not all the things in the new culture need to be accepted; it is part of true adjustment to acknowledge this (Storti 1990:65). Also Gudykunst and Kim (1992:215) note that while people can conform to new rules and behaviours, adult people cannot be forced to accept the values lying underneath.

This chapter consist of two parts: the first will introduce the basic concepts and definitions concerning cultural adjustment, or adaptation, and the second will focus on the actual process of adaptation.

4.1 Basic concepts and definitions

In the next, the relevant terms and concepts concerning adaptation will be introduced. First, the terms enculturation, acculturation, and adaptation will be explained, after which the attention will turn into the description of phases of

adaptation and acculturative stress, or culture shock. Finally, there will be a short chapter involving the outcomes of a foreign culture experience.

4.1.1 Enculturation, acculturation, and adaptation

Children are born and grow up in certain social and cultural surroundings, by the influence of which they learn the important communicational, social and cognitive behavioural rules prevailing in the community. This process is called socialization, and the process of *enculturation* is an integral part of it. Enculturation means especially the processes of socialization which links the individual to the surrounding cultural contexts. (Gudykunst and Kim 1994:215, Berry et. al. 1992:271.)

While enculturation takes place in early childhood, *acculturation* can happen at any point in life and more than once. Acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that an individual or a group goes through as a result of a changing cultural milieu. It takes place in situations where two cultural groups are in a long-term firsthand contact with each other. Acculturation is sometimes called second culture learning or resocialization because it involves similar processes as socialization, that is, learning to act according to the behavioural, cognitive and affective patterns of people in the new environment. However, it is important to keep the distinction in mind: whereas socialization happens within one cultural environment, acculturation always involves two cultures. (Berry in press, Ward 1996, Gudykunst and Kim 1992, Berry et. al. 1992.)

It is possible to distinguish two levels of acculturation. *Individual (or psychological) acculturation* refers to the changes that take place in the psychology of an individual as a result of the culture contact situation. Individuals respond differently to acculturation situation, and the changes they go through can vary from rather easy behavioural shifts to acculturative stress or even to psychopathology, where the individual gets overwhelmed by the cultural differences and cannot cope. *Group-level acculturation*, as the term implies, is a collective phenomenon and means the changes that take place in

the culture of the acculturating group. (Berry in press; Berry 1997:6-13.)

Adaptation is the long-term outcome of acculturation. It is the term used to describe the psychological changes and eventual outcomes of individuals experiencing acculturation. (Berry in press; Berry 1997:6, 13.) The level of adaptation depends on various factors (e.g. personal motivation, host culture attitudes), and therefore people's outcomes vary from poor to good adaptation (Berry 1997:13-14; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:217).

There are three types of adaptation: a person who is *socioculturally well-adapted* can manage smoothly in the physical surroundings of the new environment, ie. possesses the behavioural competence needed. *Psychological adaptation* refers to individuals' physical and psychological well-being in the new environment, including the feelings of contentment, clear sense of personal and cultural identity and good mental health. Finally, achieving good *economic adaptation* includes finding a satisfying job in the new milieu and being effective in the work. (Berry 1997:14; Ward 1996:127.)

As can be seen from above, the terms acculturation and adaptation have various overlapping features. Moreover, researchers often use them interchangeably or incoherently. The term mainly used in the present work is *adaptation*. This is justified because in the analysis part the focus will be in the psychological (instead of group-level) acculturation of au pairs, which is rather similar to adaptation, as said above. In addition, the term (*cultural*) *adjustment* is used to refer to the same phenomenon. In some cases the distinction needs to be made between sociocultural and psychological adaptation and in these instances the terms are always clearly stated.

4.1.2 Phases of adaptation and acculturative stress

Adaptation is a process, and during that process an individual experiences a variety of feelings, ranging possibly from euphoria to deep depression. Hofstede (1997:209-210; see also Osland 1995 and Adler 1987) describes the feelings or phases during the adaptation with an acculturation curve. According to him, the curve is U-shaped, due to the changing feelings of the

foreigner. While the initial and final feelings are high and positive, the middle phases involve more negative feelings, such as depression or even more serious mental problems. Brislin (1981) sees the adaptation process as W-shaped, the second V describing the feelings of returning home: arriving back home can initially trigger the so-called reverse culture shock before the person gets re-adjusted to the original society.

All researchers do not agree with the U-curve theory. According to Church (1982 as quoted by Ward 1996:131), the evidence to support the theory is weak and overgeneralized. Church says that the initial feelings resemble rather psychological malaise than positive, high feelings as suggested by the U-curve theory. Moreover, after the rise of feelings in the middle of the stay abroad, the level of depression is likely to grow again at one year of residence. These results, which form an “upside down” U-curve, represent the psychological adaptation of individuals. Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, seems to increase evenly and simultaneously with the acquisition of culture-specific skills. (Ward 1996:131-132.)

Regardless of the shape of the adaptation process, each individual living in another cultural environment is likely to encounter some sort of adaptation problems. Sometimes they are easy and pass without difficulty, causing only shifts in behaviour. In situations, more challenging to the individual's psychological capacity, acculturation stress may occur. This is typically referred to as culture shock. Hofstede (1997:209) explains that culture shock occurs when a foreign individual can conform to the rules and rituals of a new culture but cannot understand the underlying values behind them. This causes a variety of negative feelings, such as distress, helplessness, and hostility, and even the physical functioning may get affected. Berry et. al. (1992:284) add to the list of stress behaviours feelings of marginality and alienation, lowered mental health including e.g. anxiety and depression, and confusion of identity. At the worst symptoms may get so severe that the sojourner decides to return home prematurely.

Berry (in press) criticizes the term “culture shock” because it easily conveys the idea that the reason for a shock is in the new culture, although in

reality its lies in the interaction between people of different cultures. Moreover, Berry (in press) and Adler (1987) argue that the word shock is too strong to describe the feelings experienced. Therefore, Berry prefers to use the term acculturative stress instead of culture shock.

Furnham (1988:47) and Adler (1987) point out that even though culture shock, or acculturative stress is often considered negative and unnerving, it can be taken also as a cross-cultural learning experience. According to them, one can use the “shocking” experiences as a learning tool to gain better self-understanding, personal growth, and cultural awareness.

4.1.3 Outcomes of foreign culture experience

Although living in another culture can be stressful and hard, it usually turns out to be a very rewarding and educating experience. Several studies have been made on the subject, and they report very similar results on the outcomes.

Living in a foreign environment is psychologically challenging because everything is new and different. Sojourners need to deal with values, norms, beliefs and habits that are strange to them but important to the host culture, which, for its part, encourages examination of one’s own value systems. Self-discovery, tolerating differences and becoming more world-minded are some of the typical changes that take place as a result of confronting different cultural values. (Storti 1990:95; Brislin 1981:292; Osland 1995:78-79, 129-130.) For many sojourners, the time abroad has been one of the most profound experiences in their lives (Osland 1995:12).

Exchange students are a group of sojourners who have been studied a lot. Among them, the most frequently mentioned advantages gained as a result of a stay abroad include improved language and communication skills, increased cultural knowledge, personal growth, getting international friends, and gaining new (life) experiences (Garam, 2000:21; Honkonen 1999, Penninkilampi and Karjalainen 1997, Jäntti 1998:67).

4.2 Model of adjustment

Adjusting to the rules of behaviour and to all the other differences in the new culture is a complicated process. This process takes time and is influenced by several different factors, such as preparation, earlier experiences, attitudes of the host culture, social contacts, and many more. In this chapter the main interest will be in these factors and in the way they affect the adaptation process.

Adaptation has been studied by several researchers in the field of intercultural studies and cross-cultural psychology. They have created different types of models to describe the adjustment process. The model presented in the following will be a combination of different adjustment frameworks, mainly by Berry (in press and 1997), Kim (1997), Ward (1996), and Gudykunst and Kim (1992). This option was chosen instead of presenting just one model for two reasons. Firstly, it is likely that a combination of models brings out more angles of the phenomenon of adaptation than just one model. Secondly, some of the frameworks are created for special types of acculturating groups, for example Berry's framework (in press and 1997) is developed essentially in the context of immigration in Western societies. However, au pairs are not immigrants but sojourners, and unlike immigrants, they are in a country only temporarily for a rather short period of time, which can be a significant factor in their adaptation.

4.2.1 Prerequisites and preparation

When a move abroad is voluntary, it is usually a phase in life eagerly awaited. It also raises many kinds of expectations in sojourners. Speculations about the future job, living conditions, relationships with other people, and many more cross in head. However, studies (see e.g. Ward 1996) show that from the adaptation point of view, it may be harmful to create too many *expectations* about the life in the new environment. Positive but unrealistic expectations can

lead to disappointments with the new culture, one's performances, and the experience itself, thus complicating the adjustment process (Berry 1997:23; Osland 1995:47, Paige 1993). Cushner and Brislin (1996:260) suggest that one should develop realistic or even pessimistic expectations in order to avoid the problem.

Knowing the language of the host culture helps adaptation (Ward 1996:132; Gudykunst and Kim 1992) and is often also the only way for a better understanding of a culture (Paige 1993, Storti 1990:89). According to Ward, language fluency and sociocultural adjustment are closely linked to each other (Ward 1996:132). Language skills enable sojourners to participate in the life of the host society by giving them the possibility to communicate with local people on a personal level and to follow the media. Moreover, learning or knowing the host language shows that the sojourner is interested in learning about the new culture. Problems or unwillingness concerning language learning may lead to a situation where sojourners retreat to the company of the fellow countrymen where they can make themselves understood. However, this prevents the improvement of the foreign language skills, which on its turn complicates adaptation process. (Storti 1990:89.)

Training and previous intercultural experience are generally considered as assets in adaptation (Berry, in press, Berry 1997, Kim 1997, Ward 1996, Paige 1993, Gudykunst and Kim 1992). Training, whether an organised preparatory course or individual learning, accelerates sociocultural adaptation by offering the sojourner important information about various aspects of the host society concerning its history, norms, customs, art, and social, political, and economical systems (Ward 1996:132; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:225). Ward (1996:132) and Paige (1993) say that previous stays abroad can also be relevant sources of knowledge, thereby helping adaptation. Paige (1993) gives convincing grounds for this: persons with earlier intercultural experience are able to create realistic expectations, possess intercultural communication skills, are familiar with the adjustment process, and have developed coping strategies, which decrease initial stress.

The role of certain *personal attributes* in adaptation has been under a

lot of discussion. Some researchers (e.g. Gudykunst and Kim 1992, Brislin 1981) suggest that characteristics such as extroversion, openness, tolerance for ambiguity and resilience are important for an acculturating individual. This sounds convincing since that kind of attributes are likely to make facing new people and situations easier. Ward (1996:135) and Berry (1997:23 and in press), on the other hand, refer to several studies and conclude that no connection can be made between certain personality factors and successful adaptation. They suggest that more significant than a particular personality characteristic is the “cultural fit” between the acculturating individual and the norms prevailing in the host culture. However, Ward (1996:135) admits that locus of control and extroversion make an exception: they can always be considered positive for adaptation.

4.2.2 Migration motivation and length of stay

Not everyone leaves their home country voluntarily as sojourners do. The involuntary or voluntary nature of the stay abroad has a significant effect on the level of adaptation (Berry in press, Berry 1997, Gudykunst and Kim 1992). Berry (in press and 1997) makes a division of the types of cultural groups existing in plural societies. In his classification, groups are divided according to *mobility* into sedentary and migrant, and, based on *voluntariness* of contact, into voluntary and involuntary. (Berry, in press.) In the present work, the examination will concentrate on migrant groups that au pairs belong to, and leave out a closer description of sedentary groups.

While sedentary groups, such as ethnocultural groups and indigenous people, live in the lands of their origin, migrants have left their home country to take a residence in another one. They have arrived to seek for a permanent or a temporary residence, voluntary or involuntary. All of these four factors have significance for the successfulness of adaptation. Refugees (permanent) and asylum seekers (temporary) are migrant groups that have arrived to a foreign country involuntary. Their chances for adaptation are weaker than those who have a voluntary position, not only because of involuntariness but

also because they have to start their life again with minimal material possessions and often with limited cultural rights. Moreover, living in uncertainty about the permanence of one's position (asylum seekers) and language problems and unemployment or lower work status may cause stress and depression. (Berry, in press, Berry 1997.)

Immigrants and sojourners are voluntary migrant groups, the first mentioned living in a country permanently, the second temporarily. For immigrants, settling in to another country is largely due to the desire to achieve a better life elsewhere. While they usually stay permanently, not all immigrants adjust similarly. They employ a range of acculturation strategies, including integration, assimilation, separation or marginalisation. The choice of the strategy depends on the host culture's attitudes and immigrants' willingness to save or hide their cultural heritage. From the point of view of adaptation, integration is the most and marginalisation the least favourable option. (Berry, in press, Berry 1997.)

Sojourners are in a host country temporarily in a variety of roles, for example as business executives, exchange students, aid workers, diplomats or guest workers, the latter being the group to which au pairs belong. Sometimes the length of the sojourner's stay may be prolonged even to several years but still it has a temporary nature. According to Berry (in press and 1997), Kim (1997) and Gudykunst and Kim (1992), temporariness affects adaptation: the fact that sojourners know they will leave and go back home or to another country in the (near) future makes it difficult to get fully involved to the life in the host society.

Sojourners do not necessarily create close relationships with locals or start to identify with the new society they are living in. Gudykunst and Kim (1992:214) and Kim (1997:405) note that, for example, foreign students, military personnel and migrant workers can limit their adaptation to the very minimum because their roles do not require true involvement in the host society system and they can reduce their central social contacts to their fellow countrymen or other sojourners. When compared to Lundberg's (1999) findings on au pairs, this seems to be possible for them, too, even though they

live with a local family: many au pairs studied spent their free time mostly with a group of other Finnish au pairs and only rarely with their host family. Moreover, au pair work does not usually require participation in the life of the society outside the host family.

4.2.3 Interpersonal communication and social support

Communication plays a dominant part in adaptation. Gudykunst and Kim (1992) and Kim (1997) stress that successful adaptation largely equals to learning the rules of communication of the host culture. A person who masters this “host communication competence” (Kim 1997:407) knows the cognitive, affective and behavioural components of the host communication system. It includes elements like linguistic and pragmatic knowledge of the language and the ability to combine the appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions. The host communication competence can be achieved only through trial and error in interaction with host nationals.

Foreigners who arrive in new cultural surroundings often start seeking co-nationals and/or other foreigners to interact with. This is natural and, for many, even necessary for starting a satisfactory life in another culture. Other sojourners offer friendship, support and information on how to survive in the new surroundings (Osland 1995:54; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:221; Brislin 1981:110). Osland (1995:89) notes that unmarried sojourners have a tendency to create a close, supportive network with other sojourners which plays the role of a caring family. Moreover, an expatriate group functions as a safe haven for sharing the anxiety and stress that the initial adjustment create, and gives hereby the possibility for interpretation of one’s feelings and reactions (Cushner and Brislin 1996:264-265; Osland 1995:54).

Social contacts and support have a positive impact expressly on psychological adaptation. While contacts alleviate the initial stress, they are also a constant facilitator of psychological well-being during adaptation. (Ward 1996:136.) As regards the nationality of social networks, Berry (in press; 1997:25) and Ward (1996:136-137) refer to several studies and

convincingly demonstrate that the acculturating individual benefits most from both the host and co-national support systems. Berry elaborates (1997:25) that while relationships with co-nationals may reduce the acculturation stress for some, others benefit more from contacts with host nationals, especially if they give the kind of experiences expected.

From the point of view of sociocultural adaptation, it is especially the contacts with host nationals that are beneficial because they offer chances of learning culture-specific skills. Sojourners with an extensive, satisfactory interaction network with host nationals confront less sociocultural adaptation problems than those with an ethnic network. (Ward 1996:136-137.) Gudykunst and Kim (1992:221) suggest that a foreigner whose social network consists primarily of host society members is better adapted than a person who has mainly contacts to his or her own nationals or other foreigners. However, as they fail to make a distinction between sociocultural and psychological adaptation, their view sounds unsubtle. Still, both Gudykunst and Kim (1992:221) and Kim (1997) well point out that the degree of intimacy is important when assessing the contacts to hosts: the more intimate the contacts, the better the host communication competence the foreigner has acquired.

4.2.4 Cultural distance

Another factor influencing adaptation potential is the level of cultural distance between the original and the host society. Foreigners who settle into a society much similar to that of their own are likely to feel less acculturative stress than those whose new society differs considerably from the one they come from (Berry, in press; Berry 1997:23; Ward 1996:137; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:223; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988:210). According to Ward (1996:137), both psychological and sociocultural adaptation are likely to be more successful when the cultural distance is small.

Berry (1997:23) offers an explanation for the connection of cultural distance and adaptation. He suggests that people who settle into a culture distant from their own need more cultural shedding (ie. loss of home culture

behaviours) and cultural learning. Moreover, large cultural differences between the acculturating group and host nationals may cause negative intergroup attitudes, leading to conflict situations and hence, poorer adaptation (Berry 1997:23).

Political, demographic, religious, linguistic, and economic factors are useful when assessing cultural similarity or dissimilarity between two societies (Berry 1997:23; Ward 1996:138; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:223). Studies of Scandinavian students (Gudykunst and Kim 1992:224) show that they adapt easily to life in the United States, while Indian and Japanese students face lots of problems. Furnham and Bochner (1982 as quoted by Gudykunst and Kim 1992) report similar results for Scandinavian exchange students in England. This can be explained by the degree of similarity: Scandinavian countries are highly similar to the USA and England in the light of the previously mentioned factors, whereas Asian societies differ from them in all the aspects.

4.2.5 Attitudes of host society

The attitudes prevalent in the host culture towards immigration and pluralism are also important when adaptation potential is looked at. In some societies attitudes are open and tolerant, while in others the situation is stricter, e.g. due to historical reasons. In other words, some societies allow and are supportive of cultural pluralism but in some others immigrants and other foreign groups are made to conform to the existing cultural norms of the society. (Berry in press; Berry 1997:16-17; Gudykunst and Kim 1992: 226.) Berry (1997:17) reminds us that even in pluralistic societies some groups may be more rejected due to their cultural, racial or religious background, which complicates and makes long-term adaptation less probable. Moreover, the acceptance of and interest in foreigners may vary within the regions of a single society, and may thus be very different in a rural village and a metropolis.

The choice of the acculturation strategy (see also 4.2.2) is largely due to the attitudes of the host society. In pluralistic societies acculturating

individuals are free to choose their strategy, and the choice of the most favourable option, the integration strategy, becomes possible. Societies with no tolerance for diversity may force acculturating people to pursue the assimilation strategy, or even segregation or marginalisation strategies. (Berry 1997:17.)

Gudykunst and Kim (1992:225) and Kim (1997:409) say that foreigners' interaction potential with hosts is closely linked to the receptivity of the host environment. In societies with open and accepting attitude towards foreigners communication between hosts is natural, thus facilitating adaptation. In the less supportive societies the foreigner is more likely to face prejudice, discrimination, and even hostility which complicates taking contact to host nationals. The lack of positive feedback and contacts is an added risk-factor to adaptation and general well-being. (Berry 1997:17, 25; Berry in press; Ward 1996:139; Gudykunst and Kim 1992:225-226.)

The present chapter has introduced theoretical approaches to cultural adjustment. In the beginning, some general terms were explained before the discussion moved on to the presentation of a model of adjustment, which was created by combining several researchers' findings. As can be seen from the model, adaptation is an extremely multifaceted process, which consists of many different elements. Moreover, many of them are linked to each other, for example, success in creating social contacts with the hosts depends on the attitudes towards foreigners prevailing in the host society, and also on the personal characteristics of the foreigner. Because of these reasons, it may be difficult to take all the aspects of adaptation into consideration when examining the adjustment of the au pairs. However, the contents of the present chapter serve as a tool for the analysis, and therefore the model of adaptation presented here will be an elementary part for the whole work.

5 METHOD AND PROCEDURE OF STUDY

After discussing and examining the theories and findings concerning au pairs and adaptation, it is time to move on to the description of the method and the procedure of this study. This chapter will introduce the group of informants of the present study and present the way the study was proceeded with. Moreover, the data collection method will be discussed critically, and compared to other possible ways of collecting data. The final part of the chapter will deal with the reliability and validity of the present study.

The informant group for the present study was gathered by sending an e-mail to the list of members of Jyväskylä University, which reaches thousands of students. The e-mail, sent in April 2001, called out for people having worked as an au pair in Great Britain for over six months. The length of the stay was an important criterion: half a year was considered the minimum time for the stay abroad because a shorter period of time would not perhaps have brought up such a big amount of rich adaptation experiences. The e-mail said that the informants were expected to answer a questionnaire dealing with au pairs' cultural experiences and adaptation. Answerers were also advised to inform whether they wanted the questionnaire by post or e-mail. Altogether 44 people, all female, answered and expressed willingness to participate the study. The great large number of answers was surprising, and gave encouragement for proceeding with the subject.

I decided that instead of an exhaustive questionnaire, it might be more fruitful to ask the informants to write a short essay about their experiences as an au pair, concentrating on their cultural experiences and adaptation. An essay could bring out the voice of the informant better than a structured questionnaire, which is important in a qualitative study. Moreover, a questionnaire has its risks: it gives answers only to the questions asked, and thereby the areas of the experience that have been the most essential to the informant could possibly be left out by oversight. For the sake of clarity, the background information section concerning the informants was collected using a short questionnaire with ten (or eleven) questions (Appendix 2).

In the beginning, an interview method was considered as an option for collecting data. In comparison to essays, it might have given a deeper understanding and more specific information on au pairs' adaptation. However, I chose written essays for the method for the following reasons. In the first place, essays enable the collection of a much larger material in less time than interviews. A larger amount of data was seen as a possibility to increase the reliability and transferability of the present study. Secondly, giving rather free hands to the informants concerning the content of the essays hopefully enabled them to talk about the phenomena and experiences that they felt essential, instead of the interviewer limiting the themes with certain questions. Also the fact that the au pair period was experienced in the past influenced the choice of the data collection method. An interview situation requires rather quick responses which might have proven difficult for those whose au pair time is far in the past and therefore not that well maintained in memory. An essay gives more time for reflecting back to experiences, thus enabling a more accurate and reliable answers.

The letters with the instructions for the essay and the questionnaires for the background information were sent out to the answerers in December 2001 (by post) and in January 2002 (by e-mail). The letter was re-sent by e-mail to all the informants in the beginning of February to remind them of the approaching deadline. In the reminder letter the informants were also given two weeks of extra time, in case they were unable to respond sooner.

The letter gave a general idea of what the essay to be written should contain (see Appendix 1). The informants were given freedom to discuss their experiences of the British way of life and the surprises or problems that living in a foreign culture caused them. To make the writing task easier, some more detailed suggestions about the themes to write about were offered, such as expectations, adjustment to the family, other relationships, free-time activities, (dis)satisfaction of the au pair experience etc. The content of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2. It initially contained ten questions but later an eleventh question was added and e-mailed to the informants. It concerned the au pairs' feelings of the usefulness of the au pair arrangement from the point of view of becoming familiar with another culture. Unfortunately, the answer

to this question was received only from 14 informants.

The informants were approached in Finnish because it felt most natural when both the informants the researcher were Finnish speaking people. The informants were given a chance to write their essays either in Finnish or in English. It can be assumed that the possibility to use one's mother tongue gave them a chance to express their experiences and feelings in a richer and more variable way than another language would have given, however strong the skills. Only one of the essays received was written in English.

Within the given time, 22 people sent their essays and questionnaires back. Most of the answers came from students of Jyväskylä University but there were few also from other towns. All the informants were students or recently-graduated females, the ages ranging from 21 to 29 years. The length of the informants' au pair assignment varied from 6 to 13 months, and two of them had taken the position of an au pair in England twice. The time scale of working as an au pair varied from year 1991 to year 2000. Every informant had spent her au pair time in England, usually in London or in the nearby areas. Therefore, from now on the country of the stay will be referred to as England instead of Great Britain.

For the analysis of the present study, each of the background questionnaires and essays was carefully analysed. At this point each au pair was renamed to protect their identity. After getting a general understanding of the most central themes and experiences dealt with in the essays, the analysis part was written. The intention was to interpret the au pairs' writings on their experiences in the British culture and find points in common in them and the adaptation theories, introduced earlier in the present work.

It must be admitted that there are certain factors concerning the data collection method that can reduce the reliability and validity of the present study. To begin with, the fact that the informants' au pair experiences are in the past, in some cases even years behind, may have affected the writings: it is possible that experiences are not fresh in memory to be described in detail or totally faithfully. The saying "memories grow sweeter with time" may also be true in the case of material collected long after the actual experience.

The first e-mail, looking for au pairs to write about their experiences,

was sent to the mailing list of the members of Jyväskylä University, which limited the reference group to cover mainly university students. Therefore the group of informants of the present study is rather homogeneous in their educational background and age. Also the fact that the informants are all female makes the group homogeneous. Yet this is quite inevitable when studying a group like au pairs: men are a rare minority, and finding them to participate the study would have required too much effort compared to its benefits.

The requirement of writing an essay for research material may have shaped the group of participants. Writing requires time and effort more than answering a multiple-choice questionnaire, and this may be seen in the composition of the informant group. Moreover, it is important to note that the theme of the study most likely influenced the form of the group. Au pairs who felt they made only few cultural notions, gained little acculturative experiences, or felt uncomfortable or otherwise bad while in Britain may not have participated the study for those exact reasons. Then again, those au pairs with rich and positive memories of their stay and its cultural gains may have been more prompt to give their contribution to the study.

This chapter has introduced briefly the group of informants and the procedure of the present study. Also the data collection method was evaluated and its possible shortcomings were discussed. In the analysis that follows the informant group will be described in more detail. Also the themes that emerged from the au pairs' essays will be introduced and examined from the point of view of au pairs' adaptation.

6 AU PAIRS BACKGROUND

The following chapters will take a close look at the writings collected from the au pairs, and an analysis of them will be made with the help of the adaptation theories introduced in the previous chapters of the study. The proceeding of the analysis of the work in hand goes as follows: firstly, this chapter will present the au pairs' background information, including, among other things, the expectations and motives of the au pairs. In the next chapter, the au pairs' adaptation will be examined through their experiences within the host family and work in the new surroundings. After this, the au pairs' other social networks, including co-national, international and local friends, will be introduced and analysed from the point of view of adaptation. Then the interest will be in the au pairs' free-time activities, such as hobbies and travel. The next chapter will include the comments and comparisons that the au pairs make of the British society. Finally, the au pairs' views about the usefulness of their stay and the au pair arrangement in general will be discussed.

Because the group of au pairs studied is rather large, it is not purposeful to make an assessment of each au pair's adaptation separately. Moreover, it is questionable whether a vast phenomenon like cultural adjustment can be measured in individuals in a reliable manner, especially when the data is collected after the actual experience. Therefore, the analysis that follows tries to handle the subject as a whole, seeking to find out some general outlines of the adaptation possibilities and realities of Finnish au pairs in Britain.

The informants' own words are of an important value in a qualitative study, and they are examined also in the present study. In the analysis, there are many quotations taken from the au pairs' writings, which illustrate the theme discussed. The quotations have been translated from Finnish into English by the author, but also the equivalent Finnish quotations can be found in Appendix 3. For the analysis, the au pairs' essays were put in an alphabetical order according to the false names given to the informants, and then page numbers were added to each. Therefore, for example, a quotation

cited as *Paula, 3* means that the quotation in question is taken from page 3 in Paula's essay. In case there is something left out of a quotation, it is indicated by two hyphens (--). Moreover, when a sentence starts in the middle, there are three spaced full stops (. . .) to show this.

6.1 General background information

In the following, the intention is to interpret the answers the au pairs gave to the questionnaire, an example of which can be found in Appendix 2. The 22 au pairs who took part in the present study were all female, and were typically students or graduates from universities. Because of using mainly e-mail as the means of collecting data, it is impossible to say the exact amount of answers that came from Jyväskylä and those that came outside it. However, it is known that the great majority of the informants presently live, study, or work in the Central Finland. There was some variety in the fields of study of the informants, but especially the subjects of social and educational fields were widely represented (8), as were languages and communication studies (9).

The au pair experiences of the group studied dated back to the years from 1991 to 2000. Most of the experiences were quite recent: thirteen of the informants had worked as an au pair in 1998 or later, three of them having been in England as recently as in 1999 - 2000. When the data was collected, the informants were from 21 to 29 years old but at the time of the sojourn most of them were about 19 to 20 years old graduates from high school. Paula, Sofia Helena and Kerttu had taken the au pair year as a break from their university studies and, apart from Sofia, were therefore two to four years older than the rest of the informants at the time of their stay. However, of the four, Kerttu also worked her first time as an au pair right after high school.

As stated earlier, all the au pairs stayed in England, and most lived in London or the nearby areas. However, Susanna's and Mirkku's host families lived in Berkshire, Minna's near Oxford, Karita's in Manchester, and Henna's not far from Birmingham.

6.2 Earlier experience and preparation

The au pairs were asked whether they had earlier experience on living or staying abroad. Karita, Minna, Alina and Janika had taken part on a 3 to 4 week language courses or had travelled on their own prior to the au pair time, but only Helena had extensive experience of living abroad: she had stayed as an exchange student for over two years in Estonia, in addition to her earlier three-month au pair assignment in Italy and other travels. Apart from the five girls mentioned, the rest of the au pairs did not have experience of longer stays abroad. According to various researchers (e.g. Paige 1993, Ward 1996), earlier stays abroad are beneficial for adaptation.

The informants were also asked to tell about their preparation for the au pair assignment. It was assumed that as a result of their school education each informant had some basic knowledge of the English society before leaving, e.g. about its history and political system. Also some other aspects of the culture may have become familiar to them due to the influence of the media. Piritta's words represent this:

Preparation was minor. -- I trusted the "information" gained from school and other sources. (Piritta, 1)

Apart from the au pairs' assumed knowledge of the society, they prepared for the stay in England mainly by collecting information on au pair work, not so much on the culture. Eeva had participated a 7-hour au pair course organised by her agency, and also Paula had taken part on an info evening by her agency. Most of the au pairs said that they had read material sent by their agency, and some had talked with people who had worked as au pairs previously. Six informants had called the previous au pair of the host family. This is how Paula commented on her contact with the ex-au pair:

I also had a couple of phone conversations with the previous (also Finnish) au pair of the family, who could give me some advance information and tips. I felt that especially these conversations with the ex-au pair were fruitful and rewarding because she had firsthand information of the family. (Paula, 2)

A few of the au pairs also mentioned having read travel guides and got tips concerning cooking or household duties. In eight cases the au pairs had not

done anything to prepare for their stay, in four cases so because the departure to England had been so sudden that they had not had time for preparation. All in all, it seems that the informants' preparation concentrated on their future work; and as regards cultural knowledge, they trusted the previous knowledge they had on England.

6.3 Language skills and choice of country

As regards the informants' language skills prior to their stay in England, the majority of the au pairs (16) estimated themselves to possess good skills in English. Four thought they had an average knowledge of the language, and two considered their language skills excellent. As each of the informants was a high school graduate, it is justified to say that their skills of English must have been good enough, for example, for conducting a reasonable conversation or following different sources of media in English.

When the au pairs were asked about motivation for choosing Britain, most gave several reasons. However, in as many as 17 cases, a central motive was related to the language. The au pairs considered the English language simply interesting or easy enough to be able to manage with in a foreign culture, or they wanted to improve their skills in it. Janika and Kirsi even mentioned the British accent as their special impetus. Helena, Alina, Susanna, Minna, Henna and Karita said that it was the British culture that was the inspiring element for their choice of the country. In Susanna's words, Great Britain was "a place I have always wanted to get to know".

Other reasons for choosing Great Britain, mentioned more than once in the answers, included the closeness and safety of the country compared to the United States, and its familiarity through earlier trips there. Two girls also said that they chose England because the United States does not appeal to them. It seems that sometimes the au pairs had pondered between the two English-speaking countries but ended up in Great Britain for the reasons mentioned. In addition to the previous reasons, also the following ones came up in the answers: it is easy to get a job in England; novelty; coincidence; a

friend was going there, too; cost-free agency; the possibility for a short contract; a friend's recommendation; and the appeal of a big city.

As a conclusion it could be said that in this group of au pairs, the choice of Great Britain was most often made based on the au pairs' familiarity with the language. In other words, the au pairs chose a country where they could surely manage linguistically. Many also reasoned their choice by their interest in the British culture. According to various researchers (e.g. Ward 1996, Gudykunst and Kim 1992), both of these factors can be interpreted positive when predicting the au pairs' adaptation to the society: language skills facilitate adaptation and help to understand the culture better, while a general interest and a positive attitude towards the host culture have the same effect.

6.4 Motives and expectations

One of the background questions involved the informants' motives for becoming an au pair. Again, several different reasons were given in most answers. The most important of them, mentioned by 14 au pairs, was taking a gap year, either because of a desire or a need to do so when not obtaining a place in an educational establishment. The second most common reason for an au pair stay was the wish to improve and learn English. Other motives for the au pair assignment were the hope to see the world, get new experiences, widen one's world view, or find a change or an alternative to being at home. For some, au pair work fulfilled the need to go abroad, or was a safe or the simplest way of getting there. Also trying one's own wings and the desire to do something different came up in the answers. For Minna, learning about the British culture was one of her motives. These answers represent largely the same results as those reported by Lundberg (1999).

The au pairs were also questioned on what they expected or hoped for. Better language skills (15) and gaining new experiences (11) were the most frequently mentioned expectations, but also new friends, getting more life experience and freedom from studies were mentioned often. Some expected to become more familiar with the culture, and some wanted to gain

international experience. Another expectations mentioned included getting more self-esteem, having fun, travelling, and getting on well and being close with the host family.

It needs to be said that a question concerning hopes and expectations of the au pair time may be hard to answer afterwards, and maybe for this reason, the answers given to this question were rather universal. However, the au pairs' expectations expressed in the answers seem rather realistic and not set too high. According to various researchers, for example, Berry (1997) and Cushner and Brislin (1996), this is positive for adaptation.

As can be seen from the answers, both the motives for becoming an au pair and the expectations of the time are highly similar. It seems that the young age at the time of applying for the job is illustrated in the answers: The au pair time appears to serve as a time-off from studies, or as an alternative to them or to staying at home. Moreover, it is seen as a chance to develop on a personal level. Being an au pair is not an absolute value for the informants but it appears to be more of a simple, safe, and even economical means of getting abroad. Quite importantly, it is regarded as a good way of learning English.

7 WORK AND RELATIONS WITH HOST FAMILY

An au pair is a sojourner who lives and works in a host family. According to the general principles drawn to the au pair placement, au pairs should not be just workers for their host families, but should also be able to participate in the life of the family otherwise. Moreover, they should be given a certain degree of independence and a possibility to develop their cultural, professional and language skills. From the point of view of adaptation, this arrangement sounds ideal: au pairs are merged into the culture by living in and sharing the life of the foreign family but also have the freedom to live a life of their own outside the family. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how different working conditions and family relations encountered by the au pairs affected their adaptation.

7.1 Au pairs as family members

The au pairs' experiences in their host families reveal that the ideal, described above, can come true sometimes. Eeva, Kerttu, Ronja, Alina, Jaana, and Karita felt they were treated mostly like family members and were also given an appropriate amount of work. For Eeva and Karita, the families described here were their second hosts. In Alina's case, the host family was American, and in Ronja's it was Finnish.

The six au pairs describe their host families and their place in it in a warm and harmonious manner. Alina says:

... they were really warm and loving towards me. I was considered as a part of the family and my well-being was their priority. They made my stay comfortable and I was more than happy to live with and work for them. (Alina, 2)

It seems that the accepting attitude and the possibility to participate in the life of the family helped Alina's initial adaptation to the new surroundings. Also Karita's words illustrate the satisfaction that harmonious host family relations can bring to an au pair's life:

Also otherwise the spring was a happy time – things went well with the family and I got more friends. The oldest girl of the family was more of a friend than a dependant (Karita, 2)

The au pairs treated as family members could participate in the life of the host family in various ways. Kerttu (2nd au pair period) had similar interests with her host father, and they went to the theatre, and discussed sports and literature together. Kerttu also often had lunch with the whole family at weekends. Ronja travelled with her host family in various places and went to see school plays with them. Also Jaana said that she could “follow the life of her host family closely”, even though the parents were mostly very busy with their work.

The work satisfaction of the six au pairs seemed to be high. They did not complain about too many working hours or a lack of free time. Jaana, Kerttu and Eeva wrote about being happy about the trust and freedom given to them concerning their work. With reasonable working hours the au pairs could also have enough free time, which they could spend on hobbies and other activities, thus getting more familiar with the culture (discussed further in chapter 9).

Out of these six girls, only Ronja wrote about having had adaptation problems during the first months, including some home sickness. She as well as Alina wished afterwards that they had been more outgoing during their time in England. Safe and familiar host family surroundings may have given these girls an easy excuse to stay within the family, which, on its part, may have limited their scope of experiences, at least in Ronja’s opinion:

I am sure I would have gained more if I had ventured to go further from my home surroundings right from the start! (Ronja, 2)

Kerttu’s first time as an au pair and Annu’s experiences are interesting. They both felt like a part of the family but, unlike the six girls described earlier, were burdened with an enormous amount of work. Kerttu felt she was replacing the mother of the family who had committed suicide recently. She took care of the whole household, took the children to the doctor’s, did shopping for their clothes, participated in parents’ evenings at school etc.

According to her words, because her work kept her so busy she had no time to miss home. She stayed in the family for the whole ten months.

Annu's work situation was similar to that of Kerttu. Apart from giving her excessive work, her host family was very nice and helpful. Among other things, they paid Annu's bills and concert and theatre tickets, familiarised her with people and places, and took her with them to their holidays. The mother of the family was Finnish, and partly, therefore, Annu felt that her adaptation went smoothly. Finally, Annu ended up leaving the family because of the constantly increasing work load, but even after that she had good and rather close relations with the family.

7.2 Au pairs as employees

In most cases, it seems that the au pairs lived and worked in their host families in the role of employees. Mirkku, Piritta, Kirsi, Minna, Petra, Tuula, and Paula described their host family relations and work mostly quite briefly but still gave the impression that they were comfortable both with the families and their working conditions. Also in this group of au pairs, some got help for their adaptation from the host family. Tuula's hosts made a successful effort to create favourable adaptation conditions for her:

I got time for myself and for getting familiar with new things in the beginning, and the family showed me around. I understood nearly everything and things started running smoothly. I did not miss home. (Tuula, 2)

Also Paula's host family helped and was understanding towards her when she had initial problems with the language. They also expressed interest in Finland and its culture, and Paula felt she was welcomed with enthusiasm.

Out of these girls, Mirkku, Kirsi and Piritta mentioned having suffered from home sickness during the first few weeks. According to Piritta, her symptoms eased off as she learned to know her host family and their habits better. Kirsi could talk about her adjustment problems with the host mother's boyfriend, who had himself lived abroad and could thus understand her.

Helena chose her position as an employee rather than as a family member herself. Helena's host family was warm and welcoming, and they familiarised her with people and places and encouraged her to take part in activities.

I got on well with the family from the beginning, even though we did not become friends during my eight months there. It was also due to my own attitude: it is difficult to be friends with people who pay your wages.-- I moved around and travelled with them but the weekends spent in London I kept quite strictly to myself. (Helena, 2)

Helena admitted that the role she took was largely influenced by her older age (22 years) and the earlier experiences on living abroad independently. Earlier stays abroad probably helped her adaptation to England, too, as she commented on not having experienced any kind of culture-related problems.

Taija, Sofia and Susanna felt disappointed concerning their place as employees in their host families. They expected to become close with the family and be able to participate in their activities but the reality turned out to be different. This had an especially strong influence on Taija:

Right on the first day in London I felt a disappointment considering my expectations. I come from a close-knit family and I expected to be like a member of the host family. -- Soon I noticed that I was just an employee to the family. It was hard to accept. . . . my monotonous work made me want to change families. I was really disappointed, I cried and felt really bad. (Taija, 2-3)

In addition to Taija, also Susanna wrote about her disappointments and loneliness in the beginning, and Sofia said that during the first three months she missed Finland, her family and friends a lot. All the three mentioned feeling bad about being left out from the family activities, for example holidays. In these cases it is justified to say that the expectations the au pairs had created about the family and work complicated their adaptation as the reality turned out to be different. The negative influence of expectations for adaptation has been proved in several studies, reported by e.g. Berry (1997) and Ward (1996).

Henna and Riitta were also in an employee's position for their host families but their work load exceeded the recommendations set for the au pair work. Both girls wrote about their dissatisfaction about their non-existent free

time: they were supposed to be available for work every moment they were in the house. Discussions with the host mothers about the subject did not bring a change and the au pairs felt the work limited their free time. Riitta mentioned that she had a hard time adjusting because of these reasons and her inadequate language skills. She also felt betrayed because she could not attend a language course, even though promised so by the host mother in their phone conversations. However, she decided not to give up or change families because she was already attached to the children, and therefore adjusted, “grinding one’s teeth” (Riitta, 3).

In the rest of the cases, the au pairs had reasonable working hours and conditions but they faced some difficulties in the personal chemistries within the families. Tuija had problems adjusting to a poor single-parent family where she had to work with badly-behaving children, but her determination made her stay. Janika had clashes with her host mother, who was a housewife, as their plans about the daily chores clashed and the expectations set for her were too high. Karita changed families as the first host father started giving her orders on everything, and Eeva did the same because of her first host mother’s highly changeable moods.

7.3 Discussion

In the analysis of the au pairs’ host family relations and work, the au pairs were divided into two classes according to their position in the host family. In eight cases the au pairs were treated like *members of the family*, receiving support, guidance, and the possibility to join the family activities. These au pairs felt hardly any acculturative stress (Berry, in press) compared to those whose ties to the host families were not so close. They also described their family relations in a warm manner, showing that they enjoyed their time in the family. Both of these facts can be interpreted as signs of good psychological adaptation: according to Ward (1996), social contacts and support can help psychological adaptation by alleviating the initial stress and facilitating general well-being during adaptation. For these au pairs, the family seemed to offer an

important and close social network.

It can be assumed that the family member position also facilitated sociocultural adaptation (Ward 1996) because the au pairs could join the family activities, thus learning more about the culture and the skills needed in it. It is likely that also their host communication competence (Kim 1997) increased as a result of their close relations and good amount of interaction with the host family members. Moreover, most of these au pairs were also satisfied with their work, which indicates good economic adaptation (Berry 1997, Ward 1996). Interestingly, good and close relations with the host family seemed to override bad work conditions: in two cases the au pair was given far too much work but she still stayed in the family for a long time.

Also some of the au pairs in the *position of an employee* got help and support from their host families. However, in most cases there was no indication of this in their essays. It is noticeable that quite a few of the au pairs in the employee's position experienced some sort of adaptation problems. They were especially typical for those who had created expectations about their host family but faced a different reality. As stated earlier, high expectations have been proved to have a negative effect on adaptation (e.g. Berry 1997, Ward 1996, Paige 1993).

In addition, if the au pair in the employee position was burdened with too much work, she felt dissatisfaction and sometimes also experienced adaptation problems. Poor relations and/or disagreements between the au pair and the host family had a similar effect. Although some the au pairs in these circumstances ended up changing families, in some cases they simply decided to adjust because of their determination or attachment to the children.

8 CONTACTS OUTSIDE FAMILY

For most of their time, au pairs are in contact with their host families, consisting of local people. This contact is, however, to some degree compulsory and the au pair cannot fully decide on its level of intimacy. Therefore, it is interesting to examine the relations au pairs create on their free time when they can largely determine the quality and quantity of their networks themselves. In the following, the friendship networks of the au pair group of the present study will be analysed and classified in order to find out how friends possibly influenced their adaptation. The examination will include, among other things, the networks composed of other au pairs, the nationality of friends, the ways of getting them, and comments on meeting and becoming friends with the local people. The word 'international' is used here to refer to people other than Finnish or British, while 'local' means British people.

Friends seemed to play an important role in the au pairs' life in England. They were the people with whom the au pairs mostly spent their time, and were the companion in many hobbies and travels. Several au pairs commented on the easiness of creating friendships, especially with other au pairs, and said that the time in England was very social. Often Finnish and international friends were found in a language course; altogether eight girls mentioned having got to know at least part of their friends there. Also, agencies helped in establishing contacts: in six cases, the au pairs had got a list of names and phone numbers of other au pairs from their agencies, or they participated in a welcoming night organised by their agency. The Finnish Church in London was mentioned as a place to meet another au pairs by three girls. Local contacts, on the other hand, were mostly made through a hobby, a local boyfriend, in a pub or a disco, or were people introduced by the host family.

8.1 Au pair friends

It became clear from the au pairs' stories that their friendship networks consisted often of other au pairs. In roughly half of the cases, au pair friends, whether Finnish or international, offered the most important and sometimes the only network during the stay in England. Becoming friends with other au pairs was generally considered easy, and some of the au pairs offered an explanation to the unification:

My au pair agency organised an au pair meeting, in which a close group [of au pairs] was formed for those needing it. Grouping together with other Finnish girls was a logical option - each of us was in the country as a guest star and in the same situation. (Helena, 2-3)

Getting to know other au pairs was easy because we felt we were all "in the same boat". This way you found a group in the foreign country to lean on to in case of troubles. I assume that it is hard to find such a distinct peer group in any other kind of a job. (Paula, 2)

Both of the comments express au pairs' need of a family-like group of people who support each other in the foreign country. Lundberg (1999) made the same remark, and this notion is supported also by Osland (1995), who says that sojourners often group together to form a sort of a caring family.

Au pairs could understand each other well regarding the work and the problems of adjusting to another culture. This is expressed by Eeva and Piritta:

Together with other au pairs we complained about our host mothers, wondered at their ways of raising children and at local habits (e.g. not rinsing the dishes), and talked about our home countries and the things that friends usually talk about. (Eeva, 3)

[au pair] Friends always had similar experiences, and by "complaining" to them you could get over with things. Also otherwise when talking to other au pairs, it was nice to notice that I was not the only one thinking about the same things. (Piritta, 2)

Concluding from these, the au pair network could alleviate the distress of adaptation to the host family and new culture. This is supported by Cushner and Brislin's (1996) and Osland's (1995) notion of sojourners: sharing negative feelings with other expatriates can help adaptation. Moreover, Eeva's comment shows that an international au pair network was beneficial also in another sense, since it increased the au pairs' cultural knowledge of foreign lands.

8.2 Nationality of friends

The au pairs of the present study formed rather international friendship networks while in England: none of the au pairs wrote that they had only Finnish friends. Often the networks consisted of both Finnish and international friends, and sometimes also local people. Altogether 19 of the au pairs mentioned that they had international friends, while Finnish friends were mentioned by 14 informants. The quality and quantity of the local contacts is discussed later.

The essays show that sometimes the au pairs consciously avoided contacts to co-nationals. Taija, Tuula and Paula said that they wanted to stay away from the company of other Finns in order to learn English better and get to know other cultures, too. Kirsi also tried to avoid Finnish people but still ended up creating her closest contacts with other Finnish au pairs. Susanna did not meet compatriots, and when writing about cultural differences, she commented:

It was rather difficult to get adapted to this culture but because I could not find Finnish people either, I tried my best. (Susanna, 3)

Maybe host national contacts would have helped Susanna's adaptation. According to Berry (1997) and Ward (1996), for some people relationships particularly to host nationals may be beneficial for adaptation.

Finding international friends of people who came from a rather similar cultural environment was sometimes referred to in the writings. Four of the au pairs said that all or at least some of their international friends were Swedish or Nordic. Piritta saw the reason for this to be especially in the similarity of the cultures:

I also noticed that I liked to spend my time especially with Swedish people, I suppose you tried to find around you people with quite a similar cultural background. (Piritta, 2)

Maybe the small cultural distance was felt safe and easy. According to Berry (1997), interaction with people with similar cultural background reduces the individual's need of cultural shedding and learning of new cultural norms.

Interestingly, only two Sofia and Tuula expressed the importance of keeping in touch with their Finnish friends and family while in England. Tuula thought that regular communication with them alleviated her longing and was an important factor for the successfulness of her au pair stay.

8.3 Local contacts

Examination of the au pairs' local networks outside the host family shows that most of the au pairs studied created some kind of contacts with the locals. The depth of the contacts varied from mere acquaintances to friendship. In three essays (Jaana, Petra, Alina) it became evident that the au pairs had not managed to get to know other locals except for their host family.

Six of the 22 au pairs mentioned having made rather acquaintances than friends with local people during their stay. In many cases these acquaintances were men who were often met with in bars or discos, and with whom the au pairs casually stayed in touch:

It was the easiest to make acquaintances with the opposite sex, and - surprisingly - in pubs. (Karita, 3)

... mostly male friends, whom we got to know at the local "night club". I would not call them close acquaintances, however: we mainly met at weekends if we happened to be at the same pub or disco. (Henna, 2)

While many of the au pairs thought that making contacts with the opposite sex was rather easy, they admitted the difficulty of getting local female friends. Many also said that they felt it was hard to get to know the local people in general. This was remarked and pondered in many writings:

I did not get any female English friends during the whole time. (Ronja, 2)

I got a picture that English girls mainly despise au pairs and consider them "stealers of men", and therefore want to have nothing to do with them. (Piritta, 2)

Afterwards I was left with the feeling that getting to know local girls was impossible (the attitude of English girls towards au pairs was mainly scornful), whereas it was easy to get acquainted with men - they easily took notice of blond Finnish girls. (Tuija, 2)

Usually locals thought that au pairs are maids with no education, so it was difficult to get acquainted with them. (Karita, 3)

The au pairs seemed to form a cult of their own, or at least, that is how the British people perceive them. (Alina, 2)

It is indisputable that England is a class society in which paid domestic work, such as that of au pair's, is not rated high. As regards these quotations, it seems that at least partly because of their lower position in the society, the au pairs of the present study felt that getting to know locals was problematic. It may be that English women are especially aware of au pairs' low position, and are therefore more rejective of them than men are.

Roughly ten of the au pairs managed to become better acquainted (ie. friends) with locals, or at least they met them on a more frequent basis. Many of the au pairs wrote in their essays about their best friends, but interestingly enough, they were never local people but always Finnish or international. However, it is difficult to assess how close were the contacts with the locals as the content of the essays and the extent of the themes discussed, such as social contacts, varied.

Out of the ten, Janika made her local contacts through a church, and Ronja met a group of locals, originally migrated to England from other countries, through her au pair friend. With this group, Ronja travelled around and experienced many new things. She admitted that the time with the locals was the best time she had while in England. Karita had a couple of local friends, in addition to the daughter of the host family, whom she thought of as a friend, too. Also Kirsi made friends with some locals, and she stayed in touch with them even after her return to Finland.

Annu, Tuula and Susanna learned to know their local friends through the host family, and Helena as well as Annu made friends by participating in the same hobby or a course with the local people. Still, both Susanna and Helena, and to some extent also Annu, commented on the difficulty of getting close to and making friends with the English. Minna was the only au pair of the 22 who considered it was easy to learn to get to know locals while in England:

We [Minna and her au pair friend from Switzerland] got to know English people a lot, and I had heard from other au pairs that this was rare, the English want to stay in their groups and au pairs in theirs. I did not notice this, and finally I ended up knowing almost everyone, at least in my village. However, a disadvantage of this was that when living in a small village, people soon knew everything about me, or at least thought they did. (Minna, 2)

For Minna, getting to know the locals was easy. She admits being an active and social person herself but it is possible that also the small size of the community she was living in helped her to create contacts to the locals. However, most of the au pairs of the present study lived in the London area, where openness and curiosity about foreign, new people is not that common. It may be that the size of the city at least partly explains the difficulty that the au pairs felt in getting to know locals. This is illustrated in Helena's words. Although she was active in searching for local contacts, she felt that making acquaintances with the people in London was not simple:

Moreover, London people are nearly equal to their reputation of being hard to get acquainted with. (Helena, 3)

Four of the au pairs wrote about having had a relationship with an English man/boy during their stay in the country. Interpreting from Taija's and Tuija's writings, a local boyfriend could help the au pairs to get more familiar with the culture and the language:

I dated an English boy about half a year, and in that way also I got familiar with the culture and learned more language. (Tuija, 2)

My English boyfriend familiarized me with the culture of the country. He took me everywhere: to the centre of London, the countryside, his friend's wedding, to countless places for food and drink, to a house-party, pubs... Through him I got acquainted with locals and their way of life. (Taija, 3)

Also Annu admitted that a local boyfriend helped her to learn to know more local people. Her boyfriend belonged to the working class, and seeing the life of his family opened new perspectives for Annu, whose host family belonged rather to the middle or upper middle class. Although she was accepted into the boyfriend's family soon, the way of life in the working class family did not appeal to her:

I felt also otherwise that in these deeply English surroundings, among workers, I was treated really badly from time to time. The more English I became, the more I wanted to get away from the family. At the same time, however, I was dying to be Finnish and tell everyone right away that I come from Finland. (Annu, 2)

It needs to be noted here that Annu stayed in the country after her au pair time, altogether for three years. In her case, the deep immersion to the English life and the attempts of her boyfriend's family to make her more English in her way of thinking seemed to trigger a counter reaction in her. As a result of this, her Finnishness became more important for her. However, she admitted that she learned to like England, its culture, and the city (London) so much that she wanted to stay longer. It may be that Annu became one of those people who feel they are at home in two countries, still feeling a bit at a loss when in the other because they simultaneously miss the country where they cannot be. This would maybe explain why Annu needed to "declare" her Finnishness but still wanted to stay in England.

It is interesting that the au pairs commented on their contacts with English men very briefly. Even though many of them mentioned the easiness of getting familiar with local men, they did not go on to say whether these contacts were romantic or just casual acquaintances. Only Kirsi wrote that she went on dates with some of the men she met. Also the four au pairs who had a longer relationship with a local man were very brief in their comments about it. The discreet nature of the writings concerning the topic may indicate that the au pairs thought that dating is not appropriate for an au pair, or maybe they simply thought that a more detailed description was not necessary for the purposes of studying their adaptation. However, as the quotation from Taija's essay shows, a local boyfriend could be a significant help in familiarizing the au pair with the new surroundings and people.

8.4 Discussion

The examination of the au pairs' social networks outside their host families showed that the au pairs' closest friends were most often other au pairs, who were both Finnish and international. Many made also local contacts which

were, however, usually rather acquaintances than friendships.

From the point of view of the nationality of friendship networks, the results of the present study differ from Lundberg's (1999) findings. In her study, only five of the 22 au pairs interviewed had developed an international friendship network – most often the closest network of friends consisted of 2–4 other Finnish au pairs. Accordingly, the au pairs of the present study can be said to have had a more international network while in England, since all the au pairs mentioned having had also other than Finnish friends. The reason to this may lie in the data collection method: whereas Lundberg interviewed randomly chosen Finnish au pairs, the informants of this study chose to participate in it themselves after reading the e-mail request. Therefore, those who took part in this study probably were interested in its topic and possibly had quite a strong personal interest in cultural issues, too, showing, for example, in enthusiasm to create contacts to people of other nationalities.

The au pairs often spent their free time with other au pairs. Au pair friends were referred to as people who were easy to make friends with, and who understood and gave support when needed. These notions are similar to those that many researchers (e.g. Osland 1995, Gudykunst and Kim 1992) have made on sojourners: they often group together, and do so because of the support they can get from other sojourners for the adaptation to the new surroundings.

The au pairs were generally satisfied with their social life while in England, and many felt that getting new friends was easy. This has most likely been helpful for the au pairs' psychological adaptation, on which social contacts and support have been proved to have a positive impact (Ward 1996).

As regards contacts with locals, the au pairs frequently mentioned the difficulty they felt when trying to make friends with English people. According to the feelings of many au pairs, local people sometimes considered au pairs as "man hunters" or non-educated maids, and this attitude made them difficult to approach. Still, most of the au pairs managed to create at least some kind of contacts to the locals outside their host families. Some who got to know locals better mentioned that those contacts were very rewarding. Host communication competence (Gudykunst and Kim 1992) must have improved as a result of the contacts with locals, and it is likely that they also eased the au pairs'

sociocultural adaptation (Ward 1996), especially so when the au pair had established an intimate relationship with a local person.

England is a country with a long history of immigration. As a result, the society's general attitude towards migrants and other foreign groups is supposedly rather tolerant. However, the au pairs' stories show that this does not guarantee the foreigner's familiarization with locals. Actually, it seems to be almost the opposite, at least in big cities: the au pairs felt that making contacts with the locals was often difficult there. Therefore, Gudykunst and Kim's (1992) and Kim's (1997) claim on the correspondence between open and accepting attitude of the host society and good interaction possibilities with the hosts, facilitating adaptation, seems doubtful. On the contrary, the findings of this study seem to suggest that in a country, where representatives of many different nationalities have for long been in contact with each other, people have got used to giving space to everyone, not interfering with or questioning about their lives.

9 FREE TIME ACTIVITIES

Examining and reporting the ways the au pairs spent their free time is worthwhile as it was one of the subjects dealt with in every essay. The theme is essential also from the point of view of adaptation because extensive activities and active participation in the life of the new environment in general show that sojourners are interested in the culture surrounding them. As a result of experiencing new situations and seeing different places, sojourners are likely to learn to behave in the ways expected in that particular cultural milieu, which thus enhances their sociocultural adaptation.

The essays give the feeling that the au pairs were very much on the go in their free time. However, as the span the au pairs spent in England was rather long, it needs to be remembered that the extensive list of hobbies and activities concerns the whole time. Still, some of the au pairs clearly indicated that the free time, especially weekends, was characterised by constant coming and going.

9.1 Hobbies and other activities

The most common way to spend free time seemed to be meeting and spending time with friends, with whom the au pairs sat in cafes and pubs, went shopping and eating, danced at clubs, saw movies, went to parks, flea markets and market places, did sightseeing, and visited museums and exhibitions. These activities were found in variable combinations in every au pair's essay. Many went also to concerts, musicals and the theatre. Moreover, general "hanging out" and getting familiar with places was often mentioned in the writings. Paula sometimes simply just experienced and enjoyed the surroundings:

. . . I looked, listened, felt up the atmosphere, it must sound like a phrase, but I enjoyed the feelings and the moments. Somehow I realised that this is the time I can just be and enjoy the scenery, architecture, crowds of people, the sound of the tube.
(Paula, 4)

In addition to spending time in the city, au pairs had also other hobbies. Fourteen of them participated in a language course, which often met twice a week for some weeks or months. As noted earlier, many found friends in a course, but it also offered other advantages for them:

. . . I liked them [language classes] a lot, even though they were not always very challenging. However, we had plenty of discussions and they were really rewarding as we at the same time got familiarised with the English culture and customs. (Minna, 2)

I also went to a language course for some time twice a week, it was quite useful. I spent a lot of time with other Finns, so it was good to learn English also in a school like manner, otherwise the language skills would not have necessarily improved that much. (Tuija, 2)

Both Minna and Tuija benefited from the language class in their own way: according to Minna's own estimate, her previous knowledge of the language was excellent, and although the course did not offer her much linguistically, she gained cultural knowledge from the discussions. Tuija felt that learning English at the course was useful for her because she used the language rather little. She spent a lot of time with other Finns, and she also worked in a family whose single parent host mother was at work almost constantly. Added to the fact that Tuija did not like to stay at the house on her free time, she probably did not get much practice of English either in the host family or with her friends.

Different kinds of sport activities were a part of many au pairs' free time. The sports mentioned included walking, jogging, swimming, squash, dancing and going to the gym or aerobics. Also, different courses were popular: Jaana and Helena took part in a variety of courses, such as sculpting, photography, positive thinking, and drama. Eeva started to learn Spanish, motivated by her Spanish au pair friend, and Ronja went to a French class. Henna sang in a local choir, Kerttu played the piano and listened to music. Mirkku and Alina sometimes went to meet other au pairs at the Finnish Church.

Although most of the au pairs had various opportunities for spending their free time, for some the options were limited. At her first time as an au pair, Kerttu lived on an air base, where she was surrounded by "a group of

homogenous army people” (Kerttu, 2). Although the surroundings limited her possibilities, she still made her best to enjoy the free time:

By Christmas I had, however, created my own living space in these rather boring surroundings: I celebrated with my friend in Oxford and in the little pub of the base, went cross-country walking outside the base, listened to classical music and played the piano in commander’s [her au pair friend’s host father’s] house (they even tuned their piano for me). (Kerttu, 2)

Also Minna lived in a small community, and therefore she was sometimes rather bored at daytime when she was free but had nothing to do but watch TV or go for walks. At evenings and weekends, however, she enjoyed more activities with her friends. In Riitta’s and Henna’s cases, the large amount of work and the limited free time restricted their opportunities. Henna had to be always available, and therefore her host mother could tell only an hour before a concert, for example, whether Henna could go or not. Riitta could not participate in a language course, even though the host mother had promised her so in advance, and due to Riitta’s obligations in the family, she did not have a chance to get to know many people or take part in hobbies:

I did not really get to know the local youth so well, as I did not go to any hobby. -- The only thing that I regret [about the au pair year] is the lack of free time during the weeks, as a result of which I could not participate in many activities. (Riitta, 3-4)

9.2 Travels

There was a lot of variety in the amount of travels the au pairs made while living in England. It could be said that for Karita, Petra, Minna and Helena, travelling was one of their hobbies. This was often explained by the fact that they or one of their au pair friends had a car at their disposal, offering a chance for a fairly economic way of travelling. Weekends were often spent on the road, and a car gave freedom also in other ways. This was expressed in Karita’s essay:

I got a little car for my use as one of my duties was to fetch the girls from their hockey practice. -- The car gave me a lot of joy. Me and my friends drove to new places all the time (Liverpool, Preston, Warrington...) and visiting people became much easier. I paid for the petrol spent on free time myself, usually sharing it with the people I was driving. (Karita, 2)

Helena said that thanks to her host family and her own activity, she could make quite many trips. In addition to her, also Piritta, Kerttu, Ronja, Paula and Henna got a chance to travel together with their host families. For Paula, the trip she and her host family made together to Oxford was a great experience, whereas Henna admitted that the travels with the family were not relaxing as she was always on duty then.

Nearly all the au pairs got a chance to travel at least a little bit. Usually the trips were directed to nearby towns and cities. However, some au pairs made also longer journeys, for example to Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Paris, Amsterdam, Spain, and even to the United States. The au pairs travelled most often with their friends but some went alone, too. For Minna, travelling alone was a positive experience:

... and it was nice to notice that I could manage everything so well. For example, I went to a mega fashion fair in a metropolis by myself. (Minna, 2)

For many au pairs, London was a city that they adored. It “thrilled” (Mirkku, 2), was “a place of my dreams” (Tuula, 2), or “totally charmed me” (Riitta, 3). Of those au pairs who did not live in London, Mirkku, Riitta, Eeva and Susanna made several trips there, some even every weekend. The impression that some of the writings gives is that for a couple of au pairs the city offered so much that they did not really feel the need to go anywhere else.

The au pairs’ common problem concerning travelling seemed to be the lack of money. Alina, Susanna, Tuija, Henna, Paula and Sofia mentioned this in their essays. The au pairs interviewed for Lundberg’s study (1999) said the same thing. A typical remark made by the au pairs of this study was that they wanted to travel more but could not do so because of their limited financial resources:

... if you wanted to get to know other places than your town you had to save for long. -- I would have wanted to travel around England even more but expensive train fares and the lack of money prevented my dreams. (Susanna, 3)

Me and my friends intended to go to Paris for a weekend but we never found a time suitable for everyone or we did not have the money. You cannot really travel that much on the au pair’s paycheck. (Sofia, 4)

Moreover, sometimes their free time was not enough for longer trips. The lack of time was especially a problem for Henna and Riitta who were on duty almost constantly. Neither could Henna's host mother understand Henna's problems with money:

In principle the host mother encouraged me to take part in "activities" but it seemed to be hard for her to understand how little money I had at use and that this limited my travels. To make more out of the week's only day off (Wed), me and my friend made daytrips to the nearby areas, e.g. to Wales and to the coast. These daytrips have remained in memory as positive experiences. (Henna, 2-3)

9.3 Discussion

The au pairs of the present study lived an active life on their free time in England. They enjoyed spending time together with their friends in the city but took part also in many activities. The scale of the au pair's hobbies and activities was rather wide, representing largely the kind of activities that local people do in their free time. Many au pairs who got a chance to travel had fond memories of their trips. Other scholars have not commented on the role of free time activities and travels for adaptation but it can be assumed that an active participation in different activities as well as seeing new places widened the au pairs' knowledge and understanding of the culture, and increased their sociocultural adaptation.

Too much work sometimes prevented the au pairs from taking part in activities and from travelling far. Moreover, the lack of money often limited their possibilities to travel. The host families had an important role in facilitating and enriching the au pairs' free time. They could, for example, offer a car for the au pair's use and take her on the family holidays. Moreover, the host family was also the decision-maker regarding the amount of free time and money that were given to the au pair. Therefore, it could be concluded that host families have a crucial role in au pairs' free time, because they largely have the power either to hinder or to ease the ways of spending it.

10 CULTURAL NOTIONS

Living in a foreign culture always raises many kinds of thoughts in a sojourner, and comparisons between the host and one's home culture are easily made. In the covering letter sent to the informants of the present study, the au pairs were asked to write about their notions and thoughts about the English culture and people. This was done in order to find out how such a Finn perceives the local culture, and how she reacts to it. It is likely that an au pair views and experiences the English society differently than, for example, a sojourner in a position of a business executive. The theme is worth discussing also because the comments the au pairs make can shed a light on how they adapted to the foreign culture.

England and Finland are Western societies, and do not therefore differ fundamentally; for example, the Western lifestyle combines the two. Riitta and Eeva noticed the similarity between the societies in their essays. Some of the au pairs were conscious about the risks of making cultural generalisations: Eeva said that she felt that she did not get a chance to see a very typical kind of British life as she lived in a very rich family; therefore she did not want to make too many generalisations based on her experiences in the host family. Paula, who lived in London, doubted whether she could make generalisations about the whole country and culture because she did not see more of it.

10.1 Class

The most typical remark or subject concerning British culture was the class division prevailing in the society. Altogether 16 au pairs commented on this in their essays. Mostly the comments were rather neutral but the class system was also sometimes referred to as odd, unbelievable, or even shocking.

It seems that the live-in position of the au pair and the work itself give an exceptionally good angle for seeing and experiencing the class and its importance in the society in practice. The host family's behaviour showed the

au pair the typical “behaviour rules” between the classes:

My family were really conscious about belonging to the upper middle class. They could not even have imagined being related to working class people, or even being very close with them. (Jaana, 2)

The class division is still unbelievably strong in the English culture. The host mother, who was rich, gave her old clothes to her poor acquaintance, who had previously been their cleaning lady, and treated her from above. (Susanna, 3)

In the majority of cases, the au pairs’ host families belonged to the upper middle class, or, according to some girls’ notions, wanted to belong to it. The au pairs did not always hide the astonishment or irritation they felt towards the way of life of the upper classes:

... their lifestyle was rather wealthy, towards which I could not help taking a slightly critical attitude. -- The biggest problems of the people were where to spend their holidays and what to buy for dinner. (Helena, 2)

During that half a year I met very different kind of people but sometimes I felt the “finest” people were the least fine ones from the inside. Some of them had very materialistic values and the discussion topics involved mainly shopping, dieting etc. (Riitta, 4)

These comments may at least partly originate from the treatment the au pairs faced themselves: some said they were treated like working class people from time to time. Maybe for the same reason, some considered people from the lower classes more friendly and approachable. These topics are seen in Piritta’s and Riitta’s comments:

Although my host family treated me well, some of their friends had a rather different attitude, they would not even necessarily talk to me during their visit, but expected me to look after the children kindly and quietly. To them, I was clearly a servant, who should have known her place. (Piritta, 3)

... and some of these “finer” people had a bit of a patronizing attitude towards me. It was the same with the host fathers parents, who let me know that I was “just an au pair”. But there were many lovely people especially within the friends of the family, belonging to the lower middle class, who treated me like any of their equals. (Riitta, 3)

Kerttu’s experiences about the lower class people were different. She worked as an au pair on an army base where the (working class) inhabitants treated her in a boorish manner, and, for example, despised her “fine” hobbies

(e.g. classical music, theatre). She assumed the reason for this to be in the low level of their education. Also Annu, who dated a working class boy, felt she was treated badly in those circles:

[in working class circles] I did not get any female “true friends”, they spoke to me in a friendly manner but at other times they followed every movement I made and giggled at the other end of the table. Sometimes they liked to embarrass me by using words that I did not understand and by laughing when I asked for their meaning. Both boys and girls did this. (Annu, 2)

It is possible that negative experiences of trying to communicate with locals in such situations made these au pairs' adaptation more difficult. According to e.g. Berry (1997 and in press) and Ward (1996), the lack of positive feedback and contacts may have a negative effect on adaptation and general well-being.

10.2 Language, communication and people

Many of the au pairs made observations about language usage. Although each of them had studied English for years at school, the essays show that they still did not know all the details concerning, for example, the pragmatic use of the language. Small talk, a typical feature of English, was considered both difficult and useful:

... small talk seemed really impossible in the beginning. The emptiness of chit chat did not fit my straight character. (Petra, 2)

For me it was useful to learn English small talk. To chatter nonsense and to use numerous sayings that are not even used in Finnish. (Jaana, 2)

It becomes obvious from these comments that both Petra and Jaana were guided by their own cultural models in language use, and felt the need to learn the new rules to become better adjusted to the culture. Also Henna experienced difficulties concerning small talk, but for different reasons:

I had a good knowledge of English, especially a very natural accent. This “mislead” the locals to think that I also knew the culture and small talk well. Especially in the beginning this caused a lot of misunderstandings. E.g. when I was offered the last loaf of bread on the tray, I did not realise to say no, even though I “should” have done so.

I also could not use sufficiently “overflowing” words – only later I realised that when I mean “that’s nice” I need to say “wonderful, super!” instead of just saying “nice”. Possibly my way of speaking was considered very insulting because people really thought I knew the nuances of the language well. (Henna, 3)

This comment shows that while Henna was competent in the syntactic use of English, she had not yet developed a good enough host communication competence (Kim 1997) to behave in the manners expected in the foreign culture. However, the comment also reveals that Henna learned from her mistakes and thus became more competent in her language use towards the end of her stay.

Some of the au pairs also pointed out the politeness of the English language. Jaana said that when she visited Finland during her stay, the bareness of the Finnish language struck her – she had already got accustomed to using first names and various politeness words, typical of English. She also admitted having been ashamed of her Finnish friends in London when they did not remember to say “please” when needed or said “what?” instead of “pardon?”. Taija was conscious of the usage of politeness words but was initially afraid that she would not know how to use them:

I appreciate the politeness of English people and the way they take other people in consideration. First I was concerned that I might seem rude but my fear was groundless. I used the words “please”, “thank you”, “sorry” and “pardon” as any Briton. (Taija, 3)

For Taija, the politeness of the language went hand in hand with her notions about the local people. While she appreciated the politeness of people, Petra, Eeva and Janika felt it was sometimes irritating or confusing:

Moreover, English politeness – or pretending to be polite – sometimes got me to the edge of despair. Every Sunday the family went for lunch to their grandmother’s. I wanted to enjoy the peaceful morning at home but I never found out whether they asked me to join them out of politeness or whether it was a huge etiquette error to refuse the invitation time after time! And this was not the only situation of this kind. (Eeva, 4)

Again, the models the au pairs had received from their home culture affected their attitudes and ways of behaviour. The irritation about people being “too” polite probably resulted from the lack of their cultural knowledge. In other

words, the au pairs' sociocultural adaptation (Ward 1996) to the host culture had not yet reached the level where they would have known how to act in situations as described above.

Other notions the au pairs made of English people include Minna's opinion of them not being very direct, and Tuula's remark of older people being conservative, while the young are wild, free and capable of change. Susanna felt that the members of her host family were very polite and reserved. Mirkku thought that English people were social:

... I went to aerobics where I was accompanied by English housewives. They came to talk to me, in Finland it would not have been that social. (Mirkku, 2)

It is likely that Mirkku's interpretation of sociability equals to the notion of English small talk made by some other au pairs.

10.3 Housing and food

The most critical and slightly ethnocentric comments about English culture were made on material things such as housing. Several au pairs had a word or two to say about e.g. fitted carpets, single windows, cold houses, or bathroom facilities in England. Paula expressed probably the inner thoughts of many: as a Finn, she felt she was used to technology and even to clinical tidiness, and was therefore apt to notice differences in this area.

I was left with the memories of the backwardness of English people. They think they are developed e.g. in recycling etc. but they are wrong! Impractical: fitted carpets, no draining cupboards, single windows, separate taps for cold and hot water... (Janika, 2)

Also the lack of decent showers and radiators made me think of English people as stupid and primitive. (Petra, 2)

In my opinion, the culture did not differ much from Finnish, although many things were very backward. I did not notice recycling anywhere, and even milk containers were made of plastic and were thrown to the bin. (Eeva, 4)

The comments above create the impression that these au pairs could not understand these practical differences prevailing between the host and their

home culture, and therefore reflected their feelings on the local culture and people by considering them somewhat backward, at least in these issues.

However, Paula could also see some differences positively:

Gas stoves, flower wallpapers and lace curtains on the windows reminded me of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and often made me smile. I noticed in practice some of the stereotypes that there are of the English life. Red-bricked houses with roses, left-hand side traffic, the buzz of an electric car, and the clink of milk bottles could not be related to anything but Englishness. So were the letter and phone boxes and black taxis in the streets, not to mention Big Ben and other tourist attractions. (Paula, 4)

English cuisine raised a few comments among the au pairs. Paula and Tuija noted that drinking tea was very common in England. In Alina's opinion, British cuisine was "eccentric but delicious", but Sofia thought that Finnish food is much healthier and better than traditional English food. Also Paula and Kerttu had similar opinions:

The children of the family took chocolate bars and biscuits to school for a snack, every day. I considered this very unhealthy and was surprised at the typicality of this practice but as they say, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. (Paula, 5)

10.4 Other notions

The English schooling system, especially the early age of children starting school, aroused astonishment in three au pairs. Petra wrote:

The other child was a five-year-old boy, who, to my surprise, already went to school. I never got used to the fact that children were put to school so young. The boy was a monster after school and you could not get any hold on him because the poor boy was always so tired. (Petra, 2)

Another three au pairs commented on multiculturalism. It was generally taken as a positive, yet somewhat confusing matter:

The variety of different nationalities and cultures was simply bewildering. It was also lovely that in London you had the possibility to see many different cultures side by side within a small area. (Sofia, 5)

Riitta, on the other hand, noticed the traditional roles persisting between the parents of her host family. Whereas the father earned the money,

the mother was responsible for the household and children. In Kerttu's opinion, gender equality is more developed in Finland than in England.

Four of the au pairs spent their Christmas in England. For each of them, the celebration was a positive experience, even though naturally different than in Finland. According to Kirsi, the Christmas she experienced was typical of the culture. She did not, however, develop reasons for this statement:

Holidays reveal and tell a lot about the culture and customs. We had a very traditional British Christmas and nice time together. (Kirsi, 3)

10.5 Discussion

The au pairs' writings show that the informants took notice of several matters in the English culture. The theme that gained most comments and pondering among the au pairs was the class division, in which they sometimes became involved. The au pairs could observe the class system closely as they lived in an English family and thereby saw the way other classes were treated. Another common topic was the use of the English language. Many comments given by the au pairs showed that they learned the rules of its usage, ie. acquired the host communication competence, an important part of good adaptation, little by little and through trial and error (Kim 1997).

Many of the au pairs' remarks made on the English culture, concerning, for example, class, were rather critical in nature, although the culture itself or people were only rarely blamed. However, some of the au pairs' comments had also slightly ethnocentric tones. Interestingly enough, these comments mostly concerned material matters such as housing and food. Based on this, it could be assumed that it was these things that differed most between the au pairs' home and the host culture, or, on the other hand, these might have been the easiest, most visible cultural differences for them to notice.

Some features of the host culture remained confusing and unsolved, such as the possible meanings of politeness. It is likely that the rather short

time period that the au pairs spent there was not enough to gain an understanding of the deeper layers of the culture (Schneider and Barsoux 1997), such as politeness.

In their cultural notions, the au pairs concentrated most extensively on the things that differ most between their home and the host culture. Some of these differences can be put in a larger frame introduced by Hofstede (1997). For example, the masculinity – femininity dimension, which is noticeable between England and Finland, can be recognised in Riitta's discussion about the roles of the parents in her host family. Maybe also the British class division, much discussed by the au pairs, can be interpreted partly as a product of the masculine society because it often supports rigid values and differentiates people according to their financial incomes.

The other dimension on which Finland and England are somewhat apart, according to Hofstede, is collectivism versus individualism. One of the typical features of individualistic societies is the encouragement of children to early independence. Some of the au pairs noticed a sign of this in the British society where children are sent to school at very young age. As regards the collectivism – individualism dimension, Hofstede (1997) also points out that silence is more accepted in collectivistic societies. Although maybe a bit far-fetched, it is possible that au pairs arriving from a slightly more collectivistic Finnish society face difficulty in, for example, small talk in England because of this.

11 BENEFITS AND ASSESSMENT

In this chapter two final themes will be discussed. Firstly, there will be an analysis of the au pairs' evaluations of the benefits of the experience. While the focus in the earlier chapters has been more on the *adaptation process*, here the interest is in the *outcomes* of it. The discussion of the theme is important also because it shows whether the au pairs' initial motives and expectations came true as a result of their stay. The second part of the chapter will show the au pairs' views of the au pair arrangement in general, focussing on its success in making au pairs familiar with another culture. As cultural learning is one of the cornerstones of the arrangement (European Agreement on Au Pair Placement 1969), it was interesting to find out what au pairs themselves had to say about the subject.

11.1 Benefits of au pair stay

The au pairs were very unanimous in their comments on the benefits they gained through the au pair experience. It became obvious from all the essays that the time spent in England was considered as a positive and rewarding experience. This was commented on in many ways, in addition to listing the benefits of the stay in more detail. Here are some of the general feelings the au pairs had to say of their stay:

The au pair year was very rewarding in every way. -- All in all, a great experience. (Sofia, 4-5)

Although the au pair time was not without its problems, I am still really happy that I went. The experience was for me a bit like I think the army is for boys, it is not always easy but it builds your character and guts. (Tuija, 2)

I am very satisfied with my year as an au pair. I simply have nothing bad to say about it. (Paula, 5)

Already at that time I realised that the time as an au pair has a great influence in my life. Words cannot describe it. I was enriched for good. -- The time spent in England is an important factor in my life. (Taija, 3-4)

I do not regret a moment for taking the position as an au pair. Those eight months were a really educative and unforgettable experience. (Jaana, 2)

These comments, written even years after the actual experience, show that the time as an au pair has not been an irrelevant issue to the informants. It is remembered with pleasure, and maybe the essence of the experience has opened up in full only some time after the sojourn. As can be seen from Tuija's observations above, even difficulties were eventually considered purposeful and an important part of the experience. Also Henna, Kerttu (her first au pair experience) and Petra concluded that the difficulties they went through could not surpass the positive feelings that they were left with.

When the au pairs wrote about the benefits of their stay in more detail, *personal growth* was probably the most widely expressed and appreciated gain achieved. This included many things, such as increased self-esteem and self-confidence, which were often expressed through words like those put down by Susanna and Petra:

It gave me confidence: if I can manage alone abroad, I can manage anywhere. (Susanna, 3)

. . . my time in London grew me very much mentally. It made me feel that I could manage just anywhere after that. (Petra, 2)

In all, as many as eight girls expressed the increased trust in their own capabilities through similar choice of words. Also other attributes, linked to personal growth, were mentioned: Tuula said that the au pair time changed her as a person as she learned to value spiritual matters over superficial ones. Kerttu and Piritta felt they became more adaptable persons. For Riitta, the time gave an opportunity to think what she wanted from her life, and Janika became more patient. Some also said that the year made them more independent.

Another important benefit mentioned in the writings was *learning to know new people and getting new friends*. Quite a few of the au pairs formed close relationships especially to other au pairs, and they have stayed in touch ever since:

I have still, after three years, kept in close contact with the Spanish, Australian, German, Czech, Swedish, Polish and Finnish au pair, which I think is very great. (Eeva, 4)

I became really good friends with two girls, and I still keep in touch with them through e-mail and we have visited each other in Finland. (Sofia, 3)

Five girls (Kerttu, Karita, Tuula, Eeva, Mirkku) said that they still keep in touch with their host families, and Kirsi and Eeva wrote about their contacts with other locals:

Moreover, me and the host family's cleaning lady (we really became friends with that 55 year-old working class woman, we felt a spiritual affinity!) write Christmas letters to each other, as do I and my host mother. (Eeva, 4)

I learned to know -- a family of Cretan origin. We still keep in touch with this family and it feels extremely good. (Kirsi, 3)

Concluding from these and other, non-quoted au pairs' comments, the experience can be a very rewarding time in a social sense. Perhaps the work as an au pair in a foreign family and living in another culture create circumstances where a young person needs a close-knit network, and therefore the contacts established at that time are felt especially close and important even after returning home.

Some other gains were related to *becoming more international*. The au pairs often mentioned that they started to see the world more open-mindedly, ie. the experience widened their world view:

My world view expanded, I can now look at things and put them in more proportion and think more flexibly. (Paula, 3)

It taught me -- open-mindedness and gave me the basis for comparing cultures. (Janika, 2)

Tuula's comment shows that living in a foreign culture increased her interest in people coming from other cultures:

...curiosity about new people. When I returned home I could go to talk more freely especially to people who I noticed to be other than Finnish. (Tuula, 2)

For many, the au pair time gave an impulse for a new sojourn abroad, or simply made the informants more motivated and eager to travel and see the world:

. . . I also got courage to do new things, and after my au pair time I have stayed abroad a couple of times for a longer period of time, it was not so difficult to go when

you had already once had the courage to go, and you had overcome also difficult situations. (Tuija, 2)

Due to my time in England, I got an impetus to see other countries than my own. It is easier to go abroad now. I have worked three summers in Sweden and now in autumn I went for -- exchange to University of Örebro in Sweden. I was bitten by the travelling bug. Who knows where I will find myself next. It would be nice to go to England, for example for a holiday. (Mirkku, 2)

Twelve au pairs mentioned that the stay in England improved their English *language skills*. Many said that the improvement was considerable, and, especially, the courage to use the language increased. Sofia and Alina felt that the increased knowledge of English helped them to get more motivated to learn the language more. They, as well as three other informants started to study English at university after their return, and it is likely that the stay in England was not an irrelevant factor in the decision.

Some au pairs mentioned gaining *new experiences* as one of the benefits of their stay. A couple of essays expressed the idea that the *appreciation of one's home country and their loved ones and friends grew* as a result of living abroad. In addition, as noted earlier, for many the family and friends in Finland were an important support also during their stay in the foreign country.

A few felt that as a result of the au pair stay, they *learned more of the culture and adaptation*. Minna thought she adapted to the local culture very well, and was proud when people came to ask her where in Britain she came from. Also Paula's words reflect the joy of starting to become a part of the new culture:

Adaptation took its time but on the whole, it went quite smoothly. It was a great and an unbelievable feeling when you started to realise "inside things", for example on TV and in magazines. (Paula, 5)

Minna and Kirsi said they became closely attached to the country and its culture. This is quite certainly true also for Annu and Karita, who lived and studied in England for three years. As regards Kerttu and Taija, they went back to the country to work as an au pair in a new host family.

Discussion

All the au pairs who participated in the present study felt that the experience was both useful and rewarding. Even hardships were considered, if not pleasant, at least educative. In a more detailed description of the benefits of the stay, the au pairs brought up issues of increased self-confidence, better language skills, new social contacts, becoming more international, getting new experiences, respect for one's home culture and close ones, adaptation, and learning to know another culture. It is important to note that these outcomes are very similar to the expectations and motives that the au pairs set for their stay before leaving. This explains their general satisfaction, and also proves that the expectations they had created for the sojourn were reasonable and achievable.

As the findings of the benefits of the stay are compared with the results of studies on exchange students, for example, by Garam (2000), Honkonen (1999), and Jäntti (1998), it can be seen that they are almost identical. Also the au pairs of Lundberg's study (1999) felt they gained more self-confidence, independence, and responsibility as a result of their stay abroad. Thus, it seems that the au pairs of the present study got similar benefits of their stay as exchange students and other au pairs. However, it is more than likely that au pairs' involvement in the foreign culture is deeper and more thorough than that of exchange students' because, unlike (most) students, au pairs live and work in a local family. Therefore, although the studies on exchange students' and au pairs' adaptation outcomes seem similar, there is quite certainly a difference in the level they learn to know and become involved in the foreign culture, even though this is difficult to prove in a study like this.

Half of the au pairs in Lundberg's study (1999) indicated that they were dissatisfied with the improvement of their English skills. Moreover, some felt they suffered from the lack of international contacts. Interestingly enough, none of the au pairs of this study mentioned these issues, and did not speak of many other disappointments either. The reason for this may be in the method of collecting data: while Lundberg chose the informants for her study herself, in this study the group of informants consisted of those, who were motivated

and interested in writing an essay of their (usually positive) experiences as an au pair.

11.2 Assessment of au pair arrangement

Finally, the results to background question number eleven (Appendix 2) will be discussed. In that the au pairs were asked to assess the usefulness of an au pair stay from the point of view of becoming familiar with another culture. They were also encouraged to give suggestions for improving the arrangement to make it more purposeful in this sense. It is important to note that the intention of this question was to make the au pairs consider the pros and cons of the arrangement *from a broader perspective*, not merely basing their evaluation on the individual experience.

Because the question was added to the questionnaire only later, the answer was received from only 14 informants. However, the au pair arrangement was discussed in many essays even by those who did not answer the particular question, and therefore the results should give a good idea of the general feelings of this group of au pairs.

The informants of the present study generally felt that the au pair arrangement is a good or an excellent way of becoming familiar with another culture. According to Petra (p.2), it is “a very rewarding experience from the point of view of learning to know another culture”, Piritta (p.1) said it is “one of the best ways” and Kirsi (p.2) that it is “an excellent way” to get to know another culture. The more detailed reasons were often linked to the host family and the au pair’s own responsibility, which will be discussed in the following.

11.2.1 Host family

As could be expected, the informants most often mentioned the living arrangement as a positive feature of the au pair arrangement. According to their comments, as the au pair lives with a local family, she not only sees but also experiences the life of that family, and thereby learns to know also a lot

about the culture:

The au pair lives in a family and sees really close how a family of a foreign culture behaves and lives. The au pair sees and experiences the specialities of the culture “from the inside”, which a regular tourist on a packet holiday does really not see. (Petra, 2)

In it [au pair work] you can get a practical feeling of the culture and a chance to follow close the life of a “normal” family. (Alina, 1)

Living in a foreign family, if not otherwise, forces you to become familiar with the customs of another country (or those of another family!). (Eeva, 1)

As is seen from these quotations, the au pairs feel the local family is the main source and channel to cultural acquisition. It enables the au pair’s participation in the life of that family, and gives thereby the feeling of experiencing the culture “from the inside”, as the au pairs often express it.

The host family was considered important also in other ways. Many au pairs said that the host family can give support, help and advice to the au pair, and thus make the adaptation easier. Sofia makes a good point by saying that host families should take more responsibility in this process:

Also the host parents can have a great impact on the au pair’s familiarisation with the other culture, for example, they can suggest places worth visiting and encourage the au pair to move around independently and give her responsibility. Many of the au pairs I knew did not get along with their host families, and I think it is the host family’s responsibility to help the au pair adapt and not just use her as a home slave. (Sofia, 1-2)

Living in a host family was seen as a practical arrangement also in other ways. When the au pair does not need to worry about the rent or the money for food, she can focus on other things:

Living in the host family covers accommodation and food, so you need not worry about things like that, and you can quite freely concentrate on friends, free time activities, and getting to know the surroundings. (Paula, 2)

You do not need to worry about the rent, apartment, food etc. You get a chance to familiarize yourself with English daily life right at the beginning. (Riitta, 4)

Although the host family can be a great help, it does still not guarantee a good adaptation to the culture. Tuija, Sofia and Ronja pointed out that if the host family consists of Finnish members, it does not fully serve its purpose in

that sense. Moreover, some made the same notion that came up in the analysis of the present work earlier: much is up to luck and it is possible to end up in a family which treats the au pair badly and thereby makes the participation in the family life and free time activities rather difficult.

The fact that au pairs live together with their host families was not always seen as a good thing only: many au pairs commented on the difficulty of living with another family, no matter how nice they were. Especially Paula, Sofia, Helena and Henna felt that the live-in arrangement limited their freedom, independence and privacy. Most of these girls were twenty years or older at the time and had already lived independently before coming to work as an au pair. Accordingly, both Sofia and Helena suggested that the arrangement may be more suitable for young people with no previous experience of living alone.

11.2.2 Contribution of au pair

In the au pairs' opinion, the success of the stay does not depend solely on the host family. Some au pairs noted that also the au pair's own attitude and activity are essential when getting to know another culture. Especially Minna stressed this:

I think it is totally up to the person how well you do at the au pair work and how well you get to know the culture. I have met au pairs who have expected other people to approach them, and have just waited passively, and then when nothing happens, they complain that foreigners are treated so differently and disdainfully. -- In my opinion, the au pair work is an exceptionally good way to become familiar with another culture if you are active and sociable yourself. (Minna, 3)

Minna's words probably have some truth value, as she herself got to know a large number of locals during her stay.

Ronja, Minna and Eeva brought up the issue of the au pair's networks. They said that if the network consists only of other au pairs, possibly even only of co-nationals, this may prevent au pairs from getting acquainted with the local culture:

What happens sometimes is that free time is spent only with co-nationals, and then the au pair year does not, in my opinion, serve its purpose. (Eeva, 1)

But it is not useful in the sense that au pairs often form groups of their own (somehow they always find each other) and learn to know rather each other's cultures than the local one. (Ronja, 2)

On the other hand, becoming friends with other, foreign au pairs was also considered positive:

It was very rewarding to get to know people from different countries. (Paula, 2)

Paula also pointed out that the au pair's expectations may sometimes be too high, and if the reality turns out to be different from that expected, it may cause problems. This comment is similar to those suggested by Berry (1997) and Osland (1995), and the subject came up also in the discussion of chapter seven. To conclude, a couple of girls remarked that if an au pair wants to go abroad safely, she can take her position through an au pair agency, in which case the agency is responsible for helping her if she faces problems in the family.

11.2.3 Au pair and society

Some notions that Helena made are worth citing because she made relevant observations about the au pair's position in the British society. She realised that the au pair's position is not valued high, and therefore avoided telling the local people that she was "just" an au pair. She continues:

Now afterwards that sounds stupid but somehow that just did not sound like "a great career" that was worth advertising. (Helena, 3)

Helena, who had got used to a student's life, was also troubled by the fact that as an au pair, she did not really belong to any career group. And even though she considered the arrangement as a good way of getting to know another culture, she still pointed out that the au pair does not really belong to the foreign society:

Being an au pair is not, however, the best key to the society. After all, the au pair is just a guest star with no past and no planned future in that society. (Helena, 1)

Helena thus brings up the general problem involving a sojourner's life: a

complete adaptation to the foreign culture is difficult because one is always conscious of the temporal nature of the stay and the return to one's home culture (Berry 1997, Kim 1997, Gudykunst and Kim 1992).

Discussion

The au pairs of the present study generally felt that the au pair arrangement gives good possibilities for learning to know another culture. They considered that the living arrangement and the host family's supportive attitude are important assets, as is the au pair's active and social role. On the other hand, if the au pair ends up in a Finnish family, or in one where she is not treated well, the acquisition of (ie. adaptation to) the new culture becomes more difficult. Moreover, a co-national friendship network, the au pair's position in the society, and the short period of the stay can, according to the au pairs, make the adaptation to the foreign cultural surroundings more difficult.

Although many of the issues discussed above have come up already e.g. in the analysis of the au pairs' host family relations (ch. 7), it was interesting to examine the au pairs' personal views and feelings of the subject. After all, they are the experts in evaluating the arrangement, having participated in it themselves.

12 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss and suggest the significance of the findings of the present study. This will be done by grouping together the findings of the most relevant factors that facilitated or hindered the au pairs' adaptation. Moreover, the results of the study will be evaluated from the point of view of their relevance and transferability. Also possible weaknesses and problems of the work will be examined. The chapter will conclude with a suggestion for further studies in the field.

Au pairs form a special group of sojourners in many senses. To start with, for them the work itself is only rarely the main impetus for going abroad. Instead, the au pair time is seen more as a chance to see the world, gain new experiences, and develop language skills. Moreover, au pairs are young, and the stay is often be the first time they live outside the parental home.

In comparison to most other sojourner groups, au pairs are in a different position because they live with a local family. Therefore, they are nearly constantly in contact with local people. Also the kind of work they do is relevant when examining them as a group of sojourners: au pair work belongs to the lowly paid domestic sphere, and, at least in some societies, this can affect the way they are treated.

Factors supportive of adaptation

According to the findings of the present study, there are many factors that can be seen to have facilitated the adaptation of the group of au pairs studied. Starting with some notions on the general level, the *cultural distance* between Finland and England is rather small. Both are Western societies with rather similar political, economic and religious systems. Moreover, Great Britain has a long history of immigration, due to which there are a lot of people of foreign origin living in the country. Thus, *the attitudes towards foreigners in the society* are supposedly tolerant.

As regards the more individual level, the au pairs of the present study had a good starting point for their sojourn in England. The most important reason for this is that they had *good language skills* prior to their stay. The au pairs had studied English for years at school, and although many of them noticed during the stay that they were not familiar with all the aspects of the language, they could still manage with it in their daily life. Moreover, the au pairs possessed some *basic knowledge of the society*, based on their schooling and the media. These two factors were of importance also when choosing Great Britain as the location of the au pair stay.

All the au pairs were active in their *free time*, and thus seemed to have become familiar with their surroundings. Many participated in different kind of activities and hobby groups, which gave them chances to meet the locals and thus learn more about the people and culture. Some au pairs had also a good opportunity to travel, especially so if they had a car at their disposal, offered by the host family (or by the host family of an au pair friend).

Social contacts and support were an important element in the adaptation of the group of au pairs. In this, the au pair's *host family* had a significant role. At best, they could take the au pair as a part of the family and treat her accordingly, for example by letting her join in the family activities and travels, and by familiarizing her with people and places. On a more general level, a good host family did not burden the au pair with too much work, thus allowing her enough free time. Also some of the families where the au pairs were in an employee position (rather than a family member) helped and supported the au pair's adaptation in quite similar ways.

In the light of the results on host family relations, it seems that positive and close relations, combined with good working conditions could significantly increase the satisfaction of the au pair stay. Only one of the au pairs in such circumstances faced some initial acculturative stress, and none reported on clashes or disagreements with the host parents. Host families of this kind can be said to have followed the general guidelines for au pair practice, emphasizing the importance of the visitor's participation in the family life and a chance for free time. It seems that in these ideal circumstances, the au pair practice fills its aim of being a channel of cultural exchange.

Another important source of social contact and support was the *network of friends* that the au pairs met on their free time. These contacts served a slightly different purpose compared to that of the host family. Often the closest network consisted of other au pairs who were Finnish and/or international. With these people, the au pairs could share their experiences and feelings concerning the work, their host families, and the culture. In other words, the network was a considerable source of support for many au pairs, thus helping their adaptation.

In addition to au pair friends, many got to know *local people* during their stay in England. From the point of view of adaptation, those who made the most intimate contacts, such as had a local boyfriend, got the best insight to the culture. Also one au pair who lived in a small village made several contacts to the locals. However, it cannot be said reliably whether it was the size of the community or the active and *social character* of the au pair, combined to her determination to get to know locals that made learning to know them possible.

Factors hindering adaptation

While these several factors were helpful to the au pairs' adaptation, other factors could also make it more difficult. First of all, au pairs are in the country in a *position of a sojourner*. Although sojourners are in a country voluntarily, the temporary nature of the stay often affects their adaptation. This may be especially true for au pairs whose stay does not usually exceed twelve months. Some of the comments in the essays revealed that the au pairs of the present study had not learned to understand all the features of the culture while in England – possibly a longer stay would have made a difference. Moreover, au pairs do not have a clear place in the British society, and no planned future there, as was stated in one of the essays.

The analysis showed that some au pairs faced adaptation problems in the beginning of their stay if they had set their *expectations* high. Some had hoped to be taken as a part of the host family, and when they were not, the disappointments made the beginning of the stay difficult.

Just as the *host family* could facilitate the au pair's adaptation, it could also hinder it to some extent. In a few cases, the au pair was given too much work and not enough free time, which decreased her possibilities to travel, take part in activities, and/or get to know local or other people. By causing conflicts, this also often affected the relationship between the au pair and the host family. Moreover, the au pair could be left out from family trips and other activities.

Although the *au pair network* could be a great help in the au pairs' adaptation, it is possible that it had also some negative effects. In some au pairs' opinion, if the network consists of other Finns or international people only, the learning of the local culture and people may become affected. However, there were also positive sides to this – many au pairs felt that getting to know people from other cultures was rewarding. Moreover, as getting new friends and becoming more international were some of the central motives when leaving to England, these contacts have not been useless.

The *lack of money* was mentioned by several au pairs as a restricting element because it often limited the amount and length of the trips they were able to make. Many indicated that they would have been willing to travel more if they had had the chance. Accordingly, with fewer financial problems, the au pairs might have reached even better level of adaptation.

The au pairs felt in general that it was difficult to *get to know local people*, especially girls. Many managed to create quite superficial acquaintances but did not get closer than that. Similarly, some au pairs said that they felt the locals had a special attitude towards au pairs in general, thinking of them as lower class people with no education. This became visible especially in the way some of the upper class people treated them. It seems, based on these comments, that au pair work, and thereby au pairs, are not highly evaluated in the British society.

A part of the reason why the au pairs considered that it was difficult to get to know the locals may lie in the *location*. Most of them lived in London or in the nearby areas, where there are a lot of foreigners, who are thus not of particular interest. However, in a more close-knit, small communities an au pair may get more attention, thus getting a chance to learn to know locals

better. Of course, also the opposite is possible, and much is up to the au pair's own attitude as well.

The analysis of the supportive and hindering factors of adaptation shows that there were several elements, supportive of adaptation, in the au pairs' life in England. Even when there were some hindering factors involved, they were always accompanied with positive ones. For example, if the au pair did not like spending time with her host family, she would spend the time outside the house, usually in the city where she was exposed to the culture in other ways. And even when her friendship network consisted of other au pairs only, it could help the adaptation by being the surroundings where the au pair was supported and understood.

The analysis of the study shows that the host family has a very important role in the au pair's adaptation. Moreover, the au pair herself can influence adaptation, e.g. she can take part in hobbies and activities, travel (if there is money), and she is also responsible for creating the networks around her.

Reflection on other studies

Au pairs have not been studied widely earlier, unlike for example exchange students. Riitta Lundberg's (1999) Ph.D has examined the practice from a sociol-cultural point of view, giving thus only little emphasis on the phenomenon of au pairs' adaptation. Therefore, the present study was needed to examine the sociol-psychological side of the au pair arrangement, here focussing expressly on au pairs' adaptation. While Lundberg's findings suggested that au pairs seem to face some adaptation problems e.g. concerning their social relations, this study managed to map out the problematic as well as supportive areas more precisely. The findings showed that although there maybe many problems, the factors that supported the au pairs' adaptation were more dominant.

The theoretical framework for studying adaptation was taken from

researchers in intercultural studies, for example, Berry (in press and 1997), Kim (1997), Ward (1996), and Gudykunst and Kim (1992). In the analysis of the au pairs' adaptation, especially the importance of communication and social contacts and support became evident, and they could be well related to the theories chosen. On the other hand, the theoretical framework could not offer means for examining the relevance of free time for adaptation. However, according to the findings of the present study, it can be assumed that active ways of spending free time can facilitate au pairs', and probably also other sojourners', adaptation.

While this study has brought more information on the little studied phenomenon of au pairs, it has also contributed to the field of adaptation studies, where au pairs have not got much, if at all, attention previously. Therefore, the present study has succeeded in achieving the goals set for it in the beginning.

The findings of this study can be of importance, for example, to future au pairs who plan a stay in Great Britain. Having this information, they may be better aware of the culture-related phenomena that they are likely to encounter, and know their own capacity to influence adaptation.

Limitations and further studies

In the considerations of the transferability of the present study a few things must be kept in mind. First of all, the group of informants of the present study consists of 22 au pairs, which is a rather small sample. Moreover, the data collection method sets some limitations: the informants who participated the study chose to do so themselves, and were not chosen randomly by the researcher. The requirement of writing an essay, a time-consuming and a rather demanding task, may have limited the group. The theme of the study may have especially inspired au pairs with rather positive experiences on the culture, or the stay in general. Further, the informant group was relatively homogeneous regarding age, educational background and sex. Also, the fact that the au pairs wrote about experiences that took place in the past may have affected the

results: the experiences are perhaps not recalled very precisely and they may have also become a little distorted during the years. For of all these reasons, the results of this study cannot be applied to all Finnish au pairs going to or having been to England as au pairs. However, these results may well show some general tendencies and possible realities of the adaptation of Finnish au pairs to England.

As regards the possible future studies in the field, it would be interesting to do a similar type of a study of a group of other than Finnish au pairs who have stayed in Great Britain. To be able to make even more comparisons, the study could involve au pairs from e.g. two countries, one being a Western country like Finland, and the other representing a more distant culture. This kind of a study would probably be able to show the relevance of culture for adaptation in a more comparative way. Moreover, it would be tempting to study Finnish au pairs who have stayed in some other English-speaking country than Great Britain, for example the USA or Ireland, and see how the findings would differ from those of the present study.

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Appendix 1: The letter (in Finnish)

Jyväskylässä 12.12.2001

Hei,

Teen englannin kielen laitokselle gradua suomalaisista Iso-Britanniassa työskennelleistä au pareista ja heidän kulttuurikokemuksistaan. Ilmoitit kuluvan vuoden huhtikuussa voitasi osallistua au pair -kyselyyni, ja vaikka aikaa tuosta onkin kulunut runsaasti, toivon, että voisit sen yhä tehdä.

Pyytäisin sinua kirjoittamaan *lyhyen, parin sivun vapaan kirjoitelman* kokemuksistasi au pairina. Kertomus saa olla täysin omannäköisesi, kunhan tuot siinä jossain vaiheessa esille sen, *miten au pair -aikasi tutustuit brittilämään ja millaisia yllätyksiä tai vaikeuksia vieraassa kulttuurissa eläminen sinulle mahdollisesti tuotti*. Toivon, että kirjoittaisit tarinasi suunnilleen kronologisessa järjestyksessä (tunnelmasi au pair -aikasi alussa -- välillä -- lopussa -- kotiinpaluun jälkeen).

Voit käsitellä kirjoitelmassasi mm. seuraavia aiheita:

- odotukset
- (alkuvaiheen) mahdolliset ongelmat ja niistä selviäminen
- sopeutuminen tai sopeutumattomuus perheeseen
- kaveruus-/ ystävyysuhteet kohdemaassa
- harrastuksesi, matkasi ym. vapaa-ajan aktiviteetit
- au pair -ajan ajatuksia Iso-Britanniasta, sen kulttuurista, ihmisistä (pienetkin tilanteet ja asiat käyvät!)
- pohdintaa au pair -ajastasi, esim. tyytyväisyytesi/tyytymättömyytesi kokemukseesi, ajatuksia kyvystäsi sopeutua vieraaseen kulttuuriin, mahdollinen oma kasvu ja/tai ajasta saatu hyöty jne.

Tarinan voit kirjoittaa joko suomeksi tai englanniksi. Mikäli lähetät kirjoitelmasi mieluummin postitse, ilmoita siitä minulle (uiriikon@st.jyu.fi), niin lähetän sinulle kirjeen ja vastauskuoren postimaksu maksettuna.

Palautathan kirjoitelmasi 31. tammikuuta 2002 mennessä.

Suurkiitokset osallistumisestasi ja iloista joulunaikaa!

Terveisin,

Ulla Riikonen
 puh. 045 - 676 21 33 tai 014 - 608 067
 s-posti: uiriikon@st.jyu.fi

Osoite:
 Taitoniekantie 9 B 518
 40740 JKL

Appendix 1: The letter (in English)

12th December, 2001

Hi,

I am writing my thesis for the English Department on the theme of Finnish au pairs in Britain and their cultural experiences. You contacted me in April and said that you were willing to answer my questionnaire and now I hope you are still able to do so.

I would like you to write *a short essay (a couple of pages)* about your experiences as an au pair. You can make the story look exactly as you like as long as you bring in *how you experienced the British way of life and what sort of surprises/ problems living in a foreign culture caused you*. Perhaps you could write your story in a chronological order (your feelings in the beginning -- midway -- in the end -- possibly also after returning home).

You could deal with e.g. the following themes in your story:

- expectations
- possible (initial) problems and getting over them
- adjusting to the family
- relationships with other people (= friends)
- your hobbies, travels and other free time activities
- thoughts about Britain, its culture and people while working as an au pair (also minor situations and things are welcome!)
- thoughts about your time as an au pair, e.g. whether you were (un)satisfied with your au pair experience, your ability to adjust to a foreign culture, possible growth and/or the benefits of the time etc.

You can write your story either in Finnish or in English. If you would prefer to send me your story on paper, let me know that (uiriikon@st.jyu.fi) and I will send you a letter and an envelope with a stamp.

Please return your story by 31st of January, 2002.

Thank you for your time and effort!

Best regards,

Ulla Riikonen
phone: 045 - 676 21 33 or 014 - 608 067
e-mail: uiriikon@st.jyu.fi

Address:
Taitoniekantie 9 B 518
40740 JKL

Appendix 2: The questionnaire (in Finnish)

Vastaa aluksi taustakysymyksiin.

1. Olen (a) nainen (b) mies
2. Ikä:
3. Koulutus (mainitse pääaine) ja/tai ammatti (jos olet jo työelämässä):
4. Missä päin Iso-Britanniaa vietit au pair -aikasi?
Milloin (esim. kesäkuu 1998 - toukokuu 1999)?
5. Olitko viettänyt aiemmin pidempää ajanjaksoa ulkomailla?
Jos, niin missä, miksi ja kuinka kauan olit?
6. Millaisiksi arvioit englannin kielen taitosi ennen au pairiksi lähtöä?
(a) erinomainen (b) hyvä (c) keskinkertainen (d) heikko
7. Miksi halusit lähteä au pairiksi?
8. Mitä toivoit etukäteen au pair -ajaltasi? (vastaus voi olla sama kuin kysymyksessä 7)
9. Miksi valitsit maaksi Iso-Britannian?
10. Kuinka valmistauduit au pair -työhösi tai Britanniassa asumiseen ennen lähtöäsi (esim. lukemalla, juttelemalla aiempien au pairien kanssa, osallistumalla au pair -toimiston valmennuskurssille, et mitenkään)?
11. Onko au pairina työskentely mielestäsi oman/ muiden tuntemiesi ihmisten kokemusten perusteella hyvä tapa tutustua vieraaseen kulttuuriin? Perustele. Jos ei, keksitkö miten asiaa voisi parantaa?
(Jatka tarvittaessa paperin kääntöpuolelle.)

Kirjoita kirjoitelma erilliselle paperille, vain paperin yhdelle puolelle. Halutessasi voit otsikoida tarinasi.

Appendix 2: The questionnaire (in English)

First answer the background questions:

1. I am a female
 male
2. Age:
3. Education (your major) and/or your profession (if working):
4. Where did you stay in Britain?
When (e.g. June 1999 - May 2000)?
5. Had you spent a longer period of time abroad before? If yes, where, why and for how long?
6. Assessment of your English skills prior to your au pair time:
a) excellent b) good c) moderate d) poor
7. Why did you want to become an au pair?
8. What did you hope for of your au pair time in advance? (can be the same answer as in question 7)
9. Why did you choose to go to Britain?
10. How did you prepare yourself for the au pair work or living in Britain before leaving (e.g. reading, talking to other au pairs, participating in a course by an au pair agency, no preparation)?
11. According to your and your friends' experiences, do you think that au pair work is a good way of learning to know another culture? Give reasons. If not, can you think of ways to improve the situation?

Write your essay on a separate paper, on one side only. You can give a title for your story if you wish.

Appendix 3: The selected quotations in Finnish

AU PAIRS' BACKGROUND

Valmistautuminen oli vähäistä -- Luotin koulussa & muualta saatuihin "tietoihin". (Piritta, 1) p.41

Puhuin myös puhelimesta pariin otteeseen au pair -perheen aiemman (myös suomalaisen) au pairin kanssa, joka pystyi jo antamaan joitakin ennakkotietoja ja vinkkejä. Koin varsinkin tämän ex -au pairin kanssa käytyt keskustelut hedelmällisinä ja antoisina, koska hänellä oli ensikäden tietoa perheestä ym. (Paula, 2) p.42

WORK AND RELATIONS WITH HOST FAMILY

... he kohtelivat minua todella lämpimästi ja huolehtivasti. Minua pidettiin perheen jäsenenä ja minun hyvinvointini oli heille tärkeää. He tekivät kokemuksistani miellyttävän ja olin todella onnellinen, että sain asua ja työskennellä heidän perheessään. (Alina, 2) p.45

Alina's essay was in English – the Finnish text is translated by the author.

Muutenkin kevät oli onnellista aikaa – perheen kanssa meni hyvin -- Perheen vanhin tyttö Juliette oli enemmänkin ystävä kuin huollettava (Karita, 2) p.46

Olisin varmasti saanut enemmän, jos olisin heti alusta alkaen uskaltanut kotinurkiltani kauemmas! (Ronja, 2) p.46

Sain alussa aikaa itselleni ja uuden tutustumiseen ja perhe näytti minulle paikkoja. Sopeuduin perheeseen nopeasti ja hyvin ja vastoinkäymisiä ei tullut. Alussa keskityin paljon perheen kanssa olemiseen ja tutustumiseen kaikkeen mahdolliseen. (Tuula, 2) p.47

Tulin toimeen perheen kanssa alusta alkaen hyvin, vaikkei meistä kuluneen 8 kk:n aikana ystäviä tullutkaan. Syynä jo oma asenteeni: on hankalaa olla ystävä ihmisten kanssa jotka maksavat sinulle palkkaa. -- Liikuin ja matkustin heidän kanssaan, mutta Lontoossa vietetyt viikonloput pidin suht tiukasti itselläni. (Helena, 2) p.48

Heti ensimmäisenä päivänä Lontoossa koin pettymyksen odotuksiini nähden. Olen tiiviistä perheestä ja kuvittelin, että olisin au pairina kuin perheenjäsen. -- Sain pian huomata, että olin perheelleni työntekijä. Se oli vaikea hyväksyä. -- toimenkuvani yksipuolisuus sai minut haluamaan toisen perheen. Olin todella pettynyt, itkin, ja tuntui tosi pahalta. (Taija, 2-3) p.48

CONTACTS OUTSIDE FAMILY

Oma au pair -järjestö organisoi au pair -tapaamisen, joissa nopeasti muodostuivat tiivis joukko sitä tarvitseville. Jengiytyminen muiden suomalaistyttöjen kanssa oli looginen vaihtoehto – itse kukin maassa vierailevana tähtenä ja samassa tilanteessa. (Helena, 2-3) p.52

Toisiin au pareihin tutustuminen tapahtui helposti, koska koimme olevamme "samassa veneessä". Näin vieraassa maassa löytyi ryhmä, joihin saattoi tukeutua ongelmien tullen. Näin selvää vertaisryhmää lienee hankalampi löytää muiden töiden merkeissä. (Paula, 2) p.52

Päivittelimme muiden au parien kanssa "emäntiämme", näiden lastenkasvatusta, paikallisia tapoja (esim. olla huuhtelematta tiskejä) ja juttelimme kotimaistamme ja sellaisista asioista, joista kaverit keskenään puhuvat. (Eeva, 3) p.52

Kavereilla oli aina vastaavia kokemuksia ja heille "valittamalla" asiasta pääsi yli. Muutenkin oli mukavaa huomata muille au pareille jutellessa että en ollut ainoa samoja asioita miettivä. (Piritta, 2) p.52

Tähän kulttuuriin oli aika vaikea sopeutua, mutta koska en löytänyt suomalaisiakaan, yritin parhaani. (Susanna, 3) p.53

Huomasin myös viihtyväni paljon etenkin ruotsalaisten seurassa, kai sitä kuitenkin yritti etsiä ympärilleen suurin piirtein samanlaisen kulttuurin ihmisiä. (Piritta, 2) p.53

Helpoiten kontaktin luominen onnistui vastakkaiseen sukupuoleen ja - yllätys - pubissa. (Karita, 3) p.54

... muutamia, pääsääntöisesti miespuolisia ystäviä, joihin tutustuimme paikallisessa "yökerhossa". Mistään kovin syvällisistä tuttavuuksista ei tosin voinut puhua, lähinnä tapasimme viikonloppuisin, jos satuimme samaan publiin tai tanssipaikkaan. (Henna, 2) p.54

Paikallisia naispuolisia ystäviä en saanut koko aikana. (Ronja, 2) p.54

Sain sellaisen kuvan että englantilaiset tytöt lähinnä halveksivat au pareja ja pitävät heitä "miesten ryöstäjinä", eivätkä siksi halua olla heidän kanssaan missään tekemisissä. (Piritta, 2) p.54

Jälkikäteen jäi tunne, että paikallisiin tyttöihin oli mahdotonta tutustua (englantilaisten tyttöjen asenne meitä au pareja kohtaan oli lähinnä ylenkatsova), kun taas miespuoliseen väkeen oli helppo tutustua – miehet kiinnittivät helposti huomiota vaaleisiin suomalaistyttöihin. (Tuija, 2) p.54

Yleensä paikalliset ajattelivat au parien olevan piikoja vailla koulutusta, joten tutustuminen oli vaikeaa. (Karita, 3) p.55

Näytti siltä, että au parit muodostivat oman kulttinsa, ainakin brittien mielestä. (Alina, 2) p.55

Tutustuimme myös englantilaisiin ihmisiin paljon, ja olinkin kuullut muilta au pareilta, että se oli harvinaista, englantilaiset tahtovat olla omissa oloissaan ja au parit omissaan. En kokenut niin, ja varsinkin samasta kylästä tunsin loppujen lopuksi melkein kaikki. Toisaalta yhtenä haittapuolena koin sen, että pienessä kylässä asuessani ihmiset pian tiesivät minusta kaiken tai ainakin kuvittelivat tietävänsä. (Minna, 2) p.56

Lontolaiset ovat sitä paitsi lähes maineensa veroisia vaikeasti tavoitettavuudessa. (Helena, 3) p.56

Seurustelin puolisen vuotta englantilaisen pojan kanssa, ja sitäkin kautta tutustuin kulttuuriin ja opin kieltä. (Tuija, 2) p.56

Englantilaisen poikaystäväni mukana tutustuin maan kulttuuriin. Hän vei minut joka paikkaan: Lontoon keskustaan, maalle, ystävien häihin, lukemattomiin paikkoihin syömään ja juomaan, house-bileisiin, pubeihin... Hänen kautta tutustuin paikallisiin ja heidän elämänmenoonsa. (Taija, 3) p.56

Tuntui muutenkin, että tässä perienglantilaisessa ympäristössä, duunareitten keskellä, minua kohdeltiin välillä todella törkeästi. Mitä enemmän englantilaistuin, sitä enemmän halusin perheestä pois. Mutta samalla minussa paloi kova halu olla suomalainen ja kertoa aina heti kaikille, että olin Suomesta. (Annu, 2) p.57

FREE TIME ACTIVITIES

... katselin, kuuntelin, tunnustelin ilmapiiriä, tuntuu varmaan fraasilta, mutta nautin tunnelmista ja hetkistä. Jotenkin tiedostin sen, että tämä nyt on sitä aikaa, jolloin saan olla ja nautiskella maisemista, arkkitehtuurista, ihmisvilinästä, metron äänestä. (Paula, 4) p.60

... pidin niistä kovasti, joskin ne ei aina olleet kauhean haastavia. Kuitenkin ne oli todella antoisia, kun tutustuimme samalla englannin kulttuuriin ja englantilaisiin tapoihin. (Minna, 2) p.61

Kävin myös kielikurssilla jonkun aikaa pari kertaa viikossa, se oli ihan hyödyllinen. Vietin aika paljon aikaa suomalaisten kanssa, joten teki ihan hyvää koulumaisestikin opetella englantia, muuten kielitatio ei välttämättä olisi paljon kehittynyt. (Tuija, 2) p.61

Jouluuun mennessä olin kuitenkin tehnyt itselleni oman elintilan ikävähkössä ympäristössä: Juhlin ystäväni kanssa Oxfordissa ja tukikohdan pienessä pubissa, kävin maastokävelyillä tukikohdan ulkopuolella, kuuntelin klassista musiikkia ja soitin pianoa komentajan kodissa (he jopa virittivät pianonsa minua varten). (Kerttu, 2) p.62

Paikallisiin nuoriin en oikeastaan kunnolla tutustunut, koska en käynyt missään harrastuksessa. -- Ainoa asia, joka jäi harmittamaan, oli arjesta puuttuva vapaa-aika, jonka vuoksi harrastaminen jäi vähemmälle. (Riitta, 3-4) p.62

Autosta oli valtavasti iloa. Ajelimme ystäväni kanssa jatkuvasti uusiin paikkoihin (Liverpool, Preston, Warrington...) ja kyläileminen helpottui huomattavasti. Maksoin itse vapaa-ajalla kuluttamani bensa, yleensä yhdessä kyytiläisten kanssa. (Karita, 2) p.62

... ja oli kiva huomata että selvisin kaikesta niinkin hyvin, esim. kävin eräillä megamuotimessuilla eräessä miljoonakaupungissa omin avuin. (Minna, 2) p.63

Olisin halunnut kiertää Englantia enemmänkin, mutta kalliit junamatkat ja rahapula estivät haaveeni. -- ...jos halusi tutustua muihin paikkoihin kuin oma kaupunki niin oli säästettävä kauan. (Susanna, 3) p.63

Ystäväni kanssa oli tarkoitus lähteä Pariisiin viikonlopuksi, mutta emme ikinä löytäneet siihen yhteistä sopivaa aikaa tai oli rahanpuute. Au pairin palkoilla kun ei

juuri reissata. (Sofia, 4) p.63

Periaatteessa perheen äiti kannusti "aktiviteetteihin", mutta hänelle tuntui olevan vaikea ymmärtää, kuinka vähän rahaa minulla oli käytettävissäni ja että se rajoitti matkustelua Saadaksemme enemmän irti viikon ainoasta vapaapäivästä (ke) teimme kaverini kanssa päiväretkiä lähiseuduille, mm. Walesiin ja rannikolle. Nämä päiväreissut ovat jääneet hyvin mieleen positiivisina kokemuksina. (Henna, 2-3) p.64

CULTURAL NOTIONS

Perheessäni oltiin todella tarkkoja siitä, että he kuuluvat ylempään keskiluokkaan. He eivät olisi voineet kuvitella olevansa sukua työväenluokkaan kuuluville ihmisille tai edes kovin läheisiä työväenluokkaisten kanssa. (Jaana, 2) p.66

Englantilainen kulttuuri on vieläkin uskomattoman luokkajakoista. Rikas perheen äiti antoi vanhoja vaatteitaan köyhälle tuttavalleen, joka oli joskus ollut heidän siivoojansa ja kohteli häntä hiukan ylhäältä päin käsin. (Susanna, 3) p.66

... koko heidän elämänsä elämäntyyli aika vaurasta, johon en voinut olla suhtautumatta hieman kriittisesti. Väen suurimpia ongelmia oli missä viettää lomansa ja mitä ostaa illalliseksi. (Helena, 2) p.66

Kohtasin tuon puolen vuoden aikana hyvin erilaisia ihmisiä, mutta joskus tuntui että ns. "hienoimmat" ihmiset olivat niitä vähiten hienoja sisimmältään. Osalla arvomaailma oli materialistinen, ja puheenaiheet liikkuvat lähinnä shoppailussa, laihduttamisessa jne. (Riitta, 4) p.66

Vaikka perheeni kohteli minua erittäin hyvin, oli joillakin heidän tuttavillaan jokseenkin erilainen suhtautumistapa, minulle he eivät välttämättä vierailun aikana edes puhuneet vaan minun odotettiin kiltisti ja hiljaa vahtivan lapsia. Heille olin selvästikin palvelija, jonka olisi pitänyt tietää paikkansa. (Piritta, 3) p.66

... ja osa tästä "hienommasta" joukosta suhtautui minuun hieman alentuvasti, kuin palvelijaan. Sama koski kyllä perheen isän vanhempia, jotka kyllä antoivat ymmärtää, että olen "vain au pair". Mutta etenkin perheen ns. alemman keskiluokkaisissa tuttavista löytyi monia ihania ihmisiä, jotka kohtelivat minua kuin ketä tahansa vertaistaan (Riitta, 3) p.66

... en saanut tytöistä "tosikavereita", minulle puhuttiin ystävällisesti, mutta sitten katsottiin välillä jokaista liikettäni ja hihitettiin pöydän toisessa päässä. Joskus heistä oli hauska nöyryyttää minua käyttämällä sanoja, joita en tienyt ja nauramalla kun kysyin sanojen merkitystä. Tätä tekivät niin pojat kuin tytötkin. (Annu, 2) p.67

... small talk tuntui alussa todella mahdottomalta. Suoraan luonteeseeni ei sopinut jonnin joutavien löpinä. (Petra, 2) p.67

Minulle oli hyödyllistä oppia englantilaista small talkia. Lätisemään joutavia ja käyttämään lukusia sanontoja, joita suomen kielessä ei edes käytetä. (Jaana, 2) p.67

Ensimmäinen ongelma jonka huomasin liittyi kielitaitoon ja kulttuuriin. Minulla oli hyvä kielitaito, erityisesti hyvin luonteva aksentti. Tämä "harhautti" paikallisia kuvittelemaan, että hallitsen myös kulttuurin ja small talkin hyvin. Varsinkin alussa syntyi paljon väärinkäsityksiä. Esim. kun minulle lounaalla tarjottiin lautasen

viimeistä leipää en ymmärtänyt kieltäytyä, vaikka niin olisi "kuulunut" tehdä. En myöskään osannut käyttää riittävän "ylitsevuotavia" sanoja - vasta myöhemmin ymmärsin että tarkoittaessani "kiva juttu" pitää sanoa "wonderful, super!" sen sijaan että vain toteaisin "nice". Puhettani saatettiin pitää hyvinkin loukkaavana, koska minun todellakin kuviteltiin tuntevan kielen vivahteet hyvin. (Henna, 3) p.67-68

Arvostan englantilaisten kohteliaisuutta ja toisten huomioonottamista. Käytin sanoja "please", "thank you", "sorry" ja "pardon" kuin kuka tahansa brittiläinen. (Taija, 3) p.68

Lisäksi englantilainen ystävällisyys - tai sen esittäminen - sai minut joskus epätoivon partaalle. Joka sunnuntai perhe meni isoäidin luo lounaalle. Minä halusin nauttia rauhallisesta aamusta kotona, mutta en koskaan saanut selville, pyydettiinkö minua mukaan silkasta kohteliaisuudesta vai oliko kenties valtava etikettivirhe kieltäytyä kutsusta kerta toisensa jälkeen! Ja tämä ei ollut tapauksena ainutlaatuinen. (Eeva, 4) p.68

... kävin aerobicissä, jossa seuranani oli englantilaisia kotirouvia. He tulivat juttelemaan jumpassa, Suomessa ei olisi ollut niin sosiaalista. (Mirkku, 2) p.69

Takkiin jäi muistot englantilaisten takapajuisuudesta. He siellä luulevat olevansa kehittyneitä esim. kierrätyksessä jne. mutta väärässä ovat! Epäkäytännöllistä: kokolattiamatot, ei kuivauskaappeja keittiössä, yksinkertaiset ikkunat, eri hanat kylmälle ja kuumalle vedelle... (Janika, 2) p.69

Myös kunnan suihkun ja lämpöpatterin puuttuminen sai minut ajattelemaan brittejä hölmöinä ja alkukantaisina. (Petra, 2) p.69

Kulttuuri ei mielestäni poikennut valtavasti suomalaisesta, tosin monet asiat olivat hyvin takapajuisia. Kierrätystä en havainnut missään, ja maitopurkitkin tehtiin muovista ja heitettiin roskeen. (Eeva, 4) p.69

Kaasuliedet, kukkatapetit sekä pitsiverhot ikkunoissa muistuttivat Agatha Christien neiti Marplesta ja hymyilyttivät usein. Havaitsin käytännössä jotain näitä stereotyyppioita, joita englantilaisesta elämästä on ollut. Punatiiliset talot ruusuineen, vasemmanpuoleinen liikenne, sähköauton hurina aamulla ja maitopullojen kilinä eivät voisi liittyä muuhun kuin englantilaisuuteen. Samoin katukuvassa näkyvät postilaatikot, puhelinkopit ja mustat taksit, puhumattakaan Big Benistä ja muista nähtävyyksistä. (Paula, 4) p.70

Perheen lapset ottivat kouluun mukaansa suklaapatukoita ja keksejä välipalaksi, joka päivä. Itse pidin sitä hyvin epäterveellisenä ja kummastelin käytännön tavanomaisuutta, mutta kuten sanotaan, maassa maan tavalla. (Paula, 5) p.70

Toinen lapsista oli viisivuotias poika, joka kävi jo yllätyksekseni koulussa. En ikinä tottunut siihen, että englantilaiset lapset pukattiin niin aikaisin kouluun. Perheen poika oli hirviö koulun jälkeen eikä siihen saanut minkäänlaista otetta, koska poloinen oli aina niin väsynyt. (Petra, 2) p.70

Eri kansallisuuksien ja kulttuurien kirjavuus oli myös aluksi suorastaan hämmentävä. Se oli Lontoossa ihanaakin, että pienen alueen sisässä oli mahdollisuus nähdä monta eri kulttuuria rinnakkain. (Sofia, 5) p.70

Juhlapyhät paljastavat ja kertovat paljon kulttuurista ja tavoista. Miellä oli hyvin perinteinen brittijoulu ja mukavaa yhdessäoloa. (Kirsi, 3) p.71

BENEFITS OF AU PAIR STAY

Au pair -vuosi oli todella antoisa kaikin puolin. -- Kaikenkaikkiaan hieno kokemus. (Sofia, 4-5) p.73

Vaikka au pair -aika ei ollut ongelmaton, niin olen silti todella tyytyväinen, että lähdin. Kokemus oli minulle vähän samanlainen kuin kuvittelen armeijan olevan pojille, helppoa ei aina ole mutta luonnetta ja sisua se kehittää. (Tuija, 2) p.73

Olen erittäin tyytyväinen vuoteeni au pairina. Paha sanottavaa ei yksinkertaisesti ole. (Paula, 5) p.73

Jo silloin tajusin, että au pair -aika on suuri vaikuttaja elämässäni. Sitä eivät sanat riitä kuvaamaan. Rikastuin pysyvästi. (Tajja, 3-4) p.73

En kadu hetkeäkään sitä, että lähdin au pairiksi. Se kahdeksan kuukautta oli tosi opettavainen ja ikimuistoinen kokemus. (Jaana, 2) p.74

Se antoi varmuutta: jos pärjään yksin ulkomailla, pärjään missä vaan -tyylillä. (Susanna, 3) p.74

... aikani Lontoossa kasvatti minua henkisesti todella paljon. Se sai minut tuntemaan, että pärjäisin sen jälkeen ihan missä vain. (Petra, 2) p.74

Pidän yhä, kolmen vuoden jälkeen, tiiviisti yhteyttä espanjalaiseen, australialaiseen, saksalaiseen, tsekkiläiseen, ruotsalaiseen, puolalaiseen ja suomalaiseen au pariin, mitä pidän mahtavana juttuna. (Eeva, 4) p.74

Ystävystyin todella hyvin kahden tytön kanssa, ja olen heidän kanssaan edelleen yhteydessä sähköpostin välityksellä ja olemme vierailleet toistemme luona Suomessa. (Sofia, 3) p.75

Lisäksi kirjoitamme brittiperheen siivoojan (me todellakin ystävystyimme tuon 55-vuotiaan työläisnaisen kanssa, tunsimme todellista sielujen sympatiaa!) sekä äidin kanssa joulukirjeet toisillemme. (Eeva, 4) p.75

Tutustuin -- kreetalaista sukujuurta olevaan perheeseen. Tämän perheen kanssa olemme yhä yhteydessä ja se tuntuu äärettömän hyvältä. (Kirsi, 3) p.75

Maailmankuvani laajeni, pystyn nyt katsomaan asioita suhteellisemmin ja ajattelemaan joustavammin. (Paula, 3) p.75

Au pair -aika opetti -- avarakatseisuutta ja vertailupohjaa kulttuurien vertailulle. (Janika, 2) p.75

... uteliaisuudelle erilaisia kulttuureita kohtaan. Kotiin tullessani saatoin mennä juttelemaan vapautuneemmin varsinkin sellaisten ihmisten kanssa, joiden huomasi olevan muuta kuin suomalaisia. (Tuula, 2) p.75

... sain myös rohkeutta tehdä uusia asioita, ja olen ollut ap-ajan jälkeen myös pariin otteeseen pitempään ulkomailla, kynnyks lähteä ei ollut enää korkea kun kerran oli jo uskaltanut lähteä, ja selvinnyt vaikeistakin tilanteista. (Tuija, 2) p.75-76

Sain Englannin ajoistani kimmokkeen nähdä muutakin kuin kotimaata. Ulkomaille on nyt helpompi lähteä. Olen työskennellyt kolme kesää Ruotsissa ja nyt syksyllä olen -- vaihdossa Örebron yliopistossa Ruotsissa. Matkailukärpänen iski. Saa nähdä mistä itsensä löytää seuraavaksi. Englantiin olisi hauska päästä vaikkapa lomareissulle. (Mirkku, 2) p.76

Sopeutuminen kulttuuriin otti aikansa, mutta kokonaisuudessaan sujui mutkattomasti. Tuntui hienolta ja hurjan uskomattomalta, kun alkoi tajuta "sisäpiirijuttuja" vaikkapa tv-ohjelmista ja lehdistä. (Paula, 5) p.76

ASSESSMENT OF AU PAIR ARRANGEMENT

Au pair elää perheessä ja näkee todella läheltä miten vieraan kulttuuriin kuuluva perhe käyttäytyy ja elää. Au pair näkee ja kokee itse kulttuurin erikoisuudet "sisältä käsin", mitä ei tavallisena pakettimatkatouristina todellakaan näe. (Petra, 2) p.79

Siinä saa käytännön tuntumaa kulttuuriin ja saa seurata läheltä "normaalin" perheen elämää. (Alina, 1) p.79

Perheessä asuminen tutustuttaa väkisinkin toisen maan (tai toisen perheen!) tapoihin. (Eeva, 1) p.79

Myös perheen vanhemmat voivat paljolti vaikuttaa kulttuuriin tutustumiseen, esimerkiksi ehdottamalla paikkoja, joissa kannattaa käydä ja rohkaisemalla au pairia liikkumaan itsekseen ja antamalla hänelle vastuuta. Moner tuntemistani au paireista eivät tulleet hyvin toimeen perheidensä kanssa, ja mielestäni isäntien velvollisuus on auttaa au pairia sopeutumaan eikä pelkästään käyttää heitä kotiorjina. (Sofia, 1-2) p.79

Perheessä asuminen kattaa asunnon ja ruuan, joten sellaisista käytännön asioista ei tarvitse itse huolehtia ja voi keskittyä kaverisuhteisiin, vapaa-ajan elämään, ympäristöön tutustumiseen melko huolettomasti. (Paula, 2) p.79

Ei tarvitse huolehtia vuokrasta, asunnosta, ruoasta jne. Pääsee heti alussa tutustumaan englantilaiseen arkielämään. (Riitta, 4) p.79

... minun mielestä riippuu ihan ihmisestä miten au pair -toissa pärjää ja miten kulttuuriin tutustuu. Olen tavannut au pair -työntekijöitä, jotka ovat odottaneet muiden ihmisten tekevän kontakteja heihin odottaen passiivisena, ja sitten kun ei mitään tapahdu, niin syyttävät miten ulkomaalaisia kohdellaan niin erilaisilla ja luontaantyöntävästi. -- Mielestäni au pair -homma on erityisen hyvä tapa tutustua vieraan maan kulttuuriin, jos on itse aktiivinen ja sosiaalinen. (Minna, 3) p.80

Joskus käy niin, että vapaa-aika vietetään vain omanmaalaisten kanssa, jolloin au pair -vuosi ei mielestäni palvele tarkoitustaan. (Eeva, 1) p.80

Mutta siinä mielessä ei, että au pairit usein "heimoutuvat" omaksi ryhmäkseen (jotenkin he aina löytävät toisensa) ja tutustuvat ennemminkin toistensa kulttuureihin kuin paikalliskulttuuriin. (Ronja, 2) p.81

Oli myös erittäin antoisaa tutustua eri maista oleviin ihmisiin. (Paula, 2) p.81

Jälkeenpäin ajateltuna älytöntä, mutta jotenkin se ei vain tuntunut mainostamisen arvoiselta "loistavalta uralta". (Helena, 3) p.81

Au pairius ei kuitenkaan ole paras avain yhteiskuntaan, hän on lopultakin vain vieraileva tähti, jolla ei ole menneisyyttä eikä suunniteltua tulevaisuutta ko. yhteiskunnassa. (Helena, 1) p.81