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171

Carine Cools

Relational Dialectics in Intercultural Couples' Relationships

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ABSTRACT

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The main purpose of this study is to describe and to understand intercultural couples' relationships in Finland from the relational-dialectics perspective by Baxter & Montgomery (1996). Relational dialectics supports the idea that tensions (relational contradictions) are a fundamental feature of a relationship, and are thus distinct from conflict or problems.

Following the interpretive research tradition, data in this qualitative study were collected from 18 heterosexual intercultural couples (36 persons), utilizing the multi-method approach. The multi-method approach in this study includes theme interviews (5 couples), concept map interviews (six couples) and e-mail interviews (seven couples). The data were analyzed following an inductive content analysis approach.

The intercultural couples in this study experienced internal and external dialectics. Internal dialectics were specifically related to intercultural adaptation, e.g. need of support, uncertainty about the future, and identity confusion issues. Externally, the couples encountered challenges of inclusion and exclusion regarding, e.g. family support, access to a social network, which are facilitated through disclosure, which is at times problematic regarding the host community's language.

The effects of intercultural couples' cultural background on their relationship concerned continual negotiations, that constitute their lives -internally and externally- and entail repeated decision-making and compromising about friends, religion, traditions and celebrations, and their acceptance in the larger social network, the upbringing and education of their children, values and gender issues, and adaptation.

The common thread surfacing in the couples' accounts of how their different cultural backgrounds are reflected in their relationships is unquestionably the continual re-negotiation between the two partners themselves and between the couples and their social networks. In a sense these define their intercultural relationship; all their moves are negotiated moves.

Intercultural relational dialectical forces present in the intercultural couples' relationships include continual re-negotiation, cultural identity & belonging, increased sensitivity to differences and similarities, social power, social support, and uncertainty.

Keywords: external dialectics, intercultural couples, intercultural dialectics, intercultural relational forces, intercultural relationships, internal dialectics, relational dialectics

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FOREWORD

Close relationships lie at the heart of our lives. Interactions with family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances form the core of our well-being and make us who we are. Building up a life with an intercultural partner demands the renegotiation of our personal, cultural, linguistic and social boundaries. And it is exactly in the processes of communicating these boundaries that intercultural couples can sustain and develop their relationships, with each other and with their social networks.

This study was made possible by, and is therefore dedicated to, the intercultural couples who participated in this work. Their contribution during the various stages of this study was vital. Besides the long interviews, they also shared their time with me, mostly during the evening or the weekend, and this often also meant time away from their children. Although the couples had busy days behind them, they even managed, subtly, to offer some "little extra", which did not go unnoticed. These included special napkins, freshly made buns, delightfully made Japanese tea, or an Italian risotto to strengthen me for my train trip back home, to name but a few. I want to thank them all for sharing with me their profound insights into the world of intercultural couplehood.

I am grateful to those who funded my research, including the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Paasikivi Foundation, the Nyyssönen Foundation, the Department of Communication and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Jyväskylä.

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All the advice, comments and encouragement I received during this research process have meant a great deal to me: our PhD support group meetings were just invaluable, as was the patience of colleagues always ready to read and to comment on parts of this work. Throughout the entire process the discussions with fellow PhD students and students of ICC have been of great importance and joy.

I am very grateful to Eleanor Underwood for her patient and helpful editing of this manuscript. Also, I am very much obliged to Yannick Lahti and Riitta Saastamoinen who very conscientiously translated the summary into Finnish.

A special thank you is due to Professor Emerita Liisa Salo-Lee for sparking my interest in the world of interculturality.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to my dear friends, and to all those scattered all around the world who were in my heart throughout the research and writing process. Especially the people closest to me deserve the

biggest thanks: Juha, my husband and soul mate, and our wonderful "kiddileins" Ellen and Yannick. They have been "the" principal delight and support of my life, a haven always. I can never thank them enough.

Jyväskylä, November 2011

Carine Cools

"Ik hou van dit land.
Als ik ooit uitwijk neem ik het mee.
Ik zal zijn naam noemen
en het zal me volgen."

Herman De Coninck

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the study

The understanding of a globalized world, even now, is often more or less restricted to the notions of economics, politics and power. Globalization undeniably suggests a growing intensity of universal flows such that states and societies become increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interactions. Globalization is, however, often held up as a convenient explanatory coverall for phenomena as diverse as the development of cheap and accessible transnational means of transport, the creation of real-time networks of electronic communication, the redefinition of individual and family identities across continents, and the income differences between developed and developing countries (IOM, 2003). But while in the field of trade enormous steps have been taken towards liberalization of the exchange of capital, goods and services, we can notice that there have not been equivalent advances in the field of migration (Hollifield, 2003). So, it does seem we may have forgotten that globalization and its effects influence to a greater extent the very network of society, which concerns actual people and the relationships they form in the course of life.

Whether for personal reasons, studies or for professional assignments, more people go abroad for shorter or longer periods of time. These stays overseas often tend to fall together in a phase of life when people are looking for a partner or are forming families. Hence, it happens, more frequently than a few decades ago, that people find a partner or a spouse with whom they share a different cultural background.

At the same time, however, we do not have much information, and particularly in Europe there has been little research, about the special form of relationship that intercultural couples represent. We do know, though, that communication and its strategies, which are essential in relationships in general and for couples in particular, tend to govern the well being of relational partners.

This study focuses on intercultural couples' relationships in Finland. Since 1995, when Finland joined the EU, the immigrant population has increased by almost 100 percent. However, although a general phenomenon, the situation of intercultural couples in Finland is still a rather recent trend, and so their number is not yet so large as in many other European countries. Still, in Finland in 2010, 10 percent of registered married couples were living in an intercultural relationship.

As this study is set in interpersonal communication, specifically in the family communication research tradition, relationship and intercultural communication viewpoints are explored. The theoretical perspective through which I approach the lives and experiences of intercultural couples' relationships is that of Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, a concept of traditional intracultural couple interaction that is now being extended into the context of intercultural romantic relationships. This approach is quite different from some earlier relationship perspectives, which viewed relationships in terms of stages with discernible beginnings and endings. Relational dialectics supports the idea that tensions (relational contradictions) are a fundamental feature of a relationship, and are thus distinct from conflict or problems. Thinking dialectically about relationships means that in every relationship there are inherent tensions between contradictory impulses or dialectics. These dialectical tensions, and how relationship parties respond to them, are the central dynamics that explain how relationships function and how they change over time. For example, a familiar tension most couples experience is the friction between wanting to spend time together while also needing time apart with friends. Another contradiction of relating couples can come across is on the one hand the desire for predictability and on the other hand a desire for surprise and novelty. These kinds of tensions exist between partners (internal), as well as between partners and their social network comprising friends and family (external). These tensions define a relationship and also keep it alive.

Martin & Nakayama (1999) and Martin et al. (2002) offered six dialectics of intercultural communication practice that could guide research in an intercultural context. They are as follows: the intercultural dialectic of *difference-similarity* which essentially defines intercultural interaction. Although communication is impossible without a minimal common ground, the need to communicate often results from differences in the first place. The *individual-culture* dialectic signifies that there are some aspects of communication that are individual (e.g. language use, unique nonverbal communication) as well as aspects that are shared by others in the same cultural groups (e.g. family, gender). It means that people are both group members and individuals and intercultural interaction is characterized by both. The *personal-social/contextual* dialectic arises out of the relationship between individuals and society. It is individuals who communicate, but the capacity in which individuals communicate always represents a social role or a certain context. The *present-past* dialectic suggests that we need to balance both an understanding of the past and the present. The past can always be seen through the lens of the present, and vice versa. The *privilege-disadvantage* dialectic can be observed in

the form of political, social position, or status. Individuals may be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, or privileged in some contexts and disadvantaged in others. Finally, the dialectic of *static-dynamic* highlights the ever changing nature of culture and cultural practises, but also emphasize our tendency to think about these things as constant. (Martin & Nakayama, 1999: 15-18; Martin et al., 2002: 4-6.)

Research on actual communication in intercultural relationships has not offered many research findings yet; intercultural romantic relationships with a research focus on relational dialectics even fewer. Studies of relational dialectics within an intercultural context can be found in various works. Immigrant socialization into American culture was examined by Erbert et al (2003) using the dialectical theory, but it did not deal with close intercultural relationships as such. A study on intercultural relationships from a dialectical viewpoint, conducted by Miller (2003), concentrated on dialectical tensions between intercultural roommates. Dialectical tensions in romantic relationships were explored by Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) but this was not an intercultural investigation per se, though their sample of twenty couples included two couples of mixed ethnicity. A study combining intercultural relationships and relational dialectics (Chen, 2002) looked at the interplay between intercultural and relational dialectics and juxtaposed the dialectics observed in intercultural communication with the relational dialectics introduced by Baxter & Montgomery (1996). However, relational dialectics in the context of intercultural couples has not so far been studied.

In this study I look at the romantic relationships of heterosexual couples who come from different cultural backgrounds. *The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and to understand the intercultural couples' relationships in Finland from the relational-dialectics perspective.* This means that I intend to find out what challenges the intercultural couples meet. The study has three main aims. First I investigate how the intercultural couples experience their relationship, particularly with regard to whether they feel the push and pull of relational dialectics, and how they are handled. Since culture is a central concept, I intend to examine its meaning in the context of the couples' perception of culture, and its relevance for the relationship. Finally, considering the particular context of *intercultural* couples, I aim to examine whether these couples experience relational tensions of an intercultural nature.

1.2 Definitions of key concepts

As several significant concepts will be utilized throughout this study it is necessary to define the concepts used. Different research communities use the same concepts in different ways, which can make effective understanding and communication problematic. The following working set of definitions is what will be used throughout this study and is intended to establish a common ground with the reader. These definitions may not necessarily achieve

widespread acceptance among other research communities, but they are offered here as a means to avoid potential ambiguities in the body of this work, not as a definitive and static description. In fact the general objective of this chapter is to prepare the ground for what will follow in this study.

The key concepts used in this study are *communication, relationship*, *close, intimate and romantic relationships*. Also *culture and intercultural* have a central place in this work. The main theory and the central concepts of relational dialectics used in this study are clarified in-depth in Chapter two.

Communication and relationship

Although communication is not the only influence on personal relationships, it certainly is a salient and central one since people communicate with one another to express themselves and to create meaning. Communication is the key process that generates and maintains intimacy, and has the primary impact on people's experience of their relationships. The more personal, in the sense of close or intimate the relationship is, the more interpersonal we can consider the communication. Romantic partners use communication to create and sustain intimacy and satisfaction during the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. As a consequence, it is reasonable to assert, as Berger (2005) does, that the study of interpersonal communication has in many ways become linked to the study of the development of close, interpersonal relationships. Fitzpatrick (2004) recalls interpersonal communication becoming allied with the study of social and personal relationships, and remembers authors arguing the centrality of communication in modern social relationships. She herself says categorically that communication and relationships are separate concepts, and she asserts that communication links individual psychological processes to dyadic social states.

Positioning this study in the field of interpersonal communication requires knowledge of the various approaches used to understand and to study the field. One way is to divide interpersonal communication into processes (e.g. social support), contexts (e.g. couples, workplace), developmental stages (initiating, maintaining), or types (e.g. computer-mediated). Another way is to look at interpersonal communication in three broad areas: individually centered, discourse centered and relationship centered. This study concentrates on the third area, i.e. the relationship centered area, which focuses on understanding the role of communication in developing and sustaining intercultural romantic relationships. In other words, taking a relational perspective on interpersonal communication focuses on messages within relationships that influence those relationships. (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008.)

Obviously there is a connection between communication and relationship. This involves reflection on relationship research. Interpersonal communication is largely dyadic in nature but also extends to other networks. This means that persons are connected and interdependent, i.e. the actions of one person have consequences for the other person. Because of this interdependency partners' communication is inevitably and essentially relational in nature;

communication impacts and defines the relationship. (Devito, 2009.) The once somewhat radical idea of viewing relationships as "ongoing conversation" (Berger & Kellner, 1964: 3) has become more commonplace. The interwoven nature of communication and relationship also reflects the influence of the relationship on communication and vice versa. Given this interconnection, the relational communication perspective views relationships as being enacted and formed through the relational members' communication processes, and in turn, views the nature of the relationship produced as influencing the ongoing communication between the members.

Sigman (1998) claims that a social relationship and a communication relationship, both constructed in communication, are based on different orders or organizing rule systems. Social relationships such as friendship and romantic relationships influence the social order, whereas communication relationships such as the speaker and the hearer, the questioner and the answerer, are based on the interaction order of communication processes. That is why they are called interaction relationships. The difference between the two comes to the surface when considering the aspect of continuity. An interaction relationship such as a telephone conversation with its clear beginning and ending, seems quite straightforward, but the beginning and ending of a social relationship seems to have diffuse borders. Defining the beginnings and endings of relationships is not unproblematic, as we shall see in Chapter three. We need to recognise that a social and an interaction relationship are not the same, even if they may be closely intertwined with each other.

Sigman also considers the notion of continuity to be an important factor in defining a social relationship (1998: 64-65). This train of thought is similar to the concept of relationship, which includes a certain continuation and reciprocal knowledge about each other, or special expectations about the behaviour of the other and oneself, which are largely the result of repetitive communication processes (cf. Valo, 2000; Gerlander, 2003).

However, communication and relationship can also be conceptualized from a dialectical perspective (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996): "communication is signified by a dialogic, multivocal communication being laced with contradictions; a relationship is marked by dialogical multivocal communication that takes place between the parties, and exists in its own contradictions, also called dialogical complexity" (235).

In everyday talk a relationship means the state of being related or interrelated. In addition it signifies a romantic or passionate attachment; it also means a link connecting or binding the participants in a relationship; and it indicates the state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings. According to Goodwin (1999: 7), a personal relationship denotes interaction between two or more individuals within the context of wider societal and cultural forces. Romantic relationships, the focus of this study, can be examined in terms of some of the characteristics of the relationships, such as as dating, pre-marital, marital, co-habiting, serious and casual. To further define these relationship types one can employ factors such as level of commitment, intimacy, exclusivity, sexual involvement, and relationship formation (e.g.

arranged marriages, preferences for a mate). Western views of mate selection, including dating, are gradually infiltrating other cultures, though many other traditions are also still maintained. There has, however, been very little scholarly consideration of nonwestern dating relationships. (Stafford, 2008.)

Close, intimate and romantic relationships

There are various types of close relationships (e.g. friendship, family, marriage). Close relationships include, but are not limited to, romantic couples (dating, cohabiting, and married), parent-child relationships, same-gender and cross-gender friendships, relationships in the workplace, and under-studied relationships, such as gay and lesbian, and intercultural and multiracial relationships. Whereas a close relationship is normally viewed as a connection between two individuals, such as a romantic relationship, individuals can also have relationships with groups of people, such as the relation between a priest and his/her congregation, or an aunt and a family. According to Harvey & Omarzu (2006: 20), close relationships typically have the following features: behaviour-facilitating disclosure (e.g. questioning the other about feelings/behaviours), relationship-enhancing attributions (e.g. generally positive attributions for the other's behaviour), acceptance/respect (e.g. pride in the other's abilities, expressed feelings of trust and commitment), reciprocity (e.g. recognition of the other's support and effort), and process (e.g. an optimistic view of the future of the relationship).

An intimate relationship is a particularly close interpersonal relationship. It can be defined by features such as enduring behavioural interdependence, repeated interactions, emotional attachment, and need fulfillment. Humans have a universal need to belong and to love which is satisfied when an intimate relationship is formed. We have intimate relationships with people that we are attracted to, whom we like and love, and provide and receive from us emotional and personal support. Intimates can be conceptualized as loving persons whose lives are deeply intertwined. In addition, intimate relationships provide people with a social network of people who offer strong emotional attachments and fulfill our universal needs of belongingness and the need to be cared for. (Miller et al., 2007; Perlman, 2007.) Scholars distinguish between different forms of intimacy, such as emotional and physical intimacy. Emotional intimacy is particularly in sexual relationships, and typically develops after physical bonds have been established. Physical intimacy is characterized by romantic or passionate love and attachment, or sexual activity. (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2004.) Besides emotional and physical intimacy, also intellectual intimacy (e.g. thinking of one another outside the basic needs of daily chores and food, finding common ground through linking ideas and minds), social intimacy (built by spending time and sharing activities with one another, and in turn giving us things to talk about in the other intimacy levels), and spiritual intimacy (e.g. understanding the other's verbalization of beliefs and experiences without fear of ridicule or judgment) are considered to be essential components of an intimate relationship (Evett, 2007).

A close romantic relationship is characterised by each member having concern for the welfare of the other. It can be seen as an instance of mutual communal relationships, when the other has a need for the benefit, or to show concern for the other. Members provide each other with different kinds of help, including providing resources, information and companionship, sometimes because the other has a specific need for these things and sometimes just to show they care for the other. The key to a communal relationship is that members are motivated to provide the other with benefits (i.e. something that one person intentionally gives to another, or does for another, which is of use to the person receiving it) without expecting a specific benefit in return. Close romantic relationships are assumed to be strong communal relationships in which there is a very high degree of motivation to be responsive to the other's needs. They are also supposed to be mutual, where both partners have a high degree of motivation to be responsive to the other's needs. (Mills & Clarck, 2001.)

The term "romantic relationship" is mostly used in US American interpersonal research literature. It ties together the kinds of relationships which are not friendship or acquaintance relationships. In the context of romantic relationships, romance usually implies an expression of one's love, or one's deep emotional desires to connect with another person. During the initial stages of a romantic relationship there is often more emphasis on emotions, especially those of love, intimacy, compassion, appreciation, and affinity, than on physical intimacy. Historically, the term "romance" originates from the medieval ideal of chivalry as set out in its literature. The concept of romantic love became fashionable in western culture through the games of courtly love as sung by troubadours in the Middle Ages. The traditional and more general western idea of romantic love is believed to have originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, primarily from French culture. Although the word romance may not have the same connotation in other cultures, the general view of romantic love appears to have crossed cultures and been accepted as a concept at some time or another. In various cultures romantic love is often contrasted to marriages of political or economic convenience, especially arranged marriages, in which a woman may feel trapped in a relationship with an unattractive or abusive husband. The cultural traditions of marriage and engagement are often in conflict with the spontaneity and absolute quality of romance. Naturally, it is possible that romance and love can exist between partners within those customs. (Goodwin, 1999; Stafford, 2008.)

Still on the cultural theme, Fisher (1994) considers romantic love to be an example of the complex mixture of environment and heredity. Culture is said to play an essential role in one's choice of partner and in the timing and process of courting. As children we develop specific likes and dislikes in response to family, friends, and experiences. So, by one's teenage years, each individual carries within him or herself an unconscious mental template, or "love map", a group of physical, psychological and behavioural traits that he or she finds attractive in a mate. Barriers such as geographic or social constraints may

enhance fascination, as do novelty and unfamiliarity. Also cultural beliefs regularly tie patterns together. So culture plays a crucial role in who one finds attractive, when and where one dates, how one pursues a potential partner, and how one resolves problems. But culture, with its beliefs, traditions, family, friends, books, songs, and other cultural phenomena, does not teach one what to feel as one falls in love, or as one becomes attracted to a mate. (Fisher, 1994: 63.)

Although "romantic relationship" is an established term in US American interpersonal research literature, I opt to use the term intercultural couples. My justification for using this term is given in this section of key concepts under "intercultural couples".

Culture

When approaching a subject regarded as intercultural one needs to, in one way or another, define culture, or at least find some common ground to base one's ideas on and to lay the foundations for a shared understanding. Many scholars have tried this before, but there has never been complete agreement or one universal definition. My intention here is to present some key ideas about the concept of culture in order to show how I will use culture in this context of intercultural couples. It must be emphasized that throughout this work the meaning may develop and may receive a broader and context-specific meaning depending on the findings of the study.

The notion of culture grew up as a concept to cover the description of isolated traditional communities (Agar, 2002). However, this cannot be valid any more as culture is not a closed space. Especially in this globalized world, taking into account the blurring national borders and worldwide migration, culture cannot be explained in the same ways it used to be. Traditions have not disappeared but they have entered into strange and new combinations with all the other ideas, phenomena and activities floating around the planet. If what used to be labelled culture is gone, then culture has to label something else. Now it is taken to explain differences by hooking them to a common human denominator, to similarities, to the human bridge between us and them. (Agar, 2002: 123.)

One of the traditional and most famous definitions of culture, by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), goes as follows:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action. (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 181; cited by Adler 1997: 14)

In this definition, as in about 160 others, Kroeber and Kluckhohn indicate the diversity of the concept of culture. The simplified list below by Bodley (1994) specifies this diversity.

TABLE 1 Diversity of definitions of culture (Bodley, 1994)

Behavioral	Culture is shared, learned human behaviour, a way of life.
Functional	Culture is the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together.
Historical	Culture is social heritage, or tradition, that is passed on to future generations.
Mental	Culture is a complex of ideas, or learned habits, that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals.
Normative	Culture is ideals, values, or rules for living.
Structural	Culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols, or behaviours.
Symbolic	Culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a society.
Topical	Culture consists of everything on a list of topics, or categories, such as social organization, religion, or economy.

Besides the diverse definitions of culture mentioned above, numerous researchers have presented dichotomous and contrastive approaches to and frameworks for culture, e.g. high versus low (Bennett, 1998), narrow versus wide (Bolten, 1997), monochronic versus polychronic (Hall, 1976), high-context versus low-context (Hall, 1976), and etic versus emic (Bennett, 1998). Other researchers have offered cultural orientation frameworks, such as the cultural orientation framework of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), and the five dimensions of Hofstede (2001, 2009). These earlier ways of conceptualizing culture assumed that culture could be looked at as a source of inevitable misunderstanding. These approaches can be called traditional since culture was analyzed from a contrastive viewpoint which resulted in merely summing up differences between different cultures. Also, it was assumed that people from different cultures would misunderstand each other when they came into contact, since they tend to interpret things on the basis of different cultural backgrounds (Busch, 2003:1).

Blommaert (1998: 3-4) challenged these traditional ideas of culture, as well as Hall's well-known idea that "culture is communication" (1959) and Knapp & Knapp-Pothoff's (1987) claim that "everything in communication is culture", on the grounds that they impose a linear and static grid on empiry, and as cultures are usually associated with groups of people that bear a name: nationalities or known ethnic groups. Also Busch (2003: 13) claims that many researchers, aiming at better operationalization but disregarding the availability of so many different concepts of culture, still succumb to the use of enormous simplifications, such as making cultural difference equivalent to national borders, which means that culture is defined in terms of nationality. Thus preference seems to go to horizontal differentiation within and across cultures -

differences in terms of nationality, gender, religion, gender and age - rather than to vertical differentiation - differences of power and status, hierarchies, and degrees of inequality within and between societies (Blommaert, 1998: 6; Busch, 2003: 13). According to Claes (2009: 67), culture has been viewed as a source of problems and misunderstandings, a means to explain the problem without solving it, a barrier to interaction and an all-pervading source of confusion.

Lately the concept of culture has undergone a linguistic shift as various researchers have situated culture in discourse (Agar, 2002; Blommaert, 1998; Busch, 2009; Claes, 2009; Holden, 2002; Sarangi, 1995; ten Thije, 2003; 2006). They all share certain commonalities. Their main argument is based on the existence of difference. Obviously and inherently the world is full of differences. Differences are not always there, they do not always appear in the same form, and when they appear they are caught in patterns of social evaluations (Blommaert, 1998). Denying, defending or minimizing the inherent issue of difference can never be a starting point to the study of culture. Based on the above mentioned researchers' ideas on situating culture in discourse, I designed a list which synthesizes the main commonalities. In looking at culture as situated in discourse, researchers share the following eight commonalities:

1) A society or group has the capacity to find solutions to recurrent social needs and standard problems
2) The understanding of differences (as opposed to merely describing and explaining them) is conditioned by understanding inequality (culture never works without society)
3) Culture is interactively created by the deployment of different communicative repertoires (differences in conventions of communication, speech styles, and narrative patterns)
4) Culture becomes dependent on context and situation
5) This creates a dynamism in which new contexts generate new cultures and forms of communication
6) The ways in which difficulties about differences are overcome, and in which the shared meanings and practices result lead to discursive interculture
7) Misunderstandings and a lack of common ground are not just explained as caused by culturally different conventions, but are considered *as part of the process* of the construction of a discursive interculture, where meanings and practices are constructed in the communication itself and are means for constructing group boundaries
8) Therefore we can say that communication is seen as a relationship-supporting activity, a bonding process involving task-exchanging processes, knowledge sharing, networking and collaborative learning.

Hence, investigating culture begins in a social context, where differences are understood through the interactive creation of different communicative repertoires. Dynamism is created through context- and situational dependency, and results in discursive interculture. One can say that discursive interculture is the place where meanings and practices are constructed through and within communication itself, and is the ways used to construct group boundaries. It is exactly in this process of conceptualizing culture that this work links up with relationship communication within the area of interpersonal communication. Since my goal is to describe and understand intercultural couples' relationships,

it makes sense to conceptualize and examine culture as part of the process of the construction of a discursive interculture through and within communication. Communication in my work is seen as interaction, as a relationship-supporting activity, a bonding process involving task-exchanging processes, knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning, and it is examined through the lens of the relational dialectics perspective.

On the basis of these eight commonalities culture gets a whole new definition with quite a different focus from what it used to be. The following is my adaptation of a definition presented by Claes (2009: 73), which includes the main points mentioned in the six commonalities:

> Culture is not considered a static set of norms and values (materialized in artifacts and behaviour) within or for a specific group or nation or state, but as the dynamic social or group capacity to find solutions to recurrent societal needs and standard problems. Culture is interactively produced and reproduced in the perception, understanding and formation of reality. It creates an intercultural discourse that shapes a common cognitive ground, facilitates exchanging ideas, knowledge sharing, and mutual learning. Thus discourse about intercultural encounters has ceased merely presenting and contrasting difference and has become a way of analyzing the dynamic relationship between communication, language and culture, and of examining the way mutual understanding is achieved in discourse and the emergence of discursive interculture.

Intercultural couples

Depending on whether researchers stress the issue of culture, nationality, ethnicity, religion, race, language, or the differences between partners, the bonds between intercultural couples have been called respectively: interethnic marriage (Cohen, 1980), cross-national marriage (Cottrell, 1990), interfaith relationship (Crohn, 1995), mixed marriage (Gibbons, 1990; Heller & Levy, 1992), cross-cultural relationship (Ibrahim, 1990), interracial couples (Karis, Powell & Rosenblatt, 1995), linguistic intermarriage (Piller, 2001), dual-culture marriage (Rohrlich, 1988), and intercultural marriage (Romano, 1988, Tseng et al, 1977). It is noticeable that the name given to the partner leaving his/her home-country is considered significant to the understanding of the acculturation issues that partner(s) may have to face. For instance Varro (1995) tackles the position of the "transplanted" or the "de-rooted" partner.

Gaines and Brennan (2001) used the term multicultural relationship, which they define as "a close relationship involving two individuals who differ in terms of ethnicity and, presumably, cultural background" (p. 238). Some of the terms used are quite specific: the term interethnic marriage refers to the marriage of partners from two different ethnic backgrounds; a cross-national marriage means a marriage between partners from two different nationalities; and an interfaith marriage refers to the partners' different religions. Others, like mixed marriage, cross-national marriage, cross-cultural relationship, dual-culture marriage, and intercultural marriage, can refer to national, cultural, sub-cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds; they are not really specified. Altogether about fifteen different names are used for intercultural couples: bicultural, bilingual, cross-cultural, cross-cultural border-crossers,

cross-national, culture-mixed, dual-national, ethnic-mixed, interethnic, interfaith, international, interracial, linguistic intermarriage, mixed, and multicultural.

In this study I have decided to use the term intercultural. The term *intercultural* implies interaction. The prefix "inter" derives from the Latin "between", "among", and it is indeed the "interaction between" and "communication among" that are the essential topics of my investigation.

Of the adjectives cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, and religious, the use of *cultural* can encompass all the other meanings. This means that the couples in this study can be of various ethnic, linguistic, national, and religious origins. In this way *intercultural* does not impose any specific significance, nor does it eliminate any possible implications. The intercultural couples in this study are chosen across national boundaries. By isolating the international aspect of intercultural it is hoped to discover the more inclusive uses of the term. Intercultural couples can be characterized as consisting of partners from different countries, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions who may possess quite divergent beliefs, assumptions, and values as a result of their socialization (e.g., upbringing, education, language use) in different socio-cultural spaces (Karis & Killian, 2009). Although chosen across national boundaries, I see intercultural relationships in a sense of being constructed through negotiating images of the self and the other, while culture and other representations can be a part of that (see e.g. Holliday, 2010; Piller, 2011).

Yet people, if not necessarily resistant to the use of intercultural, often push to expand it (Rosenblatt et al., 1995). This means that they assert the traditional boundary between *intra* and *inter* to be superficial as any couple experiences differences and similarities also beyond nationality and language (see Falicov, 1995; Piller, 2002). How often does it happen that intracultural couples claim their relationship is also intercultural because "he is from Savo and she is from Karelia". Or then the gender issue is brought in, as Tannen (1986) does when claiming that all couples are cross-cultural, pointing to the male-female differences. To some degree, of course, they may be right. Families develop their own micro-culture, their own traditions and speech cultures, their own expectations and inside jokes. In this sense all relationships are intercultural as each couple forms its own unique culture out of two, also called relational culture (Wood, 2000). However, rejecting the more precise definition of intercultural relationships would mean overlooking the particular complexities intercultural couples confront. It would be, as Rosenblatt (1995) sees it, to leave unacknowledged the losses people in intercultural relationships suffer, the sweeping historical differences that reach into the hearts of people who come from different parts of the earth, who speak different languages.

1.3 Research on intercultural couples

In this section I will present some of the areas that have been most studied in the field of intercultural relationships.

A significant part of US American intercultural relationship research is devoted to interracial relationships. Due to its history of slavery, many states in the US, and especially the state of Virginia used to have laws dating back to the late 1600s that banned and punished any type of relationship between people of different races. Since 1961 laws concerning interracial marriages have been abolished, and there an increasing number of such marriages. The reasons interracial marriages have gained popularity include increasing social acceptance, as well as an increase in interaction between the different races, family influences, and the media. Social acceptance began to grow once laws against interracial marriages were abolished and people began to understand that what matters are how people feel and not how people look. Despite the growing social acceptance, however, there are still problems. The main problem with interracial marriages seems to be from society: if society were not so judgmental and concerned with race, people would live more happily. ("History Interracial Marriage", n.d.)

Whereas interracial relationship studies are of great significance in the US, this is not yet the case in Europe. However, the number of interracial relationships in Europe is slowly increasing, and particularly in Finland, research on migration issues points to challenges of an interracial kind (see for example Alitolppa-Niitamo, 1994; 2004). Besides the US American studies on interracial relationships, there are five other themes that are now often the focus of attention in studies on intercultural relationships: the relationships' initiation, motivation, satisfaction, relational focus, and adaptation.

Initiation

Our western practice of having "free" choice of partners is not the only way people look for a partner. This is culture based. Worldwide, the most common method of mate selection is by arrangement, usually by parents with the aid of other relatives or matchmakers. The general purpose of an arranged marriage is the union of two families, which has a number of potential benefits for society. (Goodwin, 1999; Ingolsby, 1995a; Rosenblatt & Anderson, 1981; Stephens, 1963).

What then about romantic love? Although expectations of love may be rare in arranged marriages, this does not mean there is no love (Doherty et al. 1994; Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992). Actually, it was only quite recently (around 1700) that love was linked with marriage in western literature (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Ingolsby, 1995b; Murstein, 1986). Moreover, the degree to which love is expressed openly and forms the basis of marriage may vary substantially across cultures (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Rosenblatt & Anderson, 1981).

Various researchers (Dion & Dion, 1988; Gao, 1996; Sternberg, 1986; Ting-Toomey, 1991; Tucker & Aron, 1993; Tzeng & Gomez, 1993) have looked at the

concept of love in contexts of romantic monocultural and intercultural relationships. According to Gao (1996), love characterizes romantic relationships across social, cultural, and national boundaries despite the fact that its meaning and function may vary from one relationship to another and from one culture to another (p. 329). Dion and Dion (1991) argue that romantic love is more likely to be important in individualistic societies, where everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family; there love is seen as an opportunity for exploring the real and rather individualistic self. In collectivistic societies, on the other hand, where people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, love is downplayed as the basis for marriage.

As far as the intercultural couples in this study are concerned, their meeting was related to opportunity, timing, availability, and to those specific issues that only the couples themselves can give meaning to. And love certainly played a salient role. The eighteen intercultural couples in this study (for demographic information about the couples see Chapter three) came together voluntarily and fell in love, and therefore in this study I consider their relationship to be a romantic one.

Just as various types of people are more or less likely to start an intercultural relationship (Romano, 1997), so there are diverse ways in which amorous relationships form. Ting-Toomey's (1994) findings, for instance, from several major cross-cultural personal relationship studies, indicate that both significant differences and commonalities exist in individuals' attitudes towards different romantic relationship constructs. In individual cultures, most people typically "fall in love" first, (which sometimes involves intensive dating procedures) and then get married. However, for members of many collectivistic cultures (e.g., India, Iran, and Northern Nigeria, where arranged marriages are still the norm), partners get married and carry out basic marital responsibilities and obligations and then later may fall in love. This means, according to Ting-Toomey, that the attitudes of people from individualistic cultures towards romantic love are high and intense, and they expect passion from the feeling of being in love. It also means that the attitudes of people from individualistic cultures towards romantic love are pragmatic, caring, and responsibility-based, and they expect a sense of harmonized companionship from the feeling of being in love (1994: 59).

Motivation

Studies on intercultural romantic relationships have increased during the last decade and cover various issues. Lampe (1982) conducted a study on interethnic dating among Black, Mexican American and Anglo college students to determine the subjective reasons involved in the decision to engage in interethnic dating. Results indicated that the reasons for dating someone of another ethnic group were similar to those which are common to intra-ethnic dating. Overall, according to Lampe, it appeared that the reasons for intergroup

dating can be best explained normatively, meaning that these reasons are consistent with the general expectations of contemporary society (of the early 80s) such as mate selection, recreation, and sexual intimacy (p.123).

Besides the reasons for entering into an intercultural relationship mentioned above, Chen (2002) added the following motives. Individuals' high educational level and socioeconomic status predicted the likelihood of an intercultural relationship. Sex and ethnicity seemed to interact with social dominance and status, meaning that members of the social dominant group were less likely to enter into intercultural relationships than non-dominant group members. In the case of immigrants, according to Chen, the higher their degree of acculturation, the more likely they were to form intercultural relationships. Diversity of friendship circles, individual comfort level, and social stereotypes of the opposite sex in various cultural groups were found to have an influence on the initiation of intercultural dating or romantic relationships. In addition the diversity of parents' friends and family attitudes toward intercultural dating or marriage were said to facilitate or discourage these relationships (Chen, 2002: 243).

Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be understood as the fulfillment of a desire, need, or appetite, and the pleasure thereof. Marital satisfaction relates to the ways couples communicate during everyday conversation and discussions (see Segrin, Hanzal and Domschke, 2009).

In a comparative study based on questionnaires on intercultural and intracultural married couples living in Hawaii Graham, Moeai, and Shizuru (1985) examined the internal and external variables affecting the satisfaction of the participants' relationships. The sample of intercultural and intracultural couples shared the same variable of being intrareligious. Intercultural couples reported significantly more external problems, such as intercultural experiences attributed to extended family members, relatives, friends and community, for example the expectations or demands of extended family members of the husband. Intercultural couples also reported that they felt there were greater assimilation pressures on the female to accept the husband's culture and greater negative responses towards intercultural marriage per se than intracultural couples did. The couples' responses were in agreement with the idea that for an intercultural, intrareligious marriage to succeed demands considerable sacrifice, patience and commitment. An additional finding highlighted the fact that a couple's linguistic environment will influence their language choices as well as those of their children.

Establishing and maintaining satisfaction in multicultural relationships is the subject of Gaines and Brennan's study from 2001. In it they emphasize the cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes that are most likely to foster long-term satisfaction and stability in multicultural relationships. They claim that during the formation of multicultural relationships, satisfaction is promoted to the extent that partners genuinely appreciate rather than simply

tolerate the differences in their respective personalities. For instance, individuals in multicultural relationships initially feel that the novelty that accompanies learning about their partner's different ethnic background is a source of great satisfaction. However, they also argue that those same individuals subsequently may feel that the difference in ethnic backgrounds is a source of great stress. Additionally, they claim that after multicultural relationships have formed, satisfaction is maintained to the extent that partners jointly create and sustain relationship cultures that are uniquely theirs. Gaines and Brennan (2001: 244) illustrate this using Foeman and Nance's study (1999), which found that attitudinal conflicts may present unique challenges to multicultural couples because the partners' belief systems are likely to reflect the influence of their respective ethnic groups. Finally it is stated that throughout the development and maintenance of multicultural relationships, satisfaction is created and sustained to the extent that relationship partners are open to personal growth via their association with a partner who contributes to their growth, in part due to being from a different culture (Gaines & Brennan, 2001).

Relational focus

Rohrlich (1988) initiated an area of research into intercultural marriage to which few researchers had previously paid attention, namely, the role of self-disclosure, which is a frequently researched topic in interpersonal communication. She reasons that self-disclosure and decision-making power are both fundamental to communicative understanding in intercultural relationships (p. 40). Self-disclosure patterns, or the process of making the self known to others, are said to vary from culture to culture; it is, for instance, generally agreed that northern Europeans use less self-disclosure than people in Mediterranean cultures. Decision-making power is also claimed to be of great importance in a marriage and Rohrlich suggests that intercultural relationships add a further dimension in that different cultures impose varying roles within the power structure, for example, with regard to gender issues (1988: 41). She also offers practical guidelines towards more effective communication in intercultural relationships, which relate to the interest of the communication, awareness of cultural difference, and miscommunication and communication skills (p. 42). In fact, as I have said before, studies on intercultural romantic relationships having increased during the last decade. Research on the actual communication in intercultural relationships has not offered many research findings yet, and it is still rather limited; Chen (2002) suggests that it is still in its infancy.

Gaines and Agnew (2003), Gaines and Brennan (2001) and Gaines and Ickes (1997) have conducted considerable research into the subject of interracial relationships. In their studies on interracial relationships (1997) Gaines and Ickes gave evidence that interracial relationships are statistically infrequent, and that they are different from interethnic relationships. They examined interracial relationships from two general perspectives: 1) the outside perspective of

individuals who are observers of such relationships, and 2) the inside perspective of individuals who are the members of the relationships. They examined the evolutionary, perceptual-cognitive, and socio-historical influences (e.g. xenophobia and the linking of racial markers to negative characteristics) that combine to make the perspective of outside observers of interracial relationships different from the perspective of relationship members themselves (e.g. valued differences contributing to novelty, and valued similarities contributing to rapport). They argue that the tensions between those two perspectives characteristically take different forms in different types of interracial relationships. This task is claimed to be easiest for partners in homosexual friendships, but only in cases in which the partners are presumed by most outsiders not to be sexually attracted to each other, which implies that they pose the least threat to outsiders' sensibilities.

Gaines and Ickes (1997) thus see the task of resolving the insider/outsider discrepancy as considerably more difficult for partners in heterosexual, interracial friendships and interracial romantic relationships. It is therefore important for the members of these relationships to understand the specific tensions involved in each case so that they can anticipate and attempt to resolve them. Strategies suggested to face such daily challenges are, among others, the relationship partners' attempts to reduce outsiders' anxieties by acting differently than they normally would, e.g. placing greater physical and psychological distance between each other. (Gaines & Ickes, 1997: 217-218).

Adaptation

The term adaptation refers to the process of adjusting to environmental conditions. In an intercultural context Kim (2001: 9) sees the process of crossing cultures as challenging the very basis of who we are as cultural beings, which offers opportunities for new learning and growth. Another term, acculturation, points to the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures (Sam and Berry, 2010: 472). In practice, however, acculturation tends to induce more change in one of the groups than in the other (Berry, 1990a.) While the concept of acculturation is employed to refer to the cultural changes resulting from these group encounters, the concept of adaptation is used to refer to the psychological changes and eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation (Berry, 1997: 6). Kim (2001) sees adaptation rooted in communication, and emphasizes its interactive, multifaceted, and evolving nature.

The importance of the adapting spouse has been the major concern for many researchers (Imamura, 1990; Tuomi-Nikula, 1989; Varro, 1995). Studies on intercultural couples reveal that such couples are more complicated because both partners come to the relationship equipped with a different set of rules: different values, habits, and viewpoints, different ways of relating to one another, and different ways of resolving their differences. Any intracultural marriage can run into difficulties, but the problems of intercultural marriage are said to be unique. There are traditional marriage rules and prohibitions in stable

and traditional cultures, but in many intercultural marriages there is an absence of constraint which tends to be associated with increased anxiety and uncertainty about making choices as well as an increase in the chance of erroneous or impractical choices. (Chen, 2002; Graham et al., 1985; Rohrlich, 1988; Romano, 1997; Tseng et al., 1977).

Finnish studies on intercultural couples in particular have contributed to our understanding of adaptation. Tuomi-Nikula (1989), in a study on Finnish-German couples, suggests that any intercultural relationship goes through an adaptation process. Oksi-Walter (2004) combines this process with four stages of an intercultural relationship, i.e. admiration, everyday life and routine, crisis, and objective adaptation. In her study on Greek-Finnish marriages Järvinen-Tassopoulos (2005) interviewed 39 Finnish women married to Greek men and living in Greece permanently. She examined the circumstances of how they met and dated. On a social level she looked at influential decisions they made, and at the various phases in their marriages with an emphasis on the theme of "stranger". She sees the Greek-Finnish marriages as problematic and takes the Finnish woman's, i.e. the stranger's perspective. She draws attention to the idea of a "boundary space" (which is called elsewhere in the literature "third culture", for instance Paige, 1993; Pollock & van Reken, 2001). The stranger's boundary space is considered to be an area where negotiations appear throughout their marriage. These negotiations arise occasionally and with varying intensity. The momentary and continual changes coming from the boundary space emerge at different phases in the marriage. Every phase contains contradictions and elements that overlap with each other. The phases appear in their next form, and are never stable. By the last phase balance seems to have been achieved and the spouses have learned to understand each other. Heikkilä (2007) points to international migration and tourism showing some visible signs of globalization, at the same time as growing cross-cultural communication increases the number of intercultural relationships – more and more people tend to meet their partners in environments different from their own. Considering intercultural marriages as building bridges between different cultures inherently implies adaptation.

Molina, Estrada and Burnett (2004) reveal that challenges and opportunities in the creation of "Happily ever after stories" of intercultural couplehood have presented an integrated approach to couples counseling through illustrations of intercultural stories. This means that through telling their stories (verbalizing) intercultural couples could find a relief and a listening ear in discussion groups. Molina, Estrada and Burnett's study (2004) was conducted from the viewpoint of counselling and therapy through communication and interaction, and is indirectly related to the theory of relational dialectics. Regarding the theoretical background of relational dialectics, they saw change as an intrinsic factor present in the couples' relationship, and made the following statement, which is very significant for the relational dialectical perspective in this study: *The intercultural challenges that couples struggle with are unique and yet are linked by a common desire to be connected*

to each other and to others. These theoretical issues refer to the overall topic of stability-change, and will be discussed in Chapters two and four.

1.4 Research process and structure of the study

Placing oneself textually within an academic work is a challenge, especially if it is not customary in the field. However, linking one's own experiences with the subject matter of the work does promote the ideas presented, and it may improve the reader's understanding of the themes conveyed.

My involvement and interest in this field of study spring from personal, social and scientific factors. What initiated and strengthened the personal and social incentives was the fact that I was drawn into an intercultural romantic relationship in the mid seventies, after which we moved to Germany in the eighties and lived there for almost ten years. The move to Finland in 1990, taking up my studies and finding that the life I live is an established field of study finally confirmed my interest in pursuing doctoral studies in this area.

On a personal note, my macro culture includes the following characteristics: I come from Belgium, a western country, categorized by Hofstede (2009) as highly individualistic, and I belong to the Dutch-speaking community[1]. However, my personal family culture (and I dare say this is quite generalizable for many Dutch-speaking Belgian families in the 1960s and 1970s), is highly collectivistic. This is evident from the influence the family has on decision making, the fact that children's independence is not really encouraged, parents sacrificing their time and efforts to allow their children to study, the need to spend a lot of time with the family, the importance of long-lasting meals together, and the notion of authority and respect for older family members. In fact family culture in Belgium has often been compared to Italian family culture; they have similar characteristics.

My husband's macro culture is Finland, a western country characterized by Hofstede (2009) as highly individualistic (even higher than Belgium, actually). Finnish people also value the family, but in a different way. For instance, they tend to have looser relationships between parents and children than in Belgium. Children's independence is encouraged, and "family" seldom tends to be a decisive factor when making important decisions. While dating, living together and being married for quite a while, our cultural backgrounds have brought out many differences, such as differences in native tongue and in ways of relating to nature and climate, but also shown that we have various things in common, e.g. our ideas of a relationship and how to raise children, and our human values. I suppose the blending of all these factors as well as a continuous creative adjustment illustrate that our marriage is intercultural. This personal research context, then, partly contributes to my initial motivation for

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1 Belgium has two major linguistic communities, Dutch and French, and one minor, German, linguistic community.

conducting this research, and at the same time it reflects on my position as a researcher.

The driving forces for this study that derive from the social context of my life are the fact that I have worked and studied in three different countries, I have lived in an intercultural relationship for over 30 years, and I have regularly been in contact with others living in an intercultural relationship. This, combined with daily encounters and incidents provoking a myriad of questions about issues of adaptation, immigration, the connection between language and power, relational misunderstandings, how some intercultural couples do so well while others seem to have endless conflicts, forms my social motivation. In addition, growing multiculturalism in general, and in Finland in particular, places increasing demands on society, on individuals, and on their relationships, and dealing with the challenges that arise from this requires new knowledge and competences.

Whereas my original research interest, the scientific motivation for the study, centred on intercultural couples' adaptation in a general way, in the course of my studies my approach has widened towards communication theory and narrowed towards the specific theory of relational dialectics of Baxter & Montgomery. Tackling this particular focus became an exciting and intriguing but also challenging undertaking as it seemed to open at times endless opportunities but it also came up against limitations. However, since I started this research, my approach has broadened, and the research questions have been clarified and focused many times. The research area has remained the same: intercultural couples and communication from a relational dialectical perspective.

The journey from my initial personal involvement in an intercultural relationship and from living abroad towards studying, teaching and finally systematically studying intercultural couples has taken up a great part of my life. The chronological process is shown in Figure 1.

This chronological process requires some clarification (see Siljanen, 2007). As this is an interpretative study (this will be explained in detail in Chapter three, *design of the study*), one of its goals is to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study, i.e. studying the phenomenon in context. Studying the intercultural couples in context makes this inquiry an embodied practice, that is, one in which researchers place their body in a context and use themselves as the primary "instrument" for collecting data (Frey et. al., 2000: 262). In this study the holistic knowledge and understanding of the intercultural couples is not limited to my data collection (interviews) but also calls on tacit (intuitive, felt) and propositional (expressable in language) knowledge, which includes, among other things, a wide range of other sources of inspiration and information, such as the media. Tacit and propositional knowledge are an integral part of the whole research process.

Holistic influence is relevant in this study as besides living in an intercultural relationship, I have also spent a considerable amount of time in Germany, and have lived in Finland for more than 21 years. Many of my friends and acquaintances live in intercultural relationships and therefore represent various backgrounds and perceptions of the phenomenon under study. Also

films, the media (e.g., TV, newspapers, internet), novels, poems, and seminars featuring intercultural relationships, sometimes from a dialectical perspective, have invigorated the research process.

The arrows in Figure 1 leaving the box of *holistic, tacit and propositional knowledge* point respectively to 1. personal interest, 2. study of the phenomenon, 3. theory research, 4. data gathering, and 5. summarizing, to show how all these indispensable second hand sources have been imperative to this research, even if some of them may merely serve as background substance.

Personal interest is the earliest incentive, through experience, observations, and fascination, which eventually led to the search for conceptual understanding, towards empirical research, interpretation and conclusions. *The study of the phenomenon* was marked by studies conducted and courses taught in Intercultural Communication (ICC) at various institutions and SME's, and led in time to starting my Ph.D. studies in Speech Communication at the University of Jyväskylä.

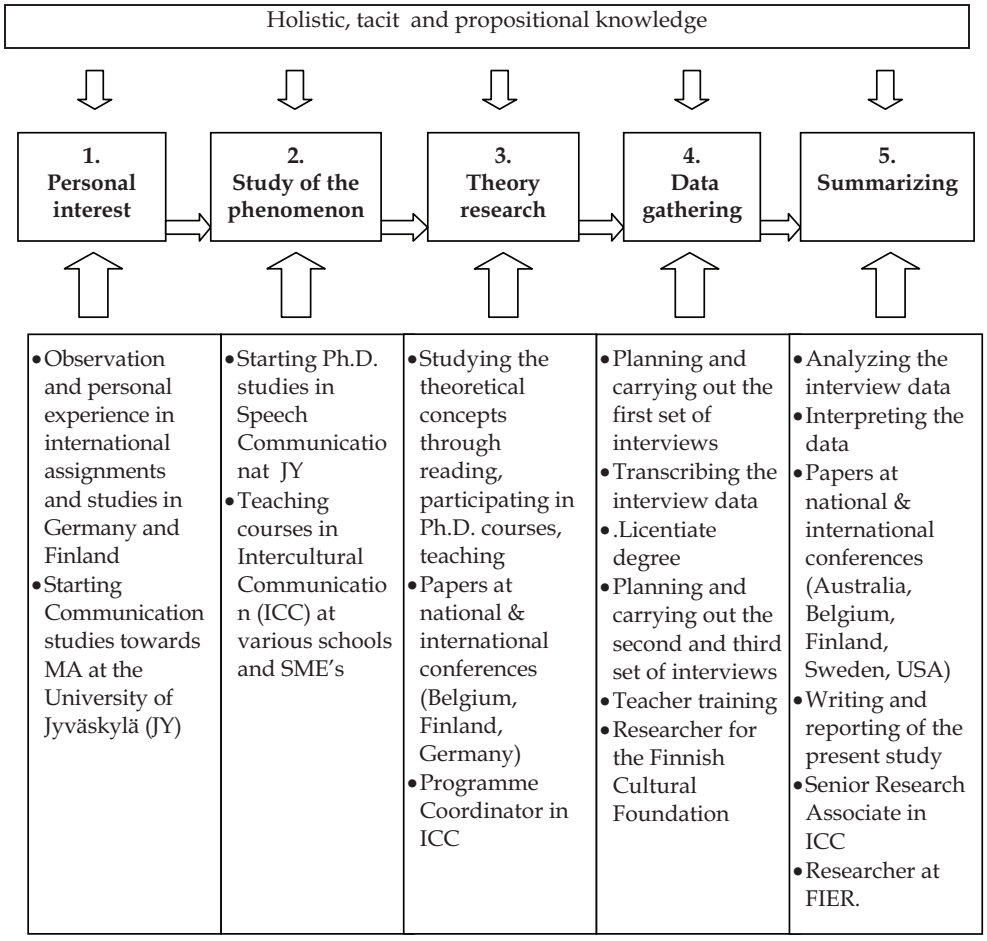

FIGURE 1 The research process

Theory research took place through in-depth study of the theoretical concepts, specifically of relational dialectics, participation in Ph.D. courses, and the presentation of research papers at national and international conferences in Belgium, Finland and Germany. During this period the theme interviews were carried out and transcribed, and my licentiate thesis was drafted.

The data gathering period partly overlapped with the theory building. After the licentiate degree, the next sets of interviews were carried out, i.e. the concept map and e-mail interviews, which were then transcribed. At the same time I started and completed pedagogical studies in the University of Applied Sciences' International Teacher Education Programme.

During *the summarizing* phase the data were analysed and interpreted, and the writing and reporting process started. I presented papers at various national and international conferences, worked in the Intercultural Communication unit as Senior Research Associate, and took up a new position as Researcher in the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER). All these phases feature fluidity and overlap; they are all interrelated.

In light of the above rationale, which presents my personal, social and scientific involvement in and motivation for conducting this research, I aimed to explain my active engagement and reflexivity (i.e. my biases and motivation), which supports the assertions, claims and findings that I make and strenghten credibility in this qualitative study. Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which such factors as one's own experiences, interests, wider aims in life and social identities shape one's research (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). In line with Ryan (2005: 2), I consider personal reflexivity to be both an acknowledgment of the role and influence of the researcher, and the condition of taking account of the personality and presence of the researcher within the research project. In addition, a clear sense of the researcher's starting point helps the reader to assess the researcher's permeability (see Fossey et al., 2002: 726).

The structure of the study

This study consists of seven chapters. This first chapter has introduced the topic and the objectives of the study. It also examines the key concepts used, and provides an overview of research conducted in the field of intercultural couples. Lastly, this introductory chapter outlines the chronology of the research process and presents the structure of the study.

The second chapter presents Baxter & Montgomery's (1996), Baxter's (1997; 2008) theoretical concept of relational dialectics; its origins, main notions, and the framework of relational dialectics, i.e. internal and external relational dialectics. In addition, this chapter introduces contemporary research investigating couple relationships from a relational dialectics perspective, or another communication view, to illustrate, support or contrast with relational dialectical theory.

Chapter three introduces the design of the study, including its methodological premises, the research aim and research questions, and the data collection procedure. It also describes the analysis process in detail.

The following three chapters form the core of this study as they provide a detailed discussion of the results. Chapter four presents the outcomes of relational dialectics within the intercultural couples' relationship.

Chapter five contains the findings of relational dialectics concerning the intercultural couples and their social network.

The sixth chapter presents the intercultural couples' perceptions of the significance of culture in their relationship, and also features intercultural relational dialectal forces.

In Chapter seven the main findings are discussed, and an evaluation of the theory and of the study are presented. Finally, implications of the study and suggestions for further research are discussed.

2 RELATIONAL DIALECTICS

A theory often used and explored in research into the communication dynamics of relationship research is the theory of relational dialectics, introduced and developed by Baxter (1993), Baxter and Montgomery (1996), Montgomery and Baxter (1998) and Baxter and Braithwaite (2008). Relational dialectics are described as "uniquely patterned and richly coloured by the dialogic complexities of communication in close relationships, with the common dialectical threads of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 6-7). A dialectical approach to relationships suggests that relationships are comprised of innate contradictions. These contradictions are conceptualized as dialectics in which the tension inherent in the contradiction is not something to be resolved through choice but something that defines the nature of the relationship and sustains the life of the relationship (Baxter, 1990).

The origins of relational dialectics that help us grasp the present understanding of this theory go far back in history. The best known view is of dialectics as a method of examining and discussing ideas in order to find the truth, which follows rules developed by Socrates and Plato, also called the art of argumentation. However, already Lao Tzu in China and Heraclitus in Greece shared ontological dialectical worldviews that show remarkable commonalities. They both referred to the essence of reality, which they pictured as a dynamic process of motion and change brought about by the interplay of opposing forces. In the 19th century Hegel and Marx each worked out their own ideas of dialectical thinking: Hegel presented the concepts of contradiction, change and totality, and Marx moved dialectics into everyday social practices. Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics is inspired by and large based on Bakhtin's dialogism. In the following section I will briefly explore Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism to illustrate the origins of relational dialectics, and to show how the ideas of dialogism and relational dialectics overlap. After that I will present their shared assumptions of the dialectical perspective, to see how we all understand relational dialectics.

2.1 Bakhtin and the notion of dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. His writings, which cover a wide variety of subjects, have inspired scholars working in a number of different traditions and in disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, history, philosophy, anthropology and psychology. His notion of dialogism became apparent in his engagement with the work of Dostoevsky, and contains important concepts, which form the basis of his thinking about dialogism, and of the later relational dialectics (Anderson, 2008).

To Bakhtin social life was not a closed, univocal "monologue" but an open "dialogue". Dialogue, unlike monologue, is multivocal, i.e. it is characterized by the presence of at least two distinct voices. Bakhtin (1981) regarded all social processes as the product of "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies", the centripetal (the forces of unity) and the centrifugal (the forces of difference) (p. 272). Hence, the multivocality of social reality is realised in the contradictory interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The four important concepts that form the foundation of dialogism 1) the self and the other situated in contradictory forces, 2) unfinalizability, 3) the chronotope and the carnivalesque, and 4) heteroglossia and utterance.

The first concept contains the idea of the relationship between *the self and other,* which points to contradictory forces. According to Bakhtin (1981), every person is influenced by others in an inescapably intertwined way, and consequently no voice can be said to be isolated. In other words, the self is constructed in the ongoing interplay of the centripetal and the centrifugal. The self is constructed out of two contradictory necessities - the need to connect with another (the centripetal force), and the simultaneous need to separate from the other (the centrifugal force).

In addition to this comes the second element of *unfinalizability*. This points to the never ceasing nature of the dynamic interplay of the contradictions: there is no finite set of contradictions to be discovered as the forces are multiple, varied and everchanging in the immediate context of the moment. To Bakhtin (1981) dialogism conceives change as a perpetual ongoingness of centripetal-centrifugal forces. The simultaneous, dynamic interaction between the centripetal and centrifugal forces gives rise to an individual's sense of self and a shared perception of the other's consciousness, representing the true nature of interpersonal communication. Applying this to communication between people, he sees tensions as the "deep structure" of all human experience. In relationships this means that on the one hand a centripetal or centralizing force pulls us together with others but that on the other hand a centrifugal or decentralizing force pushes us apart.

The third aspect of Bakhtin's concept of dialogue is his introduction of the notion of the *chronotope*, i.e. time and space, and the *carnivalesque*. The

chronotope means that every dialogue is enacted in a concrete temporal-spatial context. Chronotope literally means time-space (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). The specific phenomena that create the forces of unity and difference are obvious only in the details of the chronotopic context. In addition to the chronotopic context, Bakhtin described the context in which distinct individual voices are heard, flourish and interact together as the carnivalesque. The carnival creates the threshold situations in which regular conventions are broken or reversed and genuine dialogue becomes possible. Bakhtin portrayed the carnivalesque as a social institution (Clark and Holquist, 1984: 297-299).

Linked to the *carnivalesque*, Bakhtin (1984) described the "zones of liminality" as areas with the capacity to produce an atmosphere of the carnivalesque. He argued that, as social beings, we live in a constant liminal state, an intersubjective borderland of the utterance that exists between our own consciousness and the consciousness of others, and "in this tension-filled encounter lies […] the highest degree of sociality" (1984: 287). Within this broad definition of liminality Bakhtin (1986) addressed the problem of crossing cultures. He rejected the dualistic notion that one must "go native" and discard one's own background to understand a new culture and proposed instead that a culture is only fully revealed through the eyes of the foreigner. Therefore, the intersubjectivity of a positive dialogic encounter provides both foreigner and native resident with a more profound understanding of their own respective cultures. Also Heatherington (1998) used the term liminality from an anthropological point of view to describe the margin state, the second of the three phases of rites of passage (separation, margin, and re-aggregation). The margin state is marked by uncertainty as cultural norms and expectations are temporarily overturned. Simpson (1995) described the liminal space as a geographic site that presents opportunities for "a communion or egalitarianism among participants in the space that exists outside the boundaries of day-to-day status, structures, and hierarchy" (p. 712). These culturally ambiguous zones are also a potential source of conflict. Pratt (1990) referred to intercultural areas as contact zones, "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other…in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 34).

It is in his essays in "The Dialogic Imagination" that Bakhtin introduced the fourth concept, *heteroglossia* (Holquist, 1986: xxvi). He explained the generation of meaning through the "primacy of context over text" (heteroglossia), the hybrid nature of language (polyglossia) and the relationships between utterances, also called intertextuality (Maranhão, 1990: 4). Heteroglossia is the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance (Holquist & Emerson, 1981: 428).

Making an utterance means fitting the words of others and populating them with one's own intention. Although Bakhtin contrasted the dialogic and monologic work of literature, the term dialogic does not just apply to literature. For Bakhtin, all language, all thought, appeared dialogic. This means that everything anybody ever says always exists in response to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. In other words, we never speak in a vacuum. As a result, all language (and the

ideas which language contains and communicates) is dynamic, relational and engaged in a process of endless re-descriptions of the world. (Anderson, 2008.)

Bakhtin articulated the rigidity or the "monologization" of the human experience perceived by the political theories of that time. What is essential, so Dufva (1998: 88) argues, is firstly that dialogism does not imply an act of conversation between two people only, and secondly that it refers to something more than language use in human communication, which means that social experience is constituted at the level of communicative exchange, i.e. dialogue between persons.

Bakhtin (1986) saw the *utterance* as far more complex than the individuated act of an autonomous speaker, as it is existent at the boundaries of consciousness (p. 106). This means that he pictured both its preceding links and following links (p. 94), that is, different conversational links that precede and are expected to follow. They are also called the "dialogues of the utterance chain" (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996: 28-29). Taking into consideration the aforementioned issues of centrifugal and centripetal forces - unity and difference, the chronotope of time and space - and taking, in addition to that, the context of the actual research setting - intercultural couples in Finland - does represent quite a special research context.

The basis of dialogism is situated in the self and the other in contradictory forces - which corresponds with contradiction in relational dialectics. Contradiction is the core of relational dialectics and will be explained in detail in Section 2.2.1. In Figure 2 below the concepts of dialogism are illustrated and depicted in four circles. I present this figure here to visualize dialogism, as I will also explain dialectics from a similar figure to demonstrate the commonalities between dialogism (Bakhtin) and relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery) in Section 2.2.4. Figure 2 below shows the concepts as four circles that are interdependent and closely linked to one another. At the core one finds *the self and the other in contradictory forces*. The second circle represents the ever changing, never finalized interplay of the self and the other and embodies u*nfinalizability*. The third circle signifies the *chronotope*, the context of time and space in which the ever changing contradictory forces are located. Finally, the fourth circle stands for *heteroglossia*, denoting the dynamism and the process of endless re-descriptions of the world.

Heteroglossia also stands for "the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance" (Bakhtin, 1981: 428).

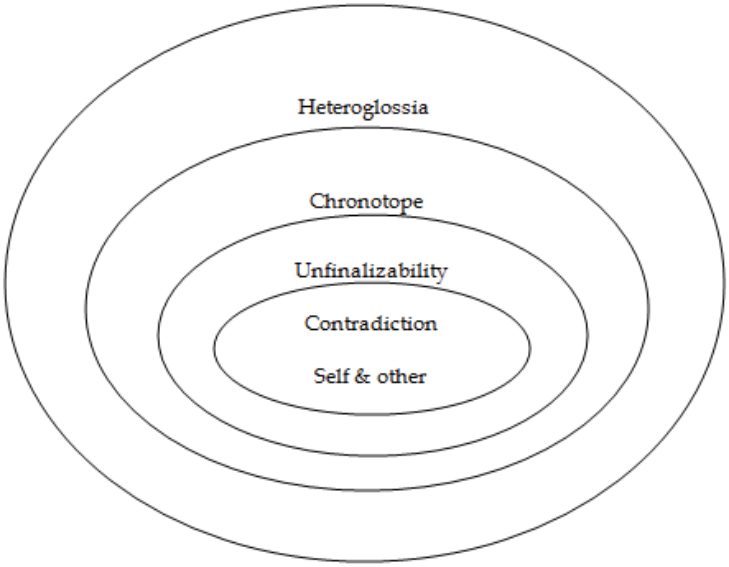

FIGURE 2 Bakhtin's foundations of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981)

Having indicated the link between dialogism and relational dialectics on several occasions it is time to move on to relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and identify its common and distinct characteristics.

Baxter and Montgomery themselves state that they largely rely on Bakhtin's views on dialogism. In their work they present the link between relational dialectics and dialogism as being to their minds so close that they tend to use the terms virtually interchangeably (1996: 47). Because dialogism is said to be a general theory of sociality rather than a context-specific theory, dialogism should be extended to the context of personal relationships (Baxter, 1993: 141).

What relationship change or relationship process really encompasses becomes clear when we look closely at the following central concepts of the relational dialectical perspective: contradiction, change, praxis and totality.

2.2 Central concepts of the relational dialectical perspective

Throughout this chapter Bakhtin's voice will be used wherever possible to show how closely dialogism is the basis of and is linked to the theory of relational dialectics. The following sections tackle "relational dialectics" from Baxter's and Montgomery's perspective and provide an insightful and comprehensive look at these core concepts. I will first present the main idea,

then I will provide an overview of the framework of relational dialectics, and finally I will engage in a critical inquiry into the main four concepts.

I want to point out here that Baxter and Montgomery's research of 1996 forms the basis of this study. Earlier previous and later versions have been written (see Table 6), but the most comprehensive version is the authors' work of 1996.

The main idea of Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics is that relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction. The ongoing interplay between oppositional features is what enables a relationship to exist as a dynamic social entity. It is further argued that a healthy relationship is not one in which the interplay of opposites has been extinguished or resolved, because these opposing features are inherent in relationships. Instead, a healthy relationship is one in which the parties manage to satisfy both oppositional demands. That is, relational well-being is marked by the capacity to achieve "both/and" status as opposed to "either/or". From a relational dialectics perspective, bonding in a relationship occurs in both interdependence with the other and independence from the other. One without the other diminishes the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 6). A dialectical approach to relationships suggests, then, that relationships are comprised of innate contradictions. These contradictions are conceptualized as dialectics in which the tension inherent in the contradiction is not supposed to be something to be resolved through choice but something that defines the nature of the relationship and sustains the life of the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

An important point to make here is that the concepts *contradiction, change, praxis and totality* are to be understood and reflected upon within the particular context of relational dialectics. It is exclusively in this context that they work and consequently make sense. This means that although these concepts do have a general meaning in common parlance and are obviously known to people as concepts to operate with, within the context of relational dialectics the meanings of the concepts differ quite considerably, and they are also given extra characteristics. Therefore, as a general rule, whenever the concepts contradiction, change, praxis and totality are used in this study, they are to be understood from a relational dialectics perspective. The concepts have a technical meaning for dialectical theorists (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 8); one could say they belong to the jargon of *relational dialectics*.

According to Baxter and Montgomery, couples face a common set of contradictions that must be negotiated. They located three points of contradiction, also called the three fundamental dialectics or supra dialectics (the term used by Erbert, 2000), that are most visible within interpersonal relationships: 1) integration - separation, 2) stability - change, and 3) expression - privacy. Each of these three fundamental dialectical tensions is manifested in six basic contradictions. These contradictions in turn can be divided into internal and external contradictions. Internal contradictions are constituted *within* the relationship of the two partners, whereas external contradictions involve a dialectical tension between the couple and the community. This means that

relational partners do not live in a vacuum but also interact with the "outside world", which then creates tensions that are situated at the nexus of the relationship and the social order. (Baxter, 1993; Baxter, 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Canary & Zelley, 1998; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Table 2 summarizes the three fundamental dialectical tensions as well as the dialectics that are internal and external to the relationship (Baxter, 1993).

TABLE 2 Typology of internal and external dialectical contradictions (Baxter, 1993; 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996)

	Dialectic of Integration-Separation	**Dialectic of Stability-Change**	**Dialectic of Expression-Privacy**
Internal	Connection-Autonomy	Predictability-Novelty	Openness-Closedness
External	Inclusion-Seclusion	Conventionality-Uniqueness	Revelation-Concealment

The dialectics in the table are explained as follows. The fundamental dialectic (Baxter, 1993) or supra dialectic (Erbert, 2000) of *integration-separation* refers to the fundamental tension between social solidarity or unity on the one hand and social division or separation on the other hand. In its internal manifestation this dialectic represents the connection-autonomy dialectic constituted within the relationship. In its external manifestation this fundamental dialectic refers to the inclusion-seclusion dialectic between the couple and others.

The fundamental dialectic of *stability-change* refers to the fundamental opposition between stability and flux. In its internal manifestation it captures the predictability-novelty dialectic constituted within the relationship. In its external manifestation the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic suggests that the relationship is marked by a struggle about how to conform to the expectations and beliefs of others in the social world.

The fundamental dialectic of *expression-privacy* focuses on what is expressed or disclosed versus what is not expressed or disclosed. The internal manifestation of this fundamental dialectic captures the extent to which the partners display openness and discretion in their interactions with each other. The external manifestation, the revelation-concealment dialectic, deals with how the relational partners reveal and fail to reveal information about the nature and status of their relationship to outsiders. Section 3.3 provides an in-depth explanation of the internal and external dialectics.

As Baxter and Montgomery's research (1996) forms the backbone of this study, it is appropriate to make open acknowledgement at this point that I rely heavily on the authors' work. Also, theirs was the first formal articulation of a dialogically oriented relational dialectic theory (Baxter, 2004). However, I consider the use of their research entirely justified as their solid study has not lost any of its value (see evaluation in Chapter seven) and scholars have not, so far, presented any essential criticism that would displace the work of Baxter & Montgomery. In addition, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) use the concepts of

"dialogism" and "dialectics" interchangeably (p. 47). I intend to follow this practice in this study. Let us now look at each of the four key aspects of the dialectical perspective in turn.

2.2.1 Contradiction as a starting point

Contradiction as a key aspect of the relational dialectical perspective refers to the ongoing dynamic interplay or tension between unified oppositions. This means that oppositions are simultaneously unified or interdependent with one another. As contradictions are inherent in social life we can say that it is the interplay of opposing tendencies that serves as the driving force for ongoing change in personal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery 1996; 1997).

Looking more closely at the words "opposites" and "unified", Baxter and Montgomery (1997) clarify how "opposites" should be understood and whether opposition is a sufficient condition for contradiction. They argue that the meaning of "opposites" is more than a simple binary pair, e.g. certainty versus uncertainty. From a dialectical perspective we might find several dialectical oppositions co-existing, for instance, certainty-insecurity, certainty-novelty, and certainty-mystery. This many-layered co-existence is covered by the term *multivocal contradictions*, which are said to be complex webs of oppositions, all of which are in simultaneous interplay with one another (1996, 30-31; 1997, 340-341). This means that concentrating only on binary pairs (of opposition) is too limiting to capture the relationship dialogue. The relationship dialogue also occurs on the many different levels of social existence implicated in personal relationships, including values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideal and actual behavioural practices (Duck, 1994a, Wood et al., 1994). The *multivocality* becomes even more important when recognizing that relationship partners are situated "locally". Bakhtin (1981) referred to this situatedness as the time-space location or the *chronotope.*

Besides the clarification of opposites, the notion of *unified or interdependent opposites* needs to be elaborated to fully understand the meaning of dialectical tensions. Interdependent unity refers to the oppositional tendencies that are unified as interdependent parts of a larger whole. The unity refers to the assumption or belief of the existence of the other for its very meaning. Two basic kinds of unity and opposition can be identified: semantic and functional. The "semantic unity/opposition" means that concepts gain their meaning only through an understanding of their semantic opposites. For instance, the concept of openness is only meaningful to us because we have a semantic understanding of what closedness is, and vice versa: without knowing what closedness, reticence, or introvertness means, the concept of openness cannot be fully understood. The "functional unity/opposition" addresses how phenomena enable or facilitate one another in practice (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001: 116).

Dynamic interplay or tension between unified oppositions refers to the ongoing dynamic interaction between these unified oppositions. The interplay, also called the "both/and" quality of relating between opposing forces, is a core

characteristic which distinguishes a dialectical perspective from a dualistic one. Both the dualistic and the dialectic perspective emphasize the presence of opposites. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 9-10.) The two perspectives are quite different, however. Dualistic opposites are rather isolated phenomena that are more or less static; they coexist in parallel, and their dynamic interaction is ignored. A dialectical perspective emphasizes that partners deal with simultaneous requirements, for instance for both certainty and uncertainty, in their relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 10). A dualistic perspective emphasizes that in a relationship one needs *either* certainty *or* uncertainty. A dialectical view, on the other hand, emphasizes *both* certainty *and* uncertainty, thereby emphasizing the interplay of oppositions.

Some scholars argue that not all contradictions are of the same order. The stability-change contradiction is seen as being distinct from other contradictions, e.g. stability-change is called metadialectic as it is a contradiction about contradictions (Van Lear, 1998; Brown et al., 1998). It is also said to be a process that is interwoven through all the interactional and contextual dialectics mentioned (Rawlins, 1998). The stability-change contradiction is indeed considered a contradiction that characterizes all contradictions, according to Montgomery & Baxter (1998), but they add that also the dialectic of certainty-uncertainty has integrity in its own right as a substantive contradiction (p.7). This means that the dynamic interplay of certainty-uncertainty is inherent in relationships, as is the stability-change contradiction, as they are always in flux.

On the other hand, considering the dynamic interplay of contradictions which manifests itself in the actual communication between relational partners, is it not the very supra dialectic of expression-privacy, which encompasses the partners' desires to disclose and to restrain themselves from being open, which can be considered "the" overarching dialectic or metadialectic? It is indeed through the very act of disclosing and not disclosing that messages of certainty and uncertainty, and the need to be connected and to be autonomous to our partner, are sent. In addition, also external dialectics are being transmitted to our social environment through the act of communication, i.e. disclosure. Another way to convey this is to state that the fundamental dialectic of expression-privacy is the overarching one which facilitates all the other dialectics, internal and external. But then does it really matter which dialectic is the most encompassing one? I suppose that the metadialectic of expression-privacy can also be considered to have integrity in its own right as a substantive contradiction. However, as will be seen later on, interdependencies and the multivocality of contradictions, also called the web of contradictions, are part of the *messiness* of relational dialectic thinking, conveying the *quality of complexity* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 233). This refers to the inherent connections between the contradictions as well as the mutual influence they have on each other. Therefore it does not really make much sense to choose one particular contradiction over any other merely to label it as the metadialectic.

In short, the main characteristics of contradiction within the relational dialectical context are: oppositions, the unity of these oppositions, and their dynamic interplay. As the interplay of unified oppositions exists in a system

that is forever in flux, it is obvious that change, the next central concept of relational dialectics, is inherent in contradiction.

2.2.2 Change as a process

Relationships naturally evolve over time as people communicate with each other. As mentioned at the very beginning of this study, communication is central to the development of personal relationships as it is through communication that we disclose, learn about and understand each other.

Relationship change is the interplay or tension of opposites that result in an ongoing fluidity or variability in any relationship. In other words, relationship change refers to quantitative and qualitative movements through time in the underlying contradictions around which a relationship is organized (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Put simply, this means that the dynamics of the multivocal contradictions inherent in a relationship influence the relationship so that it is always in motion, that there is constant alternation in the contradiction or tension of stability - change. Thus, as Baxter and Montgomery (1996) say, thinking dialectically of change also implies the presence of periods of stability.

To understand the dialectical concept of change, some earlier notions of change need to be clarified which explain the train of thought leading to dialectical change. These notions are the monologue of progress, and the dualisms in the causes and in the forms of relationship change.

The monologue of progress

The monologue of progress means that relationship development is steeped in monologic assumptions of progress, also called "unidirectional moreness" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This unidirectional moreness implies more interdependence, more intimacy, more liking/loving, more openness, more certainty, more dyadic uniqueness, more boundary impermeability from outside influences. Any movement that lessens these qualities is called regression, any moreness is progress. In short, it is said that this kind of theorizing about relationship progress is heavily teleological, i.e., relationships are conceived as developing progressively towards some idealized or preferred end state, or idealized outcome also called stable moreness or *homeostatic equilibrium.* (1996: 52.) They therefore suggest replacing "development" with "relationship process" or "relationship change", by which they mean any movement of a relationship over time (1996: 51).

The dualistic approach

The dualistic approach to relationship change contains the logic of either/or, which is organized around four basic binary pairs. Two binary pairs deal with the causes of change, i.e. deterministic or emergent, and intrinsic or extrinsic

change, and the other two are relevant to the forms of change, i.e. linear or cyclical change, and quantitative or qualitative change, see Table 3.

TABLE 3 Dualistic variations of change in relationship development (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 53-58)

DUALISMS IN CAUSES	DUALISMS IN FORMS
Deterministic or Emergent	Linear or Cyclical
Intrinsic or Extrinsic	Qualitative or Quantitative

As regards the causes of relationship change, a deterministic cause is one of the set of characteristics associated with each relationship party, for example, their pre-existing self-identity, personality, style and set of attitudes. An emergent cause draws attention to the emergent properties of the relationship process, such as the product of locally situated factors residing in the individual, the dyad in the social network in which the pair is established, or in other external environmental factors. Thinking dualistically about the relationship process implies an either/or orientation, emphasizing either distal causal determinants that are in place at the beginning of the relationship, or determinants that emergence in the immediacy of the interaction moment. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 53-55.)

To continue with the second binary pair of causes of relationship change, i.e. intrinsic or extrinsic, intrinsic causes are factors present in the individual relationship or between the parties, whereas extrinsic causes are situated outside the relationship's boundaries. While the relationship process is the result of various factors that include both intrinsic and extrinsic changes, theories of relationship development tend to specialize in either intrinsic or extrinsic factors rather than to examine the interplay of both. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 55.)

Regarding the forms of relationship change, dualisms are linear or cyclical change, and quantitative or qualitative change. Linear change is described as non-repeating, unidirectional growth, with a relationship passing through a given level or stage of closeness only once. Cyclical change refers to repeating movement. Qualitative and quantitative changes in relationships, which have been referred to as stage-oriented theories, conceive change as qualitative stages, phases or intervals which are connected to change in kind, or quantitative change, which is connected to change in degree but not in kind.

A dialectical perspective on relationship change, which is different from the monologue of progress as well as from the dualistic view of change (with either/or aspects), sees relationship change as an indeterminate process with no clear end-states and no necessary paths of change. Instead it involves ongoing quantitative and qualitative shifts that simply move a system to a different place (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997). They argue that this dialectical perspective of change as an indeterminate process can be explained by the transformation of the dualisms into dialogues/dialectics.

To explain dualistic conceptualizing I will give some examples of studies on certainty and uncertainty and begin with the monologic view. On the one hand, there is Berger's and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory (URT), which was first formulated to explain initial interaction between strangers, and was later extended to cover cross-cultural interaction (which was a catalyst for Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) (1995)) and to uncertainty in established relationships (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg & Turner, 1990). It was argued that the desire to reduce uncertainty about the other(s) in particular situations was the primary goal, as uncertainty is universally assumed to be something negative, and something to get rid of. This way of looking at certainty, i.e. increasing certainty by reducing uncertainty, is considered monologic.

On the other hand, some researchers discovered that uncertainty, unpredictability and novelty can actually be of importance to people's satisfaction in personal relationships (Baxter, 1992a; Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). It is claimed that too much uncertainty or too much certainty can be detrimental to close relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). To summarize, some studies consider certainty to be the key factor, whereas others point to uncertainty. Both sets of studies demonstrate a dualistic perspective and a static picture which does not show dynamic interplay; it is either certainty or uncertainty which is taken into account. The dialogical way of conceiving certainty and uncertainty allows for the simultaneity of both certainty and uncertainty in relationships. One cannot imagine one concept without the other. According to relational dialectics it is imperative to realize that relating is an ongoing process of weaving together the certainty of continuity and the uncertainty of discontinuity. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Knobloch, 2008).

Dialectical change also stresses the both/and of intrinsic and extrinsic factors as they are linked to the internal and external contradictions in dynamic interplay. In relationships internal and external forces are in dynamic interplay and are not likely to remain static over time. Internal contradictions are those situated within the boundaries of the dyadic relationship while external contradictions are located at the nexus of the dyad and the larger social network. The intrinsic-extrinsic distinction is itself in dynamic flux, which makes it ambiguous. According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), from a relational-dialectics perspective this ambiguity is useful because it forces us to pay attention to fluidity (p. 69).

The fact that relationships progress naturally implies change over time due to the dynamic interplay of contradictions, (in a variety of ways). Werner and Baxter (1994) present in "Temporal Qualities", five qualities that change as relationships progress. These qualities are amplitude, salience, scale, sequence and path/rhythm. *Amplitude* refers to the strength of both feelings and behavior. For instance, partners may have very strong feelings and react strongly at certain points in their relationship whereas on other occasions they may be calmer and more relaxed. *Salience* describes the focus on past, present, or future. Partners may have periods when they concentrate more on what happened in the past, whereas at other periods they may be more involved with issues

taking place in the present, or be engaged in future planning in terms of where the relationship is going. *Scale* relates to how long or how short a time patterns in the relationship last. For example, certain of a couple's rituals might last for some months whereas other things they might find themselves doing for a much shorter period of time. *Sequence* refers to the order of events in a relationship. For instance, the way a couple organizes time varies along the entire length of the relationship. Several new elements may influence the relationship's behavioural patterns so that sequencing becomes quite different, for example when the couple consists of just the two partners compared to when they have children. The fifth quality, *pace/rhythm*, points to the rapidity of events occurring in the relationship and the interval between these events. (Werner & Baxter, 1994.)

Whereas the dualistic notion of change saw linear or cyclical forms of change, researchers in relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Conville, 1998; Van Lear, 1998) prefer to talk in terms of change as a spiral which is *both* linear *and* cyclical. So we can say, as do the abovementioned authors, that the interplay of stability-instability can comprise both linear and cyclical change, characterized by a series of changes that represent both movement from one quantitative or qualitative state to another - linear - and a repeating pattern - cyclical. Linear change involves a series of non-repeating changes in which the system never returns to a previous state. Cyclical change, however, appears when the interplay of opposites goes back and forth, with relationship parties emphasizing first one oppositional tendency and then the other in an ongoing ebb and flow pattern, which creates repetition. But the combination of these two types becomes cyclic-linear change, also referred to as spiralling change (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Dindia, 1998; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Van Lear, 1998). A spiral is said to involve recurrence but it recognizes that phenomena are never repeated in an identical form; so a spiral combines elements of cyclical change (recurrence) and of linear change, i.e. the absence of identical repetition (; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Werner & Baxter, 1994).

Beginnings, middles, and endings

Dialectical change and the notion of relationship development offer many important issues to think about. What, then, are the implications of dialectical change for conceptualizing relationship development? With Baxter and Montgomery's view on dialectical change, can we still talk about beginnings, middles and endings of relationships, and of turning points? What about spiralling change? How do we conceive of change in terms of adaptation? The fascination of studying relational dialectics lies in the fact that no unanimous agreement on dialectical change can be found.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter regarding change, Baxter and Montgomery want to distinguish their view of relationship development from the traditional one. They argue that an assumption of progress still refers to a teleological view of change, presuming a directional, cumulative change

towards some idealized or preferred end state or idealized outcome, also called the stable or *homeostatic equilibrium*. Therefore they suggest replacing "development" or "progress" with "relationship process" or "relationship change", by which they mean any movement of a relationship in the course of time (1996: 51). They reject the concept of development to capture relational change and replace it with the concept of dialogic complexity (1996: 73) and Montgomery and Baxter (1998: 8). Rawlins (1989: 160) explains process as movement, activity, and change as being the fundamental properties of social life in a dialectical perspective.

Dialogical thinking finds developmental progress a problematic concept to begin with, because it privileges one set of social forces over their dialectical counterparts (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Relational dialectics are said to position the authors in such a way that they view differently the "maintained middle" of relationships, especially with regard to the notion of complexity, which does not point to stages in relationships. The very concept of maintenance is seen to privilege one pole of the ongoing and ever present dialectic between stability and change. Maintaining would infer that relationships are homeostatically organized around a stable centre point of equilibrium (whereas dialectically speaking they are organized around the interplay of contradictions). For this reason Baxter and Montgomery want to think of relationship partners as *sustaining* a relationship, as relationships are sustained to the extent that dialogical complexity is given voice (1996: 76).

In her article on relationship maintenance versus relationship change (1993), Montgomery argues that one might reasonably conclude that any attempt to link dialectics and relationship maintenance would be futile because dialectics emphasize change, and maintenance emphasizes stability (p. 205). She reasons that the word "maintenance" seems to argue against dialectical thinking because the word denotes change as an anomaly, i.e. a strange and unusual feature of a situation or process that is often unsatisfactory or unfair, rather than as an inherent construct (1993). The dialectical perspective, however, regards change as a social constant, i.e. dialectics sees the natural state of relationships as change, fluctuation, evolution and movement. Stability is said to be but a momentary transition in a stream of continuous change (p. 208). Therefore, Montgomery suggests, maintenance should be viewed dialectically and be described as relational sustainment. Change inherently consists of the means by which couples choose and react to relational maintenance strategies, namely praxis patterns, the ways they deal with contradictions.

The earlier notion of the "middle of relationships" is called sustainment in relational dialectics. It would also be useful to have a look at how relationship "beginnings" and "endings" can be conceptualized. We know that communication is inherent in relationships, meaning that personal relationships are constituted in communication. It is through the interplay of contradictory voices in the communicative enactment, between the relational partners, that meaningful explanations can be offered. From the monologic point of view relationships begin when partners shift from being acquaintances towards being friends towards being romantic partners towards marriage. Baxter and

Montgomery's view (1996) on relational sustainment is that one should not look at relationship types (acquaintance/romantic partners) as being less developed, or being still on the way to real courtship, leading eventually to the idealized destination. From a relational dialectical viewpoint we should rather look at these types as relationship forms in their own right that should be studied for their dialogic complexities. From a dialectic perspective we can say that a relationship begins with the interplay of contradictory voices or dialectical tensions.

Middle periods in relationships are seen as periods of dynamic and ongoing improvisational change, which "sustain" the relationship. This is in contrast with the earlier conceptualization of "middles", where they were defined as holding patterns of homeostatic equilibrium associated with achieved idealized destinations.

Considering the endings of relationships, the monologic view of relationship process regards endings as happening when partners cease to function interdependently. According to relational dialectics, a relationship ends when there is no more interplay of contradictions, i.e. the relationship's end is marked by the absence of contradiction, i.e. *dialogic silence*. This implies that a relationship is not necessarily over after divorce, as divorced partners continue their relationship so long as contradictions are experienced (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998).

Turning points

In relationship research turning points have been used as a way of analyzing, for instance, what types of communicative events influence the construction, maintenance, and alteration of relationships. In relational dialectics, however, turning points have a different meaning. In general, research on turning points examines all the major events in an individual's or couple's relationship from the first meeting onwards (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000). A turning point is a time when an important change takes place in a situation, especially one that makes it better. In a relational context a turning point is considered to be "a relationship change that captures a critical moment, an event or incident that has impact and import [...] triggering a reinterpretation of what the relationship means to the participants" (Graham, 1997: 351). Evidently, the notion of "turning points" incorporates the concept of change. So how exactly are they located in relational dialectics?

According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 72), "turning points" are definitely seen as a central unit of change in the relationship process. Baxter and Erbert claim that turning point research is punctuated by a wide variety of turning point events. In addition, they claim that turning point research has challenged the linear progression model of stage-based approaches, suggesting that relationship development is often a turbulent process with many ups and downs (1999: 551).

Already Bakhtin (1981) used a concept which can be compared to or even substituted for "turning point", i.e. the *chronotope of threshold*. He explains this chronotope of threshold as follows:

> We will mention one more chronotope, highly charged with emotion and value, the chronotope of threshold; it can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of crisis and break in a life. The word "threshold" itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold) (p. 248.)

From a relational dialectics perspective then, turning points are conceived as "moments in a relationship's history when the pressures of dialogic interplay are of sufficient intensity that a major quantitative or qualitative change occurs for the pair" (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 72).

While trying to understand the meaning of the last sentence the reader may wonder why Baxter and Montgomery use *or* instead of *and*, when earlier they explain explicitly: "The dialogic perspective on the "quantity versus quality" issue is, once again, a *both/and* stance […] thus "quantity" and "quality" do not merely coexist; they function in dynamic interplay with one another" (1996: 71). Here they mean that quantitative and qualitative change appear in relational dialectics as a both/and issue, as both changes in degree and changes in kind take place in each relationship process. This remains somehow unclear. Researchers have defined the concept of turning points in different ways, stressing the transformation factor: relational transition (Conville, 1988; 1998), transition point (Levinger, 1983), and transition phase (Masheter & Harris, 1986).

To summarize, change as the second central concept of relational dialectics is characterized by the interplay or tension of opposites, which results in ongoing fluidity or variability in any relationship. It also contains the idea of the existing dynamics of multivocal contradictions - inherent in a relationship - influencing the relationship so that it is always in motion, and alternating between the contradiction or tension of stability - change. In addition, change from a relational dialectical viewpoint embraces the both/and presence of contradictions as opposed to the monologic view that looks at only one part of the contradiction, and as opposed to the dualistic view which acknowledges the existence of both but considers only one or the other. Looked at from the perspective of relational dialectics, relationship beginnings, middles, endings and turning points acquire a different meaning. Instead of considering these to be particular stages in a relationship, they are seen as manifesting the continuous interplay of contradictions. They signify relationship forms in their own right, with their own particular features pointing to the dialogic complexity of the relationship process, which includes any movement of a relationship over time.

Having introduced the concepts of contradiction and of change, the next central concept is called praxis, that is, the actual ways in which partners manage to deal with these relational contradictions. Praxis signifies making

communicative choices as to how to handle the contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001).

2.2.3 Praxis as a communicative choice

When transforming dualisms into dialectics, dialectical change conceives the process of change as emergent and as praxical determinism, i.e. communication is central as the relational parties give life through their communicative practices to the contradictions inherent in relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 59).

Praxis is said to be an abstract and empty construct which fails to take into account the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives. Dialectical theorists who study communication in relationships situate the interplay of opposing tendencies in the symbolic, not in the material practices of relationship parties, and emphasize communication as a symbolic resource through which meanings are produced and reproduced (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 330). In other words, this third shared assumption or central concept of relational dialectics (i.e. praxis) is explained by the idea that people are at once actors and objects of their own actions (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 12).

The notion of praxis is based on the idea that life and interaction go on in the midst of dialectical contradictions. The dialectical tensions that are inherent in relationships are created and re-created through the active participation and interaction (i.e. the practices) of the relational partners. From the perspective of relational dialectics, relational partners give life through their communicative practices to the contradictions that organize their relationship (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 59). The relational partners need to act, i.e. make communicative choices on how to deal with the dialectical contradictions. This means that we do not have to get rid of the contradictions that organize our relationship: *"contradiction is not regarded as something to bemoan or extinguish"* (Baxter & Montgomery 1996: 60). They take it even further and suggest that contradictions should be "embraced" on their own terms (p. 60), and illustrate how to accomplish this with the examples of Bakhtin (1984) and of Pearce (1989).

Bakhtin portrayed the praxis of relational tensions as a carnivalesque spirit or carnival ambivalence (1984: 11-12), with which he meant an attitude and action of ironic approval. Pearce suggested learning to live on friendly terms with paradox, contradiction, and multivocality (1989: 199). This seems a somewhat strange or unusual idea as "embracing" contradictions means the anticipation of problems or difficulties. However, our knowledge of relational dialectics teaches us that we are not to conceive of dialectical tensions as problems that need to be eliminated, but as an inevitable and necessary part of keeping a relationship going; we could not talk about relational dialectics without the existence of the dynamic interplay of dialectical tensions, as they are inherent to the concept of relational dialectics.

Also Billig and colleagues (1988) talk about the contradictions, or "dilemmatic aspects", of everyday thinking which should not be disregarded.

They describe tensions between the themes of equality-authority, freedom-necessity, and individuality-collectivity, in various contexts such as education, medical care, race and gender. They regard dilemmas as opposing themes which enable ordinary people to find the familiar puzzling and, therefore, worthy of thought. The opposing themes are enabling rather than inhibiting: thinking about these dilemmas helps people to think meaningfully about themselves and the world.

Praxis patterns

There are eight actual praxis patterns, or ways in which dialectical tensions can be approached: denial, disorientation, spiralling inversion, segmentation, balance, integration, recalibration, and reaffirmation. Just as relational partners may deal with different dialectics in their relationship over time, so they may also deal with different dialectics in different ways. Dealing with various dialectical contradictions in diverse ways throughout a relationship is an inherently messy, fuzzy, and slippery process, as Baxter and Montgomery (1996) also characterize relationships.

Praxis patterns are said not be equally functional. A functional praxis response is one which celebrates the richness and diversity afforded by the oppositions of a contradiction. Although there are, so far, eight praxis patterns, the list is said to be far from exhaustive. Baxter and Montgomery (1996; 1997) and Miller (2003) also looked at praxis patterns. Two patterns, denial and disorientation, are characterized by limited functionality, although they might appear with some frequency in relational life (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). The following explanation of denial and disorientation shows why this is the case.

The first pattern, *denial,* is the strategy of continually responding to one pole of a dialectic while ignoring the other. The praxis pattern of denial is characterized by discourse in which the parties basically seek to deny the existence of the other pole; they extinguish the contradictory nature of their relationship. For example, a couple who says they are inseparable and always want to be together would deny the existence of any need for autonomy. This pattern of denial is likely to be dysfunctional in the long run, because needs for independence would eventually surface and have to be dealt with. In general, the denial response is destined to fail as the dominance of one opposing force creates an urgent call for the neglected opposition.

Disorientation is the second praxis pattern and involves a fatalistic attitude in which contradictions are recognized as inevitable, negative, and unresponsive or unchangeable to "praxical" change. As a result, relationship parties view their relationship and the social world as disorienting, plagued with mixed messages like "I want to talk about it" followed by "No, I actually don't want to talk about it". Partners feel trapped by problematic options and reproduce their unfortunate condition through a passive acceptance that often becomes manifest in the ambiguity of mixed messages.

The third praxis pattern, *spiralling inversion*, is said to be a praxis pattern of greater functionality. It consists of spiralling inversion with respect to which

pole of a given contradiction is dominant at a given point in time. It is the process of separating the dialogical forces over time by responding to one pull now, the other pull later. Thus, each pole of the contradiction is dominant at different points in time. There is an ebb and flow between the two poles of this dialectic. For example, a couple can cope with the desire to be together and the need to fulfill autonomous obligations by improvising a back-and-forth spiral over time between connection-based situations and autonomy-based situations. Planning these situations, with "now we do this together and in the weekend we do that apart", may however destroy a certain element of spontaneity.

Segmentation is the fourth pattern and is a separation tactic by which partners compartmentalize different aspects of their relationship. This means that one or other pole of the contradiction is dominant, depending on the nature of the topic or activity domain. Actually, this praxis pattern also involves an ebb-and-flow pattern as in spiralling inversion, but the basis of intervention here is not time but rather the topic or activity domain. As the relationship parties shift from one topic or activity to another, different opposing themes are privileged. For example, a couple may decide what topic is appropriate for disclosure. Spiralling inversion and segmentation, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 64), appear to be prevalent patterns of improvisational praxis in personal relationships. They are the praxis patterns that most clearly manifest the ongoing tension between centripetal (dominant) and centrifugal (subordinate) demands; a demand is privileged at a given moment and is dominant while opposing demands are subordinated.

The fifth pattern, *balance*, is a compromise approach that promotes ongoing dialogue because partners see both dialectical poles as equally legitimate. Balance involves an effort to respond to all oppositions at any given point in time through compromise. Each oppositional exigence is responded to only partially, as is consistent with the nature of compromise. Balance is an unstable response because responses to the oppositional poles are weakened at any particular time. Whenever one party wins, the other loses, and the supply of benefits is never sufficient to meet the demand.

Integration, the sixth pattern, means that the relational parties are able to respond fully to all the opposing forces at the same time without compromise or weakening. It is said that integration happens quite infrequently, given the inherent oppositional tension characterizing contradiction. For instance, a couple embracing their opposing relational needs for certainty and uncertainty may come up with a steadfast rule that "every Saturday night they do something new that they have never done before": "every Saturday night" points to the certainty, and "something they have never done before" points to uncertainty.

The seventh, *recalibration*, is characterized by a transformation in the form of the opposition such that the initially experienced polarities are no longer oppositional to one another. It is the process of temporarily reframing a situation so that the tugs and pulls on partners no longer seem to be in the opposite direction. Recalibration is viewed as a response that goes beyond or

transcends the form in which opposition is expressed, but without permanently resolving the contradiction.

The eighth and last praxis pattern, *reaffirmation*, involves, as in disorientation, an acceptance by the parties that contradictions cannot be reconciled in any way. However, unlike the disorientation pattern, reaffirmation celebrates the richness provided by each polarity and tolerates the tension posed by their unity. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997; Miller, 2002.)

Whereas the two praxis patterns integration and recalibration share a fleeting moment in which oppositions are united in unique ways, Baxter (2004) thinks of integration and recalibration as particular kinds of aesthetic moments, i.e. both are fleeting events in which opposing discourses somehow complete, or consummate one another (p. 187). Aesthetic moments find their origin in Bakhtin, where these moments are described as creating momentary consummation, completion, or wholeness in what is otherwise a fragmented life experience (1990: 67).

As we know that the two poles of a given contradiction are in constant motion with respect to one another, it is, however, according to Baxter and Simon (1993), the domination of one dialectical pole by the opposite pole that sets in motion efforts to achieve equilibrium. Thus, domination is the catalyst for dialectical change, followed by the actual praxis. For instance, with respect to the autonomy-connection contradiction, maintenance efforts by one partner to enhance connection should be responded to more favourably by a partner whose relationship is in the autonomy-dominated moment as opposed to the connection-dominated moment. In contrast to the connection-dominated moment, in which individual needs and wants are perceived to be sacrificed for the relationship, the autonomy-dominated moment is characterized by Baxter and Simon (1993: 229) as a perception that the needs of the relationship are secondary to fulfillment of the individual needs of the two parties.

Although the theoretical basis of praxis (that is, managing the dialectical tensions) has been provided, relatively little research has actually focused on praxis as such. However, Baxter (1990) identified four strategies commonly used to deal with contradictions in premarital romantic relationships: selection, separation, neutralization, and reframing. Baxter and Simon (1993) identified maintenance strategies of contact, romance and avoidance, and found that excessive autonomy, predictability and closedness are common dialectical problems experienced by couples in romantic and marital relationships. Stafford and Canary (1991) conducted research on general relationship stability maintenance, but not on the management of relational dialectics. Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) explored dialectical contradictions in marriage and identified the communication strategies used to manage the dialectical tensions of autonomy-connection, and of openness-closedness. Communication strategies used to manage the autonomy-connection dialectic were activities segmentation, time segmentation, reframing, interaction climate, compromise, and exclusive selection. Communication strategies used to manage the openness-closedness dialectic were topic alternation, time alternation, withdrawal, probing, anti-social behaviours, and deception.

To sum up, praxis refers to the practical choices people make when dealing with contradictions in a relationship, i.e. the dialectical tensions. In praxis people create and re-create the dialectical tensions through active participation and interaction. In turn, the choices and actions themselves create, re-create, and change the nature of the relationship and hence the dialectical tensions themselves. The different ways in which dialectical tensions can be approached, the praxis patterns, are denial, disorientation, spiralling inversion, segmentation, balance, integration, recalibration, and reaffirmation. Depending on the particular internal and external dialectics, certain praxis patterns tend to be used over others. So far, however, no strategies or praxis patterns have been studied on external dialectics. Chapters four and five will talk about praxis in more detail.

After contradiction, change and praxis, the last central concept of relational dialectics, "totality", will now be examined.

2.2.4 Totality as a dialectical holism

Totality refers to the notion that contradictions cannot be understood in isolation; in other words, they exist together and mutually define each other, and are part of a unified whole. This means that totality, from a dialectical perspective, is a way of thinking about the world as a process of relations or interdependencies. Dialectics are intrinsically related to each other; for instance, the tension between dependence and interdependence cannot be separated from the tension between openness and privacy, as both work to condition and define the other through communication.

Baxter and Montgomery (1997) argue that the notion of totality is in contrast with the totality meaning "completeness", in the sense of producing a complete portrait of a phenomenon. On the surface, the concept of totality appears to be the same as any number of other theoretical orientations that emphasize such holistic notions as contextuality or relatedness. Dialectics is indeed one form of holism. However, not all holistic theories are dialectical. (Baxter & Montgomery 1997: 330) The criterion that distinguishes dialectical holism from other holistic perspectives, they argue, is the focus on contradictions as the unit of analysis. Dialectical totality involves three issues: a) location and manifestation of the contradictions, b) interdependencies among contradictions, and c) the contextualization of contradictory interplay, to each of which I shall now turn.

a) Location and manifestation of contradictions

As relational dialectics deal with interpersonal relationships, which naturally include close romantic relationships, we know that the dynamic interplay of contradictions is conceptually located on this level. However, although we consider a relationship as a unit, we know that every relationship consists of two relational partners. Is the location of contradictions situated in the individual, in the relationship unit, or on the societal level? Researchers seldom

seem to agree about the location of contradictions. However, according to Baxter and Montgomery, unified consensus is not supposed to be a goal for dialectical theory building (1997: 2).

On the one hand researchers see contradictions located in the individual. In her research on disclosure, Dindia (1998) located contradictions both in the relationship and on the societal level. She argued, however, that it is primarily found in the mind of the individual: "individuals must decide whether or not to reveal their stigma to anyone and if so, to whom" (p.100). Van Lear (1998) also sees contradictions as existing on the individual level: "a person's cognitive, interpretive construction in a relationship context and resulting individual behavior"(p.117). Van Lear also sees contradictions on the interpersonal or relational level as a characteristic of the relationship itself, and at the group or societal level as a characteristic of a larger social system.

Baxter and Montgomery claim that dialectical attention is directed away from the individual as the unit of analysis and is directed instead towards the dilemmas and tensions that are inherent in relating (1996: 15). They reject the traditional notions of an individual-relationship distinction, arguing that the tension of opposing dialectical forces is conceptually located within the interpersonal relationship (1997: 330), and that from a dialogic perspective the individual does not exist as an autonomous entity, but instead "becomes" only in and through relating (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998: 5). As people come together in any social union they create a host of dialectical forces (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 15). Montgomery (1993) argues that dialectical tensions should not be considered as occurring between one relational partner and the other relational partner but rather they should be perceived as being played out as relational force against relational force. Also Conville (1998) claims that the individual-relationship distinction is unnecessary, as one cannot act on one's own without affecting the relationship: "Personal relationships entail mutual responsiveness and adaptation at any given time one partner's actions are evoked by the other's actions". (p. 34.) According to Brown, Werner and Altman (1998), dialectical processes may involve many different, but embedded social units, which means that they see contradictory interplay as happening between and among social units rather than within a social unit in isolation (p. 150).

Trying to "locate" the contradictions is complex. One possibility is to consider whether they are located within the individual or within the dyad - the relationship - but another is to conceive the location as a dialectical trait and accept it from a both/and viewpoint. I take it that certain contradictions sprout from the individual while others may inherently arise from the relationship. However, it is not necessary to find a consensus, or to make a distinction. We know that a close relationship consists of two individuals, and we know too that the moment an individual commits him or herself to an act of communicating, which is relating, a relationship is created. Bakhtin described this as the self that exists only in relation to others, and it is communication that reflects the relationship (1981; 1984; 1986).

While dialectical tension is said to be jointly owned by the relationship parties by the very fact of their union, this joint ownership does not automatically mean the existence of perfect synchrony in the partners' perception, as there may be little commonality in the partners' experiences of relational contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997). Relational contradictions are said to manifest themselves in two basic ways: antagonistic and non-antagonistic. Baxter and Montgomery (1997) and Sahlstein and Baxter (2001), following Giddens (1979), describe antagonistic contradictions as occurring when relational partners support their respective individual interests with different poles. For instance, one partner may desire more openness in the relationship while the other might want more reticence. Antagonistic contradictions are said to be experienced as person against person. With non-antagonistic contradictions both partners appreciate the unity and opposition of the dialectical poles, and the contradictions are experienced as force against force. For instance, both partners might see the need for autonomy, yet struggle together with the simultaneous need for connection.

Is the manifestation of contradictions (antagonistic and non-antagonistic) dependent on their localization (on the individual, relationship, or societal level)? It seems that the localization and manifestation of contradictions do not go hand-in-hand. When the relational dialectics (and their contradictions) are located in the relationship between two or more people and are experienced as force against force, one can say that they manifest non-antagonistically. For instance, both partners in a relationship acknowledge that they need both autonomy and connection. However, contradictions that are located between two or more people and are experienced as person against person manifest antagonistically. This happens, for instance, when two or more people in a relationship acknowledge that each person wants something different, e.g., he wants autonomy and she wants connection.

Let us now turn to the interdependencies among contradictions, also called dialogic complexity. Dialogic complexity is captured by simultaneous moreness and lessness on a variety of contradiction-based characteristics, for example, more and less interdependence, more and less openness, and so forth (Montgomery & Baxter 1998: 160).

b) Interdependencies among contradictions

Interdependencies among contradictions can be identified by certain features. One can talk, for instance, about 1) multivocal contradictions, 2) a knot of contradictions, and 3) the distinction between contradictions.

1) *Multivocal contradictions*

Dialectical thinking on contradictions presents them as multivocal and not simple binary pairs (see Section 2.2.1). It is said to be much too simple and mechanistic to reduce the dialectics of relationships to a series of polar oppositions like openness versus closedness, autonomy versus connection, certainty versus uncertainty (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery &

Baxter, 1998), although there has been a tendency in earlier research to do so. For instance Dindia (1998) concentrated on the single contradiction of openness-closedness. However, in addition to the relational features of, for instance, change versus stability, one could add other oppositions that co-exist. In this context Conville (1998) presented security - alienation, and disintegration - re-synthesis, for example.

2) *Knot of contradictions*
Totality draws attention to the notion that the contradictions that partners experience in a relationship are part of a whole and cannot be understood in isolation. This means that the poles of each dialectical tension cannot be separated from each other. For instance, autonomy cannot be separated from connection, nor can openness be separated from closedness. This is justified by the fact that they exist together, and they mutually define each other. The concept of totality goes beyond this, suggesting that the terms of each dialectical tension are also intrinsically related to other dialectical oppositions in a relationship. Therefore dialectical contradictions cannot be understood in isolation, but are embedded in a total knot of interrelated contradictions (Werner & Baxter, 1994; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). An example of a knot of contradictions characterizing the openness-closedness dialectic could include the dialectical pairs of discretion-negligence, disclosure-reticence, honesty-deception, and directness-indirectness. See Figure 3. This covers the interdependencies of dialectics among internal and external contradictions.

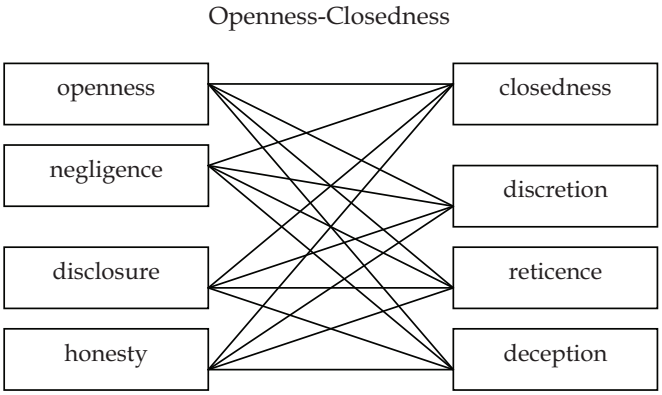

FIGURE 3 The interdependency of contradictions: multivocal and knotted together

Another term that encompasses the knot of contradictions but also refers to the concept of change is *dialogic complexity*, which (as was briefly explained above) is said to be captured by simultaneous moreness and lessness on a variety of contradictions-based characteristics, for example more and less openness, and more and less connectedness. Dialogic complexity is said to refer to a relational system, "a knot of contradictions", that stimulates multidirectional, spiralling,

qualitative and quantitative change that has meaning in its own right rather than in relation to some anticipated end state (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998: 160).

3) *Distinction between contradictions*
Yet one more issue brought up to analytically unravel the knot of contradictions is the distinction of contradictions. This refers to the distinction drawn between internal and external contradictions, with an internal contradiction being constituted within the boundaries of the relationship and an external contradiction constituted at the nexus of the relationship and its external environment. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997) This has already been explained in Section 2.2.

c) Contextualization of the dialectical interplay

As the principle of totality comprises our understanding of the world as a process of relations or interdependencies of contradictions that change and are dealt with in making communicative choices, it is important to know how we conceive the location and interdependencies of the contradictions, in addition to *the contextualization of the dialectical interplay*. As couples act in contexts that are ever changing in time and in place, a finite set of contradictions cannot exist. Moreover, as contradictions are located in the process of relating, i.e. between and among people, we accept that the self - the individual - and the social are dialogically inseparable. The individual becomes only in relating, and relating both produces and reproduces a historical, cultural and social milieu. Hence contradictions are relational phenomena (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998).

The principle of totality encompasses the idea that couples are inextricably intertwined in contexts that are social, historical, and environmental. Couples do not exist in isolation, nor can they be understood apart from these other social factors. Relationship and its context bleed into one another in a dynamic manner (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). However, not all dialectical researchers think this way. Researchers make analytical distinctions between the relationship and the context in order to focus attention on certain aspects of the dialectical experience of relating. Moreover, some also differ in their approach to the relationship-context boundary. Brown et al. (1998) regard context (recognition of the pair's complicated connection to kin, friends, and the broader culture) as an enriching factor that helps us to understand the dialectical processes of the relational partners. Some scholars have adopted a more or less traditional conception of "context", meaning the set of individual, relationship, physical, social, historical, and cultural factors that can influence, and be influenced by, the dialectics of relating (Rawlins, 1998; Conville, 1998).

Montgomery & Baxter acknowledge a debt to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, which refers to a socially constructed time-space dimension and takes into consideration the importance of temporal, spatial, and socio-historical contextual factors that enable the full understanding of the dialectical experience (1998). According to Bakhtin (1981), the term chronotope captures the notion that every dialogue is enacted in a concrete temporal-spatial context,

thus expressing the intrinsic connectedness of time and space. Within a chronotope, context and meaning are mutually created under the constraining pressure of opposing centripetal (the need to connect with one another) and centrifugal (the need to separate from the other) forces. The chronotope changes from one interaction to another, influencing meaning while simultaneously being influenced by each dialogic encounter. According to Bakhtin:

> Chronotopes intersect places where encounters occur […] where webs of intrigue are spun, where denouements occur […] this is where dialogues happen. Most important in all this is the weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private side of life […] of historical sequences with the everyday and biographical sequences. (1981: 246-247).

Bakhtin (1981) also touches on chronotopic values being different in degree and in scope. The *chronotope of encounter* encompasses the predominant temporal element as it is marked by a higher degree of intensity in emotion and values. The *chronotope of the road* is associated with encounter and is characterized by a broader scope, but also by a somewhat lesser degree of emotional and evaluative intensity (p. 243). Two other chronotopes are presented by Bakhtin, the *chronotope of threshold* (as referred to in Section 3.2.2.) meaning the chronotope of crisis and break in a life (1981; 248), and the fundamental *chronotope of biographical time* as used by Dostoevsky, where time flows smoothly in spaces and where the moments of crisis are welded firmly in the course of biographical time (1981: 249). What then is the significance of the chronotopes or of contextualization in relationships characterizing contradictory interplay? Although Bakhtin used the chronotopes to refer to literary forms, he indicated the broader significance of the chronotope to all meaning-making endeavours: "Every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (1981: 258).

Reading Bakhtin's lines on the chronotope one can easily understand Baxter and Montgomery's references to Bakhtin and see how heavily influenced they are by him. They themselves even state: "The link between relational dialectics and dialogism is so close to our minds that […] we use the terms virtually interchangeably" (1996: 47). The chronotope as described in Bakhtin's work (1981) using "narratives" could as well be replaced by the word "relationships" and consequently explains the importance of chronotope:

> What is the significance of all these chronotopes? What is most obvious is their meaning for the narratives. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. […] Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narratives concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. (p. 250).

I have now shown the roots of the theory of relational dialectics, and that Bakhtin, through the notion of dialogism, is the main founder of the theory.

As mentioned in Section 2.2 on Bakhtin and the notion of dialogism, I will discuss the comparative figure indicating the links between dialogism (Bakhtin)

and relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery). Looking at the figure and the theoretical explanations above, it is apparent that relational dialectics have their strong foundation in Bakhtin's dialogism, and that there are clear commonalities between the two.

Figure 4 below shows, left, the circle illustrating dialogism, which was presented earlier in 2.2, and on the right the circle signifying relational dialectics (RD). The relational dialectics circle shows the central concepts as four interdependent circles that are mutually supporting and closely linked to one another.

At the core one finds the contradictions. The second circle represents change, i.e. the interplay of oppositional tensions or variability in any relationship. In other words, change arises out of the quantitative and qualitative movements through time in the underlying contradictions around which a relationship is organized. The RD concept of change is linked to unfinalizability in dialogism. The third circle signifies praxis, where contradictions are managed, and where context and meaning are mutually created under the constraining pressure of opposing centripetal and centrifugal forces. The chronotopic changes from one interaction to another influence meaning and they are simultaneously influenced by each dialogic encounter. Finally, the fourth circle stands for totality, conveying dynamism and the notion that contradictions in a relationship cannot be understood in isolation: they exist together and mutually define each other, and are part of a unified whole. Thus, totality is linked to the dialogism concept of heteroglossia, which stands for the base condition managing the operation of meaning in any utterance. The main concepts of the two circles respectively representing dialogism and relational dialectics have been linked with arrows to illustrate the commonalities between the concepts. See Figure 4 below.

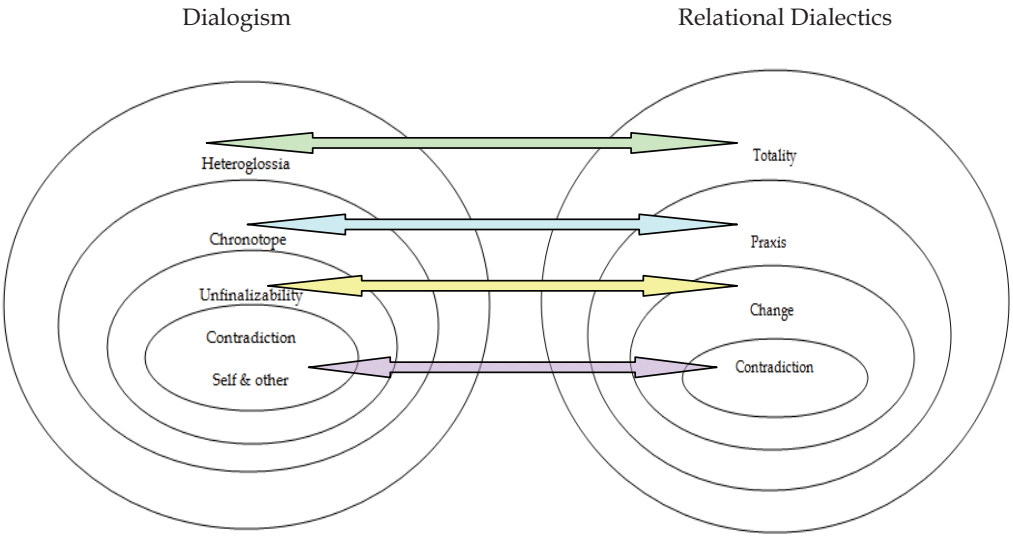

FIGURE 4 Links between dialogism and relational dialectics

To conclude, I have demonstrated in detail the central concepts of relational dialectics in line with Baxter & Montgomery's view of it. Having discussed studies in the field as a means to establish viewpoints and critiques, dialectical research simultaneously opens up the arena to research contemporaries such as Billig, 2001; Brown, Werner & Altman, 1998; Conville, 1998; Dindia, 1998; Erbert, 2000; and Rawlins, 1998.

Now that the central concepts have been presented and explained in detail, some areas still remain to be discussed; for instance, whether conflicts equal dialectical tensions, and some afterthoughts about the concept of change. Let us move on to these issues.

What about conflicts?

The term conflict has two meanings. On the one hand it can mean "overt conflict", where the conflict is brought into the open, as a physical or symbolic confrontation in which one party's words or actions are opposed by another (Deutsch, 1973). On the other hand it is connected with "conflict of interest" and in this case it situates the conflict inside the head, as a situation in which the two parties' goals cannot be simultaneously achieved (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). These two kinds of conflicts are interconnected in that a conflict of interest often produces overt conflict. Conflict, in both meanings, occurs at all levels of society, from individuals to organizations and nation states. Conflicts have considerable value when they are managed constructively. The issue here is not whether conflicts occur, but rather how they are resolved and managed.

There is a difference between resolving a conflict and managing a conflict. Resolving a conflict, Bhushan claims, ends the dispute by satisfying the interests of both parties. Managing a conflict, however, involves specialized interaction

that prevents a dispute from becoming a destructive battle. Managing a conflict focuses on the personal issues so as to allow for a constructive relationship, even though the issues themselves may not be resolvable. (Bhushan, 2004.)

Are dialectical tensions similar to interpersonal conflicts? When contradictions are experienced interpersonally, Baxter (1993) argues, two relational partners harmonize their respective interests and needs with opposing polarities, and these contradictions are referred to as antagonistic or conflictual because they are said to typically involve conflict between the two parties (Baxter, 1993: 144). Then again, taking into account the notion of joint ownership, owned by the relationship parties by the very fact of their union, it can happen that the relational partners are "out of synchrony". Hence non-antagonistic contradictions, which work force against force, never leave a couple so long as their union persists, although subsequent manifestations of the dilemma may or may not be enacted in the form of interpersonal conflict (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 15). This means, so they claim, that interpersonal conflict is not equivalent to dialectical tension, although under asynchronous circumstances dialectical tension may be manifested in interpersonal conflict between two partners.

This sounds easier than it actually is. Put simply, on the one hand one can say that as long as a couple embraces or regards the dialectical tensions as *both/and* parts of the relationship the tensions are non-antagonistic and do not lead to conflict. On the other hand, when relational partners regard the tensions as *either/or* parts of their relationship, this then leads to asynchrony, also called an antagonistic struggle.

Ting-Toomey uses the concept of relational dialectics as a viable option to explain conflict in personal relationships (1994). However she does not shed any light on the question whether and how interpersonal conflict and relational dialectics differ from each other. Instead she introduces an intercultural factor, which is obviously relevant to this study. She presents *knowledge* as one of the dimensions of how effectively intercultural intimate conflict can be managed. (Other dimensions she uses are attitudinal orientations and interaction skills.) The relevance of her study lies in the use of relational dialectics to explain this conflict management. Culture-specific knowledge and personal experiential knowledge are said to complement and enrich our understanding of intimate conflict across specific cultural and gender boundaries. According to Ting-Toomey, when approaching intimate conflict, intercultural romantic couples should remember that intimate partners who subscribe to an individualistic, independent construal of self perspective would tend to use the concepts of the "me-you" dialectical pull model of intimate conflict, with intimate conflict issues revolving around privacy-independence issues on the one hand and romantic connection-interdependence issues on the other. In contrast, intimate partners who subscribe to a collectivistic, interdependent construal of self perspective would tend to experience relational dilemmas as a "we-they" dialectical pull. As such they would view intimate conflict issues as issues revolving around the couple as a unit on the one hand, and the extended family and personal or social network on the other. (Ting-Toomey, 1994: 67.) This seems only to reinforce the fact that in individualistic cultures conflict between

partners is regarded as something to resolve internally (within the boundary of couplehood), whereas conflict between partners in collectivistic cultures tends to be resolved externally (between the couple and the social network).

Erbert (2000) attempts to use relational dialectics to explain conflict. He claims that conflict and contradiction are similar in that both involve opposition and interdependence (p. 640). However, conflict also includes the critical features of struggle and intrusion between parties to manage incompatibilities over relationship needs (p. 641). Baxter and Erbert (1999) argue that conflict occurs when two people are antagonistic, that is, when two people struggle over oppositional positions, i.e. when they are positioned on opposite poles of a contradiction: the contradiction has resulted in a struggle over oppositional positions. Yet we know that when relational partners experience tension between competing desires, this does not necessarily result in conflict. Both parties may recognize the tensions or contradictions that exist over the relationship issues and work harmoniously to manage or deal with the concerns. Erbert's study (2000) shows that dialectical contradictions and conflict are different concepts but are interrelated.

It is quite clear that dialectical tensions are not the same as conflicts, yet it is hard to differentiate between them. Some researchers make use of one concept to find explanations for the other, e.g. Erbert (2000) and Ting-Toomey (1994), who both use relational dialectics with its dialectical tensions to explain the concept of conflict.

One more argument that could bring out a difference between conflict and tensions is the fact that in relational dialectics tensions are conceived as an inevitable and necessary part of keeping the relationship going. We could not say the same about conflicts.

In short, conflicts and contradictions have oppositions and interdependencies in common but they have more differences than similarities. Table 4 below shows these distinctions, which are a summary of and based on the argumentation concerning contradictions and conflicts in this chapter. I have categorized them according to the following distinctions: types, tensions, aims, outcomes and general assumptions.

TABLE 4 Overview of the distinctions between conflicts and contradictions

DISTINCTIONS	**Conflicts**	**Contradictions**
Types	Various	Relational
Tensions	Antagonistic: *person against person*	Non-antagonistic: *force against force*
Aims	• To solve , to re-solve, to get rid of • exclusion of	• To embrace, to accept, to count on • inclusion of
Outcomes	• Resolution • Termination	• Continuous manifestation • Re-emergence
General assumptions	Unfavourable	Positive

What about change?

It is rather complicated to conceptualize the notion of dialectical change - the dialectical interplay of stability and change - which denies the cumulative effect of change (Baxter & Montgomery 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Dialogical complexity gives us a view of relationship change as multidirectional, polysemic, and unfinalized (1998: 8), especially when considering the concept of time (present and future), which allows us to live the constant ongoingness of the dialectical interplay of contradictions. Yet is it not precisely time (which includes not only the present and future but also the past, from what occurred just a minute ago to what happened years and years ago) that constitutes our relational history? Furthermore, how can the cumulative effect of the metadialectic of change - stability or of expression - privacy be denied when it is exactly these dialectics that eventually give people voice in their concrete actions – praxis?

We do not enter into relationships as tabula rasa, but we bring the inner experience of our socialization experiences with us. Over the course of the relationship's history, communicative choices made at one time by the parties are reflected in the choices that seem available to them at a later time. A relationship's contradictions are thus visible in the communicative choices of the moment, but those choices reflect, in part, the constraints of socialization and what has transpired in the prior history of the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 59). No consensus has been found with regard to the concept of time in relational dialectical research.

Time is the concept par excellence used to reflect on change. Several researchers using dialectical theory see time as important. Studies on narratives have been conducted as they show in episodic form the motion of connected lives across the curve of time (Bochner, 1997). Contradictions have been chosen as a research focus for the very fact that they happen in and through time (Conville, (1998). Research conducted both within the history of a given relationship and across the life span of the persons under study has been undertaken by Dindia (1998). Montgomery & Baxter (1998) viewed time as an essential concept through which contradictions should be studied, and they urge researchers to adopt a more social approach to temporality, addressing the subject by attending not only to processes in and through time, but also to processes by which actors jointly construct meaningful continuities and discontinuities among the past, present and future (p. 10).

Revisiting the question of accumulation, Bakhtin considered the "utterance" as *"a link in a chain of dialogue, a link bounded by both preceding links and the links that follow"* (1986: 94). The communicative choices of relationship parties can be viewed as links in a discursive chain. Each link adds something new to the chain but is inherently tied to prior and subsequent links. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 59.)

Yet another issue which is closely connected to the concept of change, the way spirals are represented, is open to discussion. It has not been mentioned anywhere how dialectical scholars perceive spiralling change, also called cyclic-

linear change. This is also relevant to the previously mentioned concept of cumulativeness, which may or may not be part of change, and to the notion of spiralling change. The cumulative factor can perhaps best be understood in the way Conville (1998) explains relational transition. He refers to relational transition as a process that is reitalics, evolutionary, and indigenous to interpersonal communication. By *reitalics* he means repetitive without repeating. By *evolutionary* he means that relational change or transition is not a random, unusual event but a transition that reflects the unfolding into the future of what was latent in the past. He explains *indigenous* as relational transitions or change being the natural habitat of human relationships.

Evolutionary is a remarkable concept as it essentially comprises the cumulative factor. Although the reader may be puzzled by the meaning of the word "latent" in the definition of evolutionary, this has, however, no impact on the notion of cumulative effect. Whether latent or overt, evolution reveals eventual possession of the past ingredients that in a certain time, place and context will have an effect on the present way in which relational partners perceive and deal with the contradictions. I believe spiralling change indeed allows for cyclic - linear change, but it also includes the cumulative effect, which can be drawn in the overlapping of the spirals, and of which certain parts will always live further or be reflected on further, and influence the next spiral. As a specific drawing of the spiralling change has not appeared in the writings of dialectical scholars (such as Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Conville, 1998) it is somewhat hard to imagine how they see it.

A two-dimensional spiral depicts best what relational change is about. This spiral, when placed on a vertical and a horizontal axis, can be understood as follows. The contradictions and praxis are placed respectively above and below the vertical axis, while change, which includes time and conceptualizes the characteristic of "process", is placed on the horizontal axis. All three elements are enacted in the notion of totality, and together this forms the idea of relational dialectics. Contradictions, praxis, change and totality highlight the core of relational partners' communicative experiences. None can occur without the other, and each occurs because of the others. This accentuates the notion of "unity of oppositions" but also the notion of totality. The contradiction-praxis-change dynamic plays not in a smooth, linear progression, but in a cyclical and continual *draw-back-to-leap* pattern of interrelationship among the elements. Partners respond to each tension using praxis pattern(s) by leaping forward and drawing back, and each step in turn activates the next leap forward.

This relational sustainment model relies heavily on Kim's (2001) Stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, which describes the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Kim's model is certainly relevant to relational dialectics as it reaffirms Dubos' (1965) view that the problems of human adaptation can be presented as a dialectic between permanence and change. It converges, according to Kim, with Hall's (1976) identity-separation-growth dynamics, and with Phinney's (1993) concept of the differentiation-conflict-integration process (Kim, 2001: 57). The model also reflects a dialectical relationship between the opposite forces of push and pull, change and stability, engagement and

disengagement (2001: 58). Above all, Kim's model reflects the intercultural transformation process. I have used and adapted the model in such a way as to capture the dynamics of relational dialectics. Whereas Kim used the draw-back-to-leap spiral to show the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, I intend it to signify the process of relational sustainment. This spiral represents best the idea of change and process as I see it, i.e. with the important moments experienced in the past playing a role in the present and also in the future. I mean to argue here that the cumulative effect or the evolutionary aspect (Conville, 1998) is an integral part of the concept of change in relational dialectics.

One can also say that all dialectical tensions, and indeed the whole process of experiencing, happen in *aesthetic moments* (Bakhtin, 1990) which create momentary consummation, completion, or wholeness in what is otherwise a fragmented life experience.

> Romantic relationship parties appear to experience several kinds of these moments in their relationship, including the wholeness of temporal continuity with the past and with the future, the wholeness of a relationship forged out of distinct selves, and a sense of oneness with the flow of the conversation or with the immediate surrounding. (Baxter & De Gooyer, 2001; Baxter, 2004: 187.)

However, many questions have been left unanswered and not everything has become clear. As I mentioned earlier, though, consensus is not the aim of dialectical theory building. Having explained the theory, I will next present the actual framework of relational dialectics.

2.3 Framework of relational dialectics

The main idea of Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics (1996) is that relationships are organized around the dynamic interplay of opposing tendencies as they are enacted in interaction. The ongoing interplay between oppositional features is what enables a relationship to exist as a dynamic social entity. They argue that partners in a relationship cannot extinguish or resolve the interplay of opposites because opposing features are inherent in relationships. Instead, partners have to manage to satisfy both oppositional demands. That is, relational well-being is marked by the capacity to achieve "both/and" status as opposed to "either/or". From a relational dialectics perspective then, bonding in a relationship occurs in both interdependence with the other and independence from the other. One without the other diminishes the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 6). Hence, a dialectical approach to relationships suggests that relationships are comprised of innate contradictions. These contradictions are conceptualized as dialectics in which the tension inherent in the contradiction is not supposed to be something to be resolved through choice but something that defines the nature of the relationship and sustains the life of the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Next let us examine more carefully each of the three metadialectics: 1) closeness (integration-separation), 2) certainty (stability-change) and 3) openness (expression-privacy). These will be illustrated by research conducted in the field. I will present the three metadialectics with both internal (within the boundary of the couplehood) and external (between the couple and their social network) orientations.

I will proceed as follows: each of the three will be presented and elaborated on according to the following features: monologic and dualistic views, and the dialectic view including multivocality and praxis. I will show that monologic and dualistic views can clearly be distinguished from dialectic ones, and that in spite of these monologic and dualistic orientations people appear to value both dialectical tensions in their personal relationships. This also supports dialogically oriented research, which is based on the *both/and-ness* of dialectical tensions. However, it is the dynamic interplay between these tensions rather than their dual presence that constructs relational dialectics.

As multivocality represents the interdependencies between contradictions and their many meanings, it represents a core feature of the focus of the metadialectic. Praxis lies at the heart of relational dialectics and each focus tends to embody its own praxis patterns.

2.3.1 The dialectic of integration-separation

	Dialectic of Integration-Separation
Internal	Connection-Autonomy
External	Inclusion-Seclusion

The focus of this dialectic in its internal and external orientation is *closeness*. The dialectic between connection and autonomy refers to the tension between interdependence with another (connection) and independence from another (autonomy) and therefore encompasses the partners' needs to sustain both interdependence and independence in their relationship. The tension between connection and autonomy has also been called the ME-WE pull, referring to the desire to be with the partner while at the same time wanting autonomy, separation, or independence to be one's own person and do one's own thing (Baxter, 1990: 76). The dialectic of connection-autonomy has been observed as being the most central to relationships:

> No relationship can exist unless the parties forsake individual autonomy. However, too much connection paradoxically destroys the relationship because the individual entities become lost. Simultaneously, autonomy can be conceptualized only in terms of separation from others. But too much autonomy paradoxically destroys the individual's identity, because connections with others are necessary to identity formation and maintenance. (Baxter, 1990: 70).

Monologic and dualistic views of closeness

To understand the dialectical approach of connection-autonomy it is helpful to first look at monologic and dualistic views of connection or closeness. Their starting point is the metaphorical concept of *closeness* being a central issue in the connection-autonomy dialectic. It seems to be a rather deep-seated characteristic of people to think of or evaluate other people's relationships in terms of good and bad, respectively pointing to the notion of closeness and distance. Baxter and Montgomery argue that two parties are thought to be close if they have influence over one another, share similar values and beliefs, and like and love one another. Mutual dependence, partner similarity, and positive affection between the partners are part of closeness or connection, whereas independence, difference, and negativity are marginalized as threats to closeness, illustrating distance or autonomy (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 80). Thus monologic views of closeness in a relationship, as detailed by Baxter and Montgomery, are observed when 1) high interdependence between the relational partners, 2) partners' congruence on attitudes, beliefs, and values, and 3) positive endearment between the partners are present (p. 81-82).

The dualistic view of closeness (as well as of certainty and of openness) is well illustrated by Fitzpatrick's relational typology (1988). By comparing husbands' and wives' perspectives on their marriages, she identified marital couple types. The "pure" types, according to Fitzpatrick, are those in which the husband and wife independently agree on a definition of their relationship. Husbands and wives who share the same ideological views of the relationship, who experience the same level of autonomy and interdependence in their marriage, and share the same view of conflict expression, end up in the same cluster. These couples are categorized as being Traditional, Independent, or Separate. (1988: 77-78). See Table 5.

TABLE 5 Schematic representation of the Relational Typology (Fitzpatrick, 1988)

	Conventional ideology		**Unconventional ideology**	
	Opennes	*Closedness*	*Openness*	*Closedness*
High interdependence	Traditional		Independent	
Low interdependence		Separate		

In Fitzpatrick's context conflict was the focus, but as the focus here is on relational dialectics and not on conflict expression, or non-expression, I have replaced the words high and low conflict of her model with *openness* and *closedness* respectively. With this typology I want to make two points: 1) the typology uses the same aspects of communicative enactment as are used in Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, when they present the three internal dialectics of connection-autonomy, predictability-novelty, and openness-closedness, and 2) the marital typology of these 3 types is introduced dualistically. Fitzpatrick's "conventional ideology" is equivalent to

predictability, and "unconventional ideology" is equivalent to novelty. "High and low conflict" respectively stand for openness and closedness, and "high and low interdependence" respectively stand for connection and autonomy. This typology, however, assumes that the partners in any couple agree that they share the same levels of ideology, conflict and interdependence. The couples are typed as being either Traditional, Separate or Independent, so this typology illustrates a dualistic view of relating, the either/or aspect described by Baxter and Montgomery as communication between relational partners that reflects a choice of one polarity (1996: 46). Also the dynamic interplay between ideology, conflict and interdependence has been neglected. Some couples are either high interdependent (concept of closeness), or low interdependent (concept of autonomy), which shows this is a dualistic characterization. Actually, Fitzpatrick also conceives of two mixed marital types the Separate/Traditionals, and the Traditional/Independents. These mixed types are characterized by husbands and wives with different ideas of how to define their relationship according to the terms mentioned above. However, this is seen as a stagnant state which does not give room for dynamism.

Dualistic voices of closeness tend to link two claims: on the one hand that mutual independence, difference and negativity facilitate relationship closeness, and on the other hand that individuals and relationships tend to systematically vary from one to another in their needs for mutual dependence, sameness and positivity. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 82-83.)

The first claim, that mutual independence, difference and negativity enable relationship closeness, is explained by the needs of individuals to be different from others in order to develop "healthy" self-identities (p. 83). One of the basic types of married couples that Fitzpatrick (1988) identified was called the Separates. Partners belonging to the Separates are characterized by wanting to believe that marriage is so important that both should "sacrifice" independence for the sake of the marriage. They live together but their bond is one of "frozen isolation". Togetherness for the Separates is a matter of habit and convenience, not a sign of a real desire to be in each other's company. When talking about their marriage, the Separates talk about having separate time, activities, and interests, and about each of them having distinct personalities. Their relationship includes little personal closeness, but they would consider their marriage to be happier than most marriages. (Fitzpatrick, 1988: 23.) The Separates illustrate a dualistic view as there is no conception of the dynamic interplay of the contradictions.

The second claim, that individuals and relationships tend to systematically vary in their needs for mutual dependence, sameness, and positivity, is explained by Baxter and Montgomery as "different strokes applying to different folks"(1996: 85), and presents variability as something stable at both individual and relationship level. An example at the individual level is the treatment of gender. This means, so Baxter and Montgomery say, that some scholars argue that females and males who are traditionally socialized are likely to display systematic differences regarding their respective needs for connection and separation (1996). In individualistic societies males are often socialized to hold a conception of the self as autonomous or separate from others, whereas females are socialized to

conceive of themselves through connections with others. From the masculine perspective of autonomy relationships are inherent obstacles to rather than enhancements of self identity. By contrast, the feminine perspective of connection tends to feature a more integrated view of relationship and self: the self becomes realized only through connection to others. The gendered interplay between connection and autonomy is therefore not located in the relationship as an inherent feature of relating, but instead is a structural element located in the gender composition of the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 87).

On a relational level, an example of variability being stable "between-subjects" is, for instance, relationship difference. Fitzpatrick's (1988) three basic types of marital couples, Traditionals, Separates, and Independents, are based on three major conceptual dimensions of relational life: respectively conventionality/non-conventionality, interdependence/autonomy, and conflict engagement/conflict avoidance. All three marital types show a different conceptualization of the interdependence/autonomy dimension. Traditional partners hold a fairly conventional view of marriage and value connectedness over separateness. Separates tend to value autonomy over interdependence, and Independents are likely to value interdependence and autonomy. However, the surprising factor in Fitzpatrick's typology - which I am pointing out in order to illustrate "relational differences" as another dualism - presents Independents as people who appear to have a marriage characterized by *both* interdependence *and* autonomy, which could point to a dialectical orientation. However, once again dynamic interplay is missing. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Fitzpatrick, 1988.)

Having presented the monologic and dualistic view of closeness I will next discuss the dialectical view. The dialectical view of closeness will be clarified by the location of connectedness and separateness, the multivocality of connectedness and separateness, and praxis.

Dialectical view of closeness

Closeness from a dialectical perspective is based on the dynamic interplay between two contradictions, namely the tension arising from the presence of *both* autonomy *and* connection. Starting from the assumption that the contradictions are located in the partners' relationship, I revisit the location of contradictions in order to show the dialectical characteristic of the concept.

a) Location of connectedness and separateness

In rejecting the concept of *self* as a unitary, autonomous entity, one recognizes that the self and others are integrally related. Therefore self-identity, and thus conceptions of our "inner", "private", "unique", or "separate" being, can only be understood through our social relationships. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 88.) This explains that "separateness" (autonomy) can only be understood in the context of "connectedness" and so these two concepts cannot be understood in conceptual isolation from one another.

This also confirms Bakhtin's views on the issue of self as he writes that, "In order to perceive that self, it must find expression in categories that can fix it, and these I can only get from the others […] We get ourselves from the others […]" (paraphrased by Clark and Holquist, 1984: 79). This raises many questions. Does this mean that *I* am *the others* and vice versa that *the others* are *me*? Are the self and the others a fusion? Are relational partners "one"? Do they not exist after all of two different, separate individuals? What is it that eventually proves us to be two individuals in a relationship despite the tension of the self and the other being interconnected?

Bakhtin explains this with the notions of "extralocality" of the two individuals (1986). Extralocality is explained as the key that ensures self identity, while based on the other's perceptions, and will always be different. As each individual is located concretely in time and space, i.e. a unique chronotopic location, two people cannot be fused to one entity as to assume the horizon of the other and see the world through the other's eyes one, one imagines the perspective of the other's concrete chronotope – location in time and space (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 89). The extralocality of a person can also be explained by an individual's experience of socialization or enculturation, which is unique and personal for each single person. The idea that the tension of separateness and connection is located or comes about through our social relationships leads to yet another idea: Montgomery (1993) claims that the location of tensions is the interplay of relational force against relational force. This conforms to the general idea of relational dialectics that contradictions are located in the relationship and act as force against force in dialogic interplay.

b) The multivocality of connectedness and separateness

Multivocality is a term used to describe the fact that dialectical contradictions are not simply binary oppositions; rather, dialectical contradictions are complex webs with many radiants of meaning and always in flux. In this interplay separateness and connectedness include the possibility for multiple meanings, such as the radiants of interdependence, and similarity.

Interdependence

Interdependence from a dialectical viewpoint is not exactly the same as mutual dependence. Mutual dependence, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), is the sum of two states of dependence, whereas interdependence directs the conceptual gaze to the "inter", that is, to the relationship that exists between the parties. It is not the individual partner who negotiates away his or her separateness to become dependent on the other person, so they argue, but interdependence arises through the communicative enactment of the two partners who simultaneously construct connectedness and separateness, both of which are inherent in the partners' relating. It is thus argued that relational partners depend on their relationship, not on one another (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 90).

This statement naturally gives rise to some debate. To claim that relational partners depend on their relationship but not on their partner is quite a strong claim. Can we really exclude or ignore the other partner when talking about interdependence in a relationship? In their statement, Baxter and Montgomery may be referring here to the essence of relating, i.e. the communicative enactment that comes about in the inherent contradictions more specific to the location of contradictions. This brings us back to the earlier arguments of where the contradictions in separateness and connectedness are located. Are they located in the self or in the other, or in the location of tensions, or is it, as Montgomery (1993) proposes, in the interplay of relational force against relational force? This seems to be an endless line of questioning. Are we talking about contradictions in a relationship or in communication? Is the location of contradictions the interplay of a force against a force in the actual communicative enactment of the partners or in the relationship? These questions are rooted in notions of communication and relationship, and they may indeed lead to an everlasting discussion; perhaps a chicken and egg situation. Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics, incorporating Bakhtin's dialogic perspective, start from the assumption that "personal relationships are constituted in communication and recognize that a unique kind of communication makes personal relationships possible" (1996: 42). It is hard to say what comes first. Although relationship is viewed as a communication construct, this does not mean that communication and relationship are the same.

Similarity

Considering the multivocal radiant of *similarity* in a dialogical sense, Baxter and Montgomery argue that similarity and difference in attitudes are not important in themselves, but what matters is knowing that you are very similar and different in the meaning that you attach to things. Similarity and difference are realized through the dialogues of relating, as the partners improvise constructions of themselves and their relationship on an ongoing basis. (1996: 90.)

From the notion of contradiction, one of the central concepts of relational dialectics, we know that interdependent unity refers to the oppositional tendencies that are unified as interdependent parts of a larger whole. Unity refers to the assumption or belief of the existence of the other. The semantic unity/opposition means that concepts can gain meaning only through an understanding of their semantic opposites. Therefore we can say that, semantically, similarity and difference are united in that the meaning of each term comes through its paired opposite; we can understand what similarity means only by an understanding of difference and vice versa. At the same time that similarity and difference are united terms, they are also opposites; total similarity negates difference, just as total difference negates similarity. (Baxter & West, 2003.)

On the subject of the autonomy-connection dialectic, three styles that characterize an adult's relationships with partners were identified: self-focused autonomy, other-focused connection, and mutuality (Harter, Waters, Pettitt, Whitesell, Kofkin and Hordan, 1997). Each style was defined by several dimensions: dominance-submission, whose needs are met, sensitivity to the partner's feelings, clarity of feelings, separateness-intimacy, and concern with the relationship. In the study by Harter et al. (1997) research partners responded to a survey in which they identified their own style of relationship and that of their partner. Mutual individuals most often reported that their partners shared the same style. Other-focused women most often reported self-focused male partners, and self-focused men most often identified their female partners as other-focused. The findings also revealed that mutual individuals with mutual partners reported the highest levels of perceived validation (when one partner listens and takes what one says seriously) and authentic-self behaviour (the ability to express what is experienced as the "real me" with one's partner). The authors emphasise the need to consider the underlying psychological processes governing relationship interactions rather than viewing the outcomes as a product of sex differences per se. This finding fits with Baxter and Montgomery's claim that we should abandon the notion that genders hold relatively stable ideologies of autonomy and connection, as a dialectical perspective presents this tension as inherent in all relationships (1996: 86). It was also observed that changes in style take place over time and that the styles within the autonomy-collection dialects are context-specific (Harter et al., 1997).

In a study on couples' perceptions of their similarities and differences, Baxter and West offer a dialectical perspective (2003). They examined the dialectical unity of two contradictions: similarity/difference and positivity/negativity in a study of friendship and romantic pairs. The findings suggest that at a given point in time – a snapshot of a relationship – partners experience both similarities and differences, sometimes situated in the same phenomenon. This is not supported by some dialectical scholars, e.g. Conville (1991), who argues that similarity and difference differ at various stages in a relationship. In Baxter and West's study similarities are seen as positive because they facilitate communication and provide pleasure and support. Differences are also seen as positive, because they contribute to individual growth and the facilitation of communication. On the other hand similarities and differences can also be seen as negative because they result in conflict or other challenges to communication. These findings contribute to an initial understanding of the complex interweave of similarity and difference in established relationships. (Baxter & West, 2003: 491-513.)

Certain relational events are said to involve different qualitative constructions of connection-autonomy for relational partners. Examples of relational events are the birth of a child and relationship breakup. "Relational events" can also be called turning points. Research on turning points examines all major events in an individual's or couple's relationship since their first meeting (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000). The birth of a first child may bring about uncertainty in a couple's relationship as to how connection and

autonomy have altered because of this event. Also relationship breakup alters the dialectical interplay of autonomy and connection as the partners may not physically spend as much time together any more. As mentioned earlier, a relationship's end is marked by dialogic silence, that is, the absence of contradictions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 73). However, it is rather uncommon for ex-partners not to be on communicative terms at all, so there remains space for contradictions. However, as far as the connection-autonomy dialectic is concerned, the ex-partners may be rather highly autonomy-oriented as their interdependence has decreased.

In their study Baxter and Erbert (1999) examined the perceived centrality of six basic contradictions in the turning points in the relationship development of heterosexual romantic pairs. Overall, internal contradictions were given greater importance than were external contradictions. However, the three internal contradictions were not regarded as equally important by the respondents. The contradictions of connection-autonomy and openness-closedness were given the greatest significance by both males and females across a wide range of turning point event types, e.g. conflict, reunion, physical separation, making up. This study bears out the issue mentioned earlier, that dialectical contradictions cannot be considered in isolation of other dialectical contradictions since they are integrally linked.

In research on partners in a romantic marital relationship, Baxter and Simon (1993) sought to examine perceived partner maintenance strategies as correlations of participant satisfaction in relationships at varying dialectical moments of autonomy-connection contradictions, among others. For both males and females, perceived partner contact was more effective in the autonomy-dominated moment than in the connection-dominated moment. It makes sense, according to Baxter and Simon, that a partner who perceived too much autonomy in the relationship would respond positively to the partner's efforts to increase contact; increased contact between partners limits autonomous activity by the partners and increases connection through more time spent together (1993: 238). This provides support for the view that maintenance strategies function in specialized ways to move a relationship toward a dialectical equilibrium (p. 239).

In a study conducted in 1990 and based on in-depth qualitative interviews with over a hundred people, Baxter examined the perceived salience of the dialectic of integration-separation in the context of non-marital romantic and marital relationships. Results indicated that the connection-autonomy tension was more salient than any other internal contradiction considered in the study. However, no correspondence was found between overall relationship satisfaction and the perceived salience of the connection-autonomy dialectic. At first glance, according to Baxter and Montgomery, this finding appears surprising given the tensions that relationship parties face as they struggle with the opposing rights and obligations of interdependence and independence (1996: 93). They suggest two possible explanations for this absence of a correspondence. The first possibility is that couples may regard the connection-autonomy dialectic as an inherent feature of all personal relationships and it

may therefore be something that "goes with the territory". The second possibility is that dissatisfaction may be associated more with how the connection-autonomy dialectic is managed from moment to moment than with its presence per se (p.93).

Management of the connection-autonomy dialectic is a way of referring to the praxis patterns couples use to manage the contradictions, some of which I will now examine.

Praxis

Contradictions are inherent in relationships; couples are faced with the inevitable flux of dialectical tensions. Praxis patterns, also called improvisational practices, are the ways couples manage the dialectical contradictions in their relationship. Having presented the eight improvisational practices as summarized by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) in Chapter three, in which couples can attempt to manage their contradictions, these improvisations, however, are not equally functional for a relationship.

According to Sahlstein and Baxter (2001), functional improvisations show that couples live comfortably with paradoxes and contradictions, and have an underlying cognitive capacity for dialectical thinking - that is, a cognitive tendency toward acceptance of contradiction. (2001: 125.) Not all practices, however, are functional. As explained earlier, the praxes of denial and disorientation are dysfunctional because, denial represents an effort to deny, obscure, or subvert the existence of a contradiction by legitimating only one dialectical theme to the virtual exclusion of opposing themes, while disorientation is characterized by a fatalistic attitude in which contradictions are regarded as inevitable, negative, and unresponsive to communicative management. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997; Sahlstein and Baxter, 2001.)

A study by Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) on relational dialectics and management strategies in married couples identified the communication strategies couples used to manage the dialectical tensions of autonomy-connection. The communication strategies used included activities segmentation, time segmentation, reframing, interaction climate, compromise, and exclusive selection. The communication strategies mentioned are not all listed in the basic eight patterns drawn up by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). However, these research findings confirm Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) and Sahlstein and Baxter's (2001) claim that the eight improvisational practices are not intended as an exhaustive listing of the ways in which parties can respond to the contradictions inherent in relationships.

Research shows that studies conducted on relational dialectics rarely investigate praxis, and this is also evident here. Most researchers concentrate on the dialectics only and do not pay attention to praxis patterns, so research on praxis is scarce.

2.3.2 The dialectic of stability-change

	Dialectic of Stability-Change
Internal	Predictability-Novelty
External	Conventionality-Uniqueness

The focus of this dialectic in its internal and external orientation is certainty. The *predictability-novelty* dialectical, which belongs to the supradialectic of stability-change, concerns the need for partners to sustain both certainty and uncertainty in their relationship. For instance, on the one hand a person needs a certain kind of routine with the other partner in the relationship. On the other hand one can also look forward to some unexpectedness with the partner, to some excitement, something unpredictable. The constant interplay of oppositional contradictions and the fact that relationships are always in flux do not exactly convey a message of certainty or predictability.

A dialectical approach to relationships claims that healthy relationships are sustained not only by certainty but also by uncertainty or novelty in the relationship. This means that a relationship that was totally certain would also be boring and could not be sustained, but on the other hand total unpredictability would be equally undesirable. Managing the tensions between certainty and uncertainty is central to the understanding of relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996.) To understand the dialogic approach of predictability-novelty, I will first present the monologic and dualistic views of certainty.

Monologic and dualistic views of certainty

One of the communication theories dealing with uncertainty, which actually deals with the reduction of uncertainty, which should result in more certainty, is the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) presented by Berger and Calabrese in 1975. The URT assumes that in the initial stage of interaction between strangers, people are driven by their desire to reduce uncertainty about each other. Berger and Calabrese argue, for instance, that there is a high level of uncertainty present at the outset of a relationship, but as the amount of verbal and nonverbal communication between strangers increases the level of uncertainty for each person in the relationship decreases. As uncertainty is further reduced, the amount of verbal and nonverbal communication will increase.

The context of the study was initial interactions and the main goal was to decrease uncertainty, which, it was supposed, would eventually lead to more certainty. However, researchers have, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 111), applied the URT beyond initial interactions, to established relationships, e.g. romantic relationships (Parks and Adelman, 1983), and as explanations for intercultural adjustment where the UTR has been reformulated to the Anxiety Management Theory by Gudykunst (1983; 1995), and Gudykunst Yang and Nishida (1985). The monologism of URT lies in the privilege it gives

to the centripetal "given" (certainty) with the consequent relative neglect of the centrifugal "new" (uncertainty).

Some scholars have argued that uncertainty, novelty and unpredictability can be important to the well being of some personal relationships. The dualistic characteristics of their work can be explained in two ways. Firstly, uncertainty is considered separately from certainty, so that the both/and interplay of the two forces is not taken into consideration. Secondly, because the dynamic interplay is ignored, the conceptions of certainty and uncertainty are presented rather statically. Dualistic perspectives are given voice in the form of three arguments: 1) a theory-specific counterpoint, 2) arguments for the importance of uncertainty to the well-being of all relationships, and 3) a claim that certainty is more important to some individuals and relationships than it is to other individuals and relationships. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) suggest that the theory-specific counterargument to the URT shows that some of its initial theorems have been less supported than others, which suggests (see Van Lear and Trujillo, 1986) that uncertainty has not always been presented as something negative and that it can even function positively. (Baxter & Montgomery (1996: 112-117.) Berger and Gudykunst (1991) found in their research into uncertainty and communication that certainty does not appear to be universally positive and that it can even prove negative for relationship parties under certain conditions.

The second argument point is the importance of uncertainty to the well-being of all relationships. Researchers (see Cupach and Metts, 1986; Gigy and Kelly, 1992) have found evidence of the importance of uncertainty in relationships: in some break-up situations boredom was a frequently expressed complaint about the relationship or was given as the reason for the break up. Research by Baxter (1992a) and Bruess (1994) also shows that fun and stimulation have emerged as important factors in relationship development, and that novelty leads to satisfaction in friendships, premarital relationships and marriage. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 114.) Baxter and Montgomery (1996) presented other studies in which uncertainty appeared as a positive phenomenon: they introduced the work of Aron and Aron (1986) and Aron, Aron, Tudor and Nelson (1991), and Aron et al. 1992), who put forward the self-expansion theory, which suggests that people seek to expand their personal competence and accomplish this by entering relationships with people who have resources that complement their own. According to Aron and Aron (1986), if two people are very similar, neither has the opportunity for self expansion, and partners in established, predictable relationships are likely to grow tired of one another and of their relationship unless new ways are found to introduce additional self-expansion opportunities on an ongoing basis (p. 116).

Argument three claims that certainty is more important to some individuals and relationships than it is to other individuals and relationships. Fitzpatrick's research on communication in marriage (1988) demonstrates different types of marriage, styles of communication and patterns of happiness. The marital types presented in her work are characterized by different ideologies toward certainty and uncertainty. The "Traditionals" have

conventional ideological values about relationships, which place more emphasis on stability than on spontaneity, and they adhere to regular daily routines. They seem to have a limited tolerance for uncertainty. The "Independents" have fairly non-conventional values about relational and family life. They tend to endorse an ideology of change, the partners do not adhere to a regular daily time-table, and they seem to require less certainty and predictability.

Dualistic views such as those presented above accentuate the either /or-ness of the certainty dimension. The dynamic interplay of centripetal certainty and centrifugal uncertainty is what we adhere to in relational dialectics, and the following section will focus on this perspective.

Dialectical view of certainty

Since certainty and uncertainty are the internal version of the supra-dialectic of stability-change, the concepts of stability and change may require closer consideration. The assumption that change is the inherent order of the social world contrasts sharply with the traditional view, which sees change as a short period between two steady states. Dialectics sees the natural state of relationships as change, fluctuation, evolution and movement. Stability is said to exist, but as a momentary transition in a stream of continuous change. (Montgomery, 1993: 208.) To Baxter and Simon, stability is but an illusion, caused by looking at relationships through too narrow a window of observation and seeing but a mere "moment" (1993: 225). We cannot but accept that the stability-change dialectic is inevitably inherent in relationships and varies according to both the chronotope of the relationship and the particular chronotope of each partner.

Considering the location of the certainty-uncertainty contradiction, a comparison of the URT and relational dialectics may be useful. Whereas in the URT certainty and uncertainty have been conceptualized as individual-level phenomena, meaning that certainty and uncertainty reside in the self-contained mind of one person about another person's feelings, beliefs, and behaviours, a dialectic perspective conceives of certainty and uncertainty as jointly "owned" by both interactors in their dialogues. As a relationship begins (with the onset of dialectical tensions), continues, and may eventually discontinue, it means that it involves interaction over time. Thus, relating is an ongoing process of intertwining the certainty of continuity and the uncertainty of discontinuity. The chronotope, the time-space component, therefore plays an important role. As we know that chronotopes are different for different individuals, personal relationships can be said to be performed in discontinuous chronotopes in which time, space and self identities are never the same (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 210-226.)

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue that parties experience each new performance as a continuation of their relationship by improvising, i.e. by enacting talk in which the *new* current chronotope is framed in the *given* of their interaction history. Therefore the *given* of the past and the *new* of the present

mutually depend on each other in performing a relationship. However, the *new* can transform the *given*, as relationships do take into account "what has been" in reconstructing their joint memory of their past with each successive encounter. (p. 119-120.)

Gudykunst's AUMT (2005) has developed towards a more dialectical view of uncertainty, wherein both certainty and uncertainty are seen as rightful and justifiable parts of the growing process towards intercultural adjustment.

The multivocality of certainty and uncertainty

The multivocal interplay of certainty and uncertainty is yet another example of the multivocality and knot of contradictions that were discussed earlier. The chronotopic nature of the interplay between certainty and uncertainty, e.g. the qualitatively different meanings that appear to be roughly chronological, are found in Baxter's study (1990) on respondents' talk about the history of their relationship.

The five multivocal radiants of certainty-uncertainty that were found revolved around the issues of 1) cognitively predicting the other's personality, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour, which appeared fairly early according to the respondents' accounts of the relationship development, 2) making plans for the scheduling of the next meeting, which is focused on the short-term pragmatic task of crafting relational continuity out of encounter discontinuities, 3) the extent to which the interaction episodes of the pair are fun, exciting, and stimulating, which usually takes place after the first two meanings ("making plans", and "what takes place"), because in the third, the pair self-identified as a couple, 4) the perceived emotional excitement of "romance", which is organized rather around emotional excitement than on activity-oriented excitement, and 5) predictability with the state of the relationship, which revolves around change as an indicator of relational health and vitality. Only five radiants have been presented, but Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 121-125) argue that they are not exhaustive, since certainty and uncertainty can take on a variety of specific meanings as long as there is dynamic interplay in the communicative enactment.

From the theoretical perspective of relational dialectics we now know that in the predictability-novelty dialectic parties struggle with simultaneous yet oppositional needs for uncertainty and novelty versus certainty and predictability. On the one hand relational partners desire certainty of each other, certainty in the state of the relationship, and certainty in the episode-to-episode rules that regulate their interactions. On the other hand, complete certainty and predictability result in emotional deadening, boredom, and insufficient stimulation for partners, who need spontaneity, novelty, and other kinds of uncertainty. (Baxter & Simon, 1993.)

Through their talk and use of symbols (communicative enactment), according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), relationship partners reference the past and the future in their present interactions. These continuity mechanisms allow a pair to construct cognitive and emotional continuity, in the sense that

their relationship exists over and in time, while simultaneously their relationship is physically constituted in a series of discontinuous, discrete episodes.

This also confirms a study in which "happy couples" were observed (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). A set of nine "tasks" or challenges within marriage were set up; they had to be addressed within the marriage from its start and updated throughout. One of the tasks was called: "preserving a double vision". This refers to the two images of the marriage the couples held in their minds: that of images from the past and of the realities of the present. Couples spoke of memories to which they returned regularly, images that reminded them of particular times or events from their shared history that connected their past and present.

A study on turning points, that employed the Retrospective Interview Technique, sought to examine the perceived importance of the six basic contradictions in the turning points of a relationship development for romantic pairs (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Whereas the contradictions of autonomy-connection, for instance were attributed greatest importance across a wide range of turning point event types, the perceived importance of predictability-novelty was localized in particular turning point events. Baxter and Erbert (1999) found that only selective importance was given to the predictability-novelty contradiction. They stated that a change of necessity (which is usually the case in turning point situations) involves an element of uncertainty as it plays with and against the certainty of stability (1999: 566). However, they explain that some particular factors may have caused this, one of them being the description of the predictability-novelty contradiction as presented to the respondents, which may have biased them.

A research project on relationship commitment from a relational dialectics perspective carried out by Sahlstein and Baxter (2001) observed that, among other dialectics, the fundamental dialectic of stability-change and its internal dialectic of predictability-novelty played an important role. Relationship commitment is typically conceived as a general desire for a combined future, and from the relational dialectic perspective, commitment is conceived as the ongoing interplay of opposing yet unified forces, themes, or elements (p. 115). They argued that commitment is a communicative accomplishment between relational partners, that the meaning of commitment is fluid and dynamic, and that commitment is a negotiated process located in the interactions between relational partners (p. 118). Commitment seems to change both in degree (quantitatively) and in kind (qualitatively) in dynamic ways as partners cope with the ongoing flux of contradictions associated with attachment, promise, and dedication. For example, at one point in a relationship a person may experience commitment toward his or her partner as extremely high in terms of level, with commitment understood as staying in the relationship but not for marriage or for life. At another point in time, the person's level may change but commitment might mean something different, so that he or she might now see commitment as an affirmation to be with the partner for life. (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001; 123.)

Praxis

As for the praxis patterns, or the ways in which couples manage the dialectical contradictions in their relationship, studies show that until now very few research projects have covered the praxis of predictability-novelty in personal relationships.

One of the claims about contradictions is that research has devoted more attention to documenting that contradictions exist than to examining their praxis patterns. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001). However, Braithwaite and Baxter (1995) found that the ritual of renewing wedding vows afforded a rich *integrative improvisation* in response to several contradictions, including the stability-change dialectic. At the same moment that a long-term married couple celebrated the endurance of their marriage and the ongoing stability of their love for each other, they recognized that their marriage of today was different from in their newly wed days.

Baxter's research on relational contradictions in relationship development (1990) suggested that romantic relationship parties appeared to negotiate privileged status for certainty and uncertainty, depending on the particular meaning of certainty and uncertainty. The praxis pattern used by the respondents was segmentation; each pole of the contradiction was dominant, depending on the nature of the topic or activity domain. The respondents indicated that they wanted certainty in their partner and in the state of the relationship but novelty in terms of activities and emotional arousal.

Baxter and Simon (1993) undertook a study to examine how perceived partner maintenance strategies related to participant satisfaction for personal relationships that were perceived in different dialectical moments of predictability-novelty. Romantic efforts by the partner were more efficient under conditions of excessive predictability in contrast to conditions of excessive novelty. They explained that the romance strategy, which consists of tactics that involve surprise and spontaneity, probably functions to alleviate the boredom that is characteristic of the predictability-dominated dialectical moment. On the other hand, relationships already high in uncertainty do not benefit from additional uncertainty in their relationship.

In Hause's & Pearson's study (1994) on married couples, the respondents said that they varied the routinized activities of their marriage with efforts to introduce novelty and excitement through such actions as giving surprise gifts or doing something fun together. This praxis pattern reflects spiralling inversion, where each pole of the contradiction is dominant at various points over time, i.e. that there is an ebb and flow between the two poles of the novelty-predictability dialectic.

In the following section I will explore more thoroughly the dialectic of expression-privacy with the monologic and dualistic view, the dialectical view, and multivocality.

2.3.3 The dialectic of expression-privacy

	Dialectic of Expression-Privacy
Internal	Openness - Closedness
External	Revelation - Concealment

The focus of this dialectic in its internal and external orientation is openness. The relational dialectic of openness-closedness, which belongs to the fundamental dialectic expression-privacy, involves the tension between the need or desire to talk openly to each other and the need to avoid disclosure on some issues at some times. This tension points to the need for partners to sustain both candour and discretion in their relationship. As in the previous sections, the monologic, dualistic and dialectical views will be tackled first.

Monologic and dualistic views of openness

Openness encompasses the notion of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is what individuals verbally reveal about themselves (including thoughts, feelings and experiences) to others (Derlega, Metts, Petronio and Margulis, 1993: 2). The act of self-disclosure has been shown to perform multiple positive functions for the individual, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), and they point to self-disclosure correlating with the individual's physical and psychological well-being: self-disclosure is positive because people no longer experience stressful inhibition (see also Pennebaker, 1989; Stiles, 1987). Other positive outcomes of self-disclosure, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), relate to self-disclosure building intimate relationships that function to reduce a person's sense of loneliness (Stokes, 1987), self-disclosure providing the discloser with feedback, thereby enhancing his or her self-understanding (Stiles, 1987). The purpose of self-disclosing is to maintain or enhance a relationship (Rosenfeld & Kendrick, 1984).

Altman and Taylor (1973) and Altman, Vinsel and Brown (1981) saw self-disclosure as the centre piece of relationship development. Their "social penetration theory" proposes that individuals move through relational stages of varying depth and breadth as information is exchanged through the process of self-disclosure and movement: in other words, relational development and relational disintegration occur as people move in a linear fashion through these varying stages of intimacy.

The importance of self-disclosure has gained widespread attention in relationship research. The consensus is that it is "good" in close relationships in that it enhances intimacy, trust, and closeness between partners (Dindia & Fitzpatrick, 1985; Duck, 1994a). The importance of self-disclosure is also indicated by the dissatisfaction expressed by relationship parties in its absence; in research into complaints and breakups a lack of openness is commonly cited as a problem. The act of mutual disclosure by relationship parties provides the parties with evidence that they are trustworthy and trusting, thereby affording emotional security and comfort. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 135). The

characteristics of a relationship (relationship status, length of relationship, relational satisfaction) can be used to predict self-disclosure, and vice versa; self-disclosure is then viewed as a stable characteristic of relationships (Dindia, 1997: 413).

So far we have seen openness from a monologic view where self-disclosure, is treated as one-sided and univoiced. The next approach, however, is dualistic and regards the concept of closedness. Whereas openness or self-disclosure was very important in the social penetration theory and in research on self-disclosure and relational intimacy, some scholars (e.g. Bochner, 1984) think that there are also times when one should value non-intimate relationships and downplay the importance of self-disclosure in interaction:

> The fact that there has been only mild, if any, opposition to the thesis that openness leads to better and more satisfying relationships suggests that some investigators have been lulled into an uncritical acceptance of an untenable proposition (Bochner, 1984: 608).

The communication boundary management model suggests that individuals need to establish a privacy territory with clear boundaries that mark ownership of a private self (Petronio, 1991; 1994). Important to this privacy boundary is the sense of control that it gives the individual in determining others' access. Petronio argues (1994) that people control their privacy boundaries in order to prevent invasions of privacy by others. It is claimed by Baxter and Montgomery that Petronio does not argue for absolute privacy, but rather for a balance between privacy and access. The concept of privacy can be interpreted therefore as a strong counterpoint to the monologue of self-disclosure. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 137). Thus Petronio's view of closedness (privacy) is classified by Baxter and Montgomery as being dualistic. However, when discussing next the dialectical views of openness-closedness, we will see how the revision of the social penetration theory (Altman et al. (1981), and Petronio's (2002) communication privacy management model have evolved towards dialectical theories.

In research on self-disclosure avoidance, participants provided reasons for information discretion or avoiding disclosure, such as fear of projecting an unfavourable image of themselves, fear of losing control, fear of damaging the relationship with the other, fear of being hurt, and fear of negativity affecting relationships with others (Rosenfeld, 1979). These reasons can be seen as supporting an avoidance of self-disclosure. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 138).

Other research also suggests that secrecy could have a beneficial effect on satisfaction in close relationships on the grounds that it provides partners with the opportunity to protect themselves from social risks (Cline, 1989; Petronio, 1991; Finkenauer, 1999).

A study on taboo topics in close relationships showed that taboo topics, such as extra-relationship activity, relationship norms, and topics that induced conflict, were avoided because they were perceived as a threat to the relationship. Taboo topics therefore represented for the relationship parties a

way to protect the relationship and personal vulnerabilities. (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985.)

These research findings give us evidence about the various types of closedness or the avoidance of self-disclosure in terms of secrecy, (absolute) privacy, discretion, taboo topics and the reasons for it, as well as the beneficial effect of closedness. However, they are approaching the subject from a dualistic viewpoint as they emphasize only closedness. The ongoing interplay of both closedness and openness is found in the dialectic viewpoint, to which we will now turn.

Dialectical view of openness

Monologic and dualistic views, as explained earlier, provide a greater understanding of what a dialectical view actually entails. Through the understanding of monologic visions, the counterpoints can be identified, i.e. the dualistic view. Only in the conceptual shift from a dualistic view to a dialectical view can the dynamic interplay between opposing forces be recognized.

People tend to be open or closed depending on the person's perception of various costs and benefits associated with openness and closedness. On the one hand we want to protect ourselves from the vulnerability and risk inherent in disclosure. At the same time, however, there is a certain pressure on a person to permit others access to one's privacy.

Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory has been criticized and the linear structure of the theory has been questioned, even though Altman and Taylor wrote in 1973*:* "The process ebbs and flows, does not follow a linear course, cycles and recycles through levels of exchange" (p. 135-136). However, in 1981 Altman et al. revised their theory and suggested a dialectical approach by proposing that relational development is not an inevitably linear one, but is instead a process marked by tensions in relational development. These tensions include the openness-closedness contradiction, and the tension between autonomy and connection. A dialectical approach suggests that the tensions will lead to cyclical patterns in relational development (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Petronio (2002) discusses the theory of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) as something that is dialectical in nature. She says that the name of the theory was adapted from Communication Boundary Management. In her work "Boundaries of Privacy" (2002), Petronio claims that CPM is both consistent with and different from other dialectical approaches that explain disclosure events. She explains*:*

> Although the reason for suggesting that CPM is dualistic is not completely clear, one possible clue is found in the focus of the notion of equilibrium and balance in the earlier versions of the theory. A way to reflect on the idea of balance is to understand that "assessment" is an alternative word for balance. CPM theory has proposed that when we think about disclosure in relationship to privacy, we "assess" the maintenance of each other before we opt to make some of our private information public while keeping other parts hidden away. […] However, without the tension

> between the two, we cannot determine the nature of the relative strengths for each in connection to the other (2002: 14-15).

Because CPM depends on this interpretation of balance, according to Petronio, the theory is not aiming for equilibrium in the psychological sense. Instead, it argues for coordination with others who do not advocate an optimum balance between disclosure and privacy. (2002: 15).

The importance of the dialectic of openness-closedness has also been identified in the work of Baxter and Simon (1993). Their central research question was how various maintenance strategies (contact, romance and avoidance) function to sustain the satisfaction levels of the parties in romantic and marital relationships characterized at different dialectical moments with respect to, among others, the openness-closedness contradictions. They expected that efforts by the partners to enhance openness would be responded to more favourably by parties in a closedness-dominated moment than in an openness-dominated moment. They state (1993: 231) that if a party perceives too little openness in the relationship, they should react positively to maintenance efforts by the partner to increase direct talk about the relationship, whereas those same efforts by a partner should get less favorable responses from a party who perceives that the relationship is already characterized by too much candour. The findings with respect to the avoidance strategy gained support among males and directional support among females. However, according to Baxter and Simon, this difference could be explained by the ineffectiveness of avoidance under conditions of excessive closedness rather than the effectiveness of avoidance under conditions of excessive openness. Overall, participants did not experience openness as very problematic. This might reflect a general cultural bias in approving openness that makes it difficult for people to respond favourably to non-openness under any circumstances. (1993: 239). An appealing note, however, comes in the conclusion, where Baxter and Simon (1993) state that:

> In sum, this study provides tentative support that the maintenance strategies of contact, romance and avoidance function in a manner consistent with Baxter's (1988) concept of dialectical specialization. All three of these maintenance strategies appear to function in specialized ways to move a relationship toward a dialectical equilibrium. (p. 239).

Considering Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) view that Petronio's work (1991; 1994) was not dialectic but dualistic, exactly because of the notion of equilibrium and balance, it seems quite surprising that in Baxter and Simon (1993) they "still" conceive of *maintenance strategies […] to move a relationship toward a dialectical equilibrium.* However, that was three years before writing their 1996 work, in which maintenance and equilibrium were understood quite differently:

> Because there is no "destination" in a dialogic system, there is no homeostatic fulcrum point whose steady state is achieved through adaptive change. […] Dialogic spiraling is "driven" by the nature of contradiction, not by a system's desire for some

> homeostatic reference point or fulcrum point of equilibrium (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 75).

Montgomery (1993: 213) does not conceive of equilibrium as a dialectical quality and claims that even temporary periods of equilibrium are only punctuated moments in a broader pattern of ongoing dialectical flux. The notion of maintenance also changed and it was given a different name and meaning over time:

> "Thus, the very concept of "maintenance" is seen to privilege one pole of the ongoing and ever present dialectic between stability and change. For these reasons, we prefer to think of partners "sustaining" a relationship rather than "maintaining" it (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 76).

The ways partners sustain their relationship is by praxis strategies, which I will talk about next.

Praxis

Although existing research claims that the two primary dialectics including the contradictions between autonomy-connection and between openness-closedness are the most central in romantic relationships, much less insight has been provided on how relational partners actually cope, i.e. what praxical strategies they use. Two improvisational practices that frequently emerge in dialectical research on the openness-closedness dialectic are spiralling inversion (when each pole of the contradiction is dominant at various points over time), and segmentation (when each pole of the contradiction is dominant, depending on the nature of the topic). (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 1997; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001).

In an interview-based study on relational dialectics and management strategies in marital couples, Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) identified six communication strategies which the respondents claimed they used in order to manage the openness-closedness dialectic: topic selection, time alternation, withdrawal, probing, anti-social behaviours, and deception. I mention these patterns here as they exceed and sometimes overlap some of the eight patterns presented by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). Moreover, this study also shows that praxis patterns are unlimited in number.

The management strategies or praxis patterns are defined by Hoppe-Nagao and Ting- Toomey (2002: 155-157) as follows.

Topic selection refers to the process of separating issues for discussion on account of the topic: certain topics are considered to be taboo or off limits, while others are considered safe to talk about.

A second strategy for managing the openness-closedness dialectic is called *time alternation*, and refers to the spouses' sensitivity to the timing of self-disclosure or the mentioning of certain subjects. In addition, time alternation refers to the couples' allocating a specific time for talking about important issues.

Withdrawal and *probing* emerged as strategies to either pole of the openness-closedness dialectic. Withdrawal strategies included physically removing oneself from the spouse's presence, or becoming silent and refusing to participate in the conversation. The use of withdrawal also seems to tie in to the use of time alternation, as partners described using withdrawal when a topic was brought up at an inappropriate time. *Probing* was used in response to the feeling that there was not enough information-sharing taking place in the relationship. The probing strategy was also used to elicit information from a spouse when he or she was not providing enough information to satisfy the needs of the interviewee. In addition, the use of probing referred to using questions to manage the openness-closedness dialectic in order to try to get the spouse to open up and to discover what topics were safe for discussion.

The strategy of *anti-social behaviour* is associated both with feeling high levels of anger or discomfort and with particular topics. When the couples reach an amount or type of openness that feels unpleasant, they shift to using strategies that appear to create a negative conflict spiral which emphasizes the gap between the dialectical poles rather than minimizing it.

Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey define the use of *deception* (considered an anti-social strategy) with a quotation from Knapp and Comadena (1979: 271); as the "conscious alteration of information a person believes to be true in order to significantly change another's perceptions from what the deceiver thought they would be without the alteration". The kinds of deception identified were falsification, attempting to conceal information, and deliberate omissions. The primary reason the partners gave for deceiving their spouse was to avoid unnecessary stress in their relationship.

After a closer look, however, at the praxis of topic selection and of time alternation, it becomes clear that they are not new, but are the same thing with different names. This can be explained by the fact that Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey's study was based on Hoppe (1993), which in turn was based on work by Baxter (1990), Baxter and Dindia (1990), Baxter and Simon (1993), and Stafford and Canary (1991). At that time Baxter (1990; 1993) used the term segmentation but did not make a distinction between activities and time segmentation. However, when Baxter and Montgomery presented the eight praxis patterns in 1996, these distinctions were taken into consideration. This means that Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey's (2002) *time alternation* was Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) spiralling inversion. *Activities segmentation* (a strategy that came up in the autonomy-connection dialectic) was called segmentation, while *topic selection* can be categorized partly under segmentation since Baxter and Montgomery's (1997) definition of segmentation includes topics as well as activities (p. 344).

2.4 Significant turns in the development of relational dialectics

In the previous sections I outlined relational dialectics using three main notions. The first notion was Bakhtin's dialogism, and the second tackled the central concepts linked to relational dialectical theory. The third notion concerns the framework of relational dialectics, portraying the three meta-dialectics each with their internal and external variants, demonstrated by research conducted in the relational dialectics field. My study on relational dialectics by intercultural couples was first put forward some eight years ago, and as time elapses, so theories develop and change.

In this section, when investigating Baxter and Montgomery's comprehensive work on relational dialectics (1996), which can be considered as *first generation* relational dialectics (Baxter, 2004), I will take a look at how "relational dialectics" has evolved from the beginning until now. As these developments tend to emphasize the ways researchers in the field understand relational communication within a particular socio-cultural context, and reflect - to a certain extent - a particular research paradigm (ranging from post-positivistic towards interpretive), one can say that these developments coincide with the *spirit of the times*.

I will then present a concise overview of the nine significant events or turns deemed important to the development of relational dialectics by Baxter in her "Tale of two voices" (2004), in which she gives an account of how she came to think in dialogic ways about relating. In Table 6 I give an overview of these significant turns.

TABLE 6 Overview of significant turns salient to the development of relational dialectics (Adapted from Baxter, 2004)

Period	Significant turns	Main features
~ 1975	Dualistic turn	Study of opposites
~1982	Dialectical turn	Shift from a dualistic towards a dialectical way of thinking
~1987	Dialogic "Baby steps"	Tinges of Bakhtin's dialogism where social life is centred in the individual's utterance → intrapersonal
~1990	Social turn	Shift towards interpersonal; contradictions are located in the communication between relationship parties
~1993	First-generation Relational Dialectics	First formal articulation of dialogically-oriented relational dialectics theory; contradictions are the main focus
~1995	Chronotopic turn	Focus on time/space concept; relational dialectics are constituted in "change"
~2000	Aesthetic turn	Fleeting "aesthetic" moments in which oppositions are united in unique ways
~2002	Turn to the Carnavalesque	"Discrowning" of dominant conceptions by privileging certain discourses and muting opposing ones
~2002	Second-generation Relational Dialectics	Contradiction is no longer the main focus; several equivalent meanings of "dialogue" are at the centre: dialogue as - centripetal-centrifugal flux, - utterance aesthetic moment - critical sensibility

The first turn, the dualistic turn started around 1975 with the study of opposites. After that, around 1982, came a shift from the dualistic turn towards a dialectical way of thinking, which consisted of a worldview *"destructive of neat systems […] and compatible with the notion of a social universe that neither fixity or solid boundaries"* (Murphy, 1971: 90).

The Dialogic "baby steps" turn (around 1987) had traces of Bakhtin's dialogism in which he saw social life centred in the utterance - utterance being conceived as a communicative act of an autonomous individual. In the 1990s came the social turn, where contradictions, from a dialogic perspective, are located in the communication between relationship parties, and a shift from intrapersonal toward interpersonal is observed.

First-generation relational dialectics started in about 1993 with the joint writing of the book published in 1996, *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In this book the first formal articulation of dialogically-oriented relational dialectics theory appeared, with contradictions as the centre piece. The chronotopic turn (1995) focused on the time-space concept, underscoring Bakhtin's position that social life is best understood locally and concretely. The three meta-dialectics were said to be not exhaustive. In addition, the notion of relational dialectics being constituted in change overthrew the idea of equilibrium and balance as static concepts.

The aesthetic turn (circa 2000) introduced the idea of fleeting or aesthetic moments in which oppositions were united in unique ways (e.g. recalibration and integration as praxis patterns). In the turn of the carnavalesque (around 2002) dominant privileged conceptions (closeness, certainty, candour) were *"discrowned"* and muted ones (autonomy, uncertainty, closedness) became heard. The carnavalesque turn also obliged scholars to adopt a critical sensibility on matters of relationships. This period also introduces the "parody" referred to in Baxter (2010).

Second-generation relational dialectics (circa 2002) moved away from contradiction as the main focus and positioned several meanings of "dialogue" on a more or less equal footing: dialogue as centripetal-centrifugal flux, as utterance, as aesthetic moment, as critical sensibility. Table 6 presents an overview of these significant events.

A brief discussion on the recent turn in the evolution of relational dialectical theory will be provided in Chapter seven as part of my evaluation of the theory of relational dialectics.

To conclude, the above scheme of significant turns underscores and acknowledges the contribution that certain events made to the development of relational dialectical theory. Conceptualizing communication in the theory of relational dialectics presupposes that communication is an essential force; relational dialectics position communication as the fundamental means through which we make the social world meaningful (Baxter, 2008).

In this chapter the relational dialectics by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have been investigated via examining research conducted on the three main fundamental dialectics, each including the internal and the external ones. Providing the monologic and dualistic views on each fundamental dialectic, offered insight on studies carried out in that particular realm. Moreover, it also presented an indication of what the dialectical views might contain. A lot of research has been done on relational dialectics, however, there is not that much variety on the dialectics, besides the mostly investigated internal ones. Multivocality renders this field of research an exciting and promising touch. Praxis however is in need of development. Most research tackles present dialectical tensions but few shed light on how they are actually managed. Finally, contexts mostly contain married and non-married couples. Yet, the context of intercultural couples has not been researched at all from a relational dialectical perspective. Hence, the upcoming research design and findings of the study of relational dialectics by intercultural couples.

3 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This chapter discusses the methodological features of the study. I will first present the premises of the study, its purpose and my research questions, and the methods. In Section 3.4 on the data collection I will introduce the intercultural couples, that is, the research participants, and I will describe the three different types of interviews and their design and implementation: the theme interviews, the concept-map interviews and the e-mail interviews. In this section I will also address ethical considerations and the role of the researcher. The last part of the chapter is concerned with the analysis and presentation of the data.

3.1 Methodological premises of the study

Researchers use different orientations in the philosophy of science, also called meta-theoretical discourses, which are intellectual traditions or paradigms they draw on to think and talk about the phenomenon of interest. These paradigms refer to world views and ways of thinking related to how we understand the nature of knowledge and reality. They form the basis of the methodological choices in research, and the background for research strategies, data collection and data analysis (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 2000). In the next few paragraphs I will discuss some key assumptions that support my methodological choices to position this study in the *interpretive paradigm*.

The purpose of this study is to describe and to understand intercultural couples' relationships through the lens of the relational- dialectics perspective, and it situates this study in the interpretive paradigm. This implies that it consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible. From an interpretive perspective the social world consists of multiple realities according to the subjective position of the person or group. Interpretive researchers are committed to a detailed understanding of how particular social realities are produced and maintained through the everyday practices of, for example,

individuals and relational partners. They need to value the "natives' point of view", which refers to the perspectives and language choices of the individuals being studied. They also need to value context or situation-specific research. Because interpretive research concentrates on local meanings and rule-governed meaning-making processes, the theories valued by interpretive researchers are those focused on meaning and meaning-making. (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008.)

As an interpretive researcher I study intercultural couples' communication in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them. The relation-centred interpersonal communication theory guiding this work, i.e. "relational dialectics", focuses on understanding the role of communication in developing and sustaining couple relationships. Relational dialectics is a theory concerning the meaning-making between relationship parties that emerges from the interplay of competing discourses; it focuses on the struggles in meaning - the disitalics tensions - that influence or constitute these relationships (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2008).

In my research on intercultural couples' relationships I have the initial aim of finding out how intercultural partners understand their world, and how they create and share meanings about their lives. So as far as the ontological basis of the study is concerned, how the nature of reality is perceived, the ontological premises rely heavily on interpretive approaches emphasizing the primacy of interaction and relationship in defining the social realities of intercultural couples. The couples live in a social world of flowing interactions constructed between and among people, they are intersubjectively constructing multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 21). This exchange of social interaction is mostly achieved through linguistic, symbolic activity, i.e. through language. Hence, the world is *socially constructed* from ideas and meanings, conveyed through language, which are constantly changing through human action and imposing constraints and possibilities on the people involved (Paron & O'Byrne, 2000). This is in step with Baxter and Braithwaite's (2008) line of thinking, according to which "relational dialectics is socially constructed, thus joining other social constructionist theories in positioning interpersonal communication as the constitutive mechanism through which we make the lives of people in interpersonal communication relationships meaningful" (p. 356).

Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and the nature of the relationship between researcher and researched. Gaining local understanding of specific social collectives and events by considering the natives' point of view involves inquiry from the inside. Thus we have the interpretive researcher immersing him/herself in the social setting, combining for instance interviewing and observation with his/her own personal experiences in the field. This means that an interpretive researcher in the relational dialectics' tradition elicits accounts about the relationships and interactions within those relationships to develop an understanding of what tensions exist, and how these tensions are created and managed through communicative praxis (Miller, 2002: 53.) One can claim that knowledge is constructed in processes of social interaction through language. The researcher

and the intercultural couples become interactively linked so that the findings can be said to be literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two (Frey et. al., 2000: 19; Lincoln & Guba, 1998: 207).

The methodological basis refers to how the researcher goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known. Not just any method is appropriate. I aim to gain a holistic and inclusive understanding of intercultural couples' relationships in their particular contexts. Therefore I will use an emergent research design, rely on qualitative methods by the acquisition of interview data, and will conduct inductive content analysis. In this way I am attempting to yield context-bound findings that apply to the particular people, situation, or time period studied, and so provide a rich understanding of the social context (Frey et. al., 2000: 20). I am studying meaningful social action in a natural setting, the focus being on the interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the social world.

Briefly, on a meta-theoretical level of discourse this study is embedded in the interpretive research paradigm, which has four main features:

1) seeing the social world as consisting of multiple realities
2) valuing the natives' point of view
3) valuing context or situation-specific research
4) focusing on meaning and meaning-making

In addition, interpretive researchers adhere to ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. In this study the salient ontological assumptions emphasize 1) the importance of interaction and relationship in defining the intercultural couples' multiple social realities which are created intersubjectively, and 2) the world bein socially constructed through the couple's interactions (language). *Epistemologically*, the interpretive perspective underlines 1) the creation of the process in interaction between the researcher and the researched, and 2) therefore implies that knowledge is constructed in processes of social interaction through language. *Methodologically*, interpretive research mainly calls for a holistic and inclusive understanding, an emergent research design, a naturalistic setting, and the use of qualitative (multiple) methods in data collection and analysis. Wrapping up the discussion leads to situating the research design of this study, which is shaped by 1) the meta-theoretical discourse of the interpretive tradition, 2) a qualitative research strategy, and 3) a research method which involves collecting data through interviews.

3.2 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand intercultural couples' relationships in Finland through the lens of the relational-dialectics perspective. The study has three main aims. First I want to find out how intercultural couples experience their relationship, and particularly whether they feel the

push and pull of relational dialectics. Second, since culture is a central concept, I intend to examine the couples' perception of culture and its relevance in their intercultural relationship. Third, considering the particular context of *intercultural* couples, I aim to examine whether these couples experience relational tensions of an intercultural character.

The three central research questions that were posed to meet the above aims are:

1. What internal and external dialectics do intercultural couples experience in their relationship?
2. What interculturally-related dialectics do intercultural couples contend with in their relationship?
3. How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?

With the first research question I intend to investigate relational dialectics through the intercultural couples in this study. Previous studies (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002; Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001) indicate that intra-cultural couples (where both partners come from the same culture) do experience internal and external dialectics. So far, however, relational dialectics have not been researched in the context of intercultural couples. Thus, I want to find out whether the relational dialectics perspective is also applicable with couples in an intercultural context, both within the boundary of the couples' relationship (internal dialectics), and at the interface of the couples and their social network, such as family and friends (external dialectics).

The central focus of the second research question, concerning interculturally-related dialectics, is on two important issues. Firstly, it aims to investigate how intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship. It focuses on the couples' perceptions of whether culture plays any role in their relationship, and if so, what. I examine the role of culture in the intercultural couples' relationship by identifying those topics that come up in the couples' daily life that need negotiation owing to their perceptions of cultural impact. Secondly, exploring interculturally-related dialectics is most vital in this study as the results may lead not only to new and unique findings but also to innovative development of the relational dialectics perspective. Only a few studies have looked at intercultural dialectics as an object of research. Miller (2003) empirically investigated intercultural dialectics in intercultural room-mate relationships. Several scholars only briefly suggest research in an intercultural context from a dialectical perspective (Lustig & Koester, 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 2006). I therefore aim to examine whether intercultural couples face interculturally-related dialectics, and if they do, what they are and how they are managed.

The central focus of the third research question: "How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?" is on couples' perceptions of whether culture plays any role in their relationship and if so, what that role is. Research on intercultural adaptation describes

culture as having an important effect on people and the relationships they form during the acculturation process (Gudykunst, 2005; Kim, 2001; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). I want to extend this search and will examine the role of culture in intercultural couples' relationships by identifying the topics that come up in the couples' daily life that need negotiation owing to their perceptions of cultural impact.

3.3 Choice of methods

The transition from the interpretive research paradigm to methods for collecting and analyzing empirical material is the link to the qualitative research strategy. In this study qualitative methods are used to describe and understand the phenomena that will characterize intercultural relationships according to the three research questions. The nature of the research questions influences how the data will be collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 195). My research questions explore meaningful aspects of the social reality of the intercultural couples' relationship such as knowledge, understanding, views and experiences, which they will convey to me during interviews. The justification for choosing interviews relates to the methodological basis for the study: how should I go about seeking knowledge? Many qualitative methods would have been feasible, but not in this particular "relationship context". For example, participant observation was out of the question, for obvious reasons: it would be quite obtrusive to be an observer and monitor how couples get on in their relationship. Other options were considered, such as diaries, and clearly these methods do have their own specific advantages. But I decided on different kinds of interviews, also called multiple interviews.

As my aim is to describe and understand the intercultural couples' experience of tensions - the pulls and pushes - in their relationship, interviewing seemed to be the best option. It meant that I could meet them face-to-face, have conversations and interact with the couples, listen to them, and gain access to their accounts of their experiences. Interviewing provided me with immediate interaction and dialogue with the people, and it gave the couples public voice. This is in line with an interpretive framework, where interviews are based on the view that knowledge can be generated by individuals through conversation, and that the perspective of others is meaningful (Patton, 2002). In this view the whole interview event (the content, the flow and choice of topics) changes to match what the interviewees know and feel, and reflects that fact that the approach of qualitative interviewing assumes a continually changing world. It also recognizes that what we hear depends on how, when and to whom we ask the questions. In other words, the aim of interviewing the couples is to understand specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world. Interviews enable data collection through direct verbal interactions between individuals and are routinely used in interpretive research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). And as

interviews allow the couples to discuss situations from their own point of view, they give the researcher access to the participants' own perspectives.

In this study I used multiple interviews as a method (multi-method research). This means that a chosen topic can be approached through several different methods of the same generic type, i.e. qualitative in this interview study. This kind of research strategy is called multi-method. Applying several methods to a study increases the possibility of getting varied and extensive results. In this study I conducted interviews with intercultural couples in the following way. Theme interviews were carried out with five couples, i.e. ten persons (N=10), concept map interviews were conducted with six couples, i.e. twelve persons (N=12) (different from the theme-interviewed couples), and the e-mail interviews were conducted with seven couples, i.e. 14 persons (N=14) (different from the theme and concept map interviewed couples).

I have two reasons for using the multiple interview method. Firstly, conducting qualitative research is not a linear but a cyclical project (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Warren & Karner, 2005): research is looked at as a process to which one returns and which can change. Each separate interview study in this research was carefully planned, though the three different types of interview were not all prepared at the outset. After the first theme interviews had been conducted and a preliminary analysis carried out, the findings guided me further, and the next step naturally followed from the previous one. The theme interviews provided me with an abundance of information, on the basis of which I prepared the second interviews: the concept map interviews. Once more the findings steered me in the next direction and so I arranged for the e-mail interviews. The study as a whole was thus a process which came to a conclusion after the three interview studies had been conducted and analyzed. This process, also called an *iterative bottom-up procedure*, continues until the researcher reaches saturation, and produces an investigation from which understanding and findings will emerge (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Hagiya, 1993). In this particular case the study involved a course of action in which I moved back and forth between selecting the groups of intercultural couples and ways of interviewing, and engaging in analysis of the interviews.

Secondly, the procedure of using multiple interviews can also be explained by relating their function to the initial research questions. The first research question, "What internal and external dialectics do intercultural couples experience in their relationship?" is based on the relational dialectics theory of Baxter and Montgomery (1996). Their theory includes two main themes (internal and external dialectics), each indicating three other themes (the six dialectics). Using these themes from the relational dialectical perspective in planning the interviews was an obvious pragmatic choice, and so these theme interviews can be called *theory-driven*.

The research question "What interculturally-related dialectics dointercultural couples contend with in their relationship?" was posed to examine whether intercultural couples experience different dialectics from the ones suggested by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) when they were conceptualized and studied in intra-cultural couples. I wanted to find out from

the couples about relationship issues in an intercultural context and I wanted to do this from a more open perspective, which makes this a *data-driven* investigation. The preliminary analysis of the theme interviews, which repeatedly brought up certain topics - concepts - prepared the ground for creating the concept map. The concept map was designed according to the guidelines provided by Novak (1998), and some adaptations of these guidelines. (See an in-depth explanation in Section 3.4.3).

In the first two interview methods the couples were interviewed together. As this study is about relationships, and the theoretical basis of relational dialectics stresses *the both /and* view, it was more than justified to interview the partners together, as a couple. Besides, when two relationship partners are present, interdependencies between them may become more evident, and this can add to the quality and quantity of information coming out of the interviews. I also thought it was necessary for both partners to be present as this could bring about possible confrontation, which could draw the attention to communication between the partners. Another advantage of interviewing the partners together was that it adds to the relational dialectical perspective, which lies in multiple exchanges arising from varied positions or points of view. According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), having more than one respondent and one interviewer makes the interview a multivocal occasion, which extends the interview to other actual voices that contribute to the meaning-making process. In other words, the participation of more than one person introduces new elements of communicative participation and dialogical features of the interview. More persons represent possibly more multivocality, which becomes more visible and poignant when it is a matter of the individual commitment of several participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995: 66).

The third research question, "How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?" examined the couples' cultural setting and its impact on their current relationship. I decided to use an e-mail interview questionnaire consisting of three open-ended questions, which gave partners the freedom to respond separately. I wanted to have both the Finnish and the non-Finnish partner's viewpoint, but I wanted them separately. Also here I wanted to find out from the couples about their relationship issues with their perception of the cultural factor in mind, which makes these e-mail interviews *data-driven*. This time I was interested in understanding the way each person experienced the relationship for him/herself and her or his role in it. The perceptions of the man or woman may not necessarily be congruent, and both perspectives are necessary for understanding the reality of intercultural couplehood. Some people may be or feel freer to answer without the presence of their partner. Responding to the e-mail questions gave each spouse an ideal opportunity to have more privacy and open up. (See more information on the e-mail interviews in Section 3.3.4).

In conclusion, the three interview types, each with its own characteristics and function, mirror the research questions on the one hand, and, on the other, show how the interview structure or type varies according to the purpose of the interview. See Table 7.

TABLE 7 The link between research questions and interview type

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LINK	INTERVIEW TYPE
What internal and external dialectics do intercultural couples experience in their relationship? (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996)	**THEMES** • based on the main themese and sub themes of Relational Dialectics	*Theory- driven* **THEME interviews** Partners TOGETHER
What interculturally-related dialectics do intercultural couples contend with in their relationship?	**CONCEPTS** • intercultural context, not directly related to RD theory • graphically represented • concepts • creative spaces	*Data- driven* **CONCEPT MAP interviews** Partners TOGETHER
How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?	**OPEN QUESTIONS** • obtaining both partners' perspectives for understanding the reality of intercultural couplehood • answers in written form	*Data-driven* **E-MAIL interviews** Partners TOGETHER & SEPARATELY

3.4 Data collection

This section includes the specifics of the data collection and starts with a presentation of the interviewees, i.e. the intercultural couples, and the sampling procedure. The following three sections then deal with the particulars of the interviews: the theme interviews, the concept-map interviews and the e-mail interviews. Each of these interview types is briefly described as a data collection method, followed by the design and its actual implementation. In the last section of the chapter I present some ethical considerations, and link these with my role as a researcher.

3.4.1. The intercultural couples

The eighteen (heterosexual) intercultural couples participating in this study were two Finnish-Belgian, one Finnish-Canadian, two Finnish-Dutch, two-Finnish-German, one Finnish-Greek, one Finnish-Hungarian, one Finnish-Italian, one Finnish-Japanese, one Finnish-Nigerian, one Finnish-Slovakian, one Finnish-Swiss/Finnish, two Finnish-US American, and one Finnish-Venezuelan couples. In seven of the eighteen couples the non Finnish partner was female. The mean age of the men was 37.2 years and of the women it was 36.6 years. Seventeen couples were married, one couple were co-habiting. In Sweden and Denmark marriage and co-habitation have become virtually indistinguishable (OECD, 2010), and the same trend can be seen in Finland. Since the late 1960s, the practice of co-habitation has become increasingly common, so much so that by the late 1970s most marriages in urban areas grew out of what Finns call *open unions*. In 2010 about 30 % of couples, with and without children, co-habit in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2010).

The minimum length of the couples' marriage or cohabitation was four years, and the maximum 20 years, with an average of eight years and three months. The participants' background information in Table 8 gives an overview of all the 36 participants (18 couples) in each data set: their gender, age, number of years in the relationship, country of origin (which in this case coincides with their nationality), years (length) of marriage, and the languages spoken at home. All the partners in the study have citizenship in their country of origin, apart from the Swiss-Finnish partner in Data 3, who has dual nationality. The couples in *Data 1* were theme interviewed (TI), those in *Data 2* were concept map interviewed (CI), and those in *Data 3* were e-mail interviewed (EI).

TABLE 8 Participants' background information

	Participant couples *(pseudonym)*	**Gender**	**Age**	**Length marriage / years**	**Country of origin**	**Languages spoken at the couple's home**
Data 1 TI1	Tutta Theo	F M	43 43	6	Finland Belgium	Dutch, English, Finnish
TI2	Silja Simon	F M	30 35	4	Finland Canada	English, Finnish
TI3	Kristel Kornelis	F M	33 42	12	Finland Netherlands	Dutch, Finnish
TI4	Riitta Rokuro	F M	29 26	6	Finland Japan	Finnish
TI5	Anita Allan	F M	39 40	17	Finland USA	English, Finnish
Data 2 CI1	Helena Hugo	F M	39 42	14	Finland Belgium	Dutch, Finnish
CI2	Marika Martijn	F M	29 34	4	Finland Netherlands	Dutch, English, Finnish
CI3	Sabine Sami	F M	30 33	4	Germany Finland	Finnish, German
CI4	Sari Silvio	F M	32 29	4	Finland Italy	Finnish, Italian
CI5	Annaliisa Anthony	F M	39 37	10	Finland Nigeria	English, Finnish
CI6	Ladica Lasse	F M	52 50	20	Slovakia Finland	Finnish, Slovakian
Data 3 EI1	Anna Ari	F M	61 51	11	Germany Finland	German
EI2	Bea Petri	F N	28 37	4	Netherlands Finland	Dutch, English, Finnish
EI3	Kersti Kostas	F M	37 32	4	Finland Greece	Finnish, English, Greek
EI4	Dóra Timo	F M	31 32	8	Hungary Finland	Finnish, Hungarian
EI5	Eeva Éric	F M	34 30	7	Finland Finland/Switz	Finnish, French
EI6	Fay Heikki	F M	36 35	9	USA Finland	English, Finnish
EI7	Gabina Kalle	F M	37 41	7	Venezuela Finland	Finnish, English, Spanish

The sampling procedure used is a variant of purposive sampling, also called snowball (or network) sampling (Frey et. al., 2000: 275; Patton, 1999). In practice this means that the interviewees are selected on the basis of convenience (e.g. availability), and according to certain criteria. After the first interviews the participants were asked to identify other qualified people who might be key informants for the study. In this way the number of participants grew. This sampling method proved to be a good one, especially for a potential "difficult-

to-reach" population; asking people to disclose their feelings about an intimate and delicate topic such as relationship issues, the subject matter of this work, can be a delicate matter.

There were two main criteria for participation in the study: 1) being in an intercultural relationship (Finnish - non-Finnish), and 2) being married/co-habiting for at least four years. As this study takes place in Finland, with the couples living their daily life in a Finnish context, I wanted to have one established characteristic, which was, that one of the partners is Finnish. The requirement that the length of marriage/co-habitation should be at least four years was applied because relational partners have different relational experiences in different relational development periods. Four years represent a reasonable relational stability.

As well as the availability of suitable interviewees, the availability of the researcher is also important; from him or her too a certain openness, readiness and alertness is expected. For instance, one weekend, when I was conducting interviews in Helsinki, a German-Finnish couple mentioned their Italian-Finnish neighbours living nearby who were "eager to be interviewed", and available that very morning (a good example of snowball-sampling). However, this was obviously a great opportunity. Having briefly checked that the main criteria were fulfilled, the first contact was made and the interview took place that same morning.

The context of the actual interviews will be described in each of the interview types that follow. My study proceeded as follows: first I interviewed five intercultural couples together using theme interviews. Secondly, I interviewed six intercultural couples, also together, using a concept map. Thirdly, seven intercultural couples were sent three open-ended questions via e-mail, and the partners were asked to answer the questions separately (which resulted in couples answering separately and together). Table 9 presents an overview of the intercultural couples in Data 1, Data 2 and Data 3, the interview type & mode in each case, and the research questions.

TABLE 9 Intercultural couples, interview type & mode, and research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW TYPE & MODE	INTERCULTURAL COUPLES
What internal and external dialectics do intercultural couples experience in their relationship?	**Theme** interviews Partners **TOGETHER**	**DATA 1** Five intercultural couples
What interculturally-related dialectics do intercultural couples contend with in their relationship?	**Concept map** interviews Partners **TOGETHER**	**DATA 2** Six intercultural couples
How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?	**E-mail** interviews Partners **SEPARATE & TOGETHER**	**DATA 3** Seven intercultural couples

3.4.2 Theme interviews

The premise that interview talk is the participants' rhetorical construction of their experience supports the purposes of qualitative interviewing, of which the most essential ones are understanding the participants' experience and perspectives through their explanations, understanding their notions of communication, and gathering information about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002: 173). In this study the collection of the first interview data from five intercultural couples was carried out by theme interviews (Mason, 1996; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000).

Theme interviews concentrate on certain themes which are then discussed. In theme interviews one takes into account that people interpret things and that the meanings are central, as they are created in interactions. Theme interviews are nearer to unstructured than to structured interviews, which means, for instance that the order of the questions may be different although the questions remain the same in each interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000: 47-48). They have the advantage that they are not restricted to a certain length of time, nor is there any limit to how deeply participants go into the subject. However, the most essential point of theme interviews is that instead of following a certain predetermined list of questions the interview progresses fluently around the central themes. In this way, so Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000: 48) argue, theme interviewing offers considerably more freedom with regard to the progress of the actual interview, and offers voice and openness to the interviewer and the interviewees. It allows freedom to change the sequence and forms of the questions in order to follow up the answers given and stories told by the participants.

Design

The main themes and sub themes of these first interviews were 1) internal dialectics with, as sub themes, autonomy-connection, certainty-uncertainty, and openness-closedness, and 2) external dialectics, with as sub themes inclusion-seclusion, uniqueness-conventionality, and revelation-concealment.

These main themes and sub themes cover Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectic theory, as explained in Chapter two. During the interviews, after a general introduction, I briefly introduced the subject of relationships and put forward the idea that at some point or other people in a relationship experience the desire within themselves to go in different directions, which can be called the interplay of "push" and "pull" (Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002).

When, for instance, inquiring about the *internal* dialectic of certainty-uncertainty, which means that on the one hand a person may need certainty or stability in a relationship while on the other hand she/he needs a sense of novelty or something uncertain, I asked the following kind of questions:

1) Well, let's talk about issues like certainty and uncertainty in your relationship. Did you ever experience this interplay between feeling that you enjoy your relationship being stable, certain and planned, and at other times feeling you would like something new or unpredictable to happen in your relationship? Can you give some examples?
2) Taking up this idea of liking some novelty in your relationship, are there any particular events, situations, periods of time, or other circumstances you can think of when this tends to occur?

Depending on the partners' answers I asked for more details, more examples of how they handled particular situations, and the partners' reactions.

External dialectics refer to the fact that besides living in a relationship, couples also live in a community or society. This means they are engaged in social networks. A couple may also experience the interplay of a push-pull situation between themselves and the community. The dialectic of revelation-concealment expresses the extent to which couples reveal or do not reveal information about the nature and status of their relationship to outsiders. On the one hand, couples may benefit from making the existence and character of their relationship known to others - some people cannot support and legitimate a relationship unless they have knowledge of it. On the other hand, other people might interfere with a relationship if they have knowledge of it, and so public disclosure of relational details may jeopardize the relationship's norms of privacy and confidentiality. When interviewing the couples about the external dialectic of revelation-concealment I asked for istance the following kind of questions:

1) This time I am more interested in you as a couple and your social surroundings. This question is about talking about relationship issues to others, to friends and family for instance. Would you say you ever felt the interplay between the desire to tell things about your relationship to others, and the desire to actually conceal certain things about your relationship from others?
2) Are there times, or topics perhaps, that you as a couple want to tell more about your relationship than others might want to hear?
3) What would be some of the events, situations, periods of time, or other circumstances when you actually experience this interplay of push & pull tending to happen?

Also here I asked for more details and examples of how the partners handled the particular situations, what their reactions were and how the people in their social networks reacted.

It is usual for theme interviews (and even for unstructured ones) to be guided by a particular theoretical orientation (Frey et. al., 2000: 278). Besides, just as interview questions are strongly related to research questions, so too are the thematic topics mentioned above illustrative of my research questions.

Implementation

The theme interviews were conducted with five intercultural couples living in Central Finland, and in every case the women were Finnish; the men were Belgian, Canadian, Dutch, Japanese and American. The youngest person was 26,

the oldest 43. The Finnish-Canadian couple had been in their relationship for four years, the Finnish-US couple for 17 years.

Four couples were married and one couple co-habited. All but one couple had children, with an average of 1.9 children per couple. Four out of the five Finnish women had a university degree, and one was still studying. One of the four women holding a degree had a tenured position, one was self employed and two had short-term employment. Four of the five non-Finnish men had polytechnic and university degrees, while one was pursuing postgraduate studies. Three of the five men were short-term employed, and one was self employed.

The language was English in three of the five interviews. One interview was carried out in Dutch, and one was in Dutch with some use of English. See Table 10 for which language was used during the thematic interviews.

The influence of language skills is an important factor in intercultural interviews. It is definitely more challenging for the researcher to interview someone in a second or third language, or for the research participants to engage in conversation in a language which is not their mother tongue. I will return and explore this topic on the basis of Marschan-Piekkari and Reis' research (2004) in my evaluation of the study. At this point it is sufficient to say that all the interviews were carried out multilingually, but English dominated. In case the respondents wanted to hear or read the questions in a language more familiar to them than English, I had prepared all the questions in Dutch and Finnish as well as English.

TABLE 10 Intercultural couples and language(s) of inquiry during the theme interviews

INTERCULTURAL COUPLES *(female partner in italics)*	**LANGUAGE(S) OF INQUIRY**
Finnish-Belgian	Dutch, English
Finnish-Canadian	English
Finnish-Dutch	Dutch
Finnish-Japanese	English
Finnish-USA	English

All the interviews took place on-site, at the couples' homes. During all five interviews the interviewees and I sat at a table with the audio-tape recorder between us. As intended, the couples were interviewed together. Before beginning the actual interview I briefly explained the purpose of the interview, the main topic being the couple's intercultural relationship. The theme interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I informed the couple briefly about my own position as an intercultural spouse in Finland (to establish trust and rapport), and I stressed the issues of confidentiality and anonymity (through the use of pseudonyms). They were promised the opportunity to read the transcripts so that they could check their veracity and make changes if necessary. The couples were presented with a letter of consent, which also contained their demographic information, to read and to sign.

I started the interviews with the *grand tour* (Spradley, 1979; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Typical grand tour questions are meant as a warm up to encourage participants to talk and to disclose their experiences. The couples were asked to briefly outline the history of their relationship, for example, how, when and where they had met, and in what language they communicated at first and nowadays.

All the couples were rather excited and seemed to have an earnest desire to talk about their relationship experiences. Their long stories were important as they intensified the rapport between us, and created an atmosphere of trust which I could more easily share without being too inquisitive. I realized that their enthusiasm came from the subject matter of these stories, as they often dealt with the non-Finnish spouse's and the couple's adaptation issues in Finland.

The duration of the interviews varied between 58 and 120 minutes, with an average length of 86 minutes (one hour and 26 minutes). The length of the interview depended on the interviewees' recollections, on their need to talk about their experiences, on their assessment of what it was worth talking about, on their sharpness of observation, and, not least, on their level of awareness.

The translations of the questions into Dutch and Finnish proved to be helpful as the interviews were carried out in English, Dutch, and Finnish (see Table 10 above). In general there was a good flow from one theme to the other. There was dialogue between the couples and me, and most often between the two partners, which allowed me to observe the partners and their ways of communicating and getting along with each other.

3.4.3 Concept map interviews

Concept mapping is considered to be a process of organizing and representing concepts and their relationships in visual form. Concepts can be defined as perceived regularities in events or objects, or records of events or objects – our own unique experiences – that we designate with a label. Concept maps are based on the premise, consistent with constructivist views of learning, that concepts do not exist in isolation but depend on others for meaning (Novak, 1998; Okebukola, 1990). Whereas concept mapping is most often used with the aim of learning, I use it here as an experimental method – a tool for interviewing - designed particularly for this study.

Design

The concept map interview as a procedure is quite different from a theme interview. Over the years Novak (1998) has found the personal interview to be the most powerful tool for capturing the knowledge held by an individual or groups of individuals. The key to successful probing and capturing of how interviewees think, feel, and act towards an idea, thing, or experience, Novak argues (1998: 101), is for the interviewer to ask the type of questions that reveal as spontaneously as possible the interviewees' thoughts, feelings, and actions

by means of a concept map. This requires some experience and skill on the part of the interviewer. The design of good personal concept mapping involves several steps. The concept map should be prepared with relevant focus question(s) that will represent a good composite of the concepts. Therefore a clear question, or set of questions, has to be formulated first, and then the concepts relevant to the interview and linked to the research question(s) are added. A concept map is always a preliminary starting point, calling for interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Novak (1998) offered some guidelines on how to get started in creating a concept map for personal interviews. Based on his guidelines (p. 127-128), I constructed and adapted a concept map for the interviews in this study.

1) I identified a focus, a main question, that addressed the problem, issues or knowledge domain I wished to be mapped: the couple's relationship: *"Please, tell me about your relationship, its history, memories, stories, everyday life issues, problems and successes, etc. The words below may help you to remember some issues,but are not exhaustive. Feel free to bring up the issues you feel comfortable with."*
2) The concepts were added partly as a result of the findings of the theme interviews (see below for more information). The concepts were placed randomly in a circle, surrounding a box in which was written: "*we as a couple - woman and man"*.
3) With lines I linked the concepts to the box: "*we as a couple - woman and man*", to signify that the concepts are connected to the couple and their relationship.
4) In addition, I added two empty, so called "creative" spaces which indicated that the partners were free to come up with concepts they themselves thought relevant, which I might not have included.

I added d) as this answers the question, "Will my interview only reveal what I designed it to reveal and perhaps miss out large and important segments of the interviewees' ideas?" In other words, I wanted to make sure the couples would also look "beyond" the concept map and would not have the idea that they were only supposed to talk about the concepts given.

As for the concepts, I used the following twenty-two concepts, presented here in alphabetical order: 1) adaptation, 2) challenges, 3) children, 4) colleagues, 5) communication, 6) conflicts, 7) culture, 8) differences, 9) difficult times, 10) expectations, 11) family, 12) feasts & celebrations, 13) free time, 14) friends, 15) happy moments, 16 home, 17) language, 18) male-female roles, 19) neighbours, 20) religion, 21) similarities, and 22) values.

I obtained these 22 concepts as follows. After reading, transcribing and analyzing the theme interviews, it was evident that certain topics repeatedly occurred in all the interviews. I circled them in the transcripts and marked them in the margins. In the process of creating the concept map I decided that a combination of three criteria would be a good strategy to finally select those concepts that would appear in the map. These criteria were: 1) the re-occurrence of concepts from the Data 1 interview transcripts, 2) the relation of many of the concepts, in one way or another, to internal and external dialectics, and 3) the relevance of the concepts in studies on intercultural adaptation. The first criterion, of occurrence in the transcript, is obvious. The second one is also in keeping with the perspective of this study, which is based on relational

dialectics; it is therefore only natural that this perspective is used. Also, I thought that the concepts used might lead to further discussion, different points of view and findings that could be interpreted as pointing to intercultural dialectics. The third criterion is also easy to understand: as at least one partner in each of the couples has made the transition to another country, the topic of intercultural adaptation is very relevant (see Kim, 2001; 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2001).

There is no particular significance to the number twenty-two. I did not want the number of concepts to be so numerous that the map would look confusing and rambling, but neither did I want it to be too empty and vague. I ended up with a good range of twenty-two concepts which looked just right and to the point. The concepts presented in both meaning and number a relevant selection of frequently occurring topics from the theme interviews, appropriate to present to the next group of couples in order to get deep and widely ranging answers to the research question: *"What interculturally-related dialectics do the intercultural couples contend with in their relationship?"*

The actual concept map used in this study was originally created in English, but it was translated into Dutch, Finnish and German for those couples who wanted it in one of these languages.

Implementation

The concept map interviews were carried out with six intercultural couples living in central and southern Finland. The couples were *Finnish*-Belgian, *Finnish*-Dutch, Finnish-*German*, *Finnish*-Italian, *Finnish*-Nigerian, and Finnish-*Slovakian (*italics*= female) - so in four of the couples the women were Finnish. The youngest person was 29, the oldest 52. All six couples were married, and all had children - an average of two children per couple. The Finnish-Italian couple had been in their relationship for four years, the Finnish-Slovakian couple for 20 years.

Of the four Finnish women, three had a university degree and of these, two were pursuing postgraduate studies. Of the two post-graduate students, one had a tenured position and the one was employed short term. The fourth Finnish woman had a polytechnic degree and was also on a short-term contract. The two Finnish men had university degrees and both held tenured positions. Of the six non-Finnish people, one held a vocational education degree, three had university degrees, and two were still university students. One person had a university degree and a polytechnic degree. As for employment, there were the two students; the person with two degrees was unemployed; and one each of the others was self employed, one short- term employed, and one was tenured.

The languages of the interviews were English, Dutch, German, English and Finnish, and English and Dutch. Table 11 presents the languages used in the interviews.

TABLE 11 Intercultural couples and language(s) of inquiry during the concept map interviews

INTERCULTURAL COUPLES *(female partner in italics)*	**LANGUAGE(S) OF INQUIRY**
Finnish-Belgian	Dutch
Finnish-Dutch	Dutch, English
Finnish-*German*	Finnish, German
Finnish-Italian	English
Finnish-Nigerian	English
Finnish-*Slovakian*	English

Four of the interviews took place in the couples' homes, one interview was at the Finnish wife's work place, and another interview began in a nearby park but continued in the couple's living room. During all the six interviews, the interviewees and I sat around a table with the tape recorder between us. It was my intention that the couples should be interviewed together, and this happened in every case. Before beginning the actual interview also here I briefly explained the purpose of the interview, the main topic being the couple's intercultural relationship. The concept map interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I told the couples a little about my own position as an intercultural spouse in Finland (establishing trust and rapport), and I stressed the issue of confidentiality, and anonymity (use of pseudonyms). They were promised the opportunity to read the transcripts so that they could check them and make changes when needed. The couples were presented with a letter of consent, which also contained their demographic information, to read and to sign. The duration of the interviews varied from 50 to 126 minutes, with an average length of 85 minutes (one hour and 25 minutes).

The concept map interview as a procedure is different from the previous theme interview. In essence, the concept map should be considered a tool for the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and for directing and supporting the interviewer. As far as the interaction is concerned, the concept map gets communication going smoothly and freely between the interviewer and the interviewees. After the introductions and background information (also here I did a grand tour) I started with a few questions to get the interviewees going, and then I presented the concept map. I spread out the concept map on the table and briefly explained that they could use any of the words/concepts shown there. It was then that the participants were free to choose the concepts they wanted to talk about and to use them as creatively as they chose.

The interviews varied very much in content as well as in depth and in time. Some couples used the concept map all the time: they pointed to a concept, discussed it and then went on to the next one. Sometimes I saw it as my role to intervene and ask more probing questions, as it seemed to be at times too superficial. Others used only a few concepts for the whole discussion. Overall, the interviews tended to be quite long and people got rather tired. Many people went back many years in their partnership, and the content of the interviews was

very intimate at times. On a few occasions the interviews came to a sudden end, with both interviewees and interviewer exhausted.

3.4.4 E-mail interviews

The third data collection method I used was electronic interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2000), which I call here e-mail interviews. Electronic interviewing, which I conducted via email, was used for virtual interviewing, when internet connections were used asynchronously to obtain information. Once everyone has the technical equipment installed, which these days is usually the case, the advantages include economy, as there are no telephone or interviewer charges, the speed of return, and getting ready transcripts. The disadvantages obviously are the elimination of face-to-face interaction, which means that neither the interviewer nor the participants have the chance to read nonverbal behaviour or observe cues from kinesics, voice, age, class, and other personal characteristics. Thus one does not in the same way establish an interviewer-interviewee relationship and live the moment while gathering the information (Hertz, 1997).

Questions about whether it is possible in electronic interviewing to obtain thick descriptions or accounts of subjective experiences, and whether such interviewing will provide the "process context" so important to qualitative interviews are relevant concerns. However, it can be affirmed already at this stage that most of the answers received - from six of the seven couples, so with only one exception - indeed contained a wide range of subtle and superb descriptions and experiences. So, even when the interviewer-interviewee relationship factor was missing, one could assume that the snowball effect did its job to unite the intercultural couples and the interviewer, since they wrote to me about their relationship so thoughtfully and in such detail. The response rate and quality of response were well beyond my expectations.

Design

The e-mail interviews were carried out by asking all the partners of all the couples to answer (separately) the same three questions in order to obtain an answer to the question: *How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship?*

I aimed to identify the topics that came up in the couples' daily life that need negotiation on account of their perceptions of cultural impact. Therefore the three sub questions asked were the following:

1. When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how is your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
2. What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural backgrounds?
3. Please describe some of the most wonderful moments you have experienced in your relationship thanks to your different cultural backgrounds

The couples were first contacted by e-mail to ask them to participate in these e-mail interviews. After their positive response they were sent a consent form safeguarding their anonymity and guaranteeing confidentiality. In addition they received a form to fill in giving demographic info, and the actual three questions in four languages (Dutch, English, Finnish, and German). They could write in any of the four languages proposed. They were also free to respond via e-mail or via handwritten mail. One couple used the handwritten option.

Implementation

Seven intercultural couples participated in the e-mail interviews, of whom four lived in central Finland and three couples in southern Finland. As the table below shows, five Finnish men were married to foreign women, one Dutch, one German, one Hungarian, one US and one Venezuelan. Two Finnish women had foreign husbands, one Greek and one Finnish-Swiss. The youngest person was 30 years old, and the oldest 61. The Finnish-Greek couple had been in their relationship for four years, the Finnish-Hungarian couple for ten years. All but three couples had children - an average of 1.2 children per couple.

As far as their education was concerned, two of the five Finnish men had a polytechnic degree and three had university degrees. All five were employed, but it was not quite clear whether this was short term or permanent. The Finnish-Swiss man had a university degree and was temporarily employed, and the Greek man, who had a polytechnic degree, was also temporarily employed. As for the five non-Finnish women, one had a polytechnic degree and the other four held university degrees. All the women were employed, and one woman was self employed. Also here it was not clear whether the employment was short term or permanent. The two Finnish women both had university degrees, one was temporarily employed and the other was pursuing a post-graduate degree. Table 12 below shows what languages the participants used when answering the e-mail interview, and whether they answered separately or whether one partner answered on behalf of both.

As was stated in the section on Choice of methods, my aim was to obtain separate answers, but this was realised in only three cases. With the other four couples it was one of the spouses who answered on behalf of them both. In these four cases it was three times the woman who wrote for the two of them, and once it was the man who answered on behalf of his partner, as can be seen in the table below.

TABLE 12 Intercultural couples, language(s) and mode of inquiry during the e-mail interviews

INTERCULTURAL COUPLES *(female partner in italics)*	**LANGUAGE(S) OF INQUIRY**	**MODE OF INQUIRY**
Finnish-*Dutch*	Finnish, English	separately
Finnish-*German*	Finnish, German	separately
Finnish-Greek	English	one on behalf of both
Finnish-*Hungarian*	Finnish	one on behalf of both
Finnish-Swiss/Finnish	English	one on behalf of both
Finnish-*USA*	English	one on behalf of both
Finnish-*Venezuela*	Finnish, English	separately

To summarize, a total of 36 persons (18 intercultural couples) living in different regions in Finland were interviewed using three different interview methods: five intercultural couples by theory-driven thematic interviews, six intercultural couples by data-driven concept map interviews, and seven intercultural couples by data-driven e-mail interviews.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Any research needs to be conducted with ethical issues in mind. In this section I will first present the ethical principles employed in this study, the interview notes used, and then I will discuss my role as a researcher in researchers' reflexivity.

Research ethics refer to moral principles and recognized rules of conduct governing the activities of researchers, which fall under the deontological principles of conducting research. Frey et al. (2000: 141) argue that for communication research to be ethical it must be consistent with fundamental moral principles that apply to all human conduct. The recognized rules of conduct towards a particular group of people demand that certain ethical decisions be made that conform to the values and behaviours considered proper by the larger community of researchers. All researchers must commit themselves to certain guidelines to protect the dignity, privacy, rights, and well-being of the persons who are involved in their study. At the same time these guidelines are intended to assist the researchers in meeting their commitment.

In practice, according to Orb, Eisenhower and Weinaden (2000), the difficulties inherent in qualitative research can be lessened by awareness and use of well-established ethical principles, specifically autonomy, beneficence, and justice. They define autonomy as reflecting respect for people's rights, e.g. the right to be informed about the study, which is usually honoured by informed consent. Maintaining the principle of beneficence means that researchers should for instance care about the potential consequences of revealing research participants' identities; this is a moral obligation. Justice refers to dealing with issues such as informing the participants how the results

will be published, or having an equal share and fairness. One of the crucial and distinctive features of this principle is avoiding exploitation and abuse of participants. (Orb et. al., 2000.)

The participants read and signed a consent letter. I informed the participants about all the ethical issues involved in a study such as this one which is related to communication between relational partners, and about the procedure, e.g. that the interviews would be transcribed and analyzed. I guaranteed confidentiality by assuring anonymity (through the use of pseudonyms), and I assured them of their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Information about the publication of this thesis, about writing scientific articles based on the findings of the thesis, and about presentations at academic conferences, was included in the letter of informed consent which the participants read and signed. This was all particularly important because the participants were being asked to disclose information about their relationship, which is a very intimate matter indeed. Some people took these ethical issues very lightly and said that they were quite comfortable with the research even if someone might "recognize" them, whereas others were quite adamant that I could not mention certain matters at all in order to protect their families, and of course in these cases I have remained silent.

Besides the informed consent, participants also received the interview transcripts, which I sent to their home address, and they could change, correct or delete any parts they later thought were too intimate or too revealing. Two couples decided to delete some parts of the transcripts which they thought might be giving too sensitive information.

Interview notes

As is usual with the interview method of inquiry, I also made observations during the interviews, which I documented in *interview notes* after each interview was carried out. These interview notes, like field notes, are written accounts that filter participants' experiences and concerns through the person and perspectives of the researcher. It is important to be aware that these notes contain the researcher's, not the participants' accounts of their experiences, meanings and concerns (Emerson, 1995: 6). Although such observational notes are said to be crucial to describing and inferring patterns in people's communication, there is little agreement as to how these notes should be compiled (Frey et. al., 2000). I wrote these detailed interview notes in order to be able later to clearly recall the interview situation and to make sense of what happened. Although the three types of interviews are the main data collection method, the information in the interview notes help one remember how the interviews went, and help one interpret the data later on in the analysis.

My interview notes typically contained observations on the following five topics: 1) the setting and the people in the setting, 2) the events of the day, 3) the interaction among the people in the setting, 4) discussion of anything that the researcher learnt about the history, life experience, events or social networks of the participants as they relate to the research question, and 5) general

impressions of the day and of the setting. These five topics were based on and adapted from Schneider's framework (2006). The interview notes written after every interview situation did not always contain all of the five elements; some did, but others concentrated on only three, perhaps, depending on the specific circumstances of each couple's interview situation. A typical entry would be as illustrated by the following extracts after an interview with one intercultural couple:

1) **Setting and the people in the setting**
   Towards the late afternoon I finally meet with C. I had to take the metro to some place I've never been before, never even took the metro in Helsinki. Weird, so empty, clean, open and spacey. C. and her youngest daughter pick me up and we drive to their place. Not so much is spoken; she seems quite in a hurry, in her own thoughts, a bit tense? When coming home - D. is there, we shake hands and have a chat - she immediately starts to make food. I offer my help but it is denied. We talk a bit about this and that, e.g. the neighborhood they live in. She makes toasts with cheese and pineapple, very nice! (and there are cute paper napkins on the table - would they be there every day?) We decide about doing the interview right after dinner as D. will go to his sports later on. The girl is very silent. They say she is behaving extraordinary well now there is a guest ;)

2) **Interaction among the people in the setting**
   They both seem to be talkers and pretty loud and lively ones too ;) They say what they want and do not always agree with the other. Sometimes they correct each other (ideas, thoughts, memories). There is a sense of humor in the air. He seems to be somehow at the same time very typical and then again not at all what one could say Finnishness is about. He is extremely open and communicative for a Finnish man (a bit like J. ;) Nice vibes!

I wrote down the notes on paper after each interview, and later on copied them onto a separate computer file. The total amount of interview notes is roughly 25 pages of text with font size twelve.

Researcher's reflexivity

> *When is [being an insider or an outsider] a key to insightful analysis? When does it stand in the way of clear thinking? How do we even know, when we are inside or outside or somewhere in between? (Acker, 2000: 190).*

Bearing in mind the ethical principles mentioned above, researchers should also reflect on their role or position as researchers. Some call this *researcher reflexivity* (Malterud, 2001) whereas others call it *positionality* (Rose, 2001). Conducting qualitative research inherently calls for reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This means that as a researcher I need to reflect on the nature of my involvement in the research process, and the way this shapes its outcomes. It also means that my background and position will affect what I choose to investigate, the angle of my investigation, the methods I judge most adequate for this purpose, the findings I consider most appropriate, and the framing and communication of my conclusions (see Malterud, 2001: 483-484). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) propose that reflexivity is a helpful conceptual tool for

understanding both the nature of ethics in qualitative research and how ethical practice in research can be achieved.

In qualitative research it has long been considered perfectly legitimate for the researcher to take on the role of "insider" and involve him/herself so as to share in the subjectivity of those being researched. Does this involvement mean to be an insider or an outsider? Is it really the case that qualitative interviewing generates richer and more valid findings when it is conducted by "insiders" - researchers who belong to the same social or cultural group as the people they are studying – rather than by "outsiders"? (Rose, 2001.)

Today these lines are said to have become much more blurred and one talks about more nuanced positions, where attempts have been made to move from a dualistic perspective to a more subtle one in which in-between categories are interposed between "outsider" and "insider". This perspective then covers situations where the researcher's position is more fluid and ambiguous, such as the "outsider within", who comes from the group being studied but has had experiences which set him/her apart from it in certain ways (Acker, 2000). This fluidity can be combined with insider-outsider identities being fluid constructions even within a single research project. This means, for instance, that within the same interview the degree of empathetic connection between the researcher and the researched can vary depending on the topic being discussed at the moment (Dyck, 1997). Dyck (1997:198) claims that researchers' identities can appear multidimensional to those whom we are studying, which may have important implications. The researcher may have to represent him/herself more of an insider or more of an outsider depending on who he/she is interviewing and what topic is being discussed at any given point in an interview, in order to gain access to the person and the information (Rose, 2001:24-26.)

Carrying out this study made me often reflect about these insider-outsider issues, whether to be the one or the other, or how to combine being some of both. As mentioned above, the importance of the issue depended, for instance, on the intimacy of the topics being discussed. Evidently, in many respects I do share the same kind of "intercultural couple" experiences as the research participants. However, this does not make me an insider per se. This came up several times because of the snowball sampling, which means that I was acquainted with some (key) couples, but there were many whom I did not know at all. During the interviews with those few couples I knew better, I tried more to take the role of "the outsider within", whereas with those I did not know I rather took the role of "the insider-outside".

When I was in the *outsider-within* role, there were some cases in which both the couples and I knew about the background of each other's intercultural relationship. They knew I was from *within*, yet exactly because of that I rather distanced myself and was a bit of an outsider; I never assumed or used the "a priori" knowledge I might have possessed about these couples' relationship but I first explicitly asked for it. The *insider-outside* position, on the other hand, refers to being an *insider* with those couples I did not know or had never met before; I was an insider because we are both in an intercultural relationship,

which places us in a particular social category sharing a common perspective. However, I remained an outsider because, although I belonged to the group being studied (intercultural couples), I still, obviously, had experiences which set me apart from them in certain ways. This insider-outsider perspective is a recurring one in the interviews and it indeed requires a certain fluidity and flexibility as there never are clear boundaries.

The insider-outsider position is also relevant to the validity of the research. One can ask whether qualitative interviewing generates richer and more valid findings when it is conducted by insider researchers who belong to the same social or cultural group as the people they are studying - or by outsiders. Then again, having argued that the interpretive qualitative research design yields socially constructed knowledge, the one important and probably only way a researcher can act reflexively and ethically is to be reflexive in assessing how the interview dynamics might have affected the discourse constructed between the researcher and the researched (Maxwell, 1996:66-69).

One way to reach this goal is to be transparent. I will come to an evaluation of the method in the final chapter of my thesis, but reflecting on the data collection, it must be said here that the interviews and their transcriptions are part of the transparency. All the interviews were transcribed, which was a time consuming activity, albeit necessary, as it is one of the first stages in which the researcher actually becomes familiar with the content - after the actual interview. The transcripts were needed for two reasons: for myself, for purposes of analysis, but also for the couples, so that as promised they could read and check whether their words were understood and transcribed correctly. Another factor allowing for transparency is the language used by the interviewer, the interviewed, and the language of the actual transcripts. I take up these considerations in the following section on data analysis.

3.6 Analyses and presentation of the data

This section includes a detailed outline of the data analysis process. The analysis of my research was conducted qualitatively, and mainly inductively. First I argue that data analysis must be seen as an integral part of the whole research process. Then I explain how the process of analysis is related to the data collection design and discuss its main features. Thirdly, I outline the steps carried out in the analysis in this study, emphasizing that the data analysis conducted is multivocal and inclusive. In the final section I briefly present the particulars used in the transcription process and representation, with a view to shedding light on the specific path taken from the actual interviews to the categories and themes that I derived from analyzing the interviews.

Researchers suggest several steps in qualitative data analysis, of which data reduction is often considered the first, followed by data display and conclusion (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, Lindlöf (1995) argues that qualitative data analysis consists of four interrelated principles, of which

process is the first one, only then followed by data reduction, explanation and theory development. I agree with this principle that the data analysis must be considered a process, an inherent part of the ongoing research procedure; it occurs throughout the whole course of a study; from the very onset of this study, during the planning and collecting of data, it has been constantly - even if sometimes unconsciously - present. The idea of process is also reflected in the notion of a holistic understanding of the qualitative process, which has researchers using an emergent design, planning out their research but at the same time taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves during the research process (Frey et. al., 2000:20). With the notion of holistic understanding, also context sensitivity and socio-cultural description play a salient role in the analysis process. In this research context sensitivity, a term used by Stewart (1998: 7), refers to my commitment with the particular setting of intercultural couples to observe linkages among various strands in the holistic data. In this way I can explain observations in terms of connections with other observations originating in the same field. In order to grasp the intercultural couples' point of view, I see their voice as vital, as after all, their presence is the essence of this study, which points to socio-cultural description (Stewart, 1998: 7).

As was presented in the preceding chapter on research design, I used three different interview types for data collection: theme interviews (theory driven), concept map interviews and e-mail interviews (data driven). As qualitative research is a holistic undertaking, these data collection methods evidently affect the analysis. In data-driven analysis, theory is developed inductively, whereas theory-driven analysis is carried out deductively (from the theory), and will also be part of the whole research design. This way of analyzing a combination of theory and data is also called abductive inference, the point being, according to Jensen, that abductive inference introduces a rule which may explain why one encounters particular (surprising) facts in a particular context (2002: 259). This is also in agreement with Miles and Huberman (1994), who claim that analytical induction essentially is a combination of inductive and deductive analysis: *"When a theme, hypothesis, or pattern is identified inductively, the researcher then moves into a verification mode trying to confirm or qualify the findings, which in its turn keys off a new inductive circle"* (p.431). Although these three forms of inference are said to be rarely found in a pure form in any given empirical study, the combinations of the three actually do serve the purpose of inquiry, and it may even be argued that an aspect of each type is required to produce new insight (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Jensen, 2002). In sum, the data analysis of this study is conducted qualitatively and mainly follows the inductive approach.

The process of my data analysis contained two overlapping steps (as condensed from Jensen, 2002; Lindlöf, 1995; and Miles & Huberman, 1994): data reduction and data coding (display and conclusion).

Data reduction

Data reduction occurs already during and right after the interviews, and during the transcription process. In this phase I could identify parts of the data relevant to the topic of the study (intercultural relationships from a relational dialectical perspective) as an integral part of data reduction. The transcription phase first consisted of careful listening to the interviews to get a general idea of what had been said, and then the actual transcription, during which initial colour coding took place, which enabled me to identify text parts significant to the particular topic. This means that there were some irrelevant parts too. Theme interviews include a lot of free talk, not all of which in this case was relevant to relationship issues, although it was very important for establishing and maintaining rapport. At this point I was able to find some initial interrelated aspects which was the basis for and led to an evolving scheme of interpretations.

Data coding (display and conclusion)

Coding (display and conclusions) is said to be the first step toward organizing the data into meaningful categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996: 34). During the data coding I had a closer and also a broader look at the initially colour-coded transcripts and loosely-formed themes. I looked for similarities, differences, patterns, and structures, which would constitute larger themes, which were then ordered and re-organized into categories - with the dialectical idea in mind. I tried as much as possible to have the research questions in mind when interpreting the categories. The established categories were checked, accepted, rejected or modified and conclusions were reached, and I tried to make sense of the concepts within the context of the theory chosen for the analysis.

It is important to remember that these stages of analysis occur simultaneously and are interrelated. The three data sets were initially kept separate but so many similarities in the answers and overlapping issues emerged that the analysis of the three types of interview data affected each other and were somehow interlinked. In this way the inductive cycle was launched again, which resulted in a more inclusive analysis. This strengthens the holistic nature of the research and the interrelatedness of the data, and also asserts the ongoing process as an inductive cycle (Huberman & Miles, 1994: 431). This raises the idea of a multivocal, inclusive analysis, as is illustrated in Figure 5.

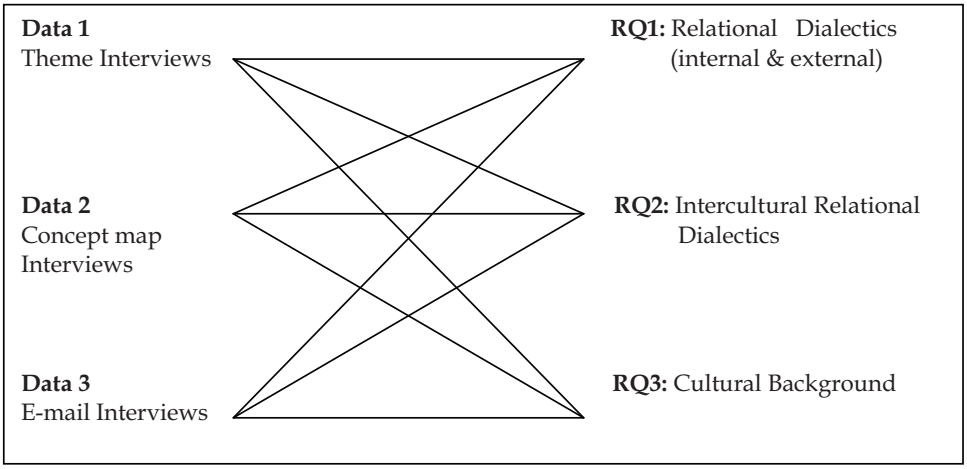

FIGURE 5 Multivocal, inclusive analysis

Figure 5 illustrates the process of analysis. Looking from left to right one can see that from every data type (theme, concept-map and e-mail interview) there is a horizontal line to its particular research question, but there is also a diagonal line to the other research question(s). This means that the categories and themes from the data types have been looked at from the point of view of the various research questions. Looking from right to left, every research question has been considered in terms of the categories and themes from all the three various data types. This then forms a kind of web or knot.

It should be noted that what emerges from this illustration is very similar to the multivocality of relational dialectics, featuring the concept of totality. There is a lot of overlap between the characteristics of multivocality and the data analysis process that was conducted here. Based on the ideas about multivocality of Baxter and Montgomery (1996; 1997), Montgomery and Baxter (1998) and Werner and Baxter (1994), one can relate this same multivocality idea to the multivocality of the analysis process.

It would be indeed much too simple and mechanistic to reduce the data analysis to a mere linear relationship of Data 1 to research question 1, Data 2 to research question 2, and Data 3 to research question 3, as the data and research questions are part of the whole and cannot be understood in isolation. This also means that none of the data types can be separated from any of the research questions. For instance, Data 1 cannot be separated from research question 2 and Data 3 cannot be separated from research question 1. They exist together and mutually define each other; each of the data types is also intrinsically related to each of the research questions. One can therefore say that the data and research questions cannot be understood in isolation, but are entangled in an interrelated knot.

This also concerns the interdependencies between data types and research questions, and encompasses the notion that data analysis as a whole is inextricably intertwined with contexts that are social, historical, and

environmental, also including for instance Bakhtin's notions of temporal-spatial context. This same idea was presented above when considering the data analysis as an integral part of the holistic research process, where context sensitivity and socio-cultural description play a salient role.

Transcripts

According to Nikander (2008), it is particularly important to discuss transcription practices since qualitative research sees transcripts as a central means of securing the validity and guaranteeing the publicly verifiable, transparent and cumulative nature of its claims and findings. She also argues that opening the question of transcription and the art of translation to wider and more detailed discussion is crucial due to the fact that qualitative research is increasingly conducted in an international environment (2008: 225).

The act of transcribing did involve some decision-making on the part of the researcher, which I will explain next. I transcribed all the interviews myself. Doing so enabled me to learn more about the persons interviewed. It made me immerse myself again in the interviewees' world and it gave me the opportunity to become more familiar with the data.

As I was interested in the people's accounts for the sake of their content, I did not make use of a formal detailed transcription system as is used for instance in conversation analysis. I used basic content transcription, which means that the participants' speech was transcribed as I heard it from the audio recordings, including for instance raised voices and laughter. As is usual for qualitative researchers I used minimal notations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002: 206) to signify for instance thinking pauses, overlaps, and laughter. I thought it important to transcribe increases in loudness, laughter, overlaps, and pauses. If these were erased, Blommaert points out, the interviewee's voice would be lost (2005: 68). The most frequent notations I used were:

1) a thinking pause: **/**
2) when participants laugh: **(laughs)**
3) increase in loudness: **!**
4) a question with rising pitch: **?**
5) when irrelevant parts (of the subject matter) of the text/speech are omitted: **[...]**, for instance when we had a coffee break, or a child interrupted the conversation
6) overlapping speech is indicated by underlining the last word(s) of the first speaker and first word(s) of the second speaker, e.g.
   he: but you said that <u>we were going</u>
   she: <u>no, I meant</u> the other day

In my transcriptions I also left out the occasional errors the participants made - for many the language of interviewing was not their native tongue. When presenting extracts from the interviews in the section on findings these errors are not included, neither in the original nor in English: as I am concentrating on the content of the interviewees' speech and not on their grammar or language skills, I see no reason to write these errors down. Especially in intercultural interviewing, language competence is often considered part of being

knowledgeable, and unfortunately, poor language skills may sometimes be equated with low capabilities (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004; Yoshihara, 2001). I also regard this as an ethical issue in order to protect the participants of my study.

As for the problems of translating the *extracts* and the way language skills influence intercultural interviewing, these will be discussed in the chapter on the evaluation of the methods. For now suffice it to say that this study involved translating extracts from Dutch, German and Finnish into English. This was necessary as some interviews were conducted in these various languages. Four interviewees were native speakers of English, and for four English was a second language, spoken in the couples' home. Dutch, which was the mother tongue of five of the partners, and German were also used as interview languages. As for the e-mail inquiries, participants were told that they could answer in Dutch, English, German, and Finnish. A detailed overview of the interview context (concerning language) was reported in the previous sections on the implementation of the theme, concept map, and e-mail interviews.

Sometimes code-switching occurred during the interviews. Sometimes this was because of the partners' native languages, or the language the couple used between them. Obviously, the interviewee's native language was not always the interview language. Also, many of the interviewed couples used a home-language ("*kotikieli*" in Finnish), which was a lingua franca for at least one of the partners, if not both. In the transcripts I did not emphasize code-switching instances, but I will show them in the extracts I use here as they are after all characteristic of a multilingual context. For example:

we lived in such a *surkea* apartment […] in such a *kaksio* [CI1]	we woonden in zo'n *surkea* appartement [...] in zo'n *kaksio* [CI1]

One of the last choices I had to make concerning transcription was its representation in any extracts. These choices related to the language of representation, the language of interviewing, its eventual English translation, which one appears on the right and which one on the left. Research reports based on multiple languages used in data collection such as interviews rarely offer such a multilingual view, which means that the extracts provided in the reports tend to be in the language of the report. This does not follow the principle of transparency. Also, the neglect or misuse of "foreign" languages may be interpreted as unprofessionalism, as if the researcher has completely ignored the interviewees.

Becoming aware of the role played by language and considering various ways of dealing with it is part of methodological contextualisation. This means the act of aligning language considerations with situational conditions, and thus ensuring fit. (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004: 224). According to Nikander (2008: 225), scholars need to be precise about following certain guidelines on how data are translated in an accesible yet precise fashion, how data should ideally be presented to the reader, and how analytic transparency is secured. Researchers should always seek to provide the reader with as much

information on the original as possible, as hiding the original data from the reader's view clearly violates the principle of validity through transparency and access. (ten Have, 1999: 93; Nikander, 2008: 227).

Of the common practices in presenting original and translated data, I have chosen to use parallel transcription in this study whenever the interviews were conducted in any other language than English. Parallel transcription uses a side-by-side column layout. In this type of transcript the verbal content of one line in the language of the research report seeks to follow that of the original (Nikander, 2008: 227-228). When offering the data extracts I will place the English text on the left and the original text on the right; this takes accessibility into account and makes it easy for readers to follow. The following example shows the way interview excerpts will be presented in the findings of this study.

CC: How do you feel? Sabine: Yes, I feel the same perhaps, so I just don't go to Germany on my own, even when you say I should finally book a flight and so, and I just don't do it because there's no time Sami: or you can't leave us Sabine: yes, exactly (both laugh) [CI3]	CC: Wie fühlst du dich? Sabine: Ja, es geht mir genauso vielleicht, also ich gehe auch nicht einfach so mal nach Deutschland alleine, obwohl du sagst ich soll endlich mal ein Flug buchen und so, und ich mache es einfach nicht weil es gibt keine Zeit Sami: oder du kannst uns nie verlassen Sabine: ja, genau (beide lachen) [CI3]

Process of Analysis

After manually colour-coding the transcribed material (for instance, internal dialectics) and making comments in the margins, I reduced the interviewees' words and my comments to different themes, out of which several main themes were identified. The following Table 13 demonstrates how Section 4.1, Connection-Autonomy, came about. It presents the themes and categories derived from analyzing the interviews linked to their respective chapter sections. The final categories are a summary of the interviewees' quotes combined with my comments. The chapter sections are the result of summarizing the categories that comprised those features of the dialectic in question. As is often the case in qualitative analysis, some topics may include elements belonging to more than one category or theme. Such occurrences are not always referred to in this study from every point of view, but perhaps only for a few of the features any one signifies. On occasion a comment with a particular significance can be used in more than one context.

TABLE 13 Illustration of themes and categories derived from analyzing the interviews, linked to their respective chapter sections

Themes	**Categories**	**Chapter-sections of Chapter 4.1 Connection-Autonomy**
1. Too much togetherness /dependency is support	- Excessive togetherness - Support: language	4.1.1 Excessive togetherness and search for separateness 4.1.2 Support: A matter of give and take
2. Missing own space	- Excessive togetherness - Search for separateness	4.1.1 Excessive togetherness and search for separateness
3. Needing a different scene/wanting a different role than mother and wife	- Search for separateness	4.1.1 Excessive togetherness and search for separateness
4. Indecision - whether or not taking the opportunity of autonomy is linked to emotions: guilt, being too close, carrying a burden, the other one stealing your time	- Excessive togetherness - Search for separateness - Support: - language - negative part of giving support - Indecision about going or staying	4.1.1 Excessive togetherness and search for separateness 4.1.2 Support - language - downside of giving support 4.1.3 Praxis: Recalibration: Shall I go or shall I stay?
5. Emotional: acceptance, suffering, embarrassment	Support - language - negative side of giving support	4.1.2 Support - language - downside of giving support: rejection
6. Lack of social contacts - burden to partner - being only a go-between	Support - language - negative side of giving support	4.1.2 Support - language - downside of giving support: neglect
7. Need for support: - reliance on the Finnish partner - dependency on partner: language	Support - language - negative part of giving support, emotional factors	4.1.2 Support - language - downside of giving support
8. When togetherness and separateness come into competition	Excessive togetherness Search for separateness	4.1.3 Praxis: Balance: When couple time becomes family time
9. Raising children makes couples consciously try to create their own time and space, and daily rhythm	Excessive togetherness Search for separateness Support	4.1.3 Praxis: Segmentation: Moving the bed, and discussion together time.
10. Partners perceive space and own time (autonomy) to be in competition with each other	Disagreement about search for separateness	4.1.3 Praxis: Denial: When both have opposing perceptions of one dialectical pole.

TABLE 14 Example of the analysis process with the intercultural couples

Comments	**Themes**	**Categories**	**Sub-section of 4.1 Connection-Autonomy**
"Because I know her very well, so I talk a lot to her / and I don't have anyone actually here whom I know very well, other than her / all my old friends are in Japan, so maybe that's the reason why she has more burden (laughs) than I do, but she has close friends you know, old friends here."[TI4, Rokuro]	Dependency on her, due to lack of social relationships in Finland	Support: - dependency on Finnish partner: lack of social contacts	**4.1.2 Support:**
	He thinks he may be a burden to her	- emotionally: burden	**A matter of give and take**
"Sometimes I feel the same […]" [CI5, Annaliisa]	She supports him by anticipating his suffering. He disregards, minimizes her support	Support is rejected	**. Language** **. Downside of giving support: neglect and reject**
"Well, basically that's just your way of seeing it […] it's very annoying because it's every time that I'm thinking, she is feeling the same thing […]" [CI5, Anthony]			
"Yes, and I am still an outsider there, and then I don't know what is my role in the discussion when I am the interpreter, am I allowed to think myself or not, etc., or am I merely a "go-between" [CI2, Marika]	Her support as interpreter seems to be minimized, overlooked	Support is neglected	
"Being dependent on your partner to get the support needed to cope with the changes related to adapting to a new culture created in the beginning a very difficult and hard time for both of us, though this becomes less and even passes, being an immigrant once in a while just creates the need for extra support." [EI, Bea]	Dependency creates support to cope with changes dealing with acculturation. Immigrant status logically creates need for extra support	Support strengthens dependency (= connection) - Support strengthens dependency (= connection)	
"My wife's Finnish is only passable. I take care of the important calls on her behalf. Of course, I have suffered that she can't take care of many things herself." [EI, Ari]	- Supporting non-Finnish partner as he knows the local language - Feelings of suffering	Support - language - negative part of giving support, - emotional factors	

To go beyond the categorization, a more detailed illustration in Table 14 shows the analysis process of the intercultural couples' comments on the issue of support. These comments were inductively categorized into themes and categories and finally drawn together to form Section 4.1 Connection-Autonomy: *4.1.2 Support: A matter of give and take, with two sub sections: language, and the downside of support: neglect and reject*.

As for the *interview notes* that I have already mentioned, they were not used for formal analysis. Although they contained important information, I used them as a back-up and for reference, to check up on comments to see whether the interpretation and idea derived from the transcripts corresponded with the actual context during the interview.

Presentation of the data

Throughout this study I report on the analyzed data of the thematic, concept map, and e-mail interviews from a multivocal viewpoint. This means, for instance, that when the data analyzed from the concept map interviews and e-mail inquiry contain results that are also connected to my first aim in this study - to understand the push and pull of the intercultural couples' internal relational dialectics – which were the focus of the thematic interviews, these will be reported too. This procedure is applicable for reporting on the three data collection methods and their respective aims.

I also present interview excerpts from the thematic and concept map interviews as well as from the e-mail inquiry whenever these are throw any light on the topic. The excerpts are given in English and in the original language of the interview. More information about this issue was given in the section on transcription.

To ensure the anonymity of the respondents in this study their names have been changed. All the partners of all the intercultural couples were given a pseudonym: for each woman and man I chose from the internet a representative name from their home country. In addition, I tried to give each woman and man belonging to one couple a name starting with the same letter for instance, Tutta-Theo and Silja-Simon, to make it more obvious that they belong together and are one couple. There were three exceptions with the choice of letters for the pairs D-T, F-H, and G-K, whom I called Dóra-Timo, Fay-Heikki, and Gabina-Kalle, as finding names starting with the same letter in each of the native tongues did not seem to be feasible. For myself I use the abbreviation CC in the interview excerpts.

Whenever an excerpt is presented, the type of interview is mentioned: [TI], [CI], and [EI], respectively for thematic interview, concept map interview and e-mail interview. The number representing the couple that was given in Table 8, Participants' background information, will also be mentioned. For example, [TI2) means theme interview, couple 2, and refer to *Silja and Simon* (as is mentioned in Table 8).

Silja: I never saw my parents really talk and go over things and try to figure things out together
Simon: yes, we are very verbal, we talk about things [TI2]

When field or interview notes are used, I mark them with F for field notes and then I mention the interview method and the couple's number from Table 7. For instance:

> Actually they were very willing to answer me, to do this interview, they seemed very hospitable, but as if they weren't really ready to open up. Language? His English is excellent. Her English is good but hesitant, it may be a reason. It took me a long while to start with the actual RD questions (transcript: page 10). I wanted to use the beginning time to warm up, this seemed so necessary, but at the same time I could ask issues about communication (and this related partly to openness-closedness), and about adaptation. They listen to each other, add things when needed, they seem to laugh a lot. Still I feel I have to drag… this is most different from the other interviews I had. They answer with very short sentences, compared to A & A, and S & S, who had these long monologues ;) [FTI4]

This extract comes from field notes, theme interview, couple four: [FTI4].

When presenting findings I will, when appropriate, refer to theoretical links, e.g. integrally linked dialectics contradictions, or interrelated dialectics. For instance, when an example occurs of a connection-autonomy dialectic which is linked with the dialectic of openness-closedness, and this can be observed, I will point this out. Similarly, if a praxis pattern arises, i.e. the strategies couples use to manage their contradictions, this will also be mentioned and explained. This means that I will not treat the contradictions and praxis patterns in isolation of one another but I will take into consideration one of the most inherent traits of relational dialectics, i.e. totality. Totality illustrates how phenomena are interdependent with other phenomena, how they are connected, and how they influence one another (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001).

I will also try to convey the dialecticality by linking the findings and interviewees' voices from both of the relational partners. This is, however, not always feasible as sometimes only one partner reports on a tension, so it may be that some extracts are from one partner only. It is not impossible, though, to examine relational dialectics based on one partner's perceptions (Baxter, 1990), as relational dialectics also manifest in individual cognitive dilemmas (Kramer, 2004; Montgomery, 1993; Van Lear, 1998).

4 RELATIONAL DIALECTICS WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF THE INTERCULTURAL COUPLES' RELATIONSHIPS

In previous chapters the foundations of this research on intercultural couples, the theoretical framework of relating dialectically, and the research design have been established. In this chapter I will present various features of the couples' communication within the boundary of their relationship as I analysed them from the interview data (the thematic, concept map and e-mail interviews). My aim here is to identify, illustrate, and understand the "push and pull" of the internal relational dialectics the intercultural couples experienced. The literature review makes it quite clear now that compared to earlier research on couples' relationships, this study has a new context for three main reasons. These are (1) the intercultural couples' diverse cultural settings as ground work, (2) relational dialectics as a theoretical perspective, and (3) the idea of the couples' relationship as a boundary, within which the intercultural couples present the various dialectical tensions.

Table 15 below presents the framework of the three internal dialectics and illustrates the chapter's subtitles (*italics*), which are the internal dialectics: *Enjoying togetherness, and needing some time apart*, *Feeling certain about the relationship, and needing to spice it up,* and *Longing to share, and keeping things to yourself.*

TABLE 15 Typology of internal dialectical contradictions (Baxter, 1993; 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) with respective section headings in italics

	INTEGRATION-SEPARATION	**STABILITY-CHANGE**	**EXPRESSION-PRIVACY**
INTERNAL	**Connection-Autonomy** *Enjoying togetherness, and needing some time apart*	**Predictability-Novelty** *Feeling certain about the relationship, and needing to spice it up*	**Openness-Closedness** *Longing to share, and keeping things to yourself*

Initially, the findings indicate that the intercultural couples in this study all experienced similar basic internal dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1993; 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) within the boundary of their relationship. This means that they talked about the dialectics of connection-autonomy, predictability-novelty, and openness-closedness. This means that similar characteristics concerning the above mentioned dialectics appear as manifestations to those experienced by intracultural couples according to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. However, the intercultural couples also raised additional - and essentially quite different - topics in distinct contexts within the boundary of their relationship.

4.1 Connection-Autonomy: Enjoying togetherness, and needing some time apart

The way connection and autonomy are perceived by the intercultural couples points to the dynamic processes in a relationship, in which the significance of connectedness and autonomy is likely to undergo changes as intercultural partners act chronotopically in the course of their relationship and in different relationship contexts. This section illustrates how challenging it is sometimes for couples to find even a temporary balance between connection and autonomy. Dialectical tension in the connection-autonomy dialectic was observed by a number of intercultural couples. Different poles of the tensions may operate at different times in the relationship. In the early stages of a relationship connection is generally preferred over autonomy, but after a long time spent in close togetherness partners need some time apart, i.e. autonomy. In this study the intercultural partners perceive connection - autonomy in a variety of ways; there are several manifestations in which the dialectic is enacted. Themes of the connection-autonomy dialectic include excessive togetherness and a search for separateness; support – a matter of give and take; and the praxis patterns of recalibration, balance and spiralling inversion.

4.1.1 Excessive togetherness and the search for separateness

Conversations with the intercultural partners about the interplay of "push and pull" of connection and autonomy in their relationship revealed, among other things, qualitatively different meanings of togetherness and separateness at different phases of the relationship, i.e. early in the relationship history. Several couples mentioned that the start of their relationship was characterized by excessive togetherness, which resulted in irritation, saying stupid things to each other, and getting bored. This led to the partners eventually recognizing their desire for some separate time, i.e. autonomy. During the first weeks and months of a romantic relationship couples obviously need to spend time together in order to strengthen their bond, as no relationship can last unless the people involved spend some time alone. This is considered to be an inherent

feature of all personal relationships, as something that goes with the territory (Baxter, 1990). Issues like whether one still meets one's other responsibilities such as work and studies or whether one still maintains ties to family and friends came up frequently. Although it is only natural to want a close and permanent bond in a relationship, and we know that no relationship can last unless the partners spend some time alone, too much time together can result in the loss of individual identity.

Autonomy can only be understood in the context of connection or closeness, i.e. the two concepts cannot be understood in conceptual isolation from one another (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 88). The intercultural partners felt that closeness was desirable, but not too much, and certainly not at the expense of autonomy. It is quite a challenge if one partner sees autonomy as precious and at risk of being reduced, and thinks of it as "being stolen", as one partner expressed it, while the other partner feels an intense need for closeness. Many of the intercultural couples experienced the pursuit of separateness within the excitement of togetherness as going hand in hand with the notion of indecision and of temporal stagnation.

As already mentioned, when they felt that there was too much connection, partners reported that they looked forward to some separateness. The search for separateness was not perceived by partners as easy. It was experienced differently by the intercultural partners qualitatively (in kind) and quantitatively (in degree), and was associated with various topics. Some of the reported motives for more separateness were, for example, lacking one's own space, needing a change of scene, and, for women in particular, wanting a different role, not just being a mother and a wife. This dialectical tension of connection-autonomy was encountered by several intercultural couples. Below is an example of the search for autonomy and the dilemma and indecision it creates.

> CC: Has it happened sometimes that you for example wanted to be separate and alone for a while, but at the same time you would like to be close as well? And how did you solve this then?
> Tutta: There is more the desire to be apart, that in a way I feel guilty about if I want to be apart, I felt guilty about: can I leave you here? If I got something to do with my friends: can I leave you here alone? […] It's my fault and then I don't know if I should leave or if I should stay
> Theo**:** We have been so much together, of course, and then it makes you sometimes that you say: I want to be alone for a moment, you need to be alone. [TI1]

Here both partners describe the unity and opposition of the dialectical poles, (which makes this a non-antagonistic contradiction). Separateness or the desire to be apart is being expressed in terms of how difficult it was for the Finnish partner to leave the house. Tutta's need for autonomy was perceived as connected to feelings of guilt, self-blame (*it's my fault*), and indecision. Indecision is articulated by *I don't know if I should leave or if I should stay*, and points to uncertainty. This extract exemplifies the integral links between dialectical contradictions, the fact that they are not isolated from other dialectical contradictions. It shows that autonomy - connection is linked with

certainty-uncertainty: the desire to be apart (*autonomy*) and the indecisiveness of if I should leave or if I should stay (*uncertainty*). In the same way being together a lot *(connection)* relates to the *certainty* of a relationship. The chronotope (time and space) points to the beginning of the relationship, and the going and moving of the relationship partners through time.

4.1.2 Support - A matter of give and take

It is apparent that all partners in their relationships sometimes need support. Intercultural partners, however, definitely seem to have an extra need for support. Besides the bonding which intensifies intercultural partners' together time, the partners experienced tensions related to togetherness and separateness which pulled them in two directions. The intercultural couples felt that some of this excessive togetherness was experienced by the non-Finnish partner's intense need for the support of her/his partner. This need for support is presented as the partner's dependence on the Finnish language, and therefore on her/his partner. The non-Finnish partners were partly or totally unable to communicate in Finnish and therefore the spouse needed to help out. This means that for most partners the Finnish spouse is the cultural mediator in terms of language for dealing with everyday tasks.

Cultural mediation is regarded by the intercultural couples as a concrete support. This was presented as language issues with practical things, for instance making phone calls, and with more serious issues in everyday life and doing things they would like to do but were unable to, such as helping with starting up the non-Finnish partner's private enterprise, being an interpreter for business negotiations, helping the partner to adapt to Finnish society, being a listening ear when the partner is discouraged about the employment situation of 'foreigners', and giving moral support. The need for support was encountered when 1) dealing with language matters provided by the partner, but also 2) coping with the challenges of adapting to a new culture. Support was also shown to have some negative sides. Next I will look more closely at these topics.

Language

There is the perception that the non-Finnish partners are very dependent on the Finnish ones. Non-native partners depend on the support of their native spouse, especially when they first move to the partner's new country - Finland in this case. Dependence here was reported as language dependence on the Finnish-speaking partner for making important phone calls, taking care of administrative matters, and doing daily errands. Dependence on the Finnish partner, however, was also linked with feelings of suffering, embarrassment, and acceptance of the "unequal" situation of the non-Finnish spouse. These feelings and reactions were also perceived by the Finnish spouse. The following excerpt illustrates how the connection - autonomy dialectic is revealed in the

dependence on the non-Finnish partner with the need for practical language help. It also shows the Finnish partner's distress.

CC: What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural backgrounds? Ari: Before she came to Finland my wife told me that in Finland she is going to be dependent on me for language reasons. She had to accept and has accepted it as she never studied Finnish intensively […] Our home language is German, so that my wife's Finnish is only passable. I take care of the important calls on her behalf. Of course, I have suffered that she can't take care of many things herself. Anna: It was actually easy for me to submit to Finnish culture. [EI1]	CC: Mitä erityisiä kysymyksiä / asioita joudutte parisuhteessanne käymään läpi / keskustelemaan, jotka johtavat juurensa kulttuuritaustan eroista? Ari: Ennen Suomeen muuttamista vaimoni sanoi minulle, että hän tulee olemaan Suomessa minusta riippuvainen kielellisistä syistä. Tämän hänen on täytynyt hyväksyä ja on hyväksynytkin, koska hän ei ole opiskellut suomea kovin intensiivisesti […] Kotikielemme ovat saksa ja näin ollen vaimoni on vain välttävää. Tärkeät puhelut hoidan hänen puolestaan. Totta kai olen kärsinyt siitä, ettei vaimoni itse ole pystynyt selvittämään näkökantojaan. Anna: Für mich war es doch leicht mich der finnischen Kultur unterzuordnen. [EI1]

Although at times it may be distressing for the Finnish partner that their spouse is unable to cope with the daily routine, the non-Finnish spouse may not see it that way. Both sides of autonomy and dependence are dominant at various points in time. The difficulty of balancing between dependence and autonomy is one example of how hard it can be for intercultural couples to find a kind of equilibrium. Here we have more dynamics present, but still nothing really points to change, the inherent quality of dialectics. Because relationship partners act in a chronotope (time and space) it is challenging to look at how connection - autonomy is construed in these intercultural couples' ongoing history. In addition, Anna's word choice *submit* (she wrote *unterordnen* in German), reflects her whole attitude and how she experiences her new life abroad, and it is reflected in what she said Ari does for her. Ari talks about the dependence part of his relationship with Anna on account of language. But while Ari experiences discomfort in his wife's dependence on him, Anna describes her particular way of adapting to Finnish society as something she feels she has dealt with rather well. The dialectical quality here lies in the Finnish partner suffering from the dependence of his foreign wife on him because he needs to do almost everything for her, while she feels that it has been quite unproblematic for her to "submit" to Finnish culture. The emphasis here is on the connection, i.e. dependence and its consequences. Relating dialectically is always a balancing act between the two poles; here it is between connection and autonomy.

The connection-autonomy dialectic, as shown in the way Anna and Ari perceive the topic of dependence, is manifested in an antagonistic contradiction (Sahlstein & Baxter, 2001). Antagonistic contradictions are evident when the relationship parties align their respective individual interests with opposing poles. Here Ari is oppressed by Anna's excessive demands and therefore might

look for some separateness. Anna, however, perceives the situation as effortless, and is therefore (virtually) calling for more togetherness. With non-antagonistic contradictions, on the other hand, according to Sahlstein and Baxter (2001), both partners appreciate the unity and opposition of the dialectical poles. For example, both partners might see the relational need for autonomy, yet grapple jointly with the simultaneous need for connection.

Subordination or the state of being subordinate to something or someone signifies the quality of obedient submissiveness. In this case subordination can be explained as a power issue in the dominant-subordinate dialectic. Anna is not being dominated by a dominant spouse, but by a dominant language, which happens to be the native tongue of her spouse and of her environment. Therefore she "subordinates" herself. The person in the dominant position (Ari) defines the relationship on his terms, but since the other person (Anna) feels subordinated and is not acting on the basis of care and consideration (*my wife told me that in Finland she is going to be dependent on me for language reasons, and*) Ari may not get what he really wants, which is for her to learn more Finnish, which would reduce the need for his support and give her some understanding of his suffering, presumably resulting in making his life easier. Anna's words, *it was actually easy for me to submit to Finnish culture*, do not show any understanding of his *suffering*. One could, however, also phrase Anna's behaviour as voluntary lingual subordination.

Most non-Finnish partners are aware of needing support, but only on certain terms: the support needed must come at the crucial moment, and it demands energy and strength from both partners. In the next excerpt the intercultural context is raised when the speaker identifies herself with the word "immigrant". It is brought out that the challenges imposed by being an immigrant do not always come at the right time for both partners, and that this can lead to quarrels. Bea talks about the extra support she needs as an immigrant.

> CC: What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural backgrounds?
> Bea: Being dependent on your partner to get the support needed to cope with the changes related to adapting to a new culture created in the beginning has been a very difficult and hard time for both of us, though this becomes less and even passes, being an immigrant once in a while just creates the need of extra support. This is fine if both have the energy to do something about it, but often this need for support comes at the wrong time. This leads to tensions and what we call "stupid quarrels". [EI2]

She puts "*being an immigrant*" in a time frame, i.e. being aware this might only be temporary. This is an example of dialectical contradictions being integrally linked, meaning that they cannot be considered in isolation of other dialectical contradictions. Here it means that connection-autonomy is linked with openness-closedness: the fact of support needed (*connection*) and stupid quarrels – what one discloses and verbalizes (*openness*). Bea's illustration is worth our attention for two reasons. Firstly, it is an example of the connection - autonomy dialectic, where connection is emphasized by support being the

dominant pole of the dialectic. Secondly, it is put in a chronotopic context of time and space: a) time, for a short period - *becomes less and even passes* - and b) space, *being an immigrant once in a while*. The support mentioned in Bea's case is also related to language in general.

Besides the common denominator of connection, which was experienced as too close and for too long, the intercultural couples talked about questions of dependence and support. Still balancing between connection and autonomy at various times, there comes a point when the partners naturally need more autonomy.

Not all support is uncomplicated. One needs it and does not really get it, or one gets it but one does not recognize it for what it is. It is always about giving and taking. Both giving support and accepting support can be problematic.

The downside of giving support: neglect and reject

The non-Finnish partners needed support, generally language support, as we have seen above, but the commitment of the support providers must also be taken into consideration. All the Finnish spouses showed a remarkable sense of responsibility to support their partners from the very beginning and demonstrated their sense of obligation and their dedication. However, providing such support was sometimes seen as challenging, and sometimes the support seemed to be rejected or not appreciated. The following illustrates these challenges of providing support.

Aanpassing Martijn: Well, it all has to do with communication […] but in order to communicate on that level you need a language and if you don't have that then it is very hard, and you stand, you did not belong to that world Marika: Yes, and I am still an outsider there, and then I don't know what is my role in the discussion when I am the interpreter, am I allowed to think for myself or not, etc., or am I merely a go-between? [CI2]	Adaptation Martijn: Nou het heeft allemaal met communicatie te maken [...] maar om op dat niveau te communiceren heb je een taal nodig en als je dat niet hebt dat is dan heel moeilijk, en jij staat, jij stond buiten die wereld Marika: Ja, en ik ben er nog steeds buiten, en dan weet ik niet wat is mijn rol in de discussie als ik de tolk ben, mag ik zelf nadenken of niet en zo, of ben ik alleen een doorgeefluik? [CI2]

When interpreting for her non-Finnish husband with his Finnish colleagues about topics of expertise to do with building, Marika questions whether she is regarded only as a go-between or a passage. She perceived support-giving as unsatisfying in this particular situation. She felt an outsider, with no clear idea of her role when interpreting, questioned even whether she was allowed to think for herself, and finally wondered whether she was being seen as merely a go-between, being oblivious. Her support can be seen as instrumental support, providing educational and helpful specifics, especially in the sense of giving

adequate help with the language. It also points, though, to instrumental support, support with very practical issues such as going shopping, providing transport, or making phone calls. (Israel & Schurman, 1990.)

If one problem of providing support is that one is simply a go-betweengo-between, someone through whom communication is passed, another challenge is the possibility that one's support is not appreciated, that it is downplayed or even rejected. After several attempts to support her non-Finnish husband by comforting him and talking to him (giving emotional support), the Finnish wife found her offer of support rejected. He seemed to minimize and to resent her caring, suffering and worrying for him. His resentment towards her reflected, among other things, his lack of friends and family support, and the racist comments he keeps hearing. She told him about the way she had suffered from these circumstances as follows:

> Culture and conflicts
> Annaliisa: Sometimes I feel the same […] I always don't feel like telling you because I know then you will get annoyed. But I think both of us, we are going through the same somehow and somehow I feel that you don't see it, how I suffer from it too, […] and I don't feel that you know, that I'm part of it sometimes because I'm going through the same thing.
> Anthony: Well, basically that's just your way of seeing it […] it's very annoying because it's every time that I'm thinking, she is feeling the same thing […] [CI5]

Annaliisa talks about giving her spouse emotional and appraisal support. This is signified by *"I feel the same"* in a regrettable situation, protecting him by not telling him certain things, by stressing that she is on his side - "*I'm part of it sometimes because I'm going through the same thing*" - and by worrying about him. However, the discussion actually ended in argument (not quoted in the excerpt above) about several issues, basically Anthony's downplaying and declining his wife's support.

In this study's intercultural context the intense need for closeness (besides the inherent feature of people in personal relationships needing to spend time together in order to strengthen their bond, as mentioned by Baxter (1990)), derives mostly from the non-Finnish partners' not knowing anyone else very well apart from their spouse, in other words, their lack of social contacts. Some Finnish partners, however, felt that they did not have enough opportunity for separateness. This can be due to the fact that if one has been used to having time just for oneself, it can be quite an effort to reorganise life to share it with another person. This novelty of connection in a relationship can then be felt as the other one "stealing one's time", so that the other partner felt that his/her dependence on his/her spouse was a burden. The non-Finnish partners' need for connection with their spouse is also linked to the desire to talk and communicate; because the non-Finnish spouse was short of social relationships, they had an increased need for openness. The need for connection and security is one aspect of the changes and uncertainties that arise when one moves to a new country. Much togetherness was reported in the beginning of the relationship to facilitate adaptation to the new environment: connection

(togetherness) was linked to adaptation in the sense that the presence of the Finnish partner was helpful when adjusting to Finnish society.

4.1.3 Praxis

In this section I will look at some of the couples' praxis patterns, i.e. how they actually manage the relational dialectics in their relationships. What do they do, and how do they do it, at the expense of what or whom? I present four types of praxis patterns which frequently seemed to be used by the intercultural couples: recalibration, balance, segmentation and denial.

Recalibration

Sometimes both partners realize the need for separateness and then actually make this happen - or then they do not. The steps taken to achieve autonomy are linked to praxis, i.e. the strategies partners use to manage the contradictions. Partners may share a similar feeling of needing autonomy but also an inability to take it, perhaps because of a feeling of guilt or because they have too tight a bond between them (closeness). The consequence of following this indecision can be one of recalibration. Sabine and Sami experience this as follows:

Conflicts Sami: […] I would need a bit of time for myself and can't take it. I have the feeling I have to be always there for the family, it is actually hard for me […], when I go sailing with a friend for a day or half a day, somewhere in me is a small worm that says I should be with (the son). Sabine: Yes, but you don't really <u>have to</u> Sami: <u>Yes,</u> I know […] and it doesn't harm our relationship because you (*to his wife*) always say I should go, and I'm so bad at going Sabine: Yes, I feel the same perhaps, so I just don't go to Germany on my own, even when you say I should finally book a flight and so, and I simply don't do it because there's no time Sami: or you can never leave us Sabine: Yes, exactly (both laugh) Sami: Yes, we are both like that, we are quite like that, like very close, "*we 3*", it's an expression of ours [CI3]	Konflikte Sami: […] ich bräuchte ein bisschen Zeit für mich und ich kann es nicht nehmen. Ich habe das Gefühl ich muss immer da sein für die Familie, also es fällt mir schwer eigentlich […], wenn ich für einen Tag oder einen halben Tag segeln gehe mit einem Freund, irgendwo ist so einen kleinen Wurm in mir der sagt ich sollte bei (der Sohn) sein. Sabine: Ja, aber du musst überhaupt <u>nicht</u> Sami: <u>Ja</u>, das weiss ich […] und es belastet unser Verhältnis nicht weil du (zu seiner Frau) sagst mir immer, ich soll gehen, und ich bin so schlecht im Gehen Sabine: Ja, es geht mir genauso vielleicht, also ich gehe auch nicht einfach so mal nach Deutschland alleine, obwohl du sagst ich soll endlich mal einen Flug buchen und so und ich mache es einfach nicht weil es gibt keine Zeit, Sami: oder du kannst uns nie verlassen Sabine: Ja, genau (beide lachen) Sami: Ja, wir sind beide so, wir sind ziemlich so, dicht bei einander so, „wir 3", das ist einen Spruch von uns [CI3]

The way Sabine and Sami manage this dialectical tension is a praxis pattern called disorientation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 62). This involves a resigned attitude in which contradictions are recognized as inevitable, and unresponsive to "praxical" change. As a result, the partners view their relationship's social world as disorienting, i.e. troubled with mixed messages like: *"I should go"* following with: *"I'm so bad at going"*. The partners are somehow caught with problematic and in this case conflicting options and enact their unfortunate condition through a passive acceptance or surrendering: *"we are both like that",* which is often manifested in the ambiguity of mixed messages. At the same time the use of "*we 3, it's an expression of ours*", definitely indicates a tight connection between the relationship partners, and the child. Such idiomatic communication forms, nicknames, and expressions are labels to the couple and to outsiders showing how close and intimate a bond they have formed (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 103). Through the couple's private communication code *"we 3"* they actually verbally express a tighter closeness and intimacy. Also here the integrally linked contradictions are signified: connection *(you can never leave us, we're very close)* and openness *(we 3, it's an expression of ours)*.

Chronotopically, there is not much happening at this particular point in time for the partners as everything remains rather static, which is actually an inherent characteristic of the praxis pattern of disorientation. Disorientation, which is said to be a dysfunctional praxis pattern (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), is characterized by a compliant regard for contradictions as inevitable, as happens with Sabine and Sami.

Reflecting on the seemingly static dimension of Sabine and Sami's "remaining" in the connection pole, we know from relational dialectics that there is no such thing as a steady state, and they do not really comply to the contradiction. It is argued (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) that dialogic spiralling happens when relationship parties respond to a contradiction by spiralling towards the fulfillment first of one pole and then of the other. What pushes a cycle to shift towards the other pole is not homeostasis but neglect of that pole's exigence. When a relationship pair fulfills one side of a certain contradiction, the pair's relational system is supposed to be simultaneously fulfilled and denied, because one contradictory exigence is met while opposing exigencies are not. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 75.) I call the praxis pattern that we see with Sami and Sabine recalibration, which is characterized by a transformation in the form of the opposition such that the initially experienced polarities are no longer oppositional to one another. Recalibration is the process of temporarily reframing a situation so that the tugs and pulls on partners no longer seem to be in opposite directions. Recalibration is viewed as a response that goes beyond or transcends the form in which an opposition is expressed, but without resolving the contradiction on a permanent basis. It can be seen as temporal stagnation: they would like more autonomy, but they end up in the connection pole for the time being.

Balance

Whereas turning points are inherently associated with change, I will discuss the concept also in the predictability-novelty dialectic. Conceptually, a turning point refers to a transformative event in which a relationship is changed in some way (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Defined differently, one can say that turning points capture a critical moment, an event or incident that has impact and import. They trigger a reinterpretation of what the relationship means to the participants. They can also be viewed as symbolic interpretations and evaluations of events and circumstances that give meaning and definition to a relationship. (Graham, 1997: 351.) Typical examples of turning points in a partner's relationship are the birth of a child and different stages in the children's upbringing.

The intercultural couples in this study brought up the issue of raising children several times as something that has an impact on their relationship. The coming and presence of children also influenced the way they the couples perceived togetherness and separateness. For instance, jealousy, and questions about having together time and separate time often came up. None of the couples could manage to have pure couple time without the help of grandparents (in Finland) or annual trips to the non-Finnish partner's home country.

Besides acknowledging the wonder and pleasure of having their children, several couples talked about the coming of children into a relationship and the time needed to raise them as a new and disturbing factor when considering the time couples spent together. Some couples reported that uniting couplehood with the presence of children seemed difficult. At times children were seen as disruptive, and they also provoked feelings of jealousy, for instance when the partner came home and inquired about the baby first. It was also noted that young parents lost both couple time and individual time, although they actually greatly needed both; the couples agreed that they need to find ways to have both. In the following extract Martijn describes the strategy he and his wife Marika used to manage the tension of connection-autonomy:

Children	Kinderen
Martijn: […] You lose your free time [...] but we need to, we want to enjoy things together [...]	Martijn: [...] Je bent daar toch tijd aan kwijt [...] maar wij moeten ook samen, willen ook samen wel genieten [...]
Our idea is with the backpack, [...] walking, having a small tent and we go to the woods and set up our tent if we want to, this has never happened […] we can terrifically enjoy eating out in a restaurant. The times that we, now that he's here (*the baby*), we take him with us. [CI2]	De idee van ons is met de rugzak, [...] lopen, we hebben een tentje en we gaan het bos in en zetten het tentje op als we zin hebben, dat is nog nooit gebeurd [...] we kunnen erg genieten als we in een restaurant gaan eten zijn. De keren dat we hem, nu dat hij er is, (*de baby*) gaat ie mee met ons. [CI2]

The praxis pattern here can be described as balance. It is a compromise approach that promotes ongoing dialogue, because the partners see both

dialectical poles as equally legitimate. Balance involves an effort to respond to all oppositions at one point in time through compromise. Each oppositional need is responded to only partially, that being the nature of compromise. Balance is an unstable response because responses to the oppositional poles are weakened at any given point in time. Whenever one party wins, the other loses, and the supply of benefits is never sufficient to meet the demand. But balance can bring temporary satisfaction.

Some of the intercultural couples felt that they had to wait a year in order to enjoy "time off" as a couple, and this happened when they visited the non-Finnish partner's family abroad. Others consciously tried to create time and space for themselves in their daily lives. Turning points like these probably come to all couples who have children, but for these intercultural couples not being able to have regular parents/grandparents' visits was especially difficult: it would have given them appreciation support, the opportunity for the children to get to know their grandparents, and above all a chance for the couples themselves to have some space for "real couple time" without the children.

Segmentation and spiralling inversion

Connection and autonomy are consciously worked on when one tries to achieve one's own space and time together. Neither option is easy to attain. Partners with children trying to achieve togetherness and separateness in their relationship face the dilemmas linked to this: raising children, spending time with them, studies, work, and even holidays, all of which reflect a postmodern flexibility on which to build praxis.

For several intercultural couples, connection can only be achieved at certain times, perhaps some weekends, or even only once a year on their holiday abroad to the parents of the non-Finnish partner. This means that togetherness is often directly dependent on the goodwill and support of the parents-in-law. Autonomy can literally mean changing the furniture around, or agreeing on certain activities on certain days a week. Next, Helena and Hugo talk about their experience of trial and error in achieving autonomy and connection.

Culture	Cultuur
Helena: We had such a strong, such a symbiotic relationship, and now we're both going through our own growth, a bit like as a person, your own person, and that of course causes collisions. We are both people who need a lot of space of our own and that is hard to combine, me my own space, Hugo his own space, and family life together, so many factors we need to look for, the right form to make it function well	Helena:Wij hadden zo een sterke, zo'n symbiotische relatie, en nu zijn wij alletwee onze eigen groei aan't doormaken, zo'n beetje zo als persoon, eigen persoon, en dat veroorzaakt ook natuurlijk botsingen. We zijn alle twee mensen die veel eigen ruimte nodig hebben, en dat is moeilijk om te combineren, ik mijn eigen ruimte, Hugo zijn eigen ruimte, en het gezinsleven samen, zo veel factoren die we nu moeten zoeken, de juiste vorm dat dat alles goed marcheert

Hugo: that bed there is a concrete example (*there is a double bed in the living room*), Helena has her own room upstairs, totally private CC: and those collisions you mention, is this due to a lack of space for yourself, or is it because you are too close at certain moments, that you need that space, or does it concern other issues? Helena: I think a lot is due to the fact that we both would like to have more time of our own. We don't have such clear roles of who takes care of the kitchen or who puts the children to bed […] Hugo: yes, that's what our arguments are mostly about, I personally think, I think (*sighs*) I think we should be more concerned about the quality of being together […]. We're also always at home together, always us two always taking care of the children, I have very few hobbies and then you never have the feeling that you have the world to yourself [CI1]	Hugo: dat bed is daar een concreet voorbeeld van *(er staat een dubbel bed in de living*), Helena heeft haar eigen kamer boven, volledig privé CC: en die botsingen waar ge van spreekt, is dat door een gebrek aan ruimte voor uw eigen, of is dat omdat ge te dicht opeen zijt op bepaalde momenten, dat ge die ruimte dan nodig hebt of gaat dat over andere dingen? Helena: Ik denk dat heel veel is dat we alle twee meer eigen tijd zouden willen. Wij hebben niet zo'n duidelijke rollen van wie zorgt voor de keuken of wie zorgt voor de kinderen in bed te krijgen [...] Hugo: ja, daar gaan ons discussies ook allemaal over he, ik denk van mijne kant denk ik dat (*zucht*) ik denk dat we meer zouden moeten werk maken van de kwaliteit van het samen zijn [...] . Wij zijn ook altijd samen thuis, altijd met ons twee zorgen wij altijd voor ons kinderen, ik heb zeer weing hobbies en dan hebt ge nooit zo'n gevoel dat ge de wereld voor uw eigen hebt [CI1]

They consciously try to achieve separateness - "I need my own space, he needs his" - and they try to realize moments of quality and quantity of togetherness, which seems hard to accomplish. At least autonomy has been reached - until a certain point - because Hugo says: "there's hardly ever the feeling that one has the world and the house to oneself". The fact that they have moved the furniture - the bed - and that she has her own room upstairs are examples of segmentation praxis. The basis of *segmentation* is that partners perceive that certain activity domains are more appropriately suited to one opposition than the other (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 63). In this case it means that separateness is preferred to togetherness: the re-organization of the house, placing the bed in the living room so that the partner has a room of her own in which to work upstairs, which leads to her - and him – having more autonomy.

Togetherness, "just the two of them" seems hard to accomplish when there are no grandparents around, because half of them live abroad. However, the couple are trying to reach togetherness, and they think about the quality of togetherness. They express this desire for togetherness after having established the autonomy part (moving the furniture). This praxis pattern through which they try to find togetherness is called *spiralling inversion*. The basis for spiralling inversion here is not the activity domain but rather the time when they think about connection after autonomy has been established (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 62).

Helena's and Hugo's dialogue illustrates the integral link between the connection-autonomy dialectic and the openness-closedness dialectic, as Hugo

affirms: *"That's what our discussions are mostly about"*. Their talks happen when they are together, and deal with topics of togetherness (connection); they actually verbalize them and do this frequently (*"mostly"*) in the form of discussions (openness).

Chronotopically both time and space have been referred to in the praxis patterns: changing the furniture after autonomy has been taken care of, the time of thinking about connection, the in-laws who would give them time for connectedness, which points to the future – it will happen in the holidays. All these chronotopic points indicate change, and indicate integrally linked contradictions. They also point to fluidity, a link between internal and external contradictions; for instance, the connectedness of the couple (internal) is linked to dependence on the grandparents (external). Although this chapter is concerned with contradictions that arise "within the couple's boundary" - internally - it is important to mention that in practice (in the real world) couples live with both internal and external contradictions. Dialogic analysis asks what the salient internal and external contradictions are for a given relationship and how they mutually pattern one another through time. Only for the sake of clarity have I made this artificial division between internal and external contradictions.

Denial

The phenomenon of autonomy assumed to be complementary in the relationship can, at a certain point in time, prove that there is no equal share of quantity divide. Autonomy is not always perceived in the same way by the relational partners. Contradiction occurs when partners perceive autonomy as meaning that they are in competition with each other. This was reported when one spouse said he assumed that his partner thought in the same way as he did about each one having a fair deal of autonomy. However, the other partner perceives this differently:

> CC: Do you recall moments that you would like to be closer to your partner, but that he/she is in a mood of needing more space?
> Alan: […] We're both like that, we need our own time. […] I always thought we were really complementary in this respect
> Anita: I think it's different after the kids. I guess, I believe I can really say that I resent sometimes the idea that he still just takes off and has his own space and has his own time and I don't, practically ever or maybe I do for 30 minutes. But it's not really that I want distance specifically from him, I want it more from it all (laughs) […] I think the actual distance from the relationship, I think that part has always come very naturally to us
> Alan: Yes, really, we almost don't talk about that part, we just assume, that that's our assumption the world is. [TI5]

Alan assumes that he and his wife agree on issues of autonomy, but Anita disagrees with him and thinks he enjoys more autonomy *("he often takes off, has his own space and own time")*. She used to have this but she does not any more *("after the kids it's different")*, and she begrudges it. She reports that she does not need distance from him but "from it all". By "distance from the relationship", I

suppose she means, as Alan put it, *"she can be off doing whatever, and we're still a couple"*, that she can be an autonomous person but they're still a twosome (connection). So where is the contradiction here? Looking at the two partners' comments, "*We're both like that, I always thought we were really complementary in this respect "*, and *"I think it's different after the kids, I can really say that I resent sometimes the idea that he still just takes off "*, the tension lies in the fact that both partners have quite a different idea of autonomy, and this does not seem to be being managed. They actually do not talk about it. Hence for managing the contradiction the partners engage in the praxis pattern of denial. It is the strategy of continually responding to one pole of a dialectic (here, autonomy) while ignoring the other (connection). The praxis pattern of denial is characterized by discourse (or non-discourse in this case) in which the parties basically seek to deny the existence of the other pole, obliterating the contradictory nature of their relationship. This pattern of denial is likely to be dysfunctional in the long run, because needs for independence will eventually surface and have to be dealt with. In general, the denial response is destined to fail as the dominance of one opposing force creates an urgent situation for the neglected opposition.

The change in autonomy reported by Anita "*after the kids"*, has also been perceived qualitatively as an important relational event. This means that relational events such as the birth of a child and the raising of children are likely to involve qualitatively different constructions of connectedness and separateness for relational partners. When children become a part of a couple's daily life there is a substantial increase in spousal interdependence for example in order to coordinate schedules. However, the couple might not experience this interdependence as especially rewarding emotionally, in contrast to how they experienced interdependence prior to the arrival of the child. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 96.)

This particular situation illustrates integrally linked contradictions. They are exemplified by two things. First of all there is change: *"it's different after the kids"*. This points to a link between the dialectics of predictability-novelty and connection-autonomy; this change gives Anita less opportunity for autonomy. Secondly, Alan mentions, *"yes, really, we almost don't talk about that part"*, which relates to the openness-closedness dialectic, integrally linked to connection-autonomy.

Essentially, there seems to be a contradiction within a contradiction: the report contradicts the perception in that both partners say that they are for autonomy (*we are complementary (Alan),* and *that part has always come very naturally to us (Anita).* This is in contradiction to one partner's perception: *I can really say that I resent sometimes the idea that he still just takes off and has his own space and has his own time and I don't, practically ever… (Anita).* One might call this the praxis pattern of "denial within agreement": when both partners have contradictory perceptions of one pole of the contradiction, while basically they verbalise support for this pole.

Appealing here as a detail, we can compare what Alan said - *"We almost don't talk about that part, we just assume…"* – with what Hugo said in the

previous dialogue - *"That's what our discussions are mostly about"*. This shows how relationship partners tend to structure their conversation differently, which is relevant to understanding connectedness and separateness at the interactional level of talk. This could have implications for making assumptions about how, for instance, highly autonomy - oriented couples would be less likely to talk about things they enjoy doing together, while couples who value connection would be more likely to use confirming utterances (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 102-103).

4.2 Predictability-Novelty: Feeling certain about the relationship, and needing to spice it up

This section considers the ways in which intercultural couples deal with issues of certainty (predictability) and uncertainty (novelty) in their relationship. Partners reported that there were times when they concentrated more on what had happened earlier, and other periods when they were more involved with what was happening just then, such as events leading to changes and transformations in the relationship. In addition, most couples said that they were concerned with future planning in terms of where the relationship was going, where to go and live, and professional choices and considerations. At different times and in different spaces partners grapple with this dialectic. This is not surprising, since equal amounts of predictability and novelty are crucial to a dynamic relationship, otherwise the parties will become either emotionally deadened or relationally unstable (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Whereas most of the couples experienced a basic certainty in their relationship, it was not very easy for them to create novelty; it rather remained an expectation, except when there was a memorable event such as the birth of a child, which created a turning point in the couples' relationship.

The intercultural partners' perceived predictability-novelty in a variety of ways. Themes of the predictability-novelty dialectic include certainty about the relationship and uncertainty about features of the intercultural lifestyle, turning points, the distinct characteristics of the partner, and ignorance about the future as triggers of uncertainty and novelty. Praxis patterns used were spiralling inversion and segmentation.

4.2.1 Relationship certainty, and adaptation related uncertainty

Regarding the predictability-novelty dialectic, the intercultural partners reported features emphasizing each dialectical pole. The certainty pole was quite stable and mirrored the stability of their relationship. The couples expressed their belief in the absolute certainty of their relationship, which showed determination and perseverance ("sisu" in Finnish). Uncertainty was mostly expressed by factors characterizing intercultural adaptation, which in the case of these intercultural couples referred to the chaos and bewilderment at

times during the first years of their life as an intercultural couple in Finland. Uncertainty was often portrayed as a search to make sense of it all in order to understand what was actually happening to them. Despite their present absolute certainty about their relationship, the intercultural couples reported various qualitatively different meanings of uncertainty in the initial years of their relationship. Several couples described these beginnings of their relationship as "shock beginnings", when everything happened (or had to happen) very fast. In the following excerpt a couple very well describes these confusing times, presenting the certainty-uncertainty dialectic.

> CC: How did this [all the problems of adjusting to a strange society] affect on your relationship?
> Tutta: We got to know each other much better, of course because it was such a shock beginning, I don't know what I did, I've never been so fast in my life, but we decided to do it because we felt so good with each other, it was a pretty normal step, and it was a very strange step into the unknown [...]
> Theo: I was changing from one life to another […] I had to leave a lot of my cultural background, my cultural heritage, I had to throw it away and that is quite hard, the younger you are the easier it is. So sometimes I feel lonely, I don't feel lonely in our relationship but I feel sometimes lonely for my cultural background, my cultural past [...] it's the same in all multicultural relationships that if you are leaving from one country to another you have to adapt to the new country and to the habits, that are quite different from your own. You have to make a decision, and to make a decision is always to lose something. [TI1]

Here certainty is expressed through the decision-making based on their positive feelings for each other, and that it seemed like the usual thing to do: when you feel good, you decide to live together. On the other hand, it is also said that although it was usual, it was also experienced as a very strange step, which points to uncertainty about what was coming: the unknown. Theo, the Belgian partner who moved to Finland, describes the process of change as a significant and encompassing event: it touches life, cultural background and heritage, which he said he had to discard. This loss made him feel lonely at times, but then he also skilfully illustrates certainty-uncertainty when saying that making a decision (which implies creating an instance of certainty) always means losing something (which signifies change and a reason for uncertainty).

Intercultural couples, although certain about their relationship and conscious of the uncertainty that is part of adaptation, are also matter-of-fact and realistic about what can be expected in and from a relationship. Rokuro put it this way:

> CC: Thinking about elements of certainty and uncertainty in your relationship, what would you say?
> Rokuro: I expect there are some certain periods and then there are some periods of uncertainty, but it doesn't affect my behaviour very much I guess, it's just a feeling of relatedness that changes sometimes. [TI4]

He uses the word "and", and acknowledges, apparently quite happily, that certainty in a relationship is a dynamic factor, even an inherent one, which changes sometimes. Actually, he uses the word "relatedness", "feeling of relatedness", which he perceives as changing sometimes. He does not however,

specify whether this is a qualitative or a quantitative change. His partner, who is certain about the relationship now that it has lasted six years, does have some doubts about the future of the relationship in terms of its quality over time, and she responds:

> Riitta: […] when you're together for many years, so you get some basic certainty […] so sometimes I think about our future if we are together let's say after 20 years or something, like would it be the same and would I be happy with the same person for a long time or not, because that's not certain, you can't know. [TI4]

For Riitta the basic certainty of the relationship lies in the length of time they have been together. This meaningful account entails the most important facets of the certainty-uncertainty dialectic, the dynamic interplay of stability and change. Riitta's words refer to the importance of relating, which is an ongoing process of weaving together the certainty of continuity and the uncertainty of eventual discontinuity. Trying to look to the future, she wonders whether they would still be together after 20 years (quantity), whether it would still be the same (quality), and whether she would be happy with the same person or not (quality, and questioning herself), because "the future" is not certain. Here she questions what lies ahead, what nobody can know. The issue of the certainty-uncertainty of the relationship seems to be chronotopically related, implying time and space.

4.2.2 Triggers of uncertainty

Three triggers were found to have an effect on the intercultural couples' relationship, causing uncertainty: 1) turning points, 2) a partner's distinct features, and 3) ignorance about the future. Uncertainty tends to be perceived as negative and novelty as rather positive, like adding something constructive to the relationship.

A turning point can be defined as a relationship change that "captures a critical moment, an event or incident that has impact (…) triggering a reinterpretation of what the relationship means to the participants" (Graham, 1997: 351). Given this meaning, turning points are an obvious component of the dialectic of predictability-novelty, which is the internal variant of the overarching supra-dialectic of stability-change, which refers to the fundamental opposition between stability and flux.

Novelty refers to our desire for excitement and change, whereas uncertainty denotes discomfort with change. This said, one could almost claim that change in itself contains the dialectic of positivity-negativity. According to Le Poire (2006), positivity refers to our desire to evaluate our family members positively, whereas negativity refers to the inevitability of our evaluating some things about our family members negatively. The dialectic tension between positivity and negatively, so Le Poire (2006: 170) claims, is especially relevant to marital satisfaction in that positive and negative communication patterns in marriage affect both marital satisfaction and stability.

Turning points

In the previous section on autonomy-connection it was mentioned that the intercultural couples perceived the birth of a child as influencing their connection as partners, therefore affecting the togetherness-separateness dialectic. Turning points (in particular the birth of a child) also influence the predictability-novelty dialectic. The following excerpt shows how Silja perceives change and transformation in her relationship with Simon.

> CC: So, about the changes, you said you need more your space now, and with him it has switched as well, how does it work right now?
> Silja: It works fine now, we are a lot together […] I see friends, he might sometimes join me, often he likes to stay home or take our daughter somewhere […] we don't get to go out together very much […] I don't know, the spark is still there but it's transformed, let's say over the years. [Ever since the children came] of course, obviously, like affection-wise you transfer the affections on to the children and you can't really demonstrate as much to the other one. Thát, I'm sometimes missing. [TI2]

Here we have a turning point: the couple (the twosome) have become parents. Silja describes this event as an expected (she uses the word "obviously") aspect of change in the relationship process. This example illustrates the dialectics of openness-closedness (the demonstration of affection), and of connection-autonomy (being together, and staying at home). What is more significant in this example, though, is the factor of change, articulated by Silja using the words "transfer" and "transform". This indicates that "turning points" in the relationship can be experienced as changes in both degree (with every newborn child coming into the couple's family, and over the years) and in kind (where affection in the case in point changes qualitatively into a different kind of affection, i.e. it is transformed). In its internal manifestation, stability-change ("the spark is still there" versus "but it's transformed") captures the predictability-novelty dialectic constituted within the relationship. It shows how partners handle certainty and uncertainty in their relationship.

Although this example shows how change in the couple's relationship, when becoming parents, leads to alterations in the bond of intimacy, it also illustrates the integrally linked nature of dialectics in that certain relational events can involve different qualitative constructions of autonomy-connection for relational partners, such as the birth of a first child, as in this particular example. Thus, as this last excerpt illustrates, the experience of contradictions suggests a dialectical totality, which refers to making connections among related phenomena for a broader, more holistic orientation towards the phenomena. The implications of this position are that social events, such as turning point experiences, often involve more than one dialectical contradiction. Further, the dialectical interplay of oppositional forces highlights the role of change as a fundamental process in social interaction. (See e.g. Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000; Erbert et al., 2003.) Researchers have used the concept of turning points with different wordings to stress the 'transformation' factor: relational transition (Conville, 1988; 1998), and transition phase (Masheter & Harris, 1986).

Partner's distinct features

Novelty has been perceived as adding something to the quality of the relationship. A partner's different characteristics (being different from oneself) was mentioned several times in the interviews. Couples said that whereas at the beginning of their relationship novelty was a more current and acceptable issue, such as job search. Later on couples tended to emphasize the certainty of their relationship. A partner's surprising characteristics are seen as spontaneous and energizing, and as something to learn from, as is expressed in the next excerpt.

> CC: Do you ever come across issues like that in your relationship that on the one hand you strive for certainty, predictability in your relationship, but at the other hand you are also longing for something new or spontaneous?
> Tutta: […] I enjoy this property of his character, you are more adventurous than me and you are looking for small surprises where I don't see even a possibility for a surprise or something new. I like it that you are very refreshing […] I hate it when you are so careless, sometimes […] I have learned to be more relaxed with you […] at the same time you are really teaching me new things, like hey, life can also be different
> Theo: but I will always find the things and I will always lose them
> Tutta: He makes my life very exciting (laughs) [TI1]

Whereas the certainty of the relationship has become the couples' main concern after a hectic beginning, yet the novelty of the partner's different features is appreciated, as Tutta describes her delight in and appreciation of her partner being different: more spontaneous, more relaxed, imaginative. At the same time she gets irritated and says she hates exactly some of the traits mentioned. Note that this example also presents a management strategy or praxis pattern of disorientation, a kind of fatalistic attitude that has been adopted in which contradiction is regarded as inevitable, negative, and unchangeable.

On the other hand, the fatalism rather lies with Theo, when he says "I will always…", and not with Tutta, as she sees his differences as enriching and instructive. Therefore one could also call this praxis pattern reaffirmation, where the contradictory poles of the dialectic are accepted and celebrated as enhancing the richness of the relationship. In the above conversation Tutta discusses how her partner's difference from her helps her to grow as an individual. It is clear that this is not an easy problem to "solve" as Theo happily comments on how different they are in their habits: "I will always find and I will always lose them", which possibly is not to be taken too seriously.

Ignorance about the future

Intercultural couples' most distressing worries lie in their ignorance about the future. Whereas this is quite commonly the case with everyone – no one really knows what lies ahead – it is a very serious concern for these intercultural couples, lack of knowledge about the future being insistently and constantly on their mind. This covers such issues as whether or not to move away from Finland to the other partner's home country, or to a third country. Sari and Silvio, who were utterly certain about their strong relationship, had a dispute

over Sari's wanting to move to Italy when Silvio would like to stay in Finland. The final decision would be made by others:

> CC: When you think in general about the future, do you feel certain or uncertain?
> Sari: I am certain we will stay together
> Silvio: I could never imagine we break up, I don't have this possibility in my mind, I never have, I know I live with her so I need her, I live with these decisions. But work, we just have to work hard and try to find our ways [...] I want to stay here, work is more possible here than in Italy. She would like to go to Italy. We can plan many things, but the children will decide. [CI4]

With other intercultural couples too, children were a decisive factor to take into consideration when deciding where to live and work. The partners' negotiations dealt with communication of these uncertainties, so that reasonable long term planning could be done, whatever the decision was (Anita, TI1). Others talked about the possibility of going abroad to the partner's country or to a third country, which was considered "a worry of 20% and an opportunity for 80%" (Sami, CI3). Many of the intercultural couples interviewed had young children, and this made some couples decide to postpone these decisions of "where to live, and "what to do" for a few years.

Fay and Heikki perceived uncertainty as a dominant constant in their life, but they also recognized the positive sides of it. Fay reports:

> CC: What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural backgrounds?
> Fay: I guess to the most basic issue, "where are we going to live?", "how often" and "for how long are we going to be in the other person's country?" [...] This issue affects pretty much everything: jobs, school, vacations, relationships with family and friends, holidays etc. I could go on forever about this and actually it is a very fun part of the dual culture family, the children get to learn and experience the fun of two cultures, there really is no downside to this except a little extra work for the parents. [EI6]

Fay succeeded well in portraying the uncertainty in their intercultural relationship, and describing how it can be simultaneously both problematic, and smooth and uncomplicated. Besides the question of where to live, how often to move, and how long to live in a particular place, she brings up various actual ordinary everyday issues that intercultural couples have to consider, such as celebrations (where and how), work, children's education, holidays, and maintaining relationships with family and friends who live a long way away. Some of these issues are considered to be fun things for "dual culture families", in which the children encounter and learn about both sides of biculturalism, and this is perceived as an advantage which only demands some extra effort from the parents.

It was also mentioned that one does not experience any particular uncertainties at all except the basic uncertainty of life in terms of death or illness. Ladica and Lasse about uncertainty:

> CC: What about hm certainties and uncertainties in life

> Lasse: Life is full of uncertain things and, that's what you have to live with, life is based on uncertainty, you watch certainty when you are dead
> Ladica: [...] I never ever have thought about anything uncertain in our relationship, of course you never know, death or disease or something like that. [CI6]

Lasse and Ladica see uncertainty in general terms and not in terms of the future and a job. This can be explained by the fact that their relationship has already lasted longer than the other couples' relationships (twelve years longer than the average), and therefore all their decisions have already been made a long time ago, their children are almost grown-up, and their professional environment is well established. As for certainty about the relationship, Ladica agrees with the other partners I have quoted that certainty about the relationship seems to be a stable factor, to which she adds that only death or disease could disrupt it.

4.2.3 Praxis

As in the previous section on connection-autonomy, here too I will have a closer look at some of the praxis patterns the couples engaged in, in other words, at how they managed the relational dialectics in their relationship. The following praxis types were used: spiralling inversion and segmentation.

Spiralling inversion

The contradiction of predictability and novelty can be managed in various ways. Focusing on novelty, the management can vary from stressing the activity area or topical area to stressing time. This is how Alan and Anita, for example, manage this dialectic.

> CC: Another of these issues is like certainty and uncertainty between you as partners, can you recognize any of these?
> Alan: The certainty for me always is, us as partners, and that seems to be the most certain feature of our whole marriage
> Anita: The relationship itself is very very certain that somehow we've been together so long and there is not, really any uncertainty about the existence of it but then there is, I think, expectations of novelty, that both of us like the idea that like something new and, exciting like to spend a weekend somewhere or something, those kinds of things, I think both of us look for, it spices up or something. [TI5]

Alan explains certainty in terms of "them as partners", and says it seems to be the most certain feature of their whole marriage. Anita agrees, but uses the word "relationship". Although both partners name the "coupleness" differently, e.g. he calls it "marriage", "us as partners", whereas she calls it a "relationship", it still conveys the dialogic perspective in which certainty is jointly owned by both partners. In addition, Anita relates certainty to the chronotope, i.e. the history of their relationship - "we've been together so long" - and emphasises that "there is not any uncertainty about the existence of it". She expresses their expectations of novelty in terms of "something new, exciting" as well as in terms of the actual activity "a weekend somewhere or something".

"A weekend somewhere" points to a praxis pattern which shows an ebb-and-flow between uncertainty and certainty, and explicitly pointing to certain days of the week signifies segmentation (pointing to time). However, the weekend somewhere is rather seen as an activity, which is clear when Anita says "the idea of something new and exciting … those kinds of things", which suggests activity rather than time. One can therefore conclude that this is the praxis pattern of spiralling inversion. Then again, as stated earlier, it is very possible that in the communicative enactment of the dialectical tensions, relationship partners use more than one praxis pattern at any given time, as relationships are many layered processes and partners can improvise in multiple ways at once.

Segmentation

When both partners appreciate both poles of the dialectic, but value one pole in different ways, the outcome is fragmented. The meaning of predictability-novelty reported by Silja is organized around emotional excitement, meaning that she would welcome some novelty within the stability (predictability) of their relationship. This way of making sense of the certainty-uncertainty dialectic also appears in Baxter´s study (1990), where emotion-based meaning revolves around the perceived emotional excitement of romance. Simon, however, claims to appreciate the relationship as it is, and says that as he sees it a certain routine is part of it.

> CC: This is about certainty and uncertainty, like feeling that you enjoy your relationship being stable, certain and planned, whereas at the same time you also might like to experience something new and look out for something unpredictable or surprises or something like that
> Silja: There's no surprise, there's no surprise at all -laughs- unless it's something unpleasant. I would love, I have this romantic image of "ok honey, I booked a ticket, two tickets for one other place and I'm taking you out there", there's no way he would think of that, it's too, apparently it's too cliché […] it would be wonderful, it would be nice
> Simon: […] I can't think of anything new and exciting at all, I suppose, there's always the routine […] I can always go out for a ski, it's part of the routine in itself. I get my novelty from reading and thinking about things, and she helps me to do it, that's variety and novelty enough for me. She's very good at listening, I'm very lucky she's able to and willing to, and does with me talk about things, and so that creates the interest and variety already, in my mind, which we create every day, talk and discussion
> Silja: […] for me surprises, I see friends, go out with them, whatever, I don't know / it would be nice […] I'm usually the one who organises things, if we go somewhere or whatever, uhm, not ever really have a surprise but I take care, I suggest, I plan […] [TI2]

Novelty as reported by Silja is organized around emotional excitement, meaning that she would welcome some novelty within the stability (predictability) of their relationship. Simon, however, says that he gets all the novelty he needs from Silja, through their talks and discussions together. Skiing, reading and thinking give him enough novelty, or variety, but these activities

rather point to the autonomy moments in their relationship. It is Silja who takes care of the novelty, for herself and sometimes for both of them.

The praxis pattern used here by Silja and Simon suggests segmentation, which is something of a separation tactic in which partners compartmentalize different aspects of their relationship. This means that each pole of the contradiction is dominant, depending on the nature of the topic or activity domain.

Although this praxis pattern also involves an ebb-and-flow pattern as in spiralling inversion, the actual basis of intervention here is not time but rather topic or activity. As relationship parties shift from one topic or activity to another, different opposing themes are privileged. For example, a couple may decide what topic is appropriate for disclosure. Spiralling inversion and segmentation, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 64), appear to be prevalent patterns of improvisational praxis in personal relationships. They are the praxis patterns that most clearly manifest the ongoing tension between the centripetal (dominant) and centrifugal (subordinate) demands; the exigence that is privileged at a given moment is dominant while the opposing demands are subordinated. Also here the integrally linked contradictions are very visible: novelty linked with autonomy, and with openness.

4.3 Openness-closedness: Longing to share, and keeping things to yourself

The openness-closedness dialectic is concerned with the interplay of tensions between the desire to share and the need for privacy. The intercultural couples interviewed are all very aware of their own and their partner's disclosure style. Openness was said to be essential, supportive and necessary for mutual understanding. Partners' different ways of disclosure were perceived as bringing uncertainty and anxiety. In this section I will present the points the intercultural couples brought up about disclosure in their relationship. Then I will give some examples that show partners' awareness of each other's communication style, and in the third part I will present the praxis patterns used by the intercultural couples to manage the openness-closedness dialectic.

4.3.1 Sharing and withholding

The basic feature of the openness-closedness dialectic is that partners have a need to disclose, but they also have issues they would rather keep to themselves, which are to them taboo topics. The couples mentioned issues to do with sharing and enjoying communication with each other in the form of discussions, analysing and thinking aloud. They also raised the fact that they avoid certain topics in their communication, that there are taboo topics such as ex-husband, role division, and uncertainty in their life. Yet another topic that couples avoided, they said, was a partner's discontent, which was said to be something

to withhold from the spouse and from friends. The conversation started about "friends":

> Friends
> Annaliisa: but I think [...] if you have friends you can go and burst out somewhere else and come back, you know like a new man
> Anthony: [...] to me going out to seeing someone in the pub is a problem, is a sign of weakness, when I have difficulties, I don't think drinking alcohol solves problems, or going to the pub to burst out does not solve my problem, I drink cold water and I think water will have to do
> Annaliisa: but ok you have a hobby now, but there you don't talk at all, you are training
> Anthony: we are different you know, basically we are two different types of people, you know, gender, everything, cultural, but basically I am from a strong base sort of, kind of school I've been to, I don't believe in sharing my problems, so I'm not washing my dirty linen outside [CI5]

On the subject of disclosing, while Annaliisa says that it would be good to share one's problems and concerns with one's spouse, or a friend, Anthony does not see it that way. He claims he and Annaliisa are different people, in all respects ("*gender, cultural, everything*"), and does not believe in sharing his problems. Here he implicitly states that his gender, for instance, defines his disclosure pattern. He illustrates this by explaining he is different from her, and belongs to, as he puts it: "*a strong base sort of, kind of school*", meaning that the sort of upbringing he had taught him not to believe in sharing problems, and therefore "one does not wash one's dirty linen outside". The tension between believing in sharing and not believing in sharing - to suppress one's innermost feelings - is an ongoing issue between the two partners.

4.3.2 Awareness of partner's disclosure style

The intercultural partners were well aware of their own disclosure style and they could compare it to their partner's style. People mentioned being more closed, and maybe talking less, while their partner was said to be more expressive and talkative. Others again said that they were quite different, but they complemented each other well: one partner might talk a lot, but the other one was rather a good listener. A partner's disclosure style might even depend on the occasion, though they also claim to discuss a lot but they choose different issues. Then again partners can get tired of sharing their world with each other, as they think the other one is after all not really so interested in what they think. Other couples see their differences in disclosure style as being linked to their origins. In the following excerpt Gabina explains their different disclosure styles by their cultural origins:

> CC: How do you see your cultural background reflected in your relationship?
> Gabina: My husband comes from a very small family from the countryside whereas I come from a big city, thus I am used to being around many people and extended family, surrounded by much noise and smiley faces. On the other hand, my husband prefers the quiet home and the peacefulness of being alone [...] he always has the impression that I am "shouting" while indeed, I am talking in the "normal" Latin way or volume of speech [EI7]

Marika and Martijn see their differences in disclosure rather in their family backgrounds:

Communication	Communicatie
Martijn: […] at my home everything was always discussed [...] at your place I have the feeling there's never a discussion going on, never, never Marika: we never talked [...] it is like Martijn also often says, that in our family we always have a second agenda, we say something but we mean something else [CI2]	Martijn: […] bij mij thuis werd er altijd over alles gediscussieerd […]bij jouw thuis heb ik het gevoel daar wordt nooit gepraat, nooit, nooit Marika: wij hebben nooit gepraat […] het is zoals Martijn ook vaak zegt, dat in onze familie houden we altijd een tweede agenda bij, we zeggen wat maar bedoelen wat anders [CI2]

The question of awareness of the partner's disclosure style also leads to the issue of whether the partners are different or similar, and whether these differences originate in culture, family, personality or something else. This very well represents the intercultural communication dialectic of difference-similarity put forward by Martin and Nakayama (1999), which is particularly relevant to intercultural relationships, where one finds fundamental contradictions in communication between the two partners, and between individuals and their social networks. It is the dialectic of difference-similarity which essentially defines intercultural interaction (Chen, 2002: 249).

Awareness of a partner's disclosure style (and its possible difference from one's own) also raises emotional issues, positive or negative, and can eventually lead to better understanding between the partners. Different disclosure styles entailed the factors of anxiety (loss of love) and of endearment (touched by the partner's willingness and determination to learn Finnish). Unfamiliarity with a new situation can give rise to anxiety, which can lead to feelings of not being loved any more, as Tutta experienced.

> CC: How do you think your ways of communicating with each other have changed, if you think how it is now and how it was in the beginning?
> Tutta: […] I always thought you can't love me anymore because you're so angry, you're so extremely angry, thát I couldn't understand that you could be so angry [...] in the beginning it made me really feel bad, and again feel guilty [...] but more or less I started to understand you better
> Theo: Belgians are more critical [TI1]

4.3.3 Openness generates support, and conveys the essence of an intercultural relationship

The need for support was mentioned in the chapter on connection and autonomy, but it is also relevant to the dialectical pole of openness. Couples see support as evolving through interaction. Rejecting or weakening someone is most often done by refusing to talk or disclose, which some couples said had been the case when a partner had – unintentionally - not supported or complimented the other one on a job well done. Support is explicitly linked to

openness and sharing. Being supportive also means not having secrets from each other. Social support refers to two interrelated interpersonal skills: the ability to provide social support to others, and the ability to recognize and make use of the social support others provide. The ability to provide social support includes getting things into perspective, empathizing with the distressed person's situation, and providing symbolic and instrumental support. The ability to utilize social support includes acceptance of what others say and the assistance they offer (Koerner & Maki, 2004).

Apart from support, disclosure also aids understanding between partners: one learns to understand the other one's thoughts. It is said that when one is in an intercultural relationship disclosure is inevitable as you just have to talk more than "normally" in order to understand each other. The following excerpt bears this out:

CC: Please describe some of the most wonderful moments you have experienced in your relationship thanks to your different cultural backgrounds Petri: As we come from different language and also cultural areas, there is more patience towards communication and interaction in this relationship than in the earlier one, in which ease of communication was the assumption. This is a fine thing and I am often very happy [EI2]	CC: Kuvailisitko muutaman kaikkein ihanimman /suurimman hetken, jotka olet kokenut parisuhteessanne kulttuuritaustanne erilaisuuden takia? Petri: Koska me tulemme eri kielten ja vähän kulttuurienkin alueelta, on tässä suhteessa enemmän kärsivällisyyttä viestintään ja vuorovaikutukseen liittyen kuin niissä aiemmissa, joissa oletuksena oli viestinnän helppous. Tämä on hieno asia ja olen siitä usein hyvin iloinen [EI2]

In conclusion, one can say, as Chen (2002: 146) does, that intercultural couples consciously disclose perceived aspects of differences to each other in order to increase understanding and anticipate possible problems related to the differences. Awareness and discussion of partners' ways of disclosure and of how they see themselves enables partners to match their impression with perceived self-image of their spouse.

An important point here is the presence of the chronotope all around and guiding the couples' dialogue. Montgomery & Baxter (1998) argue that they are influenced by Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, which refers to a socially constructed time-space dimension and takes into consideration the importance of temporal, spatial, and socio-historical contextual factors that enable full understanding of the dialectical experience. Most important in all this is the weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private side of life […] of historical sequences with the everyday and biographical sequences. (Bakhtin, 1981: 246-247.) Bakhtin referred to the broader significance of the chronotope to all meaning-making endeavours: "Every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (1981: 258). The implication of the chronological concept is therefore, says Baxter (2004: 185), that dialectics are best understood in situ.

One specific chronotope, highly charged with emotion and value, is the chronotope of threshold (Bakhtin, 1981:248). For all the intercultural partners involved, this chronotope of threshold is present in their perception of their relationship. It is said to be the most fundamental chronotope as it is the chronotope of crisis and a break in life. All the couples have at least one partner who has left his /her home country and has had to deal with the break-up of a certain part of life and embarking on another, which in turn reflects on the couple. In this chronotope of threshold, the moments of the couples' decision-making determine the whole life of the people involved, and time is essentially instantaneous. It is as if it has no duration; the event falls out of the normal course of biographical time, as is illustrated in the following:

> CC: How did this (adjusting to a strange society) effect on your relationship?
> Tutta: […]it was such a shock beginning, I don't know what I did, I've never been so fast in my life, but we decided to do it because we felt so good with each other, it was a pretty normal step, and it was a very strange step into the unknown [...]
> Theo: I was changing from one life to another […] I had to leave a lot of my cultural background, my cultural heritage [TI1]

This chronotope of threshold coined by Bakhtin finds other names for instance from Schaetti and Ramsey (2009), who state that a person in a liminal space is on a threshold, is no longer part of the past and not yet part of the new beginning (p. 4). For many people going through intercultural adaptation the experience of liminal space becomes the most constant, lived experience. According to Schaetti and Ramsey (2009), liminality can generate a powerful liberating force for intercultural, for understanding: it allows them to celebrate their marginality and multiplistic perspectives and not to be restricted by either/or thinking but instead they can more easily apply both/and thinking, reflecting the dialectical perspective.

Taking this even further, one can say that as everything happens through communication, hence through language. This is especially true in the case of intercultural relationships where partners share at least one foreign language, even "language as a treasure-house of images, is fundamentally chronotopic" (Bakhtin, 1981:251).

4.3.4 Praxis

As in the previous sections, here too I will look into the praxis patterns or communication strategies the intercultural couples used to manage the openness-closedness dialectic. They patterns are topic selection, probing, withdrawal, and confrontational conduct. These terms draw on Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey's study (2002), which I discussed in Section 2.3.3 on the subject of praxis.

Topic selection is indicated by the purposeful avoidance of certain topics. Withdrawal strategies can include physically removing oneself from the partner's presence, or becoming silent and refusing to take part in the conversation. Probing refers to a strategy in response to the feeling that there is

not enough information sharing going on in the relationship. Confrontational social conduct as a strategy serves several purposes and encompasses various types of behaviour associated with high levels of anger or discomfort as well as with particular topics. I employ the term *confrontational* conduct instead of Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey's *anti-social conduct*. I opt not to use anti-social as it is, rather, a behavioural term, whereas confrontational highlights interaction or encounters between people in which conflict or crisis occurs.

Topic selection

This way of managing the dialectic of openness-closedness deals essentially with which issues can be disclosed and which not, according to which a conscious choice is made. The following excerpt from an interview illustrates very well how this praxis of topic selection is handled and reflected on, and how perfectly it interrelates with the connection-autonomy dialectic.

CC: Do you have any taboo themes or things you say to each other: we're not going to talk about that because that provokes a fight? Kornelis: sometimes there are things, there were times like that, last year, then we didn't touch serious topics because it became too difficult, too heavy Kristel: yes, we really had a bit Kornelis: no discussions and such things, for instance about role division, about equality between men and women, that is a difficult theme, we can terribly misunderstand each other and we go in the wrong direction and we don't see a way out anymore, so let it be, let it be […] sometimes we also have to say we should only talk about issues that bring us closer to one another, those which don't bring us further apart, not about things that separate us. Sometimes we have to deal with these really very consciously, perhaps it makes our relationship quite serious in the eyes of others, sometimes I think like "strange that our relationship is so really serious", but we also have sometimes real good, less serious […] [TI3]	CC: Hebben jullie taboe thema's of dingen dat je tegen mekaar zegt: daarover gaan we niet spreken want daarover krijgen we ruzie? Kornelis: soms zijn er wel dingen, we hebben al wel eens tijden gehad, vorig jaar nog, dan raken we even geen serieuze onderwerpen aan omdat het gewoon te moeilijk was, te zwaar werd Kristel: ja toen hadden we echt wel een beetje Kornelis: geen discussies en zo van dat, bijvoorbeeld over rolverdeling, over gelijkheid tussen man en vrouw, dat is een moeilijk thema, daar kunnen we mekaar ontzettend in misbegrijpen en totaal de verkeerde kant opgaan, en we komen er toch niet uit, dus laat maar, laat het maar [...] soms moeten we ook zeggen nou gaan we't alleen maar hebben over dingen die ons dichter bij mekaar brengen en niet dingen die ons verwijderen, uit elkaar brengen. Daar moeten we soms echt heel bewust mee bezig zijn, dat maakt onze relatie misschien vrij serieus voor anderen, soms denk ik wel eens van "raar dat onze relatie zo erg serieus is", maar we hebben ook soms wel erg goeie, minder serieuzere [...] [TI3]

At first I categorized this as a form of denial, given the fact that Kornelis said *they do not bring up these issues anymore*, meaning they do not talk about the

issues. This is based on the fact, according to Kornelis, that they had some difficult times during which they did not touch serious subjects because it became too difficult. The praxis pattern of denial denies the presence of a contradiction by legitimating only one dialectical pole to the virtual exclusion of the other poles. However, he says they sometimes think they should only talk about issues that bring them closer to one another. This points, yet again, to denial: not talking about issues of autonomy. However, issues of connection are reinforced by talking about these very issues.

We should also note Kornelis's *sometimes,* which points to more than one particular time, signifying the praxis of spiralling inversion, which means that each pole of the contradiction is dominant at different times. But in the same sentence he defines the topic, saying: *we say we should talk only* and *we have to deal with these*, which in turn points to the praxis of segmentation, as here the actual topic (the issues) seems to be prevalent.

Obviously here we also see the openness-closedness dialectic, e.g. when the husband uses words about *not bringing up issues, not touching serious subjects, we should talk about,* and *we have to deal with* issues. The dialectical tension of openness-closedness becomes quite evident. At the same time Kornelis tells us how he and Kristel engage in the praxis of dealing with openness and closedness. So the praxis pattern used here is topic selection, which means the process of separating issues for discussion according to the topic. The result is that certain topics are taboo or off limits, which indicates that others are considered safe; the use of topic selection is explained by the purposeful avoidance of certain topics.

Kornelius also makes a fascinating observation in this excerpt when he says: *We have had some difficult times during which we didn't touch serious subjects […]* and a bit later later: *Sometimes we have to deal with these very consciously* (this relates to the autonomy-connection dialectic*).* This shows how the couple *sometimes* consciously deal with and sometimes refrain from *dealing with*, issues concerning the autonomy-connection dialectic in terms of time or while using the openness-closedness dialectic**.**

The last two sentences of this excerpt, when Kornelis says, *sometimes we have to deal with these very consciously*, illustrate the interdependence of the internal/external contradictions. His words imply the act of talking, something which is done sometimes, and refers to the internal dialectic of openness-closedness, the "*sometimes"* also implying times they do *not* talk about these issues. Kornelis, voicing the idea that he and Kristel sometimes deal with these issues very consciously, highlights the fact that dialectics are consciously felt and experienced. It is quite common for relational partners to be aware of and able to describe the dialectical tensions they are confronted with, but these tensions do not need to be consciously felt or described.

The last sentence, *perhaps it makes our relationship quite serious in the eyes of others*, signifies the interplay between the earlier mentioned internal dialectic of openness-closedness and the external dialectic of revelation-concealment. The partner reflects on how others or the outside world may perceive their relationship, given that they, as a couple, sometimes deal very consciously with

certain issues, which perhaps suggests that they do this in the presence of other people. The reference to the external dialectic of revelation-concealment is mentioned here to illustrate the interrelatedness between internal and external contradictions, both a fundamental part of totality.

Probing

With regard to the openness-closedness dialectic, the praxis pattern of probing is used in response to the feeling that there is not enough sharing in the relationship. Especially when partners have particular themes or topics of an intimate and personal kind which are often evaded, yet are brought up from time to time, one can talk about probing. It is also a strategy used to bring about conversation or discussion when a partner does not go deeply enough into something to satisfy the needs of the other. When partners eventually discuss the particular topic, they also actually verbalize their communication pattern. Sami and Sabine's talk illustrates this very well.

Conflicts	Konflikte
Sami: we just had a talk about our sex life, which I somehow bring up a little every 2 years, it bothers me that she never talks about it, I guess that's the only thing	Sami: wir hatten gerade so über unser Sexualleben so ein Gespräch dass ich irgendwie ein bisschen aufnehme alle 2 Jahre, das ärgert mich, dass sie nie darüber spricht, ich denke das ist so das Einzige
Sabine: hm	Sabine: hm
Sami: […] I guess it has become a kind of conversation style of mine that I always try to summarise a bit where the problem might be, or how we actually see it, but it is somehow just as we said before that I like to analyse,	Sami: […] ich denke das oft so dass ist einfach so ein Gesprächsstil dass ich versuche ein bisschen zusammenzufassen, so wo das Problem sein könnte oder wie wir das eigentlich sehen oder so, aber das ist eigentlich irgendwie einfach wie wir vorhin sagten dass ich gerne analysiere,
do you have the feeling that you are overwhelmed sometimes?	hast du das Gefühl dass du manchmal überrumpelt wirst?
Sabine: actually not	Sabine: eigentlich nicht
Sami: but I think I talk, I think I often start a conversation about our relationship	Sami: aber ich denke ich sage, ich denke ich fange öfters so ein Gespräch an über unser Verhältnis
Sabine: yes, that's possible, I'm not like that, I don't think so analytically as you do, that's why I don't talk then, so I, yes I start to speak much much later. [CI3]	Sabine: ja, das kann sein, ich bin nicht so, ich denke nicht so analytisch, deswegen spreche ich auch dann nicht, also ich, ja, ich fange viel viel später an zu sprechen. [CI3]

Sami is the one who starts discussions not only about their relationship but also in general. He says it has become a kind of talking style of his that he always synthesizes and analyzes. Sabine is not the sort of person who analyses and is not in the habit of interfering; she reports that she speaks much later, and on the whole speaks little. Here Sami actually reflects on his disclosure style, the impact it may have on Sabine, and inquires how she feels about him, if she

perhaps finds him overwhelming. As a strategy the probing here is manifested in Sami questioning his partner; trying to get her to open up and say whether the topic of their 'sex life' is suitable for discussion.

Withdrawal

The strategy of withdrawal emerged as partners answered either pole of the openness-closedness dialectic. It was a commonly described strategy, used when partners felt the discussion was leading nowhere, or when certain topics, e.g. relationship problems generally, often came up. Withdrawal strategies included a partner's refusal to take part in the conversation, as one partner mentioned:

> Silja: if we have relationship problems, he doesn't want to talk about them, they're brushed under the carpet often [TI2]

Withdrawal is often connected to time as well, in that a topic may arise at an unsuitable time. As a strategy, withdrawal is more like a mix of segmentation (topic related management) and spiralling inversion (time related management), but managed within the openness-closedness dialectic.

Destructive confrontational conduct

This praxis pattern is based on analysis of the interviews and of the field notes I made. During some interviews disagreements arose that were sometimes difficult to interpret. On such occasions I turned to my field notes, which helped me and strengthened my ideas during the analysis process.

During the interview the situation escalated, especially with the topic of "raising children". The conversation continued on the husband's terms, by which I mean that he mostly took the turns, talked a lot, and talked loudly. But most unsettling was that he offended his wife in my presence. Using confrontational conduct as a praxis pattern to try to convey one's message is done by starting arguments, shouting, crying, sulking, and engaging in unkind, offensive behaviour. One finds it particularly when someone does not want to continue a discussion, dwells on one particular issue, or dismisses an issue. The following excerpt illustrates this dysfunctional praxis pattern.

> Raising children
> Annaliisa: […] I think it was uhm like I find that you told her about it, but I feel that if I start insisting something in that situation when we are all in a hurry in the morning and if I start telling her she has to change, it's going to be a problem
> Anthony: no no no, no this is stupid, we shouldn't even talk like that because
> Annaliisa: so that she sees herself that
> Anthony: it's really funny, I don't know how to put it, it shows you don't know what you are talking about, but it's not the first time, you know […] I have to tell you because you don't seem to get this simple thing in life that […]
> Annaliisa: I kind of respect that you know, but I must say that I was brought up in a Finnish culture
> Anthony: she is

> Annaliisa: and yes, it's much more liberal and
> Anthony: it's not Finnish, you know, that is what I've been telling you, there's nothing like Finnish culture […] [CI5]

It is important to note that the use of anti-social strategies (according to Hoppe-Nagao and Ting Toomey, 2002), which I call *destructive confrontational conduct* (as I do not see this kind of communication as a strategy, which is usually planned, but rather as conduct, which refers to someone's behaviour and manner), is associated with high levels of anger and discomfort (and frustration in this case), as well as with particular topics. It seems that when a couple reaches a level of openness which feels unpleasant to one or other of them, that one shifts to confrontational conduct, which seems to create a negative conflict spiral, *emphasizing* the gap between the dialectical poles rather than *minimizing* it. The result is a dysfunctional pattern which leaves no space for interaction. My field notes also confirm the praxis of destructive confrontational conduct, and its features of widening the gap instead of narrowing it by using different strategies.

> This was something I had never expected. I mean the interaction among them. After the interview I was totally kaput. A. took me back to the station, we were quite silent in the car […] It was most of the time him speaking, constantly overlapping her. She talked now and then, she actually laughed a lot; he was very dominant. At times she was shouting, and he was putting her down with all kinds of things he said. Oh my. I felt pity for her. And then I felt pity for him. This is a damn difficult situation […] He talks, talks, does not really stay with the subject, somehow misinterprets, misunderstands her […] She tries to bring in arguments but he always overpowers her with his comments. I got even myself a feeling of being 'put down'. I often tried to give her a turn, but it didn't always succeed because he took over. And I got annoyed with him never listening to her. They don't seem to agree on anything. [FCI5]

4.4 Conclusions

The internal tensions within the boundary of the couple's relationship experienced by the intercultural couples in this study highlight certain features of the three internal dialectics, autonomy-connection, predictability-novelty and openness-closedness. In these intercultural relationships the themes belonging to the predictability-novelty dialectic were related to the certainty of the relationship and uncertainty about the future; work; and the "shock" of novelty, which includes the integration process of the non-Finnish partner, and the two people as a couple in the new situation and new surroundings.

Connection-autonomy

Regarding the connection-autonomy dialectic, it is apparent that time plays an important role in perceptions of togetherness and separateness. *Excessive togetherness* at the beginning of the relationship was perceived by some couples as suffocating. This confirms Baxter and Simon's claim that increased contact

between partners limits autonomous activity by the partners and increases connection through more time spent together (1993: 238).

The need for *extra support* related to language and integration issues was brought up by non-Finnish partners within the frame of dependence. In order to cope effectively with stressful situations individuals usually need social support from the environment (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Lazarus &Folkman, 1984). Also well-being, or satisfaction, (Ward & Kennedy, 1993: 222) is facilitated by social support during a time of acculturation (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Ward, 1996).

Although the importance of the partner's support on the non-Finnish partner's well-being seems to be evident, dependence may not be totally beneficial, as Jasinskaja found in his research on immigrants in Finland (2000). This can also be applied to close relationships. Firstly, excessive connectedness and too much help for the partner may prevent him or her from acquiring decision-making competence and developing self-regulatory skills, and also deprive him / her of the chance to establish or voice their own desires and attitudes (Liebkind & Kosonen, 1998; Roer-Stier & Rivlis, 1998). Secondly, there is a danger that the more support the non-Finnish partner receives from her/his spouse, the less she/he may learn about how to deal with everyday issues and the new cultural environment (Van Selm & Van Oudenhoven, 1997).

Strong dependence, i.e. excessive connectedness to the Finnish partner, and absolute devotion to the partner, seem to result in partners not having enough autonomy. This may complicate the non-Finnish partner's participation in the wider society and correspondingly increase their distance from it, which also confirms Jasinskaja-Lahti's research (2000: 22). In addition, as partners in a relationship influence each other, this strong dependence obviously also complicates the relationship as such, as was shown in the intercultural couples' examples, e.g., the non-Finnish partners feeling guilty and suffering, and the Finnish partner having the burden of the other one strongly depending on them.

The main result concerning the autonomy-connection dialectic is the occurrence of dialectical tensions related to intercultural adaptation issues: the excessive togetherness and search for separateness which is linked to the issue of support. However, support can be accepted, neglected, and rejected, which also signifies a tension with the ones who provide the support. The role of support is of the utmost importance, especially in intercultural relationships, as intercultural adaptation entails both the disruption of established support networks and the challenge to develop new ones. Many intercultural couples go through a stressful period because of competing family responsibilities, social isolation, and changes in their social and work status, as was also found by Copeland and Norell (2002).

Predictability-novelty

Concerning the predictability-novelty dialectic, the intercultural couples' certainty about their relationship was a permanent and stable factor. Uncertainty or novelty was perceived by the couples in issues of adaptation.

This includes uncertainty triggers such as *turning points*, *partner's distinct features*, and *ignorance about the future.*

While the need for stability and surprise are important for relationship partners because they represent important individual and relational needs, it was not always easy for the intercultural couples in this study to experience these uncertainties in their relationship. Yet on the whole the certainties of the relationship made up for the uncertainties they associated with the shock of novelty. This shock links up with theories of acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation, when people adapt to a different culture (Berry, 1997; Gudykunst, 1995; Kim, 2001). Uncertainty and anxiety, as expressed by anger and guilt, are features perceived by Finnish partners, but in interdependence with certainty they perfectly exemplify the predictability-novelty dialectic.

Uncertainty and anxiety can be explained in part by Gudykunst's anxiety/uncertainty management theory (AUM) (1988; 2005). Individuals experience more uncertainty when communicating with people unfamiliar to them or who have unfamiliar traits. Anxiety is the affective (emotional) equivalent of uncertainty. AUM is not meant to reduce anxiety but to manage it, to make people more mindful. Although Gudykunst suggests that dialectical processes are involved in AUM (2005: 13), these are not obviously visible from his theoretical framework, which shows an anxiomatic nature, a non-dialogical disposition, and an absence of dialectical tensions.

Partners tend to perceive uncertainty at the beginning of a relationship, and certainty is perceived "after being together a long time". Sometimes feelings of uncertainty are evoked when "looking at the future of the relationship". This leads us once again to Bakhtin's chronotope question. The awareness that personal relationships are performed in discontinuous chronotopes in which time, space and self-identities are never the same (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 119) is exemplified in various ways. The dialogue of certainty and uncertainty is ongoing over the history of a relationship: the meaning of certainty and uncertainty may shift over time, but ultimately it is through the communicative enactment that relational partners appear to reference the past and the future in their present interactions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; 2004).

Partners' feeling uncertain with the other one's unfamiliar traits tends to confirms Felmlee's study (1995) on "fatal attractions", where many of the participants reported being initially attracted to a quality in their partner that later became a source of alienation and resentment. Some initial uncertainties may be evaluated positively and only later be re-evaluated differently (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 122).

Whereas certainty about the relationship is a steady feature that intercultural partners count on, this study showed they also had the need for spontaneity and being surprised and romanced. This confirms Baxter and Simon's research (1993), which states that partners in romantic relationships are more satisfied with spontaneity-oriented maintenance efforts by their partner under conditions of excessive predictability (certainty) than under conditions of excessive unpredictability (uncertainty). Also in general one can say that

couples' perceptions of the certainty-uncertainty dialectic show similarities with Bruess' study (1994), which argued that the daily rituals of married couples allow them to respond simultaneously to the demands for both certainty and uncertainty.

As far as uncertainty about the future is concerned, intercultural couples seem to hold a special position in this respect. The intercultural couples convey their uncertainty about the future mostly by their indecision about where to live, where to find work, traditions, decision making, and long term planning. Many of these uncertainties are stressors all couples face, but the extra differences in culture (for instance, choosing to move between two countries versus two cities), may intensify feelings of misunderstanding and relationship dissatisfaction in intercultural couples (Durudoye, 1994).

Openness-closedness

As regards the openness-closedness dialectic, the central issues brought up by the intercultural couples concern *sharing and withholding*, *awareness of partners' disclosure style*, and *openness as a generator for support*, and *as a means to capture the essence of an intercultural relationship*. These issues raise the fundamentals of this dialectic by 1) identifying the dialectical poles, 2) pointing to the partners' consciousness and 3) denoting the functions.

Identifying the dialectical poles signifies the actual disclosing, the need to disclose (sharing), and the restraining from disclosing (withholding) caused by, for instance, taboo topics. Intercultural partners' consciousness refers to the partners being conscious of each other's disclosure style, it one way or the other. The fact that these contradictory poles are consciously felt and experienced by the partners supports Baxter and Montgomery's claim (1996; 1997) that it is quite common for relational partners to be aware of and to describe the dialectical tensions they are confronted with. However, dialectical tensions do not need to be consciously felt or described: "Dialectical interplay may work 'backstage' beyond partners' mindful awareness, nonetheless contributing to relational change" (1996: 15; 1997: 331).

As support is evoked through interaction, and understanding between partners entails disclosure, I believe that these can be considered as functions of openness, i.e. a generator for support and as a means to capture the essence of an intercultural relationship. The ability and motivation to provide social support in a relationship are necessary but insufficient conditions to guarantee its benefits; those in need of support must also possess the ability and desire to accept and to use support from others (Coble, Gantt & Mallinckrodt, 1996). Disclosure in the form of direct social support helps people cope in stressful situations. This confirms research on individuals' conceptions of the approval and care they receive from others (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003).

Couple perceptions and awareness of their similarities and differences from a dialectical perspective were found in the couples' various disclosure patterns. This corresponds with Baxter and West's study (2003), in which similarity was perceived as making interaction easy and effortless, and seemed

to be related in established romantic pairs, and where differences in disclosure, although perceived as threatening at first, contributed to individual growth or relational change and adaptability.

Praxis

The praxis patterns used in the autonomy-connection dialectic are recalibration, balance, segmentation and spiralling inversion, and denial. In the predictability-novelty dialectic the praxis patterns used are spiralling inversion, and segmentation. The praxis patterns utilized in the openness-closedness dialectic are topic selection, probing, withdrawal, and destructive confrontational conduct. These praxis patterns or management strategies show how the intercultural partners make use of various practical choices to manage the dialectical tensions they experience. In Table 16 below an overview is presented of the praxis patterns found in the internal dialectics between the intercultural partners, and their functionality. *Dysfunctional* points to the evasion or embracing of dialectical tensions by denying, withdrawing or engaging in confrontational behaviour.

TABLE 16 Praxis patterns and their functionality in internal dialectics

Praxis patterns and their functionality used in internal dialectics		
	Functional praxis patterns	*Dysfunctional praxis patterns*
Connection- autonomy	- Balance - Recalibration - Segmentation - Spiralling inversion	- Denial
Predictability-novelty	- Segmentation - Spiralling inversion	
Openness-closedness	- Probing - Topic selection	- Destructive confrontational conduct - Withdrawal

5 RELATIONAL DIALECTICS AT THE INTERFACE OF THE INTERCULTURAL COUPLES AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORK

In the previous chapter the intercultural couples' internal relational dialectics were laid out. The present chapter presents the analysis of the diverse communication facets occurring at the interface of the intercultural couples and their social networks. As in the previous chapter, the analysis is based on the interview data, that is, three sets of data deriving from the thematic, concept map and e-mail interviews. The aim is to identify, illustrate, and understand the "push and pull" of the external relational dialectics the intercultural couples experienced. This is very much in line with Bakhtin's thinking about totality. Emphasizing the chronotopic nature of social life, he urges that our ability to understand even internal contradictions is limited until we incorporate information about the social context in which parties live their relationship. This means that we have to keep in mind the interrelatedness of internal and external contradictions, and remember that contradictions are located in the process of relating that occurs between and among people. The individual and the social are dialogically inseparable, which means that the individual self becomes only in relating, and relating reproduces both a historical-cultural and a social milieu.

Table 17 below presents the framework of the three external dialectics, inclusion-seclusion, uniqueness-conventionality, and revelation-concealment. Depicting the external dialectics, Table 17 also portrays the external dialectics with their respective section headings: *The pleasure of being hospitable, and needing to set limits*; *A flair for being special, and caring what the neighbours think*; and *Sharing relational issues with friends, and those things it's best not to talk about*.

TABLE 17 Typology of external dialectical contradictions (Baxter, 1993; 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) with respective section headings in italics

	INTEGRATION-SEPARATION	STABILITY-CHANGE	EXPRESSION-PRIVACY
EXTERNAL	**Inclusion-Seclusion** *The pleasure of being hospitable, and needing to set limits*	**Uniqueness-Conventionality** *A flair for being special, and caring what the neighbours think*	**Revelation-Concealment** *Sharing relational issues with friends, and those things it's best not to talk about*

The findings indicate that the intercultural couples in this study experienced basic external dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1993; 1997; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) at the interface of the couples and their social network. This means that they perceived the inclusion-seclusion, uniqueness-conventionality, and revelation-concealment dialectics. This indicates that similar characteristics to the above mentioned external dialectics appear also in intracultural couples, according to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. However, the intercultural couples also raise additional topics in various contexts beyond the boundary of their relationship, and including within their social network.

As I have already mentioned in Chapter 4, when I am illustrating data with interview excerpts I will, when suitable, refer to theoretical links, e.g. integrally linked dialectics or contradictions, or interrelated contradictions. This means that when an example occurs of a connection-autonomy dialectic which is linked with the dialectic of openness-closedness, or with the dialectic of inclusion-seclusion and this can be obviously observed, I will refer to this. Similarly, if a praxis pattern, or the way in which partners manage their contradictions, occurs in an interview excerpt, this will be mentioned and explained, since praxis patterns complete the totality of a dialectic.

5.1 Inclusion–Seclusion: The pleasure of being hospitable, and needing to set limits

The inclusion-seclusion dialectic involves a couple's management of coping with demands to withdraw from or interact with others. The way inclusion and seclusion are perceived by intercultural couples points to the dynamic processes in a relationship, in which the meanings of inclusion and seclusion are likely to undergo changes as the partners act chronotopically in the course of their relationship, in different relationship contexts, and in interaction with their social network. This section illustrates how challenging it can be for couples to find even a temporary balance between inclusion and exclusion. Werner and Baxter (1994) assert that couples need time alone and privacy from others to

establish their own dyadic relationship. In addition, couples need to create identity as a social unit requiring integration with others. A number of tensions have been observed in the inclusion-exclusion dialectic. In this study the intercultural partners perceive inclusion-seclusion in a variety of ways, which means that there are several manifestations in which the dialectic is enacted. Themes of the inclusion-seclusion dialectic include couples' need for the support of in-laws and friends, integration and belonging as aspects of inclusion, excessive inclusion endangering the couple relationship, exclusion, seclusion, and the praxis patterns of recalibration, and dual spiraling inversion.

5.1.1 Couples' need for in-laws', friends' and acquaintances' support

Besides the support of their spouse, the intercultural couples also need their family - both the Finnish partner's family and the non-Finnish partner's family (living abroad) - and their friends and acquaintances, all of whom are significant for their "connection and inclusion" as a couple and also for keeping family ties alive. For many couples, visiting the non-Finnish partner's family abroad was only possible during an annual holiday. The idea of holidays, however, was approached with mixed feelings, as most couples claimed that the annual visit was not always perceived as a holiday. On the one hand the couples want holidays as a "real couple, not always holidays for and with the (couples') parents". On the other hand they admit that during these yearly holidays they need the parents in the non-Finnish partner's homeland to take care of the children, as this gives them a once-a-year opportunity to be together as a whole family. Some couples considered the support of the non-Finnish family abroad to be very important, especially as a help with the children:

Conflicts Marika: Without that support [of the non-Finnish partner's parents], their surprise visits, and help with the children we would long ago already have separated [CI2]	Conflicten Marika: Zonder die steun (van zijn ouders), hun verrassingsbezoekjes, en hulp met de kinderen zouden we al lang uit elkaar geweest zijn [CI2]

Whereas for some couples the in-laws were seen as a definite support, for other couples it was different. On several occasions the intercultural couples mentioned that meeting the Finnish family was complicated and demanding; irregular and sporadic visits, for example, were said to be often unsatisfying, and sometimes the family did not meet in a long time. Reasons given for not meeting were distance (within Finland), traditionally loose family ties, and religious differences between the Finnish in-laws and the non-Finnish spouse that led to conflict and made meetings impossible. Finnish partners missed their parents' visits as they mean support and appreciation in the child-raising process. This concern points to a lack of emotional support from the parents, and more specifically to a lack of appraisal support. According to Israel and

Schurman (1990), emotional and appraisal support lead to a need for feedback and reinforcement, which will enable them to carry on.

Friends and acquaintances are seen as essential by the intercultural couples. Especially when one is in a different country one has to leave friends behind, and as a result one's whole circle of friends becomes different. The couples claim to have both individual and mutual friends and acquaintances who support their relationship:

Adaptation	Aanpassing
Martijn: […] so I have, you can say, deep in the Finnish society a few very fine contacts, and that is an enormous support [CI2]	Martijn: [...] ik heb dus laat maar zeggen diep in de Finse maatschappij een paar hele fijne contacten, en dat is een enorme steun [CI2]

Friends who are mutual friends of the couple were said to support the couples' relationship, whereas friends of just one of the partners were sometimes said to put stress on the relationship.

The intercultural couples also actively bond with other couples with the aim of providing and receiving relationship support. They want to take care of each other's marriage and to support each other.

5.1.2 Integration and belonging as aspects of inclusion

Integration into society is one of the intercultural couples' aims, set out at the very beginning of their life in Finland. As well as appreciating their in-laws, other family members, and friends, the couples engage in a goal-oriented search for other intercultural couples and families, international societies, and religious societies which will provide them with a sense of belonging. Kornelis and Kristel explain this search as follows:

CC: Yes, right, that is what you said in the beginning, that you react too much to the outside world, well too much, well, especially during recent time, that you do more what others expect from you, and that you would like more to be a couple Kornelis: yes, but we also have the church and this gives a feeling of belonging, the society, and besides that we also have chosen very consciously direct integration for that reason, so having looked for contact with the church society, also to have the feeling that we belong somewhere, to a group of people Kristel: and here comes the fact that we emigrated, so that you have the need to belong somewhere [TI3]	CC: Ja juist, dat is wat je in het begin verteld had, dat je te veel reageert op de buitenwereld, wel te veel, wel vooral de laatste tijd, dat je meer doet wat de anderen van je verwachten, en dat je meer een paar zou willen zijn Kornelis: ja, maar we hebben ook de kerk en dat geeft het gevoel van erbij te horen, de maatschappij, en daarnaast hebben we ook heel bewust gekozen voor directe opvang voor die reden, dus contact gezocht met de kerkgemeenschap, ook het gevoel hebben dat we ergens bijhoren, bij een groep van mensen Kristel: en er komt bij door het feit dat we geëmigreerd zijn, dus dat je behoefte hebt om ergens bij te horen [TI3]

When people can identify with a larger group who share certain aspects of a culture (behaviour, language, traditions, values and worldviews), they have the feeling that they belong somewhere. This is explained by Ting-Toomey (1999:13), who states that group inclusion satisfies people's needs for membership affiliation and belonging, and that culture creates a comfort zone in which people experience in-group inclusion, and in-group/out-group differences. It is within their own group that people experience safety, inclusion and acceptance without having to constantly justify or explain their actions.

According to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006:11), social integration can be defined as the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships and positions of a host society. For the non-Finnish partners of intercultural couples, social integration means the process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights and obligations, gaining access to positions and social status, building personal relationships with members of the new Finnish society, and forming a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, that society. For the host society, integration means opening up institutions and granting equal opportunities to immigrants. In this interaction, however, the host society has more power and more prestige.

5.1.3 Excessive inclusion endangers the couple relationship

Excessive inclusion happens when the couple leads too much of a lifestyle where couple-time is rare. The couple enjoys inviting people over, having parties, having guests every weekend and sometimes every day, and being constantly surrounded by family and friends. On the one hand they love being hospitable, but on the other hand it becomes too much and they need to set limits because they realize that their couple-relationship is suffering; too much inclusion seems to endanger the relationship.

Yet another facet of excessive inclusion arises when one partner's family persistently seek contact with their son/daughter, and the partner in question seems still very dependent on their parents. This is about excessive inclusion of the partner's family and the partner, to the exclusion of the partner's wife or husband. Especially in the case of the Finnish-Greek couple this became a clear concern:

> CC: What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural background?
> Kersti: How to react to the mother of your Greek husband and how should we rethink her role in the relationship with her son after we have got married? Because the tie between a Greek mother and her son is tighter in Greece than in Finland, letting go of her son (in this case the only child also) may be a little bit difficult, if the separateness is not made clear and if there is still left dependency from the son's side towards his mother or vice versa [EI3]

This concern of Kersti's relates to the stereotype of overbearing mothers-in-law. Kinship has been described as the most powerful factor in Greek culture, and this is still true today (Keller et al., 2003; Loizos & Papataxiarchis, 1991). This

obviously plays an important role in the couple's life together and impinges on their need to be secluded to enable connection between the partners.

5.1.4 Exclusion from the social network

The intercultural couples experienced three kinds of exclusion: 1) exclusion in the form of a family's outspoken preference for one partner and disapproval of the other; 2) exclusion for religious reasons; and 3) exclusion because of the lack of a social network and employment.

The following passage illustrates exclusion for religious reasons:

> CC: So you surely met Riitta's parents before
> Riitta: at the beginning they didn't want to see him at all for two years maybe
> Rokuro: it was quite a shock that I, it was a scandal
> Riitta: it was a scandal yes, that he's a Buddhist
> Rokuro: it doesn't matter to me but it does matter to them, so I couldn't do anything, so I just left the thing like that
> Riitta: well of course it was bad, I couldn't tell about the things we are doing together or something like that, it was a quiet subject like no talking [TI4]

Communication and religion have common features. As stated by Long (2001: 42), spirituality and communication overlap in that both deal with things like community, connection, culture, emotion, interaction, knowing, negotiation, temporality, tradition, and understanding.

People's ways of communicating their religious behaviour can be seen as a continuum of spiritual orientations of temperaments (Hughes & Dickson, 2005). Among those who confess to being religious Hughes and Dickson label these temperaments as either intrinsic or extrinsic. They also contend that intrinsically and extrinsically religious people vary in personality and in attitude. Intrinsically religious people are characterized personally as being strongly committed to their faith, and in terms of social factors they tend to be unprejudiced, tolerant of different viewpoints, and more mature than their extrinsically oriented counterparts. Extrinsically religious people, on the other hand, are said to view their religion as a means to another end, such as personal benefit or social relationships with others, rather than having it as a central personality quality. Concerning social factors they tend to be more prejudiced, and in need of comfort and security. (Hughes & Dickson, 2005: 27.)

Couples may want to belong, to be included, but it is not always easy for them to achieve that aim, nor is it always so easy for them to find the contacts they need. For these reasons some couples may feel excluded, as is the case with Silja and Simon:

> CC: Well, there are also the kind of tensions that deal with the couple as such and the society, because you don't live in a vacuum, you live as a couple in a community, with neighbours, friends, family, so have you ever felt tensions or the interplay between wanting to be involved in society as a couple, and be as a couple on your own
> Silja: Both of us, I think, are very sociable, we love to be with people, we love to have more acquaintances, friends, going to see them, get invitations, which we never do.

> We are usually the ones to invite people over here, or wherever to meet them, so that's been a little bit of a problem because it doesn't seem that we've found people who are associable or want to be together as much as we would. But then again, I mean, sometimes, rather, because of this, because people have not displayed as much openness as we have been wishing for both of us [TI2]

Another reason leading to the non-Finnish partners feeling excluded from a social network is unemployment, the lack of a regular job. This is a topic many people brought up and suffer from in terms of self esteem, lack of contacts, isolation and loneliness. Anthony describes it as follows:

> Family
> Anthony: I was trying to tie our discussion or argument with the main point I started with like the question where do you work? You know because that question means a lot to people in a way to talk about self-esteem, that question can make or break a human being, you know, it is a very big question, but people throw it around easily […] so when someone asks you where are you working, and you say: I am not working, I am not working. Ah yeah, ok, you know, that's the end of the conversation, so of course I can live with that but you don't want to live with that, you don't want that to be happening to you, you know, you don't want to meet that person again, but it stays in your mind, you know, there are people who are not really strong enough to cope, they break down or start drinking [CI5]

Integration in society is a goal for immigrants and intercultural couples, but it is a goal which it is not always easy to achieve. The central place of employment in a person's life has been recognized in immigration research (see Valtonen, 2002). Also stress inevitably accompanies a cross-cultural move, as those involved strive to retain aspects of their old culture while also attempting to integrate into the new one (see Berry, 2001; Kim, 2005; Liebkind, 2009: Van de Vijver, 2006). In conclusion, intercultural couples with an immigrant partner are faced with transitions that include acculturation and integration. These transitions not only reflect the couple's disposition but also point to the receiving society, its perceptions of "others" and its readiness or disposition to "allow" intercultural couples into its social networks.

5.1.5. Seclusion from the social network

Whereas excessive inclusion allowed only for rare moments of couple-time due to a hectic social life or due to the domination of in-laws, couples looked for seclusion to strengthen their relationship and to guarantee their relationship's well-being.

For instance, "holidays" are seen as a time when couples can be secluded and can re-connect again, even when the families on both sides try to get their "children" included in the bigger family. This needs to be negotiated with the families, and the couples need to stand firm to gain their couple-seclusion. Every couple wants time off and needs time for bonding, and this is equally the case with intercultural couples whose in-laws, the family of the non-Finnish partner, live abroad. This means that it is often expected that the yearly holiday will be spent in the non-Finnish partner's home country. Later we will see that holidays are a topic of negotiation and often discussed by intercultural couples,

but they are also a delicate issue for many couples who need time for themselves and for togetherness, no matter where it happens. It is always a matter of negotiation with the families, but often it is a complicated issue full of twists and turns, so the couples need to stand firm to get their couple-seclusion, which is greatly needed for relationship partners to connect.

Free time	Vrije tijd
Martijn: free time and coming from two countries, when we go on holidays the chance is we go to the Netherlands to meet people, but this doesn't always mean that it is holidays for yourself, it's of course wonderful to meet people but we also have to be together, want to be together and enjoy, we, our idea always was to backpack […] and go to the woods and set up our tent when we feel like, but this has never happened, because always Marika: always we go to my parents, to your Martijn: to your parents or to the Netherlands, or, in all those years once we could skip the Netherlands, then we drove to France on our own [CI2]	Martijn: vrije tijd en het uit twee landen komen, als wij vakantie hebben is de kans groot dat we naar Nederland gaan om mensen te ontmoeten, maar dat hoeft niet altijd te betekenen dat dat dan ook vakantie is voor jezelf, het is natuurlijk heerlijk om mensen te ontmoeten maar maar wij moeten ook samen, willen ook samen wel genieten, wij , altijd die idee van ons is met de rugzak [...] en we gaan het bos in en zetten het tentje op als we zin hebben, maar dat is nog nooit gebeurd, want altijd Marika: altijd gaan we bij mijn ouders, bij jouw Martijn: bij jouw ouders of naar Nederland of, in al die jaren zijn we er één keer tussenuit geweest in Nederland, toen zijn we samen naar Frankrijk gereden [CI2]

The issue of where to spend holidays can be considered a connection issue for the couple, while it is a separation issue from the family. Regularly occurring holidays tend to emphasize obligations to others (integration), but the couples also have an obligation to themselves as partners (connection), and therefore want to be separate from the family and in-laws.

Although the intercultural couples felt a lack of inclusion, as in "why don't we have more friends", they also try to explain that they actually do not need many friends as they are pretty contented as a couple and enjoy spending time at home.

> CC: This time I am more interested in you as a couple and your social surroundings, whether to include friends and spend time with them, having a social life, and at the same time having this need for seclusion that you want some privacy for the two of you, how do you feel this interplay between these two, inclusion and seclusion?
> Alan: often, we've talked about it many times that why don't we have more friends? We've often talked about that
> Anita: but I think partly it's also because we also don't really need that
> Alan: I think that we're very comfortable with our own selves because I know we definitely like, I know I love those times when we just plan something for us at home and don't feel like we need to be inviting friends over […] I have the idea that other people would regard us as very unsocial or something that we don't have more contact with friends, but I think that we're not isolated from society, we're anyway very comfortable in our own little world here [TI5]

In this passage we can note not only integrally linked contradictions but at the same time also fluidity, or a link between internal and external contradictions.

Alan saying they have talked about the topic of friends points to openness (internal), and to seclusion, as it deals with the seclusion from a network of friends (external). Also the mentioning of "feeling very comfortable with our own selves", and "loving those times when we just plan for us" signifies connection (internal) and seclusion (external). At the same time Alan adds, "I have the idea that other people would regard us as very unsocial or something". This again indicates a link to the external dialectic of uniqueness-conventionality.: "regard us as very unsocial or something" (uniqueness), whereas the norm seems to be that couples need to be social: (conventionality). It actually underscores the fact that dialectics can be consciously felt and experienced. The reference to the external dialectic of uniqueness-conventionality serves to illustrate the interrelatedness and interconnectedness between both external contradictions, this being a fundamental part of totality.

5.1.6 Praxis

Let us now turn our attention to the communication strategies the intercultural couples use to manage the inclusion-seclusion dialectic, or the praxis thereof. The praxis patterns observed were recalibration and **dual spiralling inversion.** Recalibration is indicated by a transformation in the form of the opposition such that the initially experienced polarities are no longer oppositional to one another. It is the process of temporarily reframing a situation so that the tugs and pulls on partners no longer seem to be in opposite directions. Dual spiralling inversion points to two management strategies: 1) to a spiralling inversion between the couple and their social network, and 2) to a spiralling inversion between the partners themselves.

Recalibration

This way of managing the dialectic of inclusion-seclusion involves how a couple copes with demands to interact with others and to withdraw from others. The following excerpt from an interview with Silja and Simon illustrates how this praxis of recalibration is handled and reflected on, and how it interrelates with the inclusion-seclusion dialectic:

> CC: how do you feel this interplay between these two, inclusion and seclusion?
> Silja: I think both of us during the past three years, we have drawn back, we've stopped organizing things in our place, inviting people, to the extent that we used to, it was never really reciprocal and we've been talking about this […] so we've been talking about that, maybe it is because we're getting <u>older</u>
> Simon: <u>we're not getting older</u> (laughs)
> Silja: <u>that's been</u>, that's been our complaint really to each other, we would like to be invited and to be wanted to join and there seems to be very little of that, I don't know, maybe we are a bit repulsive, I don't know if I actually would like people dropping over unannounced, but it would be nice to have this spur of the moment like: what are you doing in an hour, is it alright if we came over, or would you like to come, as, I said we're never invited, or hardly ever [TI2]

The very first sentence in the excerpt would justify labelling this praxis as disorientation, as it could be interpreted as negative and impervious to praxical change, signifying an attitude of resignation. However, there is more to it than that. The couple actually bring up the issue and discuss it. They still have the desire to once be included, which is stated as *"we would want to", "it would be nice"*. They also think of reasons why they are not included such as being repulsive (intended rather humourously), or age, which are verbally expressed as: *"we've been talking about it"* (which indicates the link with the openness-closeness dialectic).

At this point a kind of transformation occurs whereby the initially experienced divergences are no longer so much in opposition to one another: *"I don't know if I actually would like people dropping over unannounced"*. This indicates the process of temporarily reframing the situation so that the tugs and pulls on the couple and the social network no longer seem to be in opposite directions. This praxis pattern can therefore be called recalibration, as it is a response that goes beyond, or transcends the form in which an opposition is expressed, without resolving the contradiction on a permanent basis. Their wish for inclusion remains, but at the same time they recognise that one cannot predict whether there ever will be inclusion in the form of invitations and people dropping in.

Dual spiraling inversion

This praxis pattern includes both the external dialectic of inclusion-seclusion and the internal dialectic of autonomy-connection, and it thus affects the fundamental dialectic of integration-separation, as explained in Chapter 2. As illustrated in the following excerpt with Alan and Anita, the couple needs to negotiate whether or not they will take part in a family visit (inclusion-seclusion), and what to do when one partner does not always like taking part in this. The strategy they use is to exercise inclusion to some extent, by deciding to act occasionally as autonomous partners (connection-autonomy).

> CC: so you are quite on the same length, same wave?
> Alan: […] it's also, it's not that they miss me, I mean if I'm not around, it's no big deal for them […] it's just the family pattern or the interaction pattern, it just don't work and Iwouldn't like to spend there more than just a couple of days, of course I feel then this sense of obligation
> Anita: that's your rationalization (all laugh) it's not really a problem, I just figure that it's just as easy for me to go there without him and that way I don't have to deal with him suffering […] for me it's a combination of wanting to go there and feeling that it's family, they're the closest family [TI5]

This can be seen as a situation where inclusion is desired to a certain extent, but not by everyone. To satisfy the needs of both the couple and the family the couple engage in a temporarily separation (internal), which pleases the couple and is probably also fine with the family.

This praxis pattern can be considered more functional than for instance denial, where one pole of the dialectic is totally denied. It is the process of

separating the dialogical forces over time by responding to one pull now and another pull later. Each pole of the contradiction is dominant at various points in time. The functionality gives room for four choices: 1) connection/inclusion (the couple, both partners & the family), 2) connection/seclusion (the couple, both partners & no family), 3) autonomy-inclusion (one partner & family), and 4) autonomy-seclusion (no partner & no family), the last one being slightly problematic for obvious reasons.

Spiralling inversion is the praxis signified by an ebb and flow between the two poles of the dialectic. For example, a couple can cope with the desire to be together and the need to fulfill autonomous obligations by improvising a back-and-forth spiral over time between connection-based situations and autonomy-based situations, like "now we do this together and in the weekend we do that apart". At the same time this affects their external relations. Sometimes they go together and visit the family and sometimes they do not, which indicates another spiralling inversion. One finds then two praxis patterns denoting the internal and external dialectics of the fundamental dialectic of integration-separation. As this kind of praxis pattern has not yet been identified, I hereby call it dual spiralling inversion.

5.2 Uniqueness-Conventionality: The flair of being special, and caring what others think

The dialectic of conventionality-uniqueness indicates tensions resulting from the need to preserve conventions about couple norms and the playing of social scripts versus the need for a relationship identity that is unique and different from others. This dialectic relates to the tensions felt between conforming to societal norms and creating a unique pair identity. Baxter (1993) states that compliance with social conventions provides a social identity known to outsiders, allowing the couple to interact easily with others and fit into society. Then again, although conforming to society is desirable, couples do not want to be a copy of other relationships. Hence they also feel a need for uniqueness in their couple presentation to outsiders.

The intercultural partners perceive the uniqueness-conventionality dialectic in a variety of ways, which means that there are several manifestations in which the dialectic is enacted. Themes of this dialectic are mostly related to the uniqueness pole, and can be divided into constructive, destructive and neutral aspects. The theme of appreciation unites both uniqueness and conventionality. Intercultural couples managing this dialectic engaged in the praxis pattern of re-affirmation.

5.2.1 Uniqueness as a constructive, destructive and neutral feature

Uniqueness points to what sets a couple's relationship apart from other similar relationship types, and to the desire to distinguish this unique relationship from

all others. The pole of uniqueness includes the constructive features of uniqueness, but also destructive and neutral ones.

Constructive

The constructive traits of uniqueness are those that the couples themselves presented about their relationship. The intercultural couples described their ideas and feelings surrounding the constructiveness of uniqueness as related to feeling good in the relationship. For instance, coming from two cultures and two different cultures was perceived as giving them a flair for being special. Other things the couples mentioned relating to the constructive aspect included enjoying getting the attention of people who showed some interest in their background, liking to talk and surprise people, and simply liking the idea of being different. For example:

CC: well, whether you find yourself unique as a couple and you like it, but it can also become too much that on the other hand, as you said before: I just want to be part of it and be usual, I don't want to be reminded of it all the time, like oh you're something special Kristel: but I think if we just feel great with each other and have good times, then you feel unique with each other in a way, we have it so good together and that is nice and uhm, can I explain it well? [TI3]	CC: wel of je jezelf als paar uniek vindt en dat graag hebt, maar het kan ook te veel worden, dat je langs de andere kant, zoals je daarjuist zei: ik wil er ook graag gewoon bijoren en gewoon zijn, niet er altijd willen over aangesproken worden, van oh je bent zoiets speciaal Kristel: maar ik denk als wij ons gewoon lekker met elkaar voelen en goeie tijden hebben dan, dan voel je je op een manier uniek met elkaar, we hebben het zo goed samen en dat is fijn en uhm kan ik het wel goed uitleggen? [TI3]

Destructive

Couples sometimes feel that others in their social network perceive their uniqueness as something negative or destructive of harmony. Uniqueness as a negative trait was voiced by the couples as something strange and suspicious, for instance when speaking a language other than Finnish was concerned.

It was also said that not acting normatively on gender roles was viewed by people in their social circle as irritating. When expectations on gender roles were violated friends and family commented, for example on non-Finnish males doing what were commonly seen as female household chores.

Finally, the issue of visibility was often mentioned as a disadvantageous feature. Visibility is one of ten intensity factors used to contrast cultural circumstances that have been proven to have a strong psychological impact upon individuals adjusting to a new environment (Paige et al., 2006). They are defined as those situation variables and personal attributes that can influence the psychological intensity or stress associated with intercultural experiences. Other intensity factors are for instance cultural immersion, status, power and

control. They apply in different ways and degrees to virtually all individuals adapting to a new culture be they voluntary, such as immigrants, or involuntary, such as persons displaced from their home countries by war, political conflict, and economic crises.

> Friends
> Anthony: you can walk from this bus stop to the railway station without having anything, and you can go out and some drunk man just bumps into you, ok, it can happen to anybody, ok, but the chances of it happening to a black person you see, is more than if it would happen to you, why is it that some particular people who are similar to me are treated in certain ways? [CI5]

People who are physically different from the members of the dominant or host culture are more highly visible and they may therefore become the object of curiosity, unwanted attention, or discrimination. This can lead to considerable stress. Being physically different from the host nation and thus being visible can make experiences more intense.

Adaptation Helena: sometimes I'm so fed up, even though in general I think that for a big part it is, the biggest part it is a richness, two cultures, but sometimes there are these moments, it just doesn't work, that Hugo is so noticeable, and a special figure, that he is not, that you can immediately see he is not a Fin [CI1]	Aanpassing Helena: soms ben ik da zo moe, zelfs al vind ik toch in't algemeen vind dat het een groot stuk, het allergrootste deel een rijkdom is, twee culturen, maar soms zijn er zo momenten dat da pakt niet, dat Hugo zo opvallend is, en een speciaal figuur zo, dat hij niet, dat je direct kunt zien dat hij geen Fin is [CI1]

Neutral

By neutral feature of uniqueness I mean the fact that the couples mentioned their uniqueness, their observation of deviating from the "norm", but merely descriptively, not as an evaluative observation. An illustration of this is Ladica and Lasse talking about their being an atypical Finnish family:

> Family
> Ladica: everybody thinks we´re not a typical Finnish family
> Lasse: yes, actually if there you are friends I think there is a lot of talking because first Ladica is used to be presenting to people, and she offers everyone everything and she talks then as as I told you I have my issues and when we will both speak about ourissues, there is a lot of talking there (all laugh)
> Ladica: it is always very noisy and
> Lasse: because you see I also talk
> Ladica: and he is also not, he´s not a silent Finn [CI6]

5.2.2 Uniqueness and conventionality

This all-embracing dialectic shows that relational partners can adhere to the conventional views of partnership, and accept that it is a stable, traditional, "ordinary" relationship, but they also hold on to the view that their relationship

is a distinctive and unique matching of two individual relational partners. The both/and issue becomes very clear in the following discussion between Anita and Alan, when they are discussing and reflecting on their relationship. They see it as quite conventional on the one hand, and unique and different on the other:

> CC: Ok, then there's this dimension called uniqueness and conventionality like that you feel at times that as a couple you like to be noticed as a unique unit, and at other times you just want to be like all the others, very conventional
> Anita: I think that in some parts we're an extremely conventional couple, that we have husband and wife married for a long time, no -laughs- extra affairs, kids at home, a very conventional home, in that kind of traditional thing
> Alan: I have to be conventional in terms of, for instance I care very much what these neighbours think, that I really wouldn't like if something makes them feel uncomfortable about us, but at the same time I really wouldn't like if I felt that I have to give up what I regard as unique about us, I absolutely wouldn't bend, that's more important, that they might think it's funny that I speak with the kids in a different language but the thing is I want to be, like with this, I want to conform to the extent I want to fit in, but only up to the point that I don't have to sacrifice my integrity, that is what I feel is very important
> Anita: I like the idea of difference […] in that way, what this interculturalism for example offers, that the language, and the part that we go visit across the world, and our kids speak two languages and they have two sets of grandparents from different cultures, I like that kind of difference, it's not something that I go out looking for but
> Alan: yeah, but we don't force that on anybody [TI5]

This example of Anita and Alan's discussion also includes and illustrates a praxis pattern, which will be explained next.

5.2.3 Praxis

The communication strategy the intercultural couples engaged in to manage the uniqueness-conventionality dialectic is re-affirmation. The praxis pattern of re-affirmation involves an acceptance by the relational parties that contradictions cannot be reconciled in any way. This is similar to disorientation, which is signified by the notion that contradictions are inevitable and unresponsive to praxical change. However, unlike the disorientation praxis pattern, re-affirmation celebrates the richness provided by each polarity and tolerates the tension posed by their unity. The celebration of the richness of both dialectical poles and the uniting of the tensions is very well illustrated by Alan and Anita's words: *I care very much what these neighbours think* (conventional), and *I like the idea of difference* (uniqueness).

5.3 Revelation-Concealment: Sharing relational issues with others, and wanting to keep quiet

The dialectic of revelation-concealment points to tensions resulting from the need to reveal the relationship to the community and disclose information to others, and the need to conceal from others the existence of the relationship or

specific details about it. This dialectic involves the decision to reveal relational information to outsiders. Deciding what to reveal or not to reveal creates a dilemma for relational partners. Support and legitimization by others is important, but public exposure does not always guarantee positive results (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

The intercultural partners in this study are aware of the revelation-concealment dialectic in many ways; several instances demonstrate how the dialectic is enacted. Themes of the revelation-concealment dialectic relate to 1) the couples' motivations to reveal and the advantages to them in doing so, 2) certain topics topical issues such as sharing health matters, and one's religious beliefs, and 3) the cost of privacy, such as being exposed to disapproval and having to be guarded. The praxis pattern of exclusive selection is the communication strategy used to manage this dialectic by the intercultural couples.

5.3.1 Motivational and beneficial functions of revealing

Couples do not live in a vacuum; they have friends, family, neighbours and acquaintances with whom they engage in all kinds of situations like work, hobbies, and chance encounters. Couples' needs to share relational issues naturally depend on the relationships they have with the people with whom they like spending time. It seems that "motivational and beneficial reasons" for sharing relational issues with others go hand in hand. The couples are motivated and consciously want to spend time and talk together, but they also want the opportunity to share more difficult relational issues with others because they get something out of it. They see these external talks as a source of support. The motivation then automatically results in a beneficial outcome as revealing relational issues aids everyone involved. Kristel and Kornelis express it as follows:

CC: this is the last one Kristel: (is reading aloud) to reveal and not to reveal […] we had such a group with some other couples, we met once in six weeks, eating, and then we really also talked about relational issues and so, very nice, simply eating well, drinking well, nice talks (laughs) it was lovely […] Kornelis: for me it is so that I want to talk about my relationship to also hear about other people, how other people, so that I can mirror myself, so I am quite open about my relationship, our relationship, and I hope that other people are also open about their relationship	CC: dit is het laatste Kristel: (is reading aloud) uiten en niet uiten […] we hadden zo'n groep met een paar andere stellen, en we kwamen één maal in de zes weken bij elkaar eten, en dan praatten we echt ook over relatie dingen en zo, heel leuk, gewoon lekker eten, lekker drinken, lekker praten (lacht), het was heerlijk […] Kornelis:voor mij is het wel dat ik wil praten over mijn relatie om daaruit daarmee ook te horen over andere mensen, hoe andere mensen, zodat ik me kan spiegelen, dus ik ben vrij open over mijn relatie, over onze relatie, en ik hoop dat andere mensen ook open zijn over hun relatie

Kristel: it is nice when we're happy with each other, and everyone knows such times, but you know also those times when it is less nice and it is good to talk about them to share it with others because such times too will pass and good times will come again. It once started when another couple […] suddenly started to divorce and no one knew they had problems, and then we thought like oh dear, this can't happen to us, and we tried all of us to save their marriage but there was nothing to be done anymore […] we thought let's take care at least of each other's marriages, we want to support each other and that was very nice, very nice [TI3]	Kristel: het is fijn als we gelukkig zijn met elkaar, en iedereen kent die tijden, maar je kent ook die tijden dat het minder fijntjes is en het is goed om daarover te spreken om het met anderen te delen want die tijden gaan ook weer voorbij en er komen weer goeie tijden. Het was ooit begonnen omdat een ander stel […]plotseling ging scheiden en niemand wist dat ze problemen hadden, en toen dachten we, van oh jee, dat mag ons niet overkomen en we probeerden hun huwelijk nog te redden met zijn allen maar er was niets meer aan te doen […] we dachten laten we dan tenminste zorgen voor elkaars huwelijk, we willen elkaar steunen, en dat was heel fijn, heel fijn [TI3]

This excerpt also expresses the chronotopic feature, which can be explained by the idea that tensions and time/space factors go hand in hand and are always changing: "*everyone knows such times, but you know also those times when it is less nice and it is good to talk about them to share it with others because such times too will pass and good times will come again".*

The chronotopic feature represented here is the chronotope of encounter, and it refers to the chronotope of threshold. According to Bakhtin (1981), this chronotope is highly charged with emotion and value and its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of crisis and a break in life. It is connected with a decision that changes a life, or with the indecisiveness that fails to change a life (p. 248). Illustrations reflecting these instances of crisis are words like *"once", "suddenly", "oh dear, "no one knew", "there was nothing to be done anymore", "let's take care at least of each other's marriages".*

5.3.2 Revelation at the cost of privacy

Intercultural couples and individual partners experienced a sense of discomfort when they felt that they had revealed too much to others. Sensing disapproval and feeling a need to be guarded are consequences of disclosing too much to others. Their perception of "too much" was connected to other people expressing disagreement or opposite views on certain issues, which left the couples with the feeling they were "unsympathetic" and "stupid", and felt hurt because they had exposed too much of their private beliefs and their reasons for certain decisions.

Instances like these were commented on by partners who said that their husband/wife tends to think too often about what others say and tends to try to read too much into it. Revealing too much can be misused or taken advantage of in disagreeable ways, with the result that couples will be more cautious in the future about talking about relationship issues to friends. Couples said they had become more wary about discussing intimate topics with certain people. Silja and Simon report on this issue:

> CC: I have one other uhm, I read it, whether you have ever felt the interplay between the desire to reveal things about your relationship to the others, and the desire to conceal information about your relationship to 'the others'
> Silja: (laughs) we've tried to control me (laughs) for instance to [a friend] I keep on telling things and then she takes advantage of it and uses them in a way that it is not really appropriate
> Simon: or we confide with her really intimate, or somehow she is able to you know, or over-encouraged to
> Silja: I think again much more in the past and I think we're much more careful now, yeah we're a bit more careful now
> Simon: a bit more guarded you know, it's a great way if you want to spread things around and you simply open your mouth to the right people, that is great, but not being spontaneous too much too, it's very difficult […] I don't want to emphasize the fact that I spend my day […] I just don't want people to know that too much, and that's caused a bit of tension when I told people […] this is what we're talking about what we don't want to disclose [TI2]

Disclosing too much can result in the feeling that one has shown oneself to be vulnerable, and consequently one learns to become more *"controlled"*, *"a bit more guarded"*, *"not being spontaneous too much"*, and *"not wanting to disclose"* any more.

5.3.3 Topics of revelation-concealment

Topics of revelation include three issues: 1) health, 2) the partner(s)' religious beliefs, and 3) preservation of the non-Finnish partner's native tongue to enable revelation.

Discussing one's partner's health problems, whether these are physical or mental, with others is a delicate matter. Although some of the intercultural partners thought they could be quite free and open about these things, sure that health matters could be disclosed to others, at the same time they had the feeling that this was not always the case. The other partner, for instance, might be aware of the "openness agreement," and might even say that they need to disclose in order not to feel alone with a tender, intimate health issue, but in the end they decide to withdraw from the conversation as they are unsure whether it is actually good for their partner for them to talk about it. In other words because of the need to protect one's partner, one may eventually decide not to make revelations about health to others, which results in concealment.

Another issue relates to a partner's religious beliefs, which are brought into the open by disclosing them to others. The following example illustrates this as "*giving a message to the family*":

> Religion
> Sari: The wedding took place according to an agreement the pope made between the Lutheran church and the women's church when he actually came here to Finland in 1982
> Silvio: so I had to ask permission from the bishop and had to go to Central Finland as it is the nearest Catholic Church […] after I got that permission I had to give the paper to the Catholic Church in my city in Italy, so that everything is legal
> Sari: we wanted it so that nobody in Italy could say anything about our marriage
> Silvio: yes because the problem is about how it is like to live in common together but not in the marriage […] but it was nice we could give this kind of message to my family [CI4]

However, one's partner's religious orientation can also be a topic that needs to be suppressed and cannot be disclosed to the family, as it is a source of conflict. This was the case with Riitta and Rokuro:

> CC: So, did you have a lot of discussions with your parents about his (religion) or?
> Riitta: […] it was quite a shock that I
> Rokuro: it was a scandal
> Riitta: it was a scandal yes, that he's a Buddhist and yeah
> Rokuro: it doesn't matter to me but it does matter to them, so I couldn't do anything […]
> Riitta: well of course it was bad, I couldn't tell about the things we are doing together or something like that, it was a quiet subject like no talking […] [TI4]

In this case religious belief is a topic for concealment.

The third theme relates to couples very consciously agreeing to maintain the non-Finnish partner's native language so that the children learn a second language besides Finnish. The non-Finnish partner's mother tongue often is the most important means of revealing relationship and family issues to the family "abroad" as a means for inclusion. Hugo expresses it as follows:

Language	Taal
Hugo: […] yes but I think of course it has a lot of advantages that we speak Dutch and the children hear it constantly too, and otherwise, I wouldn't speak Dutch anymore I think if we wouldn't do this now at home, so this functions well when we go to Belgium, then I can always tell [stories] to the family [CI1]	Hugo: […] ja maar ik vind het zo dat heeft natuurlijk heel veel voordelen dat we Nederlands spreken, als de kinderen dat ook constant horen, en anders, ik zou geen Nederlands meer spreken denk ik, als we dat nu niet thuis zouden doen, dus dat marcheert goed als wij naar België gaan dan kan ik met de familie altijd vertellen [CI1]

Intercultural couples also suggested that a native language can be maintained with the intention of consciously concealing information about certain topics from other people, especially from the children; it can be used as a secret language, to temporarily exclude children from the conversation.

The dialectic of revelation-concealment points to the external dialectic of inclusion-seclusion and is therefore once again an excellent illustration of the fact that dialectics do not function in isolation but are integrally linked.

5.3.4 Praxis

The communication strategies the intercultural couples use to manage the inclusion-seclusion dialectic, or the praxis thereof, will be looked at next. The praxis patterns observed were constructive confrontational conduct, and dual spiralling inversion.

Constructive confrontational conduct

This praxis pattern, stressing the dominant dialectical pole of revelation, comprises challenging and upfront performance, which is outcome-oriented and aims at being constructive. The following interview excerpt illustrates this praxis pattern:

> CC: So, did you have a lot of discussions with your parents about his (religion) or?
> Riitta: […] but then one day there was some kind of feast coming up, my sister's engagement or something, and they were thinking whom to invite to our house, and then I said: "what about Rokuro? Are you going to neglect him for the rest of your life?" I was telling them that maybe they can't accept his religion but they should treat him as a human being […] and then my father said: "yes, now I realize I've been a bad guy" (laughs) "and we should invite him to our house", so then it was the first time, nowadays we got quite a good relationship, my mother is knitting socks for him, things like that, but it was hard at the beginning [TI4]

Using constructive confrontational conduct as a praxis pattern to try to convey a message is done by opening up a discussion, arguing, and fighting for one's cause, in this case fighting verbally for inclusion. We can here, once again, notice how dialectics are integrally linked: revelation-concealment, and inclusion-exclusion. As the aim is inclusion, this is an outcome-oriented praxis pattern and clearly contains a functional characteristic.

If one reaches a level of openness which is unpleasant, one can shift to constructive confrontational conduct, which creates a positive spiral and minimizes the gap between the dialectical poles, instead of emphasizing the gap, which is what happens in destructive confrontational conduct. Constructive confrontational conduct is therefore a praxis pattern which leaves space for interaction.

Dual spiralling inversion

This praxis pattern includes both the external dialectic of revelation-concealment and the internal dialectic of openness-closedness, and it thus affects the fundamental dialectic of expression-privacy, which was explained in Chapter 2. As illustrated in the excerpt with Kristel and Kornelis, the couple reflects on how they manage revealing a health issue affecting one of the partners to others in their social circle. This is not an easy thing to do when one partner wants to reveal but the other partner feels both the need to conceal, in order to protect his partner, and to a certain extent also the need to reveal, in order not to feel too isolated with this issue. The strategy they use is to exercise revelation to some extent: they decide to act occasionally as autonomous partners (openness-closedness). The following interview extract with Kristel and Kornelis shows this praxis pattern of dual spiralling inversion.

CC: this is the <u>last one</u> Kristel: (is reading aloud) <u>to reveal</u> and not to reveal […] Kornelis: yes, and this [condition] of	CC: dit is <u>het laatste</u> Kristel: (is reading aloud) <u>uiten</u> en niet uiten […] Kornelis: ja, en die [conditie] van Kristel

Kristel's is something one can often feel oneself very alone with, so I have the need to talk about this, although on the other hand I know I shouldn't do this too much, whether it is good to do	is iets waar je je vaak alleen kunt voelen, waar ik dan behoefte aan heb om erover te praten, aan de andere kant weet ik dat ik dat niet te veel moet doen, of het goed is om te doen
Kristel: why not?	Kristel: waarom niet?
Kornelis: well, to protect you and you need to know whom you're telling	Kornelis: nou, om je te beschermen, en je moet weten tegen wie je het vertelt
Kristel: but we also have friends, people who know about this, then you can talk about it	Kristel: maar we hebben toch ook vrienden, mensen die het weten, dan kan je erover praten
Kornelis: yes	Kornelis: yes
Kristel: and we don't want to make a taboo about this with our friends, it doesn't overwhelm our life but it is a part of our life, and it isn't always a problem or so, no, or?	Kristel: en daar willen we ook geen taboe van maken met onze vrienden, het beheerst ons leven niet maar het is deel van ons leven, en het is niet altijd een probleem of zo, niet, toch?
Kornelis: no [TI3]	Kornelis: nee [TI3]

This can be seen as a situation where revelation is desired to a certain extent but not always by both partners. To satisfy the needs of both the couple and the social network, one partner may engage in a temporary closedness (internal), and the couple may engage for some time autonomously (internal). This is acknowledged by the couple, and they probably have their reasons for revelation or concealment to some of the people in their social network

This praxis pattern can also be considered of greater functionality than for instance denial, in which one pole of the dialectic is denied. Dual spiralling inversion is the process of separating the dialogical forces over time by responding to one pull now and another pull later. Each pole of the contradiction is dominant at various points in time. The functionality gives room for four choices: 1) openness/revelation (the couple, both partners & the social network), 2) openness/concealment (the couple, both partners & no social network), 3) closedness/revelation (one partner & social network), and 4) closedness/concealment (no partner & no social network), the last of these being slightly problematic, apparently.

Spiralling inversion is the praxis signified by an ebb and flow between the two poles of the dialectic. For example, a couple can cope with the desire to disclose to each other and for each to have some private space by improvising a back-and-forth spiral over time between openness-based situations and closedness-based situations, like "now we tell each other about this tricky issue, and at the weekend we keep this to ourselves and don't touch it". At the same time this also affects the external side. Sometimes they reveal some difficult issues to family and friends, and sometimes they may each separately deal with the issue in their own way; one partner reveals to certain people, and the other partner to other people, which indicates yet another spiralling inversion. One thus finds twice the praxis pattern used to handle the internal and external dialectics of the fundamental dialectic of expression-privacy. This is a similar pattern to the one used in the inclusion-seclusion dialectical praxis.

5.4 Conclusions

The external tensions at the interface of the intercultural couples and their social network that were experienced by the intercultural couples in this study highlight certain features of the three external dialectics: inclusion-seclusion, conventionality-uniqueness, and revelation-concealment. In these intercultural couple relationships with their social networks a range of themes came up, to which I will now turn.

Inclusion-seclusion

The themes belonging to the inclusion-seclusion dialectic are related to
1) the couples' need for the support of in-laws, friends and acquaintances
2) integration and belonging as aspects of inclusion
3) excessive inclusion endangering the couple relationship
4) exclusion from the social network
5) seclusion from the social network

As was the case with the internal dialectics, so here too in tackling the external dialectics the topic of support appeared to be the most important one. As is the case in any other couple relationships, intercultural couples too depend on support systems like family (in-laws), friends and casual acquaintances. This is seen as decisive for inclusion, especially as intercultural couples tend to have only one partner's family nearby and therefore cannot always count on the support generally available to monocultural couples. The quantity and quality of support they receive obviously has an impact on the extent of couples' inclusion.

According to Chen (2002), social support in intercultural relationships is so important that intercultural couples often seek communities or form their own social networks where they may find support. When couples do not find support from the host community, or from their own social networks, people feel excluded and may even consider moving elsewhere. (Chen, 2002:251.)

Too much inclusion, on the other hand, having hardly any couple time, leads to a deterioration of the relationship because there is no private, secluded time for the couples themselves. Seclusion then is something one consciously longs for as it may be rarely available, or it is a preferred condition, as the partners have a general feeling of well-being between themselves and do not feel the need for too much inclusion per se.

Besides inclusion-seclusion the topic of inclusion-exclusion also came up, which directly relates to the intercultural context of the couples in this study. This inclusion-exclusion dialectic brings up the idea of belonging and not belonging, i.e. being excluded. This emerged in forms of exclusion which were addressed personally (disapproval), socially (lack of network and employment), and topically (religious preferences). To summarize, intercultural couples have to cope with the challenge of needing to be both included and secluded, and in

addition they have to deal with the challenge of being excluded, all in a variety of ways.

Conventionality-uniqueness

The themes appearing in the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic are linked to

1) uniqueness, which has constructive, destructive and neutral features
2) the simultaneous emergence of uniqueness and conventionality

Examining how the relationship partners experienced each or a combination of the conventionality-uniqueness dialectics showed that there was rather a tendency to conventionality: the intercultural couples perceived themselves as pretty conventional in one way, such as conforming to traditional (conventional) relationship ideas.

Reflections on uniqueness, on the other hand, were the intercultural partners' conceptualizations which were associated with constructive features, e.g. such as cherishing the idea of difference and seeing it as a good thing.

A second reflection on uniqueness concerns the couples' ideas of how others view their uniqueness, e.g. if others perceive the couples' language as strange and suspicious, if they think the couples do not conform to standard gender roles, or if visibility works against the couples.

A third way in which uniqueness was perceived relates to the intercultural couples' conceptualizations of deviation from the norm in a descriptive, non-evaluative manner.

So whereas couples can embrace conventionality, which means conforming to an idea of couplehood that has a stable underpinning with certain expectations and obligations, at the same time they also embrace ambiguity by following an idea of couplehood as a unique joining up of selves (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004). However, as the findings show, one can also claim, as does Chen (2002: 252), that the very form of an intercultural relationship inherently presents a deviation, a challenge to convention.

Revelation-concealment

In the revelation-concealment dialectic I found the following salient themes:

1) motivational and beneficial functions of revealing
2) revelation at the cost of privacy
3) various topics of revelation-concealment such as health issues, partner(s)' religious beliefs, and preservation of one's native tongue enabling revelation

Revelation is the essential vehicle through which couples can gain essential social support. Intercultural couples' motivation for revelation is related to their need to share and enjoy company, and if they create such social encounters the surroundings are then safe for and conducive to disclosure.

Couples' disclosure to others can also have its downside. At times one feels that one has disclosed too much personal information, which leads to a feeling of being over-exposed, or offended, and of being labelled insensitive and simple-minded. Excessive revelation can also lead to one being taken advantage of, when others exploit the personal information one has given. As a consequence couples may hold back from revelation.

Topics that can affect both the revelation and the concealment poles may relate to health, where on the one hand partners want to protect and safeguard the other one, and on the other hand they want to be open and want to avoid taboos. Also religion can be a stumbling block as it can be a reason to offend or to include, or it can be seen as an opportunity to share and offer a message - of respect - to others. Finally partners consciously maintain their native tongue as they know it is the only medium that allows them to reveal and share with their social network. It can, however, also be used deliberately to puzzle others or to conceal information from others.

Intercultural couples' praxis patterns in the external relational dialectics

The praxis patterns used in the inclusion-seclusion dialectic are recalibration and dual spiralling inversion. In the uniqueness-conventionality dialectic the praxis pattern of re-affirmation is employed. The praxis patterns utilized in the revelation-concealment dialectic are recalibration and dual spiralling inversion.

All these praxis patterns show how the intercultural partners make use of various practical choices to manage the dialectical tensions experienced at the interface with their social networks. All the praxis patterns used in the external dialectics are functional. Table 18 below presents an overview.

TABLE 18 Praxis patterns and their functionality in the external dialectics

External dialectics	**Functional Praxis patterns**
Inclusion-seclusion	- Recalibration - Dual spiralling inversion
Uniqueness-conventionality	- Re-affirmation
Revelation-concealment	- Recalibration - Dual spiralling inversion

In conclusion, what was said in the previous chapter on internal dialectics about the chronotopic qualities in which dialectics are embedded also applies here to external dialectics. Intercultural couples' social existence is established in time and space, i.e. in the chronotope *"where the knots of narrative are tied and untied, and to which belongs the meaning that shapes narrative* (Bakhtin, 1986: 250). The principle of totality - the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena – also supports the idea of intercultural

couples being inseparably interconnected with many social, historical, and environmental contexts. Couples do not exist in isolation, nor can they be understood apart from these social factors (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996:156).

One can say that intracultural and intercultural couples coping with fluctuations in three internal (autonomy-connection, predictability-novelty, openness-closedness) and three external dialectics (inclusion-seclusion, uniqueness-conventionality, revelation-concealment) conform to the same archetypes of the six relational dialectics. However, the specific dialectical themes, as indicated by the dominant poles of each dialectic, and to a certain extent some of the praxis patterns are different and may be new.

6 INTERCULTURAL RELATIONAL DIALECTICS

The previous chapters showed how the intercultural couples perceived internal and external dialectics, and the praxis patterns they used. The current chapter offers an analysis of the intercultural couples' perceptions of how their different cultural backgrounds are reflected in their everyday life. It also takes into account the findings of the previous chapters and contributes to the creation of intercultural relational dialectics. This analysis is primarily based on but is not limited to the e-mail interviews the author carried out with the intercultural couples. Additionally, the analysis builds on the two other sets of data, that is, the theme and the concept map interviews.

This chapter starts by discussing the intercultural couples' perceptions of culture as shown in their reflections on the challenges to their relationship presented by their culturally diverse background. Due to this diversity a variety of topics needs extra negotiation in the couples' relationship.

In the second part I will present intercultural relational dialectics on the basis of the couples' responses to my inquiry into the internal and external relational dialectics of their relationship and the impact of culture on it.

6.1 The reflection of couples' cultural backgrounds in their relationship

Four main themes brought up by the intercultural couples form the basis of this section. They are related to how the couples, contemplating their relationship and their life in Finland, perceive their different cultural backgrounds as being reflected in their relationship and in everyday life. The four themes are: 1) language issues, 2) traditions and celebrations, 3) values and gender issues, and 4) adaptation.

6.1.1 Language issues

All the intercultural couples used a language that was not the native tongue of at least one of the partners, and sometimes they both used a third shared language. The couples raised the following issues about language in their intercultural relationship which seemed to them to be important: doubting one's proficiency in the host language (Finnish), speaking the non-Finnish partner's native language, the deterioration of one's native language proficiency, and the need for support leading to dependence on the Finnish partner.

Doubt of host-language proficiency (Finnish)

Often partners have to choose which language to communicate in, whether to use one of the partners' languages, a third one, or a mixture of languages. Since one's mother tongue assumes a powerful, emotional resonance and defines characteristics of one's identity, being unable to use that language may create situations in which issues of incorrect speech pragmatics, having to cope with corrective feedback, embarrassment, and power, play an important role.

All the highly-educated non-Finnish spouses in this study spoke at least one other foreign language fluently in addition to their mother tongue. For some of these non-Finnish spouses the Finnish language was experienced as more than just a temporary stumbling block. Although the non-Finnish spouses have lived in Finland for at least four years, and one of them has lived here for as much as 20 years, many situations were seen as difficult for the non-Finnish partners, such as not being able to follow conversations in Finnish, missing information, misunderstandings, and feeling "an outsider forever". The following excerpt illustrates this:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Fay: […] this has been a struggle continually…It has been very difficult and unfortunately will always be a difficulty no matter what level I get to […] how we function as a couple, I know there has probably been more misunderstanding because of having two languages [EI6]

The contradiction between self-identification and the way one is identified by others is one of the major reasons for acculturation stress, the origins of which are directly related to communication problems. Ineffective communication can cause pain.

Encouraging issues related to the use of a foreign language are the couples' observations that speaking two or more languages at home is considered a richness, and that with the additional language also come the chance for small jokes and the use of idioms. Also, in many couples the Finnish partners learned their spouse's mother tongue. Some couples said that the more of the language they learned, the more they learned about each other. They also mentioned the strategies they used to communicate in another language when there were no common words.

A unique example of inventing words is given here by Sari and Silvio:

CC: what about language, what language did you start speaking to each other?
Sari: our own English, we had really problems about language because I knew English, and Swedish, a little bit German, and he didn't know any of these languages so he spoke only English and French
Silvio: I spoke French, yes I was speaking English just 2 weeks before I met her, and we just tried to speak English, we always laugh about this because I didn't know how to say "liar", so we we
Sari: we invented a word
Silvio: yes
Sari: so you said "make Pinocchio"
Silvio: "make Pinocchio" (laughs) [CI4]

Other strategies the couples used usually related to language switching (code switching), depending on the person one was talking to, whether or not the children were present and who was in the vicinity of the conversation taking place. A certain sensitivity and respect for others contributes to making a communication situation successful, however difficult the situation might be.

Language	Taal
Martijn: However, if you have a lot of respect for each other, it can be you can enjoy these particular moments we didn't understand each other [CI2]	Martijn: Maar, als je veel respect hebt voor mekaar, kan het zijn dat je kan genieten van die bepaalde momenten waar we mekaar niet verstaan hebben [CI2]

This excerpt can be seen as illustrating an "aesthetic moment", that is, a fleeting moment of wholeness that parties can occasionally create, a moment in which competing fragments and disorder are temporarily united. According to Baxter (2004: 186), these aesthetic moments create momentary consummation, completion, or wholeness in what is otherwise a fragmented life experience.

Speaking the non-Finnish partner's native language

Second language learning is different for everyone; it is a very personal experience, and it depends on many factors. The partner who is speaking a foreign language may be put in a weaker position, especially when arguing, as the couples mentioned. Several spouses speaking in a foreign language with their partner, and non-Finnish partners interacting with members of the host culture (Finland), experienced inequality and lack of power, which were associated with disadvantage. Some people get frustrated, or feel helpless and embarrassed, as one Finnish spouse says in the following excerpt:

CC: Did you speak Dutch with each other already then, or already in Belgium, or already in Holland or?	CC: Spraken jullie toen al Nederlands met elkaar, of in België al of in Holland al of?
Helena: […] we had a phase we spoke English, hm no, we spoke Dutch already but we quarrelled in English, then we were more	Helena: […] wij hadden zo'n fase dat wij spraken Engels, euh nee, dat wij Nederlands al spraken maar we maakten ruzie in't Engels, toen waren wij meer zo, toen waren

like, then we were more equal, but now (laughs) we quarrel in Dutch, but actually I find I am always a bit weaker in conversations because we discuss in his mother tongue […] but it is like that when we have conversations, I feel weaker	wij meer zo hetzelfde, maar nu (lacht) maken wij ruzie in't Nederlands, maar ik vind eigenlijk dat ik altijd een beetje zwakker ben bij gesprekken omdat wij discussieren in zijn moedertaal […] maar dat is zo als wij gesprekken hebben, ik voel mij zwakker
CC: do you mention that when you quarrel, do you get, or how does it affect you, when you feel you are weaker?	CC: zegt gij dat dan als ge nu ruzie maakt, wordt ge er dan van, of hoe wordt ge er dan van, als ge dat voelt als ge zwakker zijt?
Helena: I get angry and am frustrated and then I try to explain something and he doesn't understand me or misunderstands and then I feel a bit like: "how can you be so stupid" (laughs) "that you don't understand this", although I know deep down that the mistake is mine, because I just can't get it said so well but I am often furious because he doesn't understand me [CI1]	Helena: ik word daar boos van en ben dan gefrustreerd en ik probeer dan iets uit te leggen en hij verstaat me niet of hij misverstaat en dan voel ik zo'n beetje van "hoe kunde gij zo stom zijn?" (lacht) " dat ge dat niet verstaat", alhoewel ik weet in mijn binnenste dat de fout in mij ligt, omdat ik dat niet zo goed gezegd kan krijgen maar ben dikwijls razend kwaad omdat hij mij niet verstaat [CI1]

Helplessness, frustration and silence are some of the consequences of having to speak a language which is not one's own. Sometimes people feel loss and betrayal when speaking another language, which points to issues of identity (Granger, 2004). As Lightbow and Spada (1993) point out, children are praised for their efforts to speak a language, regardless of accuracy, and have ample time and opportunity to listen and learn before producing. In contrast, adults are exposed to much more complex language from the onset, and are expected to figure out (and produce) accordingly.

Dependence on the Finnish partner

Because of doubt about their host-language (Finnish) proficiency and the fact that their level of Finnish was inadequate, the non-Finnish partners are heavily dependent on their Finnish spouses, which both parties perceive as challenging. This is, however, first of all a problem for the non-Finnish partners, since it creates a feeling of vulnerability.

However, this dependence on the Finnish partner is also felt to be difficult at times for both spouses. The Finnish partners want to help as much as they can, and also feel obliged to support their non-Finnish spouse in carrying out everyday tasks, such as shopping and telephone calls. The non-Finnish spouse feels their basic inability and helplessness to be humiliating and embarrassing, and it can even make them aware of the prejudice that some Finnish people still feel towards non-Finnish citizens.

The need for support creates dependence, and giving support can be an emotional burden. The non-Finnish partners are in need of support, but one

should not overlook the commitment of the support providers. All of the Finnish spouses show a remarkable sense of responsibility for supporting their partners from the very first moment and they demonstrate their sense of obligation and dedication. However, providing such support is sometimes seen as inconvenient and challenging too. Entering into and living in an intercultural relationship requires a period of transition for both partners, and they may experience this time when both need support as difficult to cope with.

Language loss

The deterioration of native language proficiency (also called language loss), or in other words not being able to fluently and correctly speak and/or write one's native language, is a concern mentioned by many of the non-Finnish spouses in the discussions and email interviews. Generally speaking this is not really a novel finding. Language attrition has been researched intensively, and especially in the 1980s. It can be described as a form of language change that causes potential communication problems between individuals and the community of which they consider themselves a member (Jaspaert & Kroon, 1991: 54). Language loss belongs in the field of linguistics but it is also of concern in cultural adaptation as it raises the problem of deculturation, for example when an individual adapts to a new culture at the expense of his or her primary culture, and eventually unlearns the native tongue (Kim, 2001). Hamers and Blanc (2000) argue that extreme deculturation can lead to assimilation, and may be accompanied by first-language loss. If no assimilation into the host culture occurs, they argue, deculturation can lead to a complex psychologocial state involving feelings of alienation and isolation vis-à-vis the society of residence.

Language loss describes the problem of living in a new cultural environment where people may feel at times displaced and may experience, sometimes temporarily, loss of language. This happened to some of the intercultural couples in this study, as Bea, for example, explains:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Bea: […] and then there is the language. Living in a country where you have to learn an almost impossible language and becoming less fluent and sure about my own mother tongue [EI2]

Language deterioration is a question of lack of hearing and not using the language, or of interruption in instruction in the native language, both of which impede its development, and can result in language loss (Rhodes, Ochoa and Ortiz, 2005: 194). Drawing on Taylor and Moghaddam's (1987) suggestion that an individual may adapt to the dominant group while, at the same time, retaining a number of features of his or her own identity, van Oudenhoven, Prins and Buunck (1998) suggest that a strong ethnic self-concept is related to integration, while a weak one is related to assimilation; ethnic identity is evaluated more positively in integration than in assimilation. At the same time,

majority members feel more sympathy for assimilating than for integrating immigrants and express more prejudices against those who are integrating. (Hamers & Blanc, 2000.) The contradiction between self-identification and the way a person is identified by others is one of the major reasons for acculturation stress.

Questions of language and communication are experienced as the biggest difference in the intercultural couples' lives due to their coming from different cultural backgrounds. The couples describe situations and tell stories of how this becomes apparent. The situations described and the stories told are about communication, about blending in, about fitting in and not fitting in, about adapting, not feeling left out and at times feeling displaced, about belonging and having a place in society. They are about negotiating, which always means having to give up something but also means gaining something. Fay, for example, in her short description below, describes how she gives up being herself for a while, being American, which at the same time, in the eyes of her Finnish environment means being the foreigner, and she blends in and speaks Finnish. These are relevant everyday matters for people living in these multicultural realities.

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Fay: In our household there are always two languages being used. I speak English to the kids and H. speaks Finnish with them. In my opinion it is nearly impossible to switch the original language a relationship starts in. Of course when we are around Finnish people who do not speak English we all speak Finnish. Perfect example is Heikki's family, they only speak Finnish so when they are around or we are visiting them, we all speak Finnish. This gets a little strange, when the kids ask me something, they will ask in English then in order not to make Mummi, for example feel left out of the conversation, I will respond to them using Finnish which I would never do at home. Shopping is another challenge, sometimes I just feel like blending in, it does get tiring always being "the foreigner", the kids and I will speak Finnish together but it is not a natural feeling. The children have not had any problem witheither language and seem just as comfortable using one as the other. The languages do get mixed, for example "Mommy, I want to wear my valkoinen hame!" [EI6]

Frequent discussions and continual re-negotiations

Endless negotiating and re-negotiating seem to be the order of the day for the intercultural couples involved. They justify this, and claim that talking and discussing make up an obvious and important part of their life. They also argue that they have to make more compromises to manage their life than "ordinary" couples, by which they mean monocultural couples. Also it appears to them that in one way or another "all their moves are negotiated". Finally, it looks as if far more than just basic things need to be negotiated. Often what seems quite a normal everyday issue for other people may in these intercultural families provoke an existential question, or even conflict, or it can be once again the beginning of a long negotiation. These intercultural couples discuss the different ways of looking at things more than they ever did in monocultural relationships they had. Recurrent topics of negotiation are where to live, child

raising, religion, the concept of time, taboos, friends and spending time with friends, and specific areas of difference. Child raising and religion are often linked and are common concerns for the partners. For instance, Gabina illustrates the religious issue in their relationship:

> CC: What are the specific issues in your relationship that need negotiation due/thanks to your different cultural backgrounds?
> Gabina: One of the most sensitive areas that required the most negotiation has beenreligion. I am a Roman Catholic, whereas he belongs to the Pentecostal church, so we had to compromise and find a common ground as to how to raise our daughter: in the Catholic or the protestant faith. Nowadays, we have found a "fair" common ground for both in which both faiths are acknowledged [EI7]

An example of child raising as a negotiation topic is provided by Annaliisa and Anthony:

> Raising children
> Anthony: so when we talk about the way you bring up children and since I have girls, I have to teach them discipline, I don't mean they should sit the way my mother was expected us to sit, my mother would expect us to sit in a certain way, legs *closed* like a freezer
> Annaliisa: but I think we
> Anthony: but basically my mother would expect us to listen and reply in a positive […]
> Annaliisa: no no no no no
> Anthony: or she can determine what she wants to
> Annaliisa: no, no, that's extreme, but like this morning ok, she had dressed up in something like a huppari, something with a hood and then very tight trousers, and then she had some bracelets or something which were really like out of style (laughs) the whole combination she had and Anthony said "you're going like a clown, how can you dress up like that"? He was expecting support from me but I just felt like "what am I going to tell the girl" you know, she has to go through like learn by herself, like if I say it's bad, she will insist even more to put on those things, because that's the age, she has to feel it, but I think if her friends would comment, and say like "'hey you are looking like a clown", then maybe [CI5]

Issues of holidays, where to go, and can one (afford to) go, in whose country to live and for how long, whether people are *his* friends or *her* friends or *mutual* friends, and whether it is OK to spend time with a friend in a pub or at home, are regular topics that come up and need to be renegotiated all the time. According to Crippen and Brew (2007), one of the first important decisions for an intercultural couple from different cultural backgrounds is to determine a place of residence. Most studies of migration view the family unit as a huge unit affecting decisions about where to live, yet partners have different emotions and desires prior to a decision-making process that is characterized by negotiation and tension and is affected by differential levels of power (p.108), especially when considering partners coming from different cultural backgrounds. Factors such as the subjective meaning of 'home', and the influence of family, friends and work have some bearing on the decision-making.

Nonverbal communication

Among the intercultural couples in this study it appears that the Finnish partners more than the non-Finnish partners experience non-verbal communication issues with their spouses as problematic. They mention aspects such as intonation, which they perceive as rude, quarrelsome, or dictatorial, or they may express the view that their partner's reactions are too visible or too audible. Ari talks about his wife:

CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life? Ari: In similar situations a Finn would hold back, bite his lip, make his hand into a fist and put his hands deep into his pocket. When my wife talks with her mother at the table, it rather sounds like a loud debate or an argument than like a discussion. My wife is spontaneous and impulsive […] I am in many respects the brake man. I have to be reasonable for instance concerning money matters. My wife is very sociable and during the past 10 years she has created a large social network in Finland too. She can naturally get near to complete strangers, something which I as a Finnish man am not able to do. I'd rather keep myself to myself [EI1]	CC: Kun ajattelet suhdetta puolisoosi ja elämääsi Suomessa, kuinka teidän erilaiset kulttuuriset taustanne tulevat esiin jokapäiväisessä elämässä? Ari: Vastaavassa tilanteessa suomalainen pidättäytyy, puree huulta ja laittaa kätensä nyrkkiin ja työntää käden taskuun. Kun vaimoni keskustelee äitinsä kanssa pöydän äressä, kuulostaa se enemmänkin äänekkäältä debatilta, väittelyltä kuin keskustelulta. Vaimoni on spontaani ja impulsiivinen […] minä olen monissa asiassa se jarrumies. Minun on pakko olla järkevä esim. raha-asioissa. Vaimoni on hyvin sosiaalinen ja hän on luonutkin myös suomessa runsaan 10 vuoden aikana laajan sosiaalisen verkoston. Hän osaa luontevasti lähestyä täysin vierasta ihmistä, mihin minä suomalaisena miehenä en pysty. Olen kuin pidättyväinen [sic] [EI1]

Being direct is also said to be an issue that challenges Finnish partners' tendency to avoid direct confrontation; they tend to be rather indirect in their manner. Some non-Finnish partners mention being bothered by this indirectness of the Finnish in-laws, which is found to be hard to live with and to respond to, partly as the non-Finnish partners are not always so fluent in Finnish. Interaction then is steered toward the Finnish partner, who tends to understand both sides and feels bad about the whole situation.

Daily interaction routines

The couples saw daily interaction routines as typical of their cultural diversity, which appeared in and through regular day-by-day interaction and everyday situations. Topics that arose covered a range of household chores, such as child care, cleaning, doing the dishes, preparing food, shopping, and how to spend money. These routines tend to lead to discussions about cultural differences, and to arguments. The couples mention three typical grounds for these kinds of

discussions: 1) the differences are much more apparent than they would be in intacultural couples and therefore they are seen as actually easier to deal with; since they are so obvious they just have to be discussed, 2) the continual need for more compromises, and 3) all moves are continuously negotiated in one way or another; all moves are negotiated moves.

Other topics that need negotiation are whether a move is personal, family or culture bound, holidays (when, where, if at all), spending time with friends (with whom, how long, where, together or apart), taboos (sex), raising children (educational preferences, dress style, language use), where to live (in her or his or a third country), the concept of time (different norms of punctuality), and religion (his, hers, another).

6.1.2 Traditions and celebrations

The integration of each partner's traditions and celebrations into the intercultural couple's daily life does not seem problematic as such. In some cases they improvise, re-create or vary certain traditions with such means as are available in the host country (Finland). For instance the US Christmas man who usually comes down the chimney after everyone is asleep happens to come on Christmas Eve in Finland. These issues are seen as the fun part of being an intercultural family, where the children get to learn and experience the pleasure of two cultures. Obstacles appear when traditions and celebrations are shared with friends and family, and when they are associated with food.

Where family and friends are concerned, intercultural couples are often disappointed. They feel that friends and family do not understand that they reflect on, transform and re-create rituals and their festivities in order to integrate and respect both partners' backgrounds. Family and friends fail to see the efforts the couples have made, are at times inconsiderate and insensitive towards the non-Finnish partner's special ways, and tend to be ethnocentric in their own perception of how festivals "should be" celebrated. Whereas the intercultural partners encourage each other to bring in their own cultural heritage, it seems more complicated to do this with family and friends. Couples mention that some celebrations are supported by associations such as the Finnish-German Association or the Finnish-Dutch Association, which organize gatherings and thus make it easier for them to celebrate them with other people, but this is less likely to happen with friends.

As far as food is concerned, this is more an issue that arises between the two intercultural partners. Food is something that needs to be negotiated. Related issues are time-tabling (when to have lunch, dinner, and how often to eat each day), aesthetics, and variety (what kind of food, ready prepared versus fresh food, Finnish or international). Meals can also become a course in etiquette, e.g. about how the meal should be eaten (manners, utensils), and whether one eats something sweet or salty with bread. Sabina and Sami describe it as follows:

Traditions	Traditionen
Sabina: at the table, there are, there are quite a lot of things, in Germany one never eats bread with the food and here there is always bread, sometimes we simply leave it out totally, for instance yesterday when your father visited us and suddenly we didn't have bread on the table and he asked where is the bread, but for the rest	Sabina: am Tisch, einfach gibt es, da gibt es relativ viele Sachen, in Deutschland isst man nie Brot beim Essen und hier ist immer Brot da, wir lassen es manchmal überhaupt weg, zum Beispiel gestern dann war dein Vater zum Besuch und wir hatten plötzlich kein Brot auf dem Tisch und er hat gefragt wo das Brot bleibt, aber sonst
Sami: or I was at a friend's and wanted jam on my toast and he: Sami you are so German, and me: doesn't one do that in Finland?	Sami: oder ich war bei einem Freund und will Marmelade auf den Tost und er so: Sami du bist so deutsch, und ich: macht man das nicht in Finnland?
Sabina: or that one leaves the knife in the butter, in Germany everyone has their own knife and takes it back to their own plate and, recently, N. [son] left his knife, when my sister and her husband were here, he left his knife in the butter, and the husband took the butter like: "ho, why is there a knife?" but we don't take this so very seriously, sometimes we have a butter knife, sometimes we don't [CI3]	Sabina: oder dass man das Messer in der Butter lässt, in Deutschland jeder hat sein Messer und nimmt es wieder mit zu seinem Teller und, [Sohn] hat neulich sein Messer, als meine Schwester und ihr Mann da waren, er hat sein Messer in der Butter gelassen, und der Mann nahm die Butter so: „ho, wieso ist da ein Messer?" Also wir nehmen das überhaupt nicht sehr ernst, manchmal haben wir ein Buttermesser, manchmal haben wir nicht [CI3]

These issues can become a source of conflict between the spouses, between parents and children, and between the couple and family and friends. It thus seems that cultural practices associated with food can be particularly powerful as food has the capacity to mobilize strong emotions (Appadurai, 1981: 494). Rituals involving the preparation of food, eating of food, manners and etiquette are all important. Also questions of how much to buy and what to have in reserve, and the need to have plenty to serve when guests turn up unexpectedly are culturally bound. An example of the latter is given by Ladica and Lasse:

> Culture
> Ladica: we actually, we always have a lot of food at home, and that's something what friends of our children they notice that
> Lasse: Slavic habit
> Ladica: ja, it's a Slavic habit I mean custom, you always have to have a full kind of a cupboard, you've got to have all kinds of dishes also, nothing like just plates and cups you've got to have all kinds of sets you know to offer something else […] and you have really lots of food, you have to have kind of basic
> Lasse: I don't know whether it has to do with the relation but
> Ladica: like flour, sugar, salt and, there is no possibility you could ever run out
> Lasse: […] when people come to visit us, it's always, she puts everything and when nobody wants to take anything she: 'you have to take something more', so there's all the time some
> Ladica: it's very pushing you know
> Lasse: that's the same thing when I was visiting, at our wedding in Slovakia when my parents came there, I was very skinny then, and my father gained in one week five kilos more
> Ladica & CC: -laugh-

> Lasse: because first you cannot learn the way how to deny because you are polite, like they say many times that "would you take one more plate", "no I can't", "but one more plate", "ok, just a little bit", and then you get the full plate and so it goes on and it takes at least one week when you learn a good strategy
> Ladica: our children started now to say "mother, don't be so pushing, stop it, stop it" especially when the boyfriends showed up and I: "have some more, have some more" -laughs-, so it's in a way, well of course it affects the family and our relations [CI6]

6.1.3. Values

The intercultural couples in this study claim to mostly share similar values. Values are the beliefs we accept by choice, they comprise a sense of responsibility upon which we act. In other words, values are those things that really matter to us; they are the ideas and beliefs that are evaluated as good or bad, right or wrong: they are the ideas and beliefs we hold as special (Gardner, jewler and Barefoot,2008: 106; Kreps & Thornton, 1992: 167). It is through continuous interaction and the need to understand each other that values (similar or different) are communicated and they create a very strong emotional bond between the partners.

The most commonly mentioned value differences concerned upbringing and education: how to bring up the children, and gender issues. Values can be classified into three levels of cultural importance, primary, secondary and tertiary, but it is important to acknowledge that for instance a tertiary value in western society such as "respect for the elderly" is a primary value in African, Muslim and Eastern cultures. Values, in other words, are culture bound. Values can also be divided into moral values (which we do not force on others but which are of immense importance to ourselves), aesthetic values (the standard by which we judge beauty), and performance values (how well a person performs to some standard) (see Stecker, 2008). However, again, we need to understand that many values can be a mixture of these: the values raised by the intercultural couples, education and gender issues, originate from a blend of moral, aesthetic and performance values.

The upbringing of children

How to raise the children is a constant concern for intercultural couples. The couples' commitment to their children growing up in an intercultural family is a source of both happiness and hope, and of doubt and despair. Happiness and hope are portrayed by the richness of having two or more languages spoken and understood at home, which enables the children to communicate with friends and family on both sides. Also the uniqueness of the couple's family composition allows for special treatment such as travelling abroad, having a lot of celebrations (from the mother's and the father's culture), and having grandparents from different cultures. In addition the couples are aware that they can offer their children a wide range of experiences: "life is not only like this, but it can also be done in different ways".

Doubt and despair are related to aesthetic and performance values concerning the children's upbringing. They raise many questions. How well does my child perform at school, how well does she/he fit in, and how well can she/he make use of being bicultural? What are the benefits for the child when she/he knows more than one language, and can these issues be discussed at school? How can I teach my children to behave "properly" according to mum's or dad's standards - in other words questions of politeness, the norms of which are different in each partner's culture? Raising children thus seems to be both a challenge and an opportunity for intercultural couples.

Gender issues

Tannen (1986: 109) argues that male-female conversation is always cross-cultural communication, so all heterosexual couples can be said to be intercultural in that they bring together the different cultural worlds and experiences of men and women. Mentioning gender in this communication context draws attention to the fact that gender is a relational concept.

In addition, gender is shaped by socio-cultural conditions such as class, education, family system and history. Whereas gender identity is acquired largely subconsciously by each individual through continuous, lifelong interaction with others within the same socio-cultural environment (Refsing, 1998: 194), gender roles signify the public expression of gender identity, i.e. of attitudes that indicate to others the degree of one's maleness or femaleness.

People and societies can be femininity-oriented or masculinity-oriented. According to Hofstede (2009), masculinity and femininity refer to the distribution of roles between the genders, which is a fundamental issue for any society. Studies have revealed that 1) women's values differ less among societies than men's values, 2) men's values vary from one country to another with a dimension from, on the one hand, very assertive, competitive and maximally different from women's values, to modest, caring and similar to women's values on the other. The assertive pole is called "masculine" and the modest, caring pole "feminine". The women in feminine countries tend to have the same modest, caring values as the men whereas in masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men (Hofstede, 2009).

This said, we can now more easily approach intercultural couples' gender perceptions. Most of the partners in these intercultural couples believe that anything a man can do, a woman can do just as well (except motherhood). Partners from femininity-oriented and masculinity-oriented backgrounds tend to integrate their blended gender roles in their intercultural relationship towards a femininity-oriented one. This means that 1) the man can fulfill the parental role just as well as a woman, 2) household chores (child care, cooking, dishwashing, drilling, dusting, hoovering, mopping), and "value-free contact with the other sex" are not gender specific, i.e. they are shared on a more or less equal basis, and 3) women can be independent (support themselves and pursue personal goals in life). Hence, there seems to be a femininity orientation among the intercultural couples, and between their partners. These findings seem to be

an internal version of gender role perceptions, i.e. they occur within the boundary of the intercultural couples' relationship.

Externally, femininity-oriented gender roles between the couple and their social network, the family, are more complicated and less tolerated. Even if they work well between the partners themselves they tend to provoke criticism from the partners' families, who seem to expect a masculinity orientation. The intercultural couples have to listen to families' comments which at best express some doubt or disapproval of their femininity-oriented behaviour and at worst express ridicule or outright hostility. There are, of course, exceptions, like for instance, Hugo, who refers to his positive surprise at being able to meet Finnish women openly and easily:

Gender roles	Mannen-vrouwen rollen
Hugo: yes, and for me it was a revelation when I came to live in Finland, that it is something I so enjoyed, that women directly approach a man, I so enjoyed that. When I went with –daughter- to the music school, the first contacts I had here, on a regular basis, there was a woman who was there also by chance, with her child […] and I had my little baby, and she had her baby […] the two of us with the buggies went to play near the sandpit and so, and we were like twice a week for one hour always together, a bit talking, but the initiative came from her, and that was for me so, then I thought back to Belgium, then I thought, this can't be, I mean, in Belgium it is like, it just can't be, what will her husband think or I don't know, but that was something for me like: waaaw, this is possible here [CI1]	Hugo: ja, en dat is voor mij de openbaring geweest als ik naar Finland ben komen wonen, dat dat iets is, waar dat ik heel erg van genoten heb, dat vrouwen rechtstreeks contact opnemen met een man, ik heb daar zo van genoten. Als ik met –dochter- naar de muskari ging, de eerste contacten die ik hier gehad heb, zo echt regelmatig, er was een vrouw die daar ook toevallig was met haar kindje […] en ik had mijn babyke daar bij , en zij had toen haar baby […] met ons twee met die buggykes, gingen wij spelen aan de zandbak en zo, en we waren toen twee keren per week toen altijd een uur samen, zo wa babbelen, maar da initiatief was van haar gekomen, en da was voor mij zo, dan dacht ik terug aan België, toen dacht ik, da kan nie, ik bedoel, in België is da, da kan nie, wat gaat die man daar van denken of ik weet niet wa allemaal, maar da was iets voor mij van: waaaw, da kan hier [CI1]

Some of the intercultural couples, however, engage in the non-integration of gender roles. This happens in couples in which there are non-Finnish women from highly masculine societies. The gender identity of these women appears to dominate in determining the gender role distribution in their intercultural relationship. The gender identity of the Finnish husbands is generally unchallenged by having women doing household tasks while they themselves take care of the "masculine" chores. Most of the characteristics of the non-Finnish women's gender identity are respected by their Finnish husbands. The ambiguity of Finnish male gender identity (generally femininity-oriented) thus allowed for adaptation to both older more traditional gender roles and to current role-sharing types of intercultural relationships. An illustration of this is given by Gabina:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, howare your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Gabina: my "chauvinist" or "machista" upbringing has had an impact on the way we relate as a couple. For instance, when referring to home tasks, such as doing the dishes or cooking, my upbringing as a Latin American woman responsible for taking care of the family and home tasks, manifests itself. The kitchen is my "territory" therefore, my husband is not too "welcomed" to help as in many "typical "Finnish egalitarian families. My husband, coming from a gender equality society, differs from the more "macho" oriented men in Latin America [EI7]

Considering Hofstede's findings (2009) that Finland has a masculinity index of 26 (=highly feminine), and the other countries represented by the intercultural partners in this study have a masculinity index between 46 (Nigeria) and 110 (Slovakia), it is clear that gender issues do form a challenge and just have to be tackled somehow, which they are, according to the findings. One exception, of an "unexpected" finding, is that "statistically labelled" gender roles do not necessarily coincide with real life experience. In the Netherlands there is strong femininity-orientation (masculinity index of 14); the following example illustrates a Finnish-Dutch couple's gender identity and gender role differences in their relationship, and situates these in the sphere of the traditional profession of being a sailor:

Female-male roles	Vrouwen-mannen rollen
Kristel: He comes from a traditional family where the woman is at home, where the roles are clearly divided, the man works outside the house, the wife works inside. I see many good things in this, and things I want to make my own, but not for ever, and there we collide sometimes, and we have collided	Kristel: Hij komt uit een traditioneel gezin waar dat de vrouw thuis is, en waar de rollen duidelijk verdeeld zijn, de man werkt buitenhuis, een vrouw werkt binnen. Ik zie er vele goeie dingen en dingen die ik ook mijn eigen wil maken maar niet voor altijd, en daar botsen we ook wel eens, en hebben we gebotst
Kornelis: no, I think, I admit, I come from a traditional family and I think that my trade is traditional too, seaman, the whole seamanship, thus very traditional […] yes, the man is the head of the family, that is something I strongly, it leads to quarrels for us in a way, there is equality but also role division, task division, yes they are things that we are concerned about […] it still is my ideal, together working towards one goal […] and I find it difficult when she, on the one hand I want her to develop herself, so she can widen her horizons and can make use of her talents, but sometimes I have the feeling, when she becomes so absorbed in her studies and with her life, hm, well it can be a bit less (laughs) [TI3]	Kornelis: nee, ik vind, ik geef toe, ik kom uit een traditioneel gezin en ik denk dat mijn vakrichting is ook traditioneel, zeeman, het hele zeemanschap, dus heel traditioneel […] ja, de man is hoofd van het gezin, dat is iets wat ik heel sterk, wat een strijdpunt is voor ons op een manier, er is wel gelijkheid maar wel rolverdeling, taakverdeling, ja dat zijn dingen die ons wel bezighouden […] het is nog wel mijn ideaal, samen voor één doel werken […] en ik vind het moeilijk als zij, aan één kant wil ik dat zij zich ontwikkelt, dat ze zich kan ontplooien en gebruik maken van haar talenten, maar soms heb ik wel eens het gevoel, als zij zo helemaal opgaat met haar studies en met haar leven, hm, nou dat mag wel wat minder (lacht) [TI3]

This account, although an exception in this study, underscores how gender identity and role are open to continuous reconstruction and modification, in line with changes occurring in the surrounding society. Also, there are differences between different professional groups, as in this example, differences between urban and rural life, and between different social classes. (see also Refsing, 1998.)

These gender issues, gender identity and gender role, obviously matter and influence a couple's relationship in three ways. First of all, gender identity inherently develops through interaction with the other. Secondly, acting upon gender identity establishes the gender role. And thirdly, relationships are affected by interaction with similar or different gender roles. Gender issues in general are seen as challenging, especially for men. Women's emancipation has turned the world upside down and men now need to accomplish many different things as well. It has been suggested that the man's role nowadays has become less clear, that men are in crisis and need to create a new self image, which is the challenge of this era.

6.1.4 Adaptation

Cross-cultural adaptation, a complex process in which a person gradually becomes capable of functioning effectively in a culture other than the one into which he or she was originally socialized (Kim, 2001), also affects the intercultural couples in this study. The non-Finnish partners' immersion into Finnish culture is affected by the adaptation process in various ways. But couplehood comprises two people, so what affects the non-Finnish partners also has consequences for the couple – as we know from Bakhtin's dialogism and from Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics: "we only become through the other". In this section I will consider the adaptation issues the couples deem important; these include both challenging and constructive components.

Challenging components

The main challenges concern language, emotional difficulties in building up friendships, unconscious differences, and identity issues.

Language issues have appeared in areas of this study that I have already discussed, related to internal relational dialectics and in particular to support giving and dependence on the partner. Also in this current chapter there is a separate section on language issues as they are one of the cultural differences that shape couples' intercultural relationships. In this section on adaptation, language issues are seen as a challenging feature of the adaptation process of the immigrant spouse and their Finnish partner.

Non-Finnish partners describe the use of a second, third, or shared foreign language in their relationship as the biggest difference and greatest challenge in their life. These differences and challenges are concerned with language and communication, about blending in, about adapting, about feeling excluded and

at times displaced, and about belonging and having a place in society. It is about negotiating, which always means having to give something up while gaining something else.

The difficulty of learning the host language (Finnish) is not only an issue between the partners themselves but it is also, and more, an external challenge, something that occurs between the intercultural partner and the Finnish environment. Inability to function in the Finnish language is hard to accept and repeated messages that one is "handicapped" "an idiot", "incomplete", and "a retard", make it worse. Since they lack a common history with the host-society the non-Finnish spouses need to "position themselves". This means that establishing and maintaining contacts does not only have so much to do with a common world of thoughts, but, also with a shared history on which one can count. Also the lack of synchrony and associative communication with host nationals make it difficult to sustain conversations. An example of this is illustrated by Martijn:

Language Martijn: my biggest handicap is the language, I can't express that I do understand a lot of things, and it goes then like, the people think like: "he doesn't get it", but I *do* get it, but *that*, help me out with *that,* only with *that*, then I can help you, so help me, just tell me *that*, and I can't say it, and I'm very afraid this will never disappear [CI2]	Taal Martijn: de grootste handicap die ik heb, dat is de taal, ik kan niet uitdrukken dat ik een heleboel dingen snap, en dat is dan, de mensen denken dan van "ja, dat snapt ie niet", maar dat snap ik *wel*, maar *dat*, help me nou even met *dat*, alleen *dat* maar, dan kan ik je helpen, help me nou, zeg me nou alleen maar *dat*, en ik kan dat niet vertellen, en daar ben ik wel heel bang voor dat dat nooit zal verdwijnen [CI2]

Speaking a language one is not fluent in puts one automatically in a weaker position and therefore creates inequality between the people in the conversation. This results in the less skilled language user feeling disadvantaged.

Internally, within the boundary of a couple's relationship, speaking another language, whether Finnish or the other partner's language, also places one in the weaker position and makes one feels unequal. It is also true that it sometimes feels unnatural and emotionally constraining to speak with one's partner in his/her native tongue.

Externally, when speaking another language than Finnish with family or friends, the intercultural couples experience that others are observing them in "strange and suspicious ways".

According to Moyer (2004: 38), in intercultural adaptation situations adults are often embarrassed by their lack of mastery of the language and they may develop a sense of inadequacy after repeated experiences of frustration when trying to say exactly what they mean. Such frustration affects self-evaluation, possibly increases anxiety, and has a negative impact on motivation and perseverance.

The combination of language difficulties presented above, together with the non-Finnish spouse's heightened visibility and the general nature of the

host society, which tends to favour being reserved over being communicative, makes it hard to make contacts and establish friendships. These visibility issues (differing from the norm in skin complexion), and the problems with linguistic expression (using a foreign language, speaking Finnish with an accent or distinctive intonation) result in a feeling of estrangement and therefore may hinder relationship building. Tutta and Theo describe an encounter with Tutta's grandmother as follows:

> CC: What would you say makes your relationship an intercultural relationship?
> Tutta: […] my grandmother, oei oei oei, she was so cute, she is 90 years
> Theo: she had never seen a foreigner before in her life, and then she said (all laugh)
> Tutta: and then she didn't know what to say and she said: "on se niin tumma, on se niin tumma*"(he is so dark, he is so dark)* (all laugh)
> Tutta: she was always staring at him, he was really a monkey for her
> Theo: I was a monkey ja […] I always said to her: "your grandmother is a racist" (laughs)
> Tutta: but no, she was not, she was embarrassed […] [TI1]

The result of intercultural couples, like immigrant families, living here on a long term or even a permanent basis and having sometimes unsatisfactory interaction with the host society is emotional distress. Perceived linguistic inability (by others and by oneself), unwanted attention (visibility), and disappointment lead to contact avoidance and seclusion from members of the host society, to feelings of incompetence, weaker self identity and negativity in the form of hopelessness and gloominess. This is mentioned in phrases like: *"but I will always remain a foreigner, I always remain a foreigner"* [CI2], or in the following comment made by Rokuro who, despite his self-perceived adaptation to Finnish society, raises the idea of non-recognition and insufficiency and of being a foreigner:

> CC: What about your adaptation here?
> Rokuro: Sometimes I feel I'm really adapted to this place, on some occasions I realize I'm anyway a foreigner, applying for a visa, visiblity, even when I speak Finnish as a Finn, I still have an image of a foreigner [TI4]

Besides the differences presented above, there are also so-called unconscious differences that are part of the adaptation process and perceived as a struggle, such as getting used to doors opening the "wrong" way, learning to walk "differently" along the pavement, learning to walk on ice and icy roads, and getting used to the long darkness in winter or to people's faces.

Whereas the challenging features mentioned above somehow depicted intercultural couplehood as only partially demanding, one partner gave a rather grim picture of his intercultural relationship:

CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life? Kalle: In my opinion the differences in our	CC: Kun ajattelet suhdetta puolisoosi ja elämääsi Suomessa, kuinka teidän erilaiset kulttuuriset taustanne tulevat esiin jokapäiväisessä elämässä? Kalle: Mielestäni erot

cultural background have brought mainly a negative feel to certain situations in everyday life. I can't name any wonderful / great moments that would come down to different cultural backgrounds. The best in life however is ordinary everyday life – even when it is hard – when it happens with mutual understanding both supporting each other [EI7]	kulttuuritaustassa ovat tuoneet lähinnä kielteistä sävyä tietyissä tilanteissa arkisessa elämässä. En pysty nimeämään mitään ihania/suuria hetkiä, jotka olisivat olleet kulttuuritaustojen erojen ansiota. Parasta elämässä on kuitenkin päivittäinen arki – vaikka se olisi raskastakin – silloin kun se sujuu yhteisymmärryksessä kummankin tukiessa toistaan. [EI7]

Constructive components

The bright side of intercultural couplehood concerns four main areas: communication, education, personal-emotional, and the use of free time.

Communication, as has been mentioned many times in this study, is seen by the intercultural couples as a source of fascination and attraction. Communication reflects the intercultural partners' use of language, language learning, and ways of speaking. This is exemplified by partners being astonished, charmed and touched by their spouse's progress in a foreign language (the native language of the partner). Also the spouse's openness and talkativeness are appreciated and a source of delight. Other factors influencing communication are experienced, like the partner's different temperament (which perhaps leads to him/her shouting a lot), his or her standing unusually close to people for Finland, or not wanting to disclose problems. Studies indicate that significant differences exist both cross-culturally and intraculturally with regard to communication and its avoidance. Issues such as openness, according to Stafford (2003), may be reported in US research more frequently because of the widespread and deeply rooted cultural belief in that culture that self-disclosure is a guarantee of a good, successful relationship. The actual expression of intimacy also appears to be more common in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures (Yum & Canary, 2003), although even individualistic cultures may differ in the communicative enactment of intimacy. Anita illustrates this as follows:

> CC: Did you ever experience this interplay between feeling that you enjoy talking and being open with each other, whereas there are also times you are more closed and not so willing to share everything verbally?
> Anita: In Finnish, the "I love you" is so much bigger and stronger than it is in America, in America, people say it so much, they say it to their mums and dads and brothers and sisters and, but for me it was like so overwhelmingly big somehow that uhm, when Alan first said it, I thought: "Oh my God, I'm not ready to say that" (laughs) [TI5]

The challenge of understanding communicative behaviours across cultures does not solely lie in the success or failure of the non-natives' acculturation to the new culture; according to Kim (2001: 404), it also includes questions concerning individuals' predispositions towards talking and the reactions of others to the manifestations of such predispositions. In addition, host country nationals'

reception and communication readiness matter at least as much in adaptation situations.

As for the question of bringing up children, the intercultural couples see the richness, the advantages, and the joy of raising bicultural children as the most wonderful project in their lives. A strong commitment to their children's bilingual education unites all the intercultural couples (except those who are childless). In addition to bicultural child raising, they learn from each other while living in the "other's culture", and because of the growth and development they have undergone and achieved thanks to their intercultural lives in Finland. The couples also learn to accept and appreciate each other's cultural background, they learn from each other and complete each other in many ways. Marika (CI2) says: "I often think my life started after our marriage, I became more free […] we learned new things about love". Also, the intercultural couples learn "to expand their horizons", and learn that "cultural difference has a lot to do with codes, about Finnish language and Finnish culture". In the following, Gabina summarizes the learning route she experienced in her intercultural relationship with her husband:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Gabina: We are constantly learning from each other, I have learned to think and feel like him, and vice versa, and to be more flexible about things, and see the "other" perspective, we have become mediators in our own cultures and more tolerant as a result [EI7]

And related to the partner's social network, in-laws in particular, Silvio (CI4) says: "I learned a lot of things […] from her father, to me he is very important, he is my translator, he is my book of Finnish culture".

On a personal-emotional level the partners praise each other's character as being "most caring", "loveable", "most sensitive", or "gentleman-like", for instance. Besides the partner himself or herself, also their own core family (the couple and their children), the partners' relatives (Finnish and non-Finnish), and both partners' friends bring an "enriching", "surprising" and "fun" element as well as a "new dimension" to their life. The couples' memories of their "double wedding", which combined elements from both cultural traditions, is treasured.

Regarding the use of free time, people expressed appreciation of things to do with food, the combination of their cultural ways of recreation, and nature. The discovery of each partner's food culture, such as "likes and dislikes", "exotic food", "smells and tastes", "special shops and favourite restaurants", "delicious dinners and romantic taverns", " fresh herbs and wines" are a genuine source of pleasure for the intercultural couples. Bea describes this as follows:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Bea: […] we were going on a train to catch a boat to Ahvenanmaa. We were both hungry so Petri ran to a shop to buy some snacks, before we jumped on the train. In

> the train he opens the bag of snacks: smoked salmon, leipäjuusto and some garlic filled bread. This has to have been the most wonderful snack I have ever eaten in my life! [EI2]

Combining their cultural ways of recreation refers to the places the couples travel to and visit together with what they do when they get there, like "making a return trip to Lausanne (in 48 hours) to eat Mövenpick ice-cream", or "combining the best of the Netherlands (a nice beach with good sand and the sea) with neppis, a fun game from Finland".

The enjoyment of nature is seen in how the couples become closer to nature through the opportunities offered in Finland: the discovery of new berries, mushrooms and vegetables are sources of enjoyment that "bring pride and an occasion for celebration".

Identity issues

Besides the challenging and constructive features, adaptation also raises issues of identity. The intercultural couples in this study expressed issues connected to identity in terms of 1) searching for and 2) coming to terms with "who I am". This indicates that identity is something uncertain but also something changeable. Rootlessness is a common experience. Eric expresses this as follows:

> CC: When considering your relationship and your life in Finland, how are your different cultural backgrounds reflected in your everyday life?
> Èric: My problem or my situation is, that I'm not a pure Finn and I'm not anymore pure Swiss either, and I will never be. I'm kind of a rootless person [EI5]

The search for identity is associated with feelings of anger, doubt, frustration, humour and separation. The following excerpt illustrates this in a conversation between Hugo and Helena:

Adaptation	Aanpassing
Hugo: I have my frustrations and sometimes strong frustrations, also, to find my identity here and this and that, but I think it also belongs to the mid-life crisis and, it belongs to life at any time […] I also often think back and so, and I often actively think back about what kind of person I would have become, had I stayed there […]	Hugo: ik heb mijn frustraties en soms stevige frustraties, ook, om mijn identiteit hier te vinden en dit en dat, maar ik denk dat hoort ook bij de mid-life crisis en, dat hoort bij't leven überhaupt […] ik denk ook dikwijls terug en zo, en dikwijls denk ik actief terug aan wat voor ene zou ik geworden zijn zou ik daar gebleven zijn […]
Helena: but actually I have a bit the same, even when living in my own country now, I, I don't feel fully, 100% Finnish, not any more […] I often feel a bit like yes, where do we actually belong, this is not so clear […] it often brings doubts […] and then often, it is a bit of consolation	Helena: maar ik heb eigenlijk ook het beetje hetzelfde he, zelfs als we nu in mijn thuisland wonen, ik, ik voel me niet volledig, 100 % een Fin, niet meer […] ik voel me dikwijls zo'n beetje van ja, waar horen wij nu eigenlijk bij, das nu niet zo duidelijk […] dat brengt dikwijls zo wel twijfels […] en dikwijls dan, dat is zo een beetje een troost

for myself, that when it is difficult with Finns, then I forget sometimes that, hei I am a Finn myself too (laughs), sometimes I curse Finnish people (laughs) […] sometimes I make small jokes like that I am already 1/3 Belgian (all laugh), and sometimes I feel it is less [CI1]	voor mijn eigen zo, da als da met Finnen moeilijk is, dan vergeet ik soms dat ik, hei ik ben zelf ook een Fin (lacht), soms vervloek ik de Finse mensen (lacht) […] soms maak ik daar grapjes van dat ik al 1/3 Belg ben (alle lachen), en soms voel ik zo dat da minder is [CI1]

Feelings like those above related to the search for identity illustrate what Ting-Toomey calls the *"emotional significance that we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture",* which she defines as cultural identity (1999:30). It seems that only when one finds oneself in another culture or in interaction with people from another culture does one start to reflect on and become more aware of the influence of one's cultural identity.

Also Bauman maintains that *"one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs, when one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence"* (1996: 19).

This discussion on identity goes further and leads us to the idea of "coming to terms" with ones' identity. This is illustrated in the next part of Helena and Hugo's conversation :

Adaptation Hugo: […] I experience myself now as an international person, as a world citizen, I don't really belong here, when I go to Belgium, I don't really belong there, but I belong enough here and enough there to actually be happy Helena: […] when we are there for a period […] I feel it stronger then that, that a certain part of me belongs there, and yet, I feel of course like a stranger there too, but I can have those feelings [of belonging and being a stranger] here as well [CI1]	Aanpassing Hugo: […] ik ervaar me nu als nen internationale, zo ne wereldburger, ik hoor hier niet echt bij, als ik naar Belgie ga, ik hoor daar niet echt bij, maar ik hoor hier genoeg bij en daar genoeg bij om eigenlijk gelukkig te zijn Helena: maar als wij dan daar zijn voor een tijd […] dan voel ik dat sterker zo dat, dat een zeker stuk van mij daar toch bijhoort, en toch voel ik me natuurlijk daar ook een vreemdeling, maar ik kan die gevoelens [erbij horen en een vreemdeling zijn] ook hier even goed hebben [CI1]

Issues of "not really belonging here" and "not really belonging there", and "enough belonging here" and "enough belonging there", "belonging to a certain part", "belonging and being a stranger", all indicate what Bakhtin (1981) calls the *chronotope of threshold*; *a chronotope, highly charged with emotion and value* (p. 248). This chronotope of threshold indicates a turning point in life, a decision that changes one's life, or the indecision that fails to change a life, or the fear to step over the threshold (Bakhtin, 1981:248). Another expression for the

threshold chronotope is "liminality of belonging", which is described by Greenholtz and Kim as *"the state of existing in the gap between fixed realities; a state of ambiguity and indeterminacy"* (2009: 67).

Liminality, a term also used to describe a marginal state, is marked by uncertainty as cultural norms and expectations are temporarily overturned. The loosening of normative constraints and the heightened uncertainty it creates produces a feeling of an affectual and experiential condition of togetherness. (Heatherington, 1998: 97.)

Before we go any further with this discussion of issues of liminality and the margin state, we need to explain what we mean by identity so that we can understand and place the intercultural couples' perceptions regarding this phenomenon.

First of all, identity includes both individual and collective identity. Considering individual (personal) identity, the self is formed on the basis of who an individual is and thinks she/he is. Collective identity is based on the grounds of her/his belonging to different social groups (collectives). Belongingness, identification with members of the same group, and differentiation from non-members, are the three basic elements that constitute collective identity. So there is an interrelationship between collective and individual identity as the individual identity is always built and shaped in relation to the social belongings of an individual. The individual and the collective sense is always socially and culturally embedded. (Petkova, 2005: 11-20.)

Second, identity is a concept created through our communication with others (Kim, 2001). Our identity, or self-image, is influenced and formed by our culture and through interaction with those of our own culture (Ting-Toomey, 1999). As a result, our self-image is affirmed and feels safest when we are communicating with those with whom we are familiar. How one experiences intercultural encounters such as those in intercultural relationships is decided by the security and vulnerability of one's identity. Unfamiliar situations and different communication styles can create a crisis in which one fails to feel the identity security, inclusion, boundary regulation, adaptation, and communication coordination that is desired. (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 26.) It is clear that issues of adaptation, belonging, boundaries and inclusion are part of the concept of identity.

If there is inclusion and belonging there is also something like exclusion, which can lead to being marginalized. This margin state has been studied by Berry (2001). His presentation of attitudinal positions is based on the assumption that immigrant groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to engage in intercultural relations, which, of course, is not always the case (Berry, 2001). For immigrants, the main question is "How shall *we* deal with these issues of acculturation (which include belonging and exclusion)?" whereas for the receiving society it is "How should *they* deal with them?" In practice, however, each group must also concern itself with the views and practices of the other. Thus, for both groups in contact, there

is necessarily a *mutual* process, involving one's own attitudes and behaviours and a perception of those of the other groups. (Berry, 2001: 618-619.)

Considering liminality and marginality from the point of view of immigrant groups, when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination), then *marginalization* is defined. (Berry, 2001:619.)

At this point I will not yet take into account the receiving society as it is the concept of marginalization that is being considered, i.e. the non-dominant, immigrant viewpoint. But whereas Berry (2001) sees marginalization as an attitudinal issue of immigrants not being interested in their cultural heritage and identity (or not having the possibility), nor in having relationships with the receiving society, Bennett (1993) considers this quite differently. She coins two concepts: encapsulated and constructive marginality. She argues that spending a significant number of their formative years overseas affords individuals either encapsulated or constructive marginal status. According to Bennett (1993) an "encapsulated marginal" is someone who feels stuck between the multitudes of cultures he/she has experienced and therefore never feels at home anywhere. A "constructive marginal", on the other hand, is someone who has come to understand his/her cultural marginality and has still managed to construct a clear sense of who he/she is. These people have the ability to feel at home everywhere. She states that constructive marginals are able to form clear boundaries in the face of multiple cultural perspectives (Bennett, 1993: 115). In summary, this means that a "marginal" state does not necessarily mean one is cut off and totally isolated from one's own and other cultural groups, as Berry suggests. Considering the "in-betweenness" or intercultural couples' liminality, their feeling of "not really knowing where they belong" raises questions like "Do they feel at all that they belong?" and "Where do they belong?" A typical comment by the intercultural couples in this study about "belonging" is made by Sami and Sabine:

Adaptation	Anpassung
Sami: I actually belong there where Sabine and [son] are Sabine: uhm, right now I have the feeling I rather belong in Helsinki, but even stronger is this family, that I belong in these two [CI3]	Sami: ich gehöre dahin wo Sabine und [Sohn] sind eigentlich Sabine: hm, also ich habe im Moment das Gefühl dass ich eher zu Helsinki gehöre, aber stärker ist noch diese Familie, dass ich zu den zwei gehöre [CI3]

The intercultural couples' sense of belonging is not really defined by a place or a country. It seems, however, to be strongly relationship related, as one spouse states: "home is where my family is", which is also what Sami and Sabine claim in the previous interview excerpt. When talking about belonging the couples point to family, meaning the spouse and children or the nuclear family, and this can be considered the "primary or internal sense of belonging" since it occurs

within the boundary of the couple – including possible children. Hence, one can say that the intercultural partners' primary sense of belonging appears to be *the place where their close relationships are*; where they feel most at ease and secure. This implies that primary or internal belonging refers to a non-geographically labelled place, *a space defined by relationships*.

Besides the boundary of couplehood and/or the nuclear family, the couples also feel a sense of external belonging to groups that share certain similarities. For instance, Helena tries to convey this as follows:

Adaptation	Aanpassing
Helena: and I think that, that we […] (sighs) we don't have Finnish friends, like couples who are friends, I do have Finnish friends [women and men] but as couples we don't have Finnish couples, and often I feel when we are with couples talking about two cultures, there are many issues of understanding, yes, in a certain way it uhm feels easy CC: so couples who aren't both Finnish? Helena, yes, yes, right, so from two cultures, that there is so much understanding, that you don't need to explain certain things, you can immediately feel that about other people [CI1]	Helena: en ik denk dat, dat wij […] (zucht)wij hebben geen Finse vrienden, zo vrienden koppels, ik heb wel Finse vrienden en vriendinnen, maar als koppels, wij hebben geen Finse koppels, en dikwijls voel ik als we bij koppels zo bezig zijn van twee culturen, dat daar veel zaken zijn die begrip, ja, dat op een bepaalde manier voelt dat uhm, gemakkelijk CC: dus koppels die niet alle twee Fins zijn? Helena: ja, ja, juist, dus van twee culturen, dat er zoveel begrip is, dat ge niet zoveel moet uitleggen van bepaalde dingen, ge kunt dat direct aanvoelen van andere mensen [CI1]

Other intercultural couples mentioned that they feel a certain affiliation with other intercultural couples. Alan for instance expresses it like this:

> CC: how would you say your relationship evolved over the years?
> Alan: […] my sense of it is that it has always evolved in a very positive stronger direction but uhm one thing we've consciously talked about was, for me anyway was interesting is, not along the pattern that we can recognize with too many otherpeople, with exception of perhaps these other multicultural couples […] that certainly shapes the things we talk about and the things we experience [TI5]

So, the intercultural couples also have a sense of externally belonging, with for example groups with a similar constellation: intercultural couples. Obviously couples do not live in isolation and, according to Petkova, *"who we are depends on where we are, who we are with, and what the context is, thus generating the concept of social identity"* (2005: 12). The intercultural couples recognize a sense of belonging or a need to orient towards others with whom they find commonalities that they share and that eventually make them part of a group (see also Grote, 2011). In this study the intercultural couples have various senses of belonging, internally and externally, partly belonging "here and there", and an awareness of fractional but fluid belonging between the fringes of encapsulation and constructiveness. According to Schaetti and Ramsey (2009: 5), the experience of liminality, *"living on the border"* (Miller, 2003) or *"on the*

threshold" (Bakhtin, 1981) can serve as a powerful liberating force for intercultural couples, because understanding it allows them to celebrate their boundaries with their diverse perspectives, and not to be confined by either/or thinking but to embrace the both/and (Schaetti & Ramsey, 2009: 5). This can be applied to the couples in this study.

6.2 Relational dialectics in the context of intercultural couplehood

The findings presented in the previous two chapters on internal and external relational dialectics clearly show that intercultural couples experience particular internal and external tensions in their relationships, essentially contributing to Baxter & Montgomery's relational dialectics framework. In addition, it is also demonstrated that the intercultural couples perceive their different cultural backgrounds as having an impact on their relationship in terms of language and communication, traditions and celebrations, values and gender issues, and adaptation. Bringing together and crystallizing these findings results in *intercultural relational dialectics*.

Finding the intercultural relational dialectics was done by both 1) linking the findings of Chapters four and five with the findings of Chapter 6.1, i.e. the couples' accounts of how their cultural background is reflected in their relationship, and 2) juxtaposing them with intercultural dialectics of difference-similarity, individual-culture, personal-contextual, privilege-disadvantage, static-dynamic, and present/future-history/past, as these seemed to be relevant in the couples' lives, according to the previous findings of this study (Chen, 2002; Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Martin, Nakayama and Flores, 2002).

Obviously, the intercultural dialectics of static-dynamic and difference-similarity (Martin & Nakayama, 1999) are inherent in intercultural relationships. This means first of all that change, representing the dialectic of static-dynamic, defines the relationships. This was explained thoroughly in Chapter two, Section two, where change is seen as one of the central concepts of relational dialectics. Secondly, the intercultural dialectic of difference-similarity fundamentally defines intercultural interaction. In a philosophical vein one can say that communication is practically unthinkable without some mutual understanding (similarity), although the need to communicate often arises from differences. All the relational dialectics in the context of intercultural couples underlie the management of difference-similarity (see also Chen, 2002: 249).

This being the case, cultural identity and belonging, increased sensitivity towards differences and similarities, ongoing re-negotiations, power, social support, and uncertainty, are all manifestations of intercultural relational dialectical forces that allow many forms in different conditions and with respect to different matters, internal and external to the intercultural couples' relationship.

I will next describe the manifestations of intercultural relational dialectics along with the internal and external relational dialectics, each encompassing the fundamental need for 1) interdependency (internal and external processes of integration-separation), 2) fluctuation (internal and external processes of stability-change), and 3) negotiation (internal and external processes of expression-privacy).

6.2.1 Interdependency

Internally, the intercultural couples' interdependency (autonomy-connection) is signified by greater connection (excessive togetherness) on the one hand, and by a clear search for separateness on the other hand. This is a consequence of the difference-similarity dialectic having an influence on the autonomy-connection dialectic. This means that certain kinds of effort that one or other of the partners has to make, especially concerning language-related skills and requirements (inherently different for both partners), demand and allow the desire for greater closeness. Support, as we have seen before, is a matter of give and take, of provider and receiver. Whereas one may feel somehow obliged to help one's spouse and entirely committed to the idea of doing so, at the same time it also can be perceived as an embarrassment. However, these pleas for support and answering these pleas, which both draw partners together, can also pull them apart, as they can lead to boredom and an explicit need for separateness.

In fact we can see an interplay of similarity-difference, autonomy-connection and individual-culture. The need for support related to language and everyday issues between the two partners (interdependency) can be directly attributed to the relevance of the cultural differences in which each of the partners was socialized, whereas, obviously, the partners also relate to each other as individuals. Especially taking into consideration the intercultural couples' particular communication features, which were illustrated by their frequent discussions, the continual re-negotiations, the nonverbal communication and the daily interaction routines also demonstrate the individual-culture dialectic. They may be characteristic features of an intercultural couple's discussions. Such features include repeated negotiations and re-negotiations, because discussions make up an obvious and important part of their life, and all moves are negotiated. These instances of the couple's interactions, examples of open communication, which plays an important role in relational maintenance, can be considered to be relationship-specific-support, and they play a particularly important role in relational adjustment for intercultural couples. This idea is supported by Stafford et al. (2000) and by Gaines and Agnew (2003).

Considering the construction of self and self-identity, which, according to Bakhtin (1981), is essentially realized by the other, the difference-similarity dialectic accentuates partners' connection and autonomy. It defines what is similar and what is different, and therefore underlies the cultural identity issue. For instance, the intercultural couples' perceptions of the interdependency of

support, the giving and the taking, are embedded in the couples' discourses that bring them more together (connection) and at times may pull them apart (autonomy). These discourses simultaneously reflect the interplay of similarity and difference that constructs the partners' identities (see e.g. Baxter, 2010: 12).

Externally, the intercultural couples face obstacles related to the difference-similarity dialectic and the inclusion-seclusion dialectic. As with the internal dialectic, here too the couples have a strong need for support from family, friends and acquaintances, as well as each other. This need once again relates to language and communication skills and originates in poor or non-existent skills in the host society's native languages, which then leads to seclusion. A general lack of this external support by the intercultural couples in this study results in the couples developing excessive inclusion, which runs the risk of the relationship leading to seclusion, and eventual exclusion: the couple cannot receive the support they need when they seclude themselves as a couple. However, into this come the aspirations and desires of the intercultural partners to be part of society: the desire to integrate and belong. When these are hard to realize intercultural couples tend to find their own social networks, which facilitate understanding through shared experiences and less-challenging demands for interaction. As Helena says in the following excerpt:

Adaptation	Aanpassing
Helena: … and often I feel when we are with [intercultural] couples talking about two cultures, there are many issues of understanding, yes, in a certain way it uhm feels easy […] that there is so much understanding, that you don't need to explain certain things, you can immediately feel that about other people [CI1	Helena: … en dikwijls voel ik als we bij [interculturele] koppels zo bezig zijn van twee culturen, dat daar veel zaken zijn die begrip, ja, dat op een bepaalde manier voelt dat uhm, gemakkelijk […] dat er zoveel begrip is, dat ge niet zoveel moet uitleggen van bepaalde dingen, ge kunt dat direct aanvoelen van andere mensen [CI1]

So, as inclusion in the larger community is not always possible for both partners, the intercultural couples may seclude in some way, which allows them to join in smaller societal units of their own choice. The smaller units may enable the partners to feel included to some extent, and may also allow them to enjoy the personal and self-regulating dimensions of a relationship contrary to the sometimes certain contextual roles they may have to take up to manage inclusion issues (see also Chen, 2002). This means that depending on the social context, the social role a partner plays can be quite different from his or her usual personal one: for instance, their use of language and their degree of fluency may create a personal image which will be quite different in a different context. Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 169) contribute to our understanding of complex dialectical dialogues; they state that culture-couple contacts compose dialogic lines of influence being interdependent, and being the products of jointly created and re-created meanings about relationships.

Inclusion-exclusion brings up the idea of belonging and not belonging, i.e. being excluded by disapproval, lack of social networks or religious preferences.

At the same time inclusion-exclusion raises the notion of identity, which signifies a collective feature (the interrelationship between collective and individual identity, as the individual identity is always built and shaped in relation to the other and to the individual's social belongings), and demonstrates the link between the inclusion-seclusion dialectic and the individual-cultural dialectic, as we know from Petkova (2005) that both the individual and the collective meaning are always socially and culturally embedded. This is exemplified by Hugo when he says: "I don't really belong here […], I don't really belong there, but I belong enough here and enough there to actually be happy." [CI1]

Yet whether the non-Finnish partner works, studies, or regularly interacts with friends, integration cannot be taken for granted, and as has been mentioned previously, what affects one partner in a relationship affects both. An example by Sami and Sabina:

Adaptation	Anpassung
Sami: […] I don't want to somehow persuade you you aren't integrated here Sabina: no no no no no Sami: […] well, it could worry me a bit, simply because it makes my own situation more unstable, and it could mean that we somehow once will have to go, but actually I don't have so many thoughts as something will arise, when not then not. But actually it is your decision and your integration, it influences my life, that is obvious Sabina: yes [CI3]	Sami: […]ich will es dir nicht irgendwie einreden, du bist hier nicht integriert Sabina: nein nein nein nein nein Sami: […] also das könnte mich ein bisschen beunruhigen, einfach weil das meine eigene Lage hier unstabiler macht, also das könnte bedeuten, dass wir irgendwie mal wegmüssen, aber so viel Gedanken mache ich mir eigentlich gar nicht weil das ergibt sich, wenn nicht dann nicht. Aber das ist irgendwie so was deine Entscheidung und deine Integration, das beeinflusst mein Leben, das ist ganz klar Sabina: ja [CI3]

The partners realize that one of them is actually not integrated, with which Sabina agrees. Sami responds that although it could worry him, he also realizes that it influences his life as well, and that - as a consequence of her not being integrated - they might have to move elsewhere at some time. He switches from "her" not being integrated to "his" becoming worried eventually and "his" own situation being unstable, towards "their" having to move, and finally that it will be "her" decision as it is about "her" integration influencing "his" life. As people in a relationship share feelings and thoughts, and do things together, they also tend to influence each other (Berscheid & Regan, 2004). This example shows the topic of inclusion-exclusion being linked with the difference-similarity and the personal-societal dialectics.

By and large, the intercultural couples were – as a couple - mostly engaged in one partner's networks due to the practical impossibility of their engaging in the other partner's networks. Once again language barriers in the form of lack of Finnish communication skills lay at the heart of this. One couple explained what it was like to visit the neighbours and workmates:

> CC: Does it [Finnish language skills] reflect on the way you communicate or the way you relate to persons in your social life?
> Anita: well it's the lack of Finnish, for example if we go visit some neighbours or some completely Finnish couple then it does seem like he is silent for the evening and I
> Alan: it's hard to say because it's, it's we don't do it so much but for example the other night when we visited [the neighbours] I wasn't silent for the whole evening
> Anita: pretty much
> Alan: but I do, I really once, once if the primary mode is Finnish, I become much more silent though I'm still there and I'm engaged but I am, usually, in many cases happy to be there, but I don't talk nearly as much uhm, I don't get on with the threshold, I'm not able to jump in uhm […] I read their body language and the overall context tells me, well they don't think I'm a complete idiot or a retard (all laugh) [TI5]

Alan mostly focuses on the overall conversational context and the body language, and does not talk much himself as he is unable to interrupt and get his say in. But he follows the conversation and assumes that the neighbours notice that; he also hopes they don't think him ignorant. The way he explains it demonstrates a synchronic interplay of some struggles that are serious in tone and others that have a more playful quality. This refers to Bakhtin's "parody" as a way to playfully accomplish a radical scepticism toward a centripetal system of meaning (conventional: where the majority speaks Finnish). One can say this conversation is dethroned, i.e. removed from its serious position (Baxter, 2010: 16.) A lot goes on in the non-Finnish partner's mind, as well as in his wife's, who is constantly wondering whether he is having any fun and whether there is any point making "this kind of visit" at all. Both partners struggle in some way with the fact that the language issue is a barrier to inclusion, and are concerned. Network overlap or the presence of people who are in the interaction network of both relationship parties provides a couples with opportunities to participate jointly in activities with others and thereby establish and sustain social recognition (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 176). With the intercultural couples in this study, network overlap happened when they met up with other intercultural families. Otherwise this feature of network overlap was not commonly shared by the intercultural couples.

In intercultural couples there will always be at least one partner who can not communicate in his/her native tongue. Often partners have to choose which language to communicate in, whether to use one of the partners' languages, a third language, or a mixture of languages. As one's mother tongue assumes a powerful, emotional resonance and defines characteristics of identity, being unable to use one's mother tongue may create situations in which issues of incorrect speech pragmatics, having to cope with corrective feedback, embarrassment, and power, play an important role. Relational partners do find "their" common language, but in terms of the partners' social network, the language issue may become more problematic. This is the case for the intercultural couples in this study. All the educated "foreign" spouses spoke, in addition to their mother tongue, at least one other foreign language fluently. For some of these non-Finnish spouses the Finnish language was experienced as

more than just a temporary stumbling block. This does not directly impact on the relationship of the twosome, but it does have a greater influence on the making and sustaining of a social network, which in turn also reflects professional prospects. Hence, these language issues predominantly take place on the level of the social network, although one cannot ignore their impact on the non-Finnish spouse and indirectly on the relationship. In addition, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) state that we have to think of couples as inextricably intertwined with many social, historical, and environmental concepts; couples do not exist in isolation, nor can they be understood apart from these other social factors (p. 156).

In this study the idea of power related to speaking a second or third language often comes up and it is seen as positioning the partner who speaks his/her native tongue as the stronger, and the other one as the weaker. This leads us to Martin and Nakayama's (1999) notion of privilege-disadvantage. The manifestation of power through the dialectical contradiction of privilege and disadvantage is inherent in exchanges that cross the lines of social role, status and hierarchy in particular, but also of culture, gender and race. The intercultural partners interact through communication by means of a language, which, in these particular intercultural situations, means that inherently one of the partners is stronger or weaker than the other.

To summarize, an interplay of similarity-difference, personal-contextual/societal, individual-cultural, privilege-disadvantage and inclusion-seclusion dialectics in intercultural couples' relationships influences the intercultural couples' relationship in terms of support, re-negotiations, identity, social networks, and power issues.

6.2.2 Fluctuation

Looking internally at the intercultural couples' relationship, a strong relationship certainty was observed that highlighted permanence and stability. Unpredictability was signified in connection with adaptation issues, such as turning points, a partner's distinct features, and ignorance about the future. The intercultural couples display uncertainty about the future in terms of where to live, where to find work, traditions, decision making, and long-term planning. Many of these uncertainties can be stressors for monocultural as also for intracultural couples, but the extra differences due to the partners' different cultural backgrounds (for instance, the dilemma of moving between two countries versus two cities) may intensify feelings of misunderstanding. On the other hand these uncertainties may balance the relationship certainties the couples experience. The intercultural couples' different cultural backgrounds and different experiences of socialization account for the intercultural dialectic of similarity-difference playing a role in the manifestation of the predictability-novelty dialectic.

Being forced to think and re-visit issues concerning their own particular upbringing, for instance when they become parents, compels the partners to re-negotiate their value system, to think about issues that they consider important

or unimportant, child raising issues that will be passed on or then not, or traditions that will be taken over or not or in a different form, and so on. These value-related issues enable the partners to learn about themselves and to re-evaluate and recognize their own and their partner's value systems, which results in seeing the other not only as an individual but also as a cultural being. On the one hand, the individual-cultural dialectic also has the effect of enabling partners to see charming or exciting features in their partner, those which give an extra touch of novelty, for instance when calling your partner adventurous or spontaneous (Tutta,TI1), or Anita's neighbours' comments on her husband bringing her flowers [Anita, TI5]. On the other hand, partners have become used to these cultural differences and do not notice them anymore; they see them merely as individual differences in their relationship:

> CC: Do you have these moments that as a couple that you feel special sometimes, that you are aware you are a mixed couple, and that there are times you want to hide it or don't want to think of it?
> Anita: I think that as a couple, I just think about us as we've been together for so long that uhm that the intercultural thing is I think a very little consequence there, I think there are some things that are, that, that I'm so used to him, doing some things that aren't, I don't think of it any kind of a cultural thing at all […] I just think we've been together so long that I just think that it is something that a husband does for me (laughs) rather than because I have a foreign husband
> Alan: because I guess, yeah, I don't regard it like that either [TI5]

Usually at the beginning stages of a relationship one is quite well aware of each other's particular cultural differences, but by a later stage this may have become less so. Some couples may attribute these differences to personal characteristics and respond with less tolerance, and this can lead to difficulties, according to Chen (2002: 252). This said, it does not necessarily have to be that way: one can also acquire a heightened sensitivity to cultural-related issues after a long time together, as is shown in the same conversation by Anita and Alan:

> CC: Are there features in Anita you would say this is not the way like you thought an American person would do it, in your relationship or towards the children or in society?
> Alan: […] well I think like that sometimes, it seems I catch it more like with the kids than with Anita like with the kids I often much more think like: "ah that's their Finnish side speaking", but with Anita, it's maybe, it's more like: " that's her Finnish side not speaking" (laughs) […] [TI5]

Baxter & Montgomery (1996) call the often trivial topics mentioned in the literature on cultural differences "cultural artifacts" and claim that cultural artifacts address relational themes, that their messages differ from life experiences, and that they influence attitudes to relationships. However, asserting that cultural artifacts have communicative force in an ongoing, multivocal exchange with couples about the nature of personal relationships extends such thinking into the dialogic realm. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 166.) An example of this is shown in a short excerpt from an interview with Sabina and Sami

Differences Sami: yes, I don't know, we are similar otherwise, somehow well relatively peaceful people I suppose Sabina: yes, although otherwise I suppose we're not that similar often, well (laughs) also culturally or so, how we were raised, there are often some differences but they just aren't that important Sami: that is all superficial, it is like that, whether one eats jam on bread, or one doesn't, or, that really is, we never collide there, with culture Sabina: well no there is never any reason to quarrel [CI3]	Unterschiede Sami: ja ich weiss nicht, wir sind uns sonst ähnlich, irgendwie so relativ so ruhige Leute glaube ich Sabina: ja, aber sonst sind wir letztendlich doch gar nicht so ähnlich manchmal, also (lacht) auch kulturell oder so, wie wir aufgewachsen sind, gibt es manchmal ziemliche Unterschiede aber die sind einfach nicht so wichtig Sami: das ist alles Oberfläche, das ist so, ob man jetzt Marmelade auf Brot isst, oder nicht, oder, das ist wirklich, da kollidieren wir nie, mit dem Kultur Sabina: also nein da gibt es nie ein Anlass uns zu streiten [CI3]

The chronotope of time and space plays an important role within this internal fluctuation as it is at the crossroads of time and space that partners realize that certain poles of the dialectic are active depending on the moment in time. For instance, at the beginning of a relationship, certain dialectical poles are manifested in the couples' communicative interplay. This also signifies that the dialogue of certainty and uncertainty is ongoing over the history of a relationship, and illustrates the presence of the intercultural dialectic of static-dynamic. On the one hand the partners express certainty in their relationship as a stable factor over time, one there is no doubt about. On the other hand, they experience uncertainties deriving from differences in their socialization and upbringing in another culture - in the past - which effects them in the present, and also affects the various options - still uncertain ones – that they will have in the future. These certainty-uncertainty ideas contribute to the presence of the intercultural dialectic of present/future-history/past. Hence, concerning internal fluctuation, the intercultural dialectics of difference-similarity, individual-culture, static-dynamic, and present/future-history-past interlink with the relational dialectic of predictability and novelty.

Externally, as seen earlier in Chapter five, whereas couples may embrace conventionality, i.e. conforming to an idea of couplehood that has a stable underpinning with certain expectations and obligations, at the same time they may also embrace ambiguity by following an idea of couplehood as a unique joining up of selves. This means that the relationship partners experience each or a combination of the conventionality-uniqueness dialectics, albeit with a tendency towards conventionality. The intercultural couples perceived themselves as pretty conventional in, for instance, conforming to traditional (conventional) relationship ideas.

It seems that conventionality-uniqueness also affects the individual-cultural dialectic in the sense that partners perceive themselves as adhering to the norm like any individual or any two partners in a relationship, but features that indicate uniqueness may also surface, relating to the more cultural aspects

of their relationship and life. The intercultural dialectic of difference-similarity manifests itself in couples admitting this uniqueness and coming to terms with it, at times even being proud of it, e.g. when people in the street hear the couple and their children use more than one language. Or then they may minimize their uniqueness, trying to demonstrate they are just like any other couple "with husband and wife, married for a long time, no extra-marital affairs, kids at home", as was mentioned by one couple in this study. Then again, couples may become so used to thinking that they are ordinary that they no longer see the uniqueness. Chen calls this the desensitizing of the cultural side of each other (2002: 252), which nevertheless may still be apparent to "others", as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> CC: Do you have these moments that as a couple that you feel special sometimes, that you are aware you are a mixed couple, and that there are times you want to hide it or don't want to think of it?
> Anita: […] it has really caught me by surprise a couple of times when these neighbour women have said, it caught me off guard like when they said: "oh he does such things for you" […] [TI5]

It is said that the very form of intercultural relationship is a deviation that presents a challenge to convention and expectations; it is about stepping outside normal frames of reference (Martin et al. 2002). On the other hand, the intercultural couples label the dialectical pole of uniqueness with constructive, destructive and neutral features. Grearson and Smith (1995) see their uniqueness as something that intercultural couples must be prepared for, something that will inevitably invite some extra attention, some of it subtle and some of it not so subtle.

As for the personal-contextual intercultural dialectic manifesting the conventional-uniqueness dialectic, the issue of power, especially language, can be observed, which positions the intercultural spouses in a distinctive place in the social network. This points once again to the notion of power, already mentioned.

Coming back to Bakhtin (1981), one can say that the language and communication issues mentioned so frequently in this study essentially lie in the centripetal-centrifugal distinction marking the inequality of discourses; centripetal means the moving toward the centre (which we can also call the norm), and centrifugal can be referred to as the moving away (re-fuge) from that norm (the centre), which implies the margins (see Bakhtin, 1981d; Baxter, 2011: 123). The couples' various statements related to the use of language and communication and how language use positions them also overlap with the external dialectic of integration-separation, examined above. The message conveyed by the non-Finnish partners in this study, and often by their Finnish partners for that matter, was gripping and poignant, and so were the words they chose to use to express their struggle. As this topic is also related to expression, it will be examined more deeply in the next section on negotiation.

In summary one can say that the internal version of the fluctuation dialectic is strongly linked to the intercultural dialectics of difference-similarity,

individual-culture, personal-contextual, and privilege-disadvantage. Especially the notion of what is conventional, conforming to the norm, and what is unique, the centrifugal feature of discussion, points to the idea of power.

6.2.3 Negotiation

As we saw in the findings in Chapter four, the internal side of the expression-privacy dialectic signified the couples' actual disclosing, their need to disclose (sharing), and their restraining from disclosing (withholding) caused by, for instance, taboo topics. The intercultural partners' awareness indicates that they are conscious of each other's disclosure style, whichever way it is. Also, support evoked through interaction, and understanding between partners calls for disclosure; they are functions of openness, i.e. disclosure is the generator for support and a means to capture the essence of an intercultural relationship. Disclosure in the form of direct social support was seen to help the partners deal with demanding situations.

The intercultural partners' disclosure practices in this study point to the intercultural context. The partner's disclosure is perceived as holding great awareness of the partner's communication style, generating support and conveying the essence of an intercultural relationship. Particularly in the praxis of this internal version of expression-privacy two dysfunctional patterns appeared, i.e. withholding and destructive confrontational conduct. These praxis patterns at that particular moment inherently contain difference, and show there is no room for dialectical interplay; they signify conflict.

If we add here the intercultural dialectic of difference-similarity, Baxter & West's interview study (2003) on intracultural friendship and romantic pairs' awareness of similarities and differences on disclosure patterns makes a lot of sense as similarities deemed positive were perceived for instance as facilitating communication and providing assistance/support. Differences that were also considered positive contributed to individual growth and the facilitation of communication. Similarities and differences that were regarded as negative resulted in conflict or other challenges to communication. This means that it is fairly obvious that while intracultural couples experience the existence of similarity and difference, this dialectic has similar if not more relevance in an intercultural context, as we have seen in this study.

The intercultural dialectic of individual-culture was visible in the partners' talk when they (mostly) expressed mutual respect and a genuine desire to help the one in need. These cultural issues often revolved around use of another language, with particular daily interaction topics adding to the situation. These cultural issues combined with the relational dialectic of predictability-novelty, ideas that were of a novel kind and brought about uncertainty, such as where to live and how to bring up children, were consciously dealt with. The couples handled these issues with discussions displaying recognition of difference, mutual respect, and the ability to put things into perspective.

In addition, through the dialectics of openness-closeness and difference-similarity the couples engaged in frequent discussions and continual

renegotiations. Exactly because the differences are seen as much more apparent, the couples have to continuously make more compromises and negotiate all their moves. These kinds of actions also include the intercultural dialectic of individual-culture and to a certain extent the one privilege-disadvantage. Partners revealed their feelings of weakness, of being unequal and inferior when they were unable to express what they really wanted to say. In spite of these feelings, they clearly expressed their awareness of how much they learn from each other and of the particular communication situations they are in. This finding also supports Reiter and Gee's (2008) results from a follow-up study on young adults involved in intercultural and interfaith romantic relationships. Compared to intracultural relationships, individuals in intercultural romantic relationships were more likely to indicate that discussion of cultural differences helped promote relationship growth. This is also in line with Falicov's study (1995) that presents intercultural partners appreciating, integrating, and understanding each other's similarities and differences, which they could use in a positive and enriching way. Also Kim (2001: 195-196) considers the issue of growth in an intercultural context and asserts that people leading an intercultural existence are influenced by that particular way of life, which projects a high level of personal development through extensive and cumulative experiences of acculturation and deculturation, e.g. language loss, and of stress, adaptation, and growth.

The crossroads of the intercultural dialectics of difference-similarity and individual-culture with the internal side of expression-privacy show commonalities with those internal accounts of fluctuation and interdependency, and demonstrate once again the integrally linked contradictions and the interplay of their multivocal radiants.

Externally, the intercultural dialectic of difference-similarity plays a role and is integrally linked with the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic. Their uniqueness presents intercultural couples with challenges of revelation and concealment. This engagement also contains the intercultural dialectic of personal-social and includes motivational and beneficial functions for revealing ideas about the nature of their intercultural relationship to their social networks, in terms of getting the support they need, and certain topical themes such as health, religion, and language preservation. The couples are motivated and consciously want to spend time and talk together, but they also welcome the opportunity to share more difficult relational issues with others because it is useful to them, most often bringing them encouragement, assistance and support. However, as outsiders may tend to make their own attributions about the motivations of people in intercultural bonds, couples in this study have learned to be cautious about what and how much they reveal: excessive disclosure can lead to unwanted exposure, and so they tend to be cautious and restrained.

The praxis on the external side of expression-privacy has a functional and constructive feature, where partners conveying a message open up a discussion directed at their social network, argue, and fight for inclusion. This demonstrates once again the integrally linked features of relational dialectics.

Given that inclusion is a central aim of people's adaptation to a new cultural environment, where adaptation is at the intersection of the person and the environment, Kim's approach (2001) of becoming intercultural through the process of cross-cultural adaptation views this process essentially as a communication process: "*the process that makes the intersection possible through the exchange of messages"* (p.32). Here we clearly see the interconnection between revelation-concealment and inclusion-seclusion, which has often been demonstrated in the findings of this study. Returning to the issue of inclusion-seclusion as conveyed through communication brings us back to the basic power issue connected to language, which was often seen as an obstacle by the non-Finnish partners to the accessing of social networks, and by the couples who chose to not to reveal to their own social networks. The challenges of language when trying to get access to society or other difficulties in entering society were repeatedly illustrated by the non-Finnish partners with the following words, e.g. *anger, burden, challenge, constraint, dependent, excluded, frustrated, handicapped, helpless, inadequate, unequal, powerless, misplaced, subordinated,* and *vulnerable*, to name but a few. These words, clearly holding emotional significance, point to Baxter's (2011: 67) discursive struggle between individualism and community played out on an emotional plane with separation and integration framed, respectively, in terms of emotional distance and closeness between the relating parties.

The internal and external side of the expression-privacy dialectic is multifaceted: 1) it interrelates with the intercultural dialectics of difference-similarity, individual-culture, and privilege-disadvantage, 2) it displays dialectical forces of support, awareness, negotiations, power, growth, and 3) it also regulates the interdependency dialectic, i.e. inclusion-seclusion in several ways.

6.3 Conclusions

This chapter presented an account of the intercultural couples' perceptions of how their cultural backgrounds are reflected in their relationship. The main issues focus around the themes of language, traditions and celebrations, values and gender issues, and adaptation.

With language, the intercultural couples had to deal with language adaptation matters that form barriers when entering a new cultural environment. These include problems related to the perceived difficulties of the majority language of the new environment (Finnish in this case), the partners learning their non-Finnish spouse's native tongue, and the language loss of the non- Finnish partner. The intercultural couples discuss these issues emotionally, at times as though the topic is too sensitive to talk about. The couples feel sometimes that there is too much dependence on the Finnish partner because of the non-Finnish partner's problems with the Finnish language. This is also an outcome of the internal relational dialectics discussed in Chapter four.

Concerning interaction routines and perceptions thereof, the couples have endless negotiations which make up an important part of their life. The need to make compromises, which they considered essential to an intercultural life, featured prominently. These repeated negotiations usually concern questions such as the upbringing and education of their children, holidays, a lack of friends, and religion. Daily interaction routines are also seen as influencing the couples' communication, e.g. negotiations about taboos, where to live, and concepts of time.

Traditions and celebrations also take up an important part of the intercultural couples' life and are carried out as improvisations, and re-creations of various lifestyles. They may become problematic when they are shared with friends and family who do not necessarily appreciate or understand the variant modes of the celebrations and traditions. Incorporated into these celebrations are issues of food, which may become difficult when questions of etiquette, aesthetics and variety conflict and are not accepted.

Values are mostly shared. When this is not the case, they are often related to the children's upbringing and education, and their being appreciated as valuable members of the school community with their particular multilingual and multicultural skills. Gender issues are not considered much of a dilemma with the intercultural couples in this study. This is mostly due to the femininity-oriented gender roles among the intercultural partners. Externally this presents some dilemmas, as femininity-oriented gender roles between the couple and their family seem occasionally more complicated and less tolerated, although there are also exceptions.

Adaptation presents more particular challenges, and includes for example difficulty in learning Finnish, which results internally and externally in the perception of being weak and therefore disadvantaged. Also visibility issues and disappointment with contact with members of the host society lead to issues of belonging and of seclusion. Identity issues include feelings of doubt and frustration and even separation which do not improve the integration process of the non-Finnish partners into Finnish society. In this connection the topic of belonging and liminality is introduced, signifying the encapsulated or marginalized state of the non-Finnish partners' integration process. The non-Finnish partners in this study identify with a sense of belonging or a need to orient towards others with whom they share commonalities that eventually make them part of a group.

In view of the findings on intercultural relational dialectics, a blend of 1) intercultural dialectics (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Martin et al.2002) including difference-similarity, individual-cultural, personal-social, privilege-disadvantage, static-dynamic, and present/future-history past, 2) internal and external forms of relational dialectics, and 3) the intercultural couples' perceptions of their cultural background reflected in their relationship, manifests in various *intercultural relational dialectical forces.*

The use of the word "forces" requires some clarification. The objective of finding intercultural relational dialectics, which was also one of my research questions, turned out to be somewhat different from what I had expected. This

concerns the choice made to classify or compose the intercultural couples' relational dialectics in an intercultural context, which I call *intercultural relational dialectical forces*. Initially, I anticipated finding intercultural relational dialectics in the form of "neat dialectical pairs", but in fact they did not seem to pair up nicely and this labelling proved to be problematic. I will discuss this choice more when evaluating the theory in Section 7.2 on relational dialectics as an interpersonal communication theory. Henceforth I will call them intercultural relational dialectical forces.

These forces include *cultural identity & belonging*, *increased sensitivity to differences and similarities*, *ongoing re-negotiations*, *social power*, *social support*, and *uncertainty*. They present themselves in various forms in different conditions and in different subjects, internal and external to the intercultural couples' relationships (Figure 6).

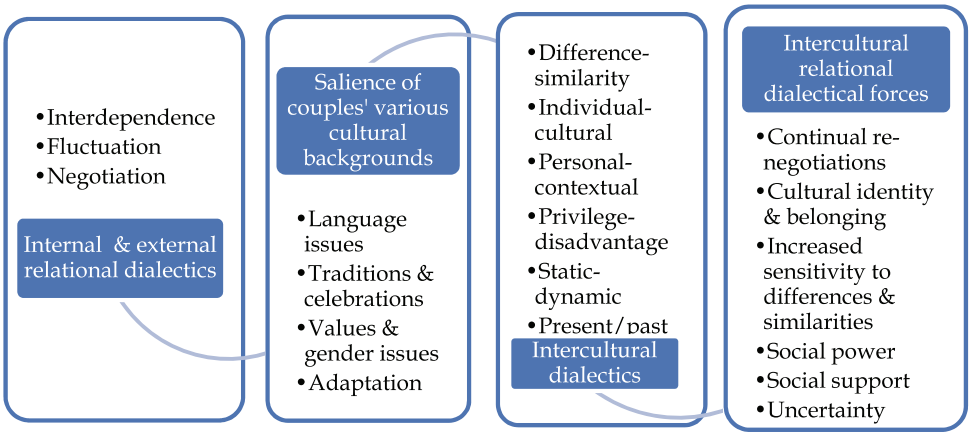

FIGURE 6 The interrelation of the Salience of couples' various cultural backgrounds, Internal and External Dialectics and of Intercultural Dialectics (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Martin et al.2002) resulting in Intercultural Relational Dialectical Forces

The intercultural couples in this study deal with the internal side of uncertainty when discussing topics related to where to live, and their children's upbringing and education. Externally, uncertainty is experienced when confronting people in their social network who are insensitive towards their traditions and celebrations. Uncertainty in general appears in the couples arguing, discussing, agreeing and disagreeing, which seem to them endless negotiations that occur as part of their daily routine and which they have incorporated as such into their everyday lives.

Uncertainty also emerges when the couples verbalize their need for and acceptance of support, from each other and from their social network. Support is at times hard to find, and one needs to know where to look for it, since certain internal or external relationships may not be very rewarding as far as the need for support is concerned. Asking for support in its external form is

accomplished by verbal display, which is at times difficult as the non-Finnish partners do not have the skills needed to interact in the host society's language.

This puts the non-Finnish partners in a weaker position towards their partner and towards the social network. They often have to face situations in which they have less social power, manifested by having to use a language they experience as challenging. As a result of dealing with uncertainty, with the need for social support and with negative experiences of power issues in their interactions with each other and with people in their social network, the non-Finnish partners are more inclined to look for a middle ground through continual negotiation. These negotiations occur in all their interactions and seem to be a constant feature of their lives.

Through these negotiations the intercultural couples express and share observations and experiences about relationship-related issues on an internal and external level. This makes them very alert and responsive to issues that require sensitivity towards differences and similarities on a personal, contextual, and cultural level. Intercultural partners relate to each other and to people in their social networks through a great deal of interaction. The non-Finnish partner somehow needs to be received by the host society in order to be recognized. Issues of cultural identity, connected with integration into the new society or into community groups, can happen effortlessly or with difficulty, and may lead to a marginalization of the non-Finnish partners, whether encapsulated or constructive, and can lead to the partner's feeling that they belong, they are included, or that they are actively excluded from particular social relationships.

The interconnected intercultural relational dialectical forces weave like a common thread through the couples' perceptions of their intercultural relationship. It is quite apparent that their diligent interactional traits form the prime core of the findings. This means that the intercultural couples' continuous negotiations are a leitmotif reflected in the intercultural relational dialectical forces; they cross multiple boundaries of internal and external relational dialectics and of integrally linked dialectics, and they cross the boundaries of an infinite variety of topics related to personal, cultural, social, power and time-space issues.

7 DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study was to *to describe and understand intercultural couples' relationships in Finland from the relational-dialectics perspective.* The purpose was to investigate how intercultural couples experience their relationship, particularly with regard to whether they feel the conflicting tensions of relational dialectics (Baxter 1993, Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008), and how they handle these tensions of push and pull. I also examined the meaning of culture in the context of the couples' perception of culture, and its relevance for the relationship. Finally, considering the particular context of intercultural couples, my aim was to examine whether these couples experience relational tensions of an intercultural nature.

Section 7.1 of this chapter looks at the main findings by answering the research questions posed and by identifying the factors salient to intercultural couples' relationships. Section 7.2 presents an evaluation of the relational dialectical theory used in this study within the particular intercultural context. Since this study is of an interpretive nature, it requires not only a description of the methodology employed, but also a critical examination of the same. Therefore, I give in Section 7.3 an evaluation of the study, highlighting the methodological approach, the multi-method approach, and the particular choices made for interviewing the couples together and apart, and cross-culturally. I conclude by offering the implications of my study for future research.

7.1 Main findings

At the outset it was rather assumed that intercultural couples in Finland are influenced by the particular intercultural context in which they live. To investigate this in a meaningful way I drew on Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) theory of relational dialectics, which has many fascinating aspects. Relational dialectics sees people's relationships as inherently filled with non-exhaustive

contradictory tensions or dialectics, which change over time. Placing relational dialectics in the context of intercultural couples living in Finland and aiming to discover these relational tensions led me to the following research questions: 1) What internal and external dialectics do intercultural couples experience in their relationship, and how are they handled? 2) What interculturally-related dialectics do intercultural couples contend with in their relationship? 3) How do intercultural couples see their different cultural background affecting their relationship? Next I present the main findings to the research questions, however, in a different order, i.e. in the order of how the findings can be conceptualized in a processual and continual manner. This means that the findings regarding the first research question are presented first, then I provide the findings regarding the couples' cultural background reflected in their relationship, and finally I present the findings regarding the interculturally-related dialectics. last research question one will be provided, then the findings of as this order actuallyin a different order

The intercultural couples experienced internal and external relational dialectics, in accordance with Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectical framework. Within these six basic relational dialectics, the couples experienced dialectical tensions significant to relating in an intercultural context, such as adaptation, support, disadvantage, uncertainty, inclusion and seclusion. They engaged in praxis according to the praxis patters established by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), Baxter (1997) and Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002). However, one praxis pattern turned out to be novel: destructive confrontation behavior.

The couples saw their different cultural backgrounds as affecting their relationship in the following issues: language and daily interaction routines, traditions and celebrations, repeated negotiations, and adaptation.

Intercultural relational dialectics were found in the following dialectical forces: continual re-negotiations, cultural identity and belonging, increased sensitivity to differences and similarities, social power and social support, and uncertainty.

In the following three sub sections I will look more closely at these main findings.

7.1.1 Relating dialectically

Reflecting on the findings of the intercultural couples' internal and external dialectical tensions, two points became clear: 1) intercultural couples experience dialectical tensions internal and external to their relationship, 2) these dialectical tensions fall within the framework of Baxter and Montgomery's typology of internal and external contradictions (1996).

The findings show that the intercultural partners' conversations contain – both internally and externally - particular features of the time-space chronotope inherent to their relationships. This means that the intercultural couples' conversations are based in particular contexts (being an intercultural couple, being a Finnish partner, being a non-Finnish partner, the intercultural couples'

families on both sides, etc.) and have chronotopic values of different degrees and scopes that present unique findings. The essence of an intercultural relationship lies in the contexts of the intercultural couples' communication and in the internal and external dialectical tensions that appear there.

On the internal level, dialectical tensions related to intercultural adaptation, e.g. excessive togetherness and the search for separateness are linked to the issue of support. However, support can be accepted, neglected, or rejected, which also signifies a tension with the support providers. The partners experience support through interaction with each other and with their social network, which helps them manage uncertain situations and helps them to cope with stressful circumstances (see e.g. Albrecht & Goldsmith (2003). Support is of the utmost importance, especially in intercultural relationships, as intercultural adaptation, as Copeland and Norell (2002) say, entails both the disruption of established support networks and the challenge to develop new ones.

Whereas certainty about the relationship is a steady feature that intercultural partners count on, they also expressed the need for spontaneity and for being surprised and romanced. They perceived uncertainty in issues of adaptation but also about the future; intercultural couples seem to be in a special position in this respect. The intercultural couples convey their uncertainty about the future mostly by their indecision about where to live, where to find work, how to uphold traditions, decision making, and long term planning, which is also supported by Crippen (2011). All couples face these uncertainties, but the extra variations, some of which are brought about by cultural diversity, and some by the distinct contextual time-space chronotope, e.g. choosing to move between two countries (continents at times) versus two cities (villages at times), may intensify feelings of confusion and exclusion.

Intercultural couples' disclosure can be considered the access for support and as a means to capture the essence of an intercultural relationship. Besides support, another significant issue was being in a disadvantaged position where the Finnish language is concerned. This also led to the challenges of inclusion and seclusion and to questions of identity confusion.

The external tensions include intercultural couples' need for the support of in-laws, friends and acquaintances; integration and belonging as aspects of inclusion; excessive inclusion endangering the couple's relationship; exclusion from the social network; and seclusion from the social network. As is the case in any other couple relationships, intercultural couples too depend on support systems like family (in-laws), friends and casual acquaintances. With intercultural couples these different networks are seen as crucial for inclusion, especially as they tend to have only one partner's family nearby and therefore cannot always count on the support generally available to intracultural couples. The quantity and quality of support received obviously has an impact on the extent of the couples' perceived inclusion.

The inclusion-exclusion dialectic, and the idea of belonging or not belonging, arose from either a sense that members of their social environment disapproved in some way, or from the lack of a social network or employment.

The intercultural couples perceived themselves as pretty conventional in one way, such as conforming to traditional (conventional) relationship ideas. Reflections on uniqueness were associated with constructive features, e.g. such as cherishing the idea of difference and seeing it as a good thing. Uniqueness was also seen, however, as the intercultural couples' deviation from the norm in a descriptive, non-evaluative manner, and the "others'" perceptions of the couples' particular ways, such as communication or visibility, as non-conforming.

Disclosure within their social network is essential for the couples to gain social support. Their motivation for revelation is related to their need to share and enjoy company and to create social encounters safe for and conducive to disclosure. This was not always possible for the non-Finnish partners due to their being unable to communicate in the host-country's language, and they perceived this as disadvantageous. The couples' main concern regarding external expression is the maintenance of their native tongue, as this enables them to interact with their children and their family. Both intercultural partners consciously maintain their native tongue as they know it is the only medium that allows them to reveal and share with their social network.

As for praxis and its patterns, the intercultural couples engaged in balance, recalibration, segmentation, spiralling inversion, probing, topic selection, denial and withdrawal. These praxis patterns generally corresponded with the ones presented by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and in other studies (see e.g. Baxter, 1997; Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002). One dysfunctional praxis pattern, destructive confrontational conduct, was used to try to get one's message across by starting arguments, shouting, crying, sulking, and engaging in unkind, offensive behaviour. One finds it particularly when someone does not want to continue a discussion, dwells on one particular issue, or dismisses an issue.

Considering the external praxis patterns, on which few studies have been conducted, the following patterns arose: re-affirmation and recalibration. These patterns were similar to those seen by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), Baxter (1997) and by Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002). I did find one new praxis pattern that I call dual-spiralling inversion. It includes both the external dialectic of revelation-concealment and the internal dialectic of openness-closedness, and it thus affects the fundamental dialectic of expression-privacy. Dual spiralling inversion is the process of separating dialogical forces over time by responding to one pull now and another pull later. Each pole of the contradiction is dominant at various points in time. What makes it a dual spiralling inversion is that it gives room for four different choices, which I presented in Chapter four.

As praxis actually is a part of a totality, and it is liable to change, I did not go further into praxis when looking for the intercultural relational dialectics. As every praxis is a momentum of relational dialectical interaction, of contradictory interplay, and as these intercultural features have been dealt with on an abstract level in Chapter 6.2 I think it is unnecessary to look deeper into the instances and facets of praxis. It can obviously be taken up in a future study.

7.1.2 The effect of intercultural couples' cultural background on their relationship

Since my goal was to describe and understand intercultural couples' relationships, it made sense to conceptualize and examine culture as part of the process of the construction of a discursive interculture through and within communication. Communication in this study has been looked at as interaction, as a relational and bonding process, with knowledge sharing, networking and mutual learning, which has been examined through the lens of the relational dialectics perspective.

Most striking, yet not surprising, are the intercultural couples' continual negotiations, which seem to constitute their lives - internally and externally - and entail repeated decision-making and compromising about nearly everything: holidays, friends, nonverbal communication issues disturbing their communication, religion, traditions and celebrations and their acceptance in the larger social network, the upbringing and education of their children, and values and gender issues. Finally, adaptation was presented as problematic and involving power issues of disadvantage since one partner was the weaker link in interactions.

The intercultural couples were repeatedly faced with language issues. Learning a new language was seen as a barrier to the non-Finnish partners and it hampered full participation in Finnish society. Language and its radiants are seen as powerful elements in the daily lives of the intercultural couples. They include tenacious language learning, language use between the partners, which included the daily management of at least two languages, and the ache of language loss, and they also reveal experiencing strong sentiments in support giving-and-taking, resulting in excessive interdependence.

The partners gave evidence of inclusion, exclusion, and seclusion, and they touched on the issue of belonging. Belonging affected the partners in instances of identity search, visibility, difference, rootedness, multi-local terrains of belonging, and transnational connection. The concept of transnational connection has been taken up by Fortier (1999). Cultural identity is something the non-Finnish partners reflect on from the perspective of their presence and participation in the target culture (Finland), but it is also something that concerns them when they are "back home". Also the Finnish partners are affected by identity search as a result of being in an intercultural partnership and of having spent time in their non-Finnish partner's home culture. The topic of rootlessness came up as an issue of identity confusion and as a search for belonging. Identity, as we know, has an individual and a collective meaning (Petkova, 2005), which was also illustrated by the notion of Bakhtin that we become self-conscious subjects only *through* the *other*, who is the bearer of "everything that pertains to me" (1986: 138). This confirms that identity is an interactive and changeable conception, which means that it is also linguistically positioned, i.e. "language and social identity are mutually constitutive" (Piller, 2002: 12).

The common thread surfacing in the couples' accounts of how their different cultural backgrounds are reflected in their relationships is unquestionably the continual re-negotiation between the two partners themselves and between the couples and their social networks. In a sense these define their intercultural relationship; all their moves are negotiated moves, as one participant expressed it. This is a fascinating finding, especially as it is located in interaction, denotes the specific salient all-encompassing need for negotiations, and holds the essence of intercultural couplehood. While this is not a new finding (see e.g. Falicov, 1995; Heller & Wood, 2000; Piller, 2002; Refsing, 1998) it is nevertheless important and cannot be ignored. It shows that communication is absolutely vital to the intercultural couples' relationships, as it is to any relationship for that matter; but it was emphasised more often, on countless occasions, by the couples in this study. The incessant negotiation may be one of the many reasons why the couples describe their relationships as rich and fulfilling. Although intercultural couples may have many challenges that are inherent in their relationships, such as cultural diversity, for example, in the end it is the recurring processes of negotiation of these challenges that lead to transformative opportunities for the intercultural couples and their children, opportunities that would not have been realized in an intracultural family.

7.1.3 Relating dialectically in an intercultural context

Intercultural relational dialectics consist of a blending of three factors, manifesting in various intercultural relational dialectical forces: 1) the internal and external forms of the relational dialectics, 2) the intercultural couples' perceptions of how their cultural backgrounds are reflected in their relationship, and 3) intercultural dialectics comprising for example difference-similarity, individual-cultural, personal-social, privilege-disadvantage, static-dynamic, and present/future-history/past. These forces include continual re-negotiation, cultural identity & belonging, increased sensitivity to differences and similarities, social power, social support, and uncertainty.

Continual re-negotiation is an overarching force through which all the other forces come about, yet it is also independent and has meaning and authority itself. Continual re-negotiation is the common thread emerging from the couples' communicative actions, and defines their intercultural relationship: all their moves are negotiated moves.

Cultural identity and belonging point to adaptation to a new environment, to living with various feelings of belonging. Identity search and belonging also signify the looking for a balance within the relationship and with family and friends, which at times can be a considerable challenge for the couples.

Increased sensitivity to differences and similarities inherently characterizes the couples' intercultural relationships. In addition, their being continually exposed to the negotiation of differences and similarities brings about increased sensitivity.

Social power refers to the manifestation of power in the interactions between the spouses, and between the non-Finnish spouses and their social

network. It indicates the spouse's positioning, i.e. whether he or she is the weaker or the stronger partner, and directly relates to language use.

Social support concerns the need for internal and external backing and encouragement. It is frequently related to language, and is evidence of the significance of the cultural differences which the non-Finnish partners have to handle.

Uncertainty stems from the inherent uncertainties that come along with intercultural relationships, e.g. uncertainty about the future, indecision, and the impossibility of long term planning.

All these forces are interrelated and are generated by a variety of interactions between relational dialectics (internal and external), the couples' ideas of how culture is reflected in their relationship, and particularly intercultural dialectics (see Figure 7 below). The interrelatedness lies in the various layers of the circles each referring to particular combinations of internal and external relational dialectics, the couples' cultural perceptions, and the intercultural dialectics. Continual re-negotiation is the umbrella term covering the other forces and it is the vehicle through which these forces are set in motion.

As these forces are grounded in the carefully examined relational dialectical tensions of the intercultural couples in this study, we can assume that they are intercultural relational dialectical forces. As mentioned earlier in this section, the common thread running through the intercultural couples' lives is continual re-negotiation; particularly for the intercultural couples in this study, the topics of language and identity predominate.

Besides the repeated re-negotiation, identity is also a salient issue that is the key to enabling or disabling a person's integration via language into (Finnish) society. Within the context of this study Finnish is the host language for the non-Finnish partners. The fact that Finnish was perceived to be a challenging language led to stress for the non-Finnish as well as for the Finnish partners, in terms of dependency, and support giving and taking. Finnish was seen as a demanding language to learn and connected to few other languages. In Piller's (2000) sociolinguistic study on intercultural couples the community language is said to be the most powerful indicator of the language intercultural couples use for marital communication. This means, according to Piller (2000a) that intercultural couples make motivated choices, one of them choosing to speak the language of the (mono)lingual area where the couples live. In the Finnish context of the intercultural couples in this study, where the community language (also called dominant language) is Finnish, few couples use Finnish in their everyday communication.

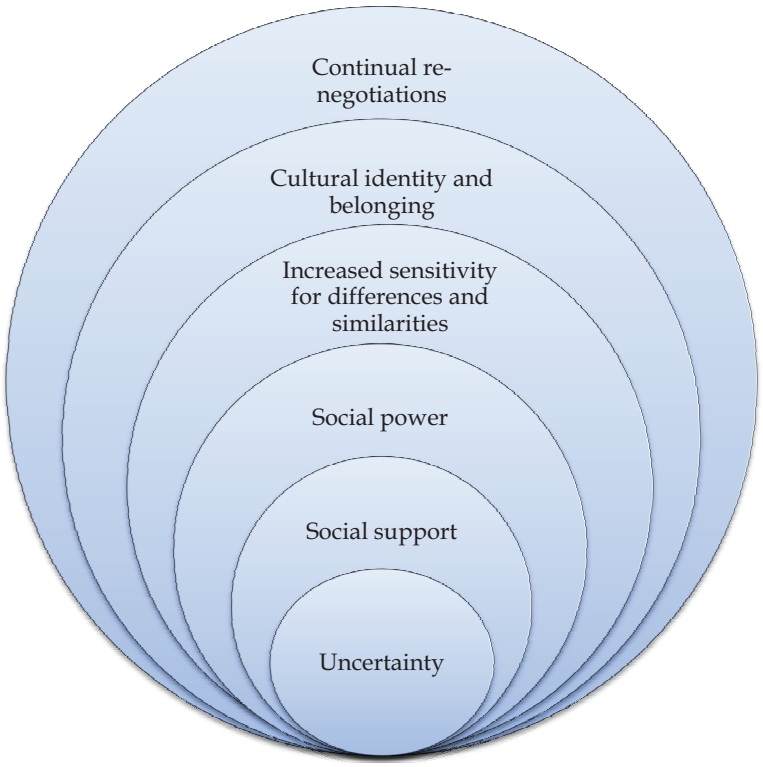

FIGURE 7 Intercultural Relational Dialectical Forces in Intercultural Couples' Communication

As regards identity, the couples in this study, and especially the non-Finnish partners, clearly conveyed at times confusion over where they belong. Adapting to a new environment, living with feelings of belonging and not belonging, looking for a balance within the relationship and with family and friends are all considerable challenges. Some people feel they belong in both cultures, while others may have a strong sense of belonging in one culture, which does not necessarily mean they feel a weaker sense of belonging in the other. Belonging, adapting and integrating depend on both the immigrant and on the host culture and how they receive the newcomer (Kim 2001), the whole process obviously reflecting the relationship of each to the other. Nevertheless, however important identity and also interculturality as a whole seem to be for the intercultural couples in this study, these concepts have been referred to as "tired" concepts that are often interrelated (Dervin, 2011). The findings of this study confirm that they definitely are interrelated, and that they are deemed important to the couples. As we can see from Figure 7, and the findings, intercultural relational dialectical forces, constructed by the couples through dialogues of continual re-negotiation, are the essence of an intercultural relationship, and contain intercultural dialectical forces of identity and belonging, among others.

The topic of integration demands deeper consideration. Assuming integration to be an important goal of the non-Finnish spouses (and of their Finnish spouses), and is also a very complex question, as it involves the integration of both the immigrant spouse and members of the host society.

According to Hoffman, Hirsiaho, Pöyhönen, Tarnanen, Rynkänen and Kokkonen (2009) integration policy assumes, among other things, that one learns the language of the host country. It is claimed that command of the host country's language and preservation of one's own sustain one's individual and collective identity, membership in social groups and the formation of self-esteem. This can obviously be challenged as there is clearly no one kind of migrant or one pattern of integration.

Considering the host society, migrants can see 'others' as an impediment to integration. In a study based on a critical approach to the concepts of integration and the politics of differences, it has been shown how discourses on the "same", the "foreign" other and the local (Finns) point to certain patterns in the way psychological integration is conceptualized by sojourners. Findings convey dialectical features in which the locals (Finns) are characterized as present-absent: omnipresent in sojourners' discourses, but mostly absent from their daily lives. Whether or not this impedes integration is not the question here. Relevant is that integration, at best, seems limited. (Dervin & Gao, 2009.) This obviously leaves room for reflection on integration issues in general, and integration in Finland in particular.

Remarkable in this study is the extent to which the intercultural couples acknowledge the challenges in their relationship, and express their awareness of having learned so much about one another, of having gained understanding, and having changed into a better person. This means that their particular intercultural relationship has expanded personal growth, which relates to what Crippen calls transformative opportunities (2011). Transformative opportunities also reflect the findings of this study; they can be found in the intercultural couples' dialogues about having developed a broader frame of reference (also regarding transformative prospects for their children), increased cultural sensitivity towards uncertainties, the need for support and awareness of power issues, tolerance for diversity, and cultural belonging and empathy, all reflecting the intercultural relational dialectical forces.

7.2 Evaluation of the theory

Relational dialectics theory was at the centre of this research from the very beginning. It was reviewed in depth in Chapter two, it was the basis for the chapter on methodology, and it was pivotal to the findings of this study. In this section I will consider how relational dialectics as a theory evolved throughout the study. I will first look at the theory on a conceptual level and will briefly re-visit the central concepts. Then I will reflect on relational dialectics as an interpersonal communication theory.

Conceptual level

The notion of totality presented by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) provides an outstanding framework of relational dialectics as it includes the concepts of contradiction, change and praxis. Yet these four concepts (including totality) are all elegantly intertwined; that is, they exist together, mutually define each other, and cannot be understood in isolation. The contradictions, consistent with the dialectical view, are the dynamic interplay of unified oppositions, and are characterized by the fact that they are multivocal, knotted, distinct from other contradictions, and chronotopic.

The question whether contradictions are similar to, or different from conflict, is a difficult one to answer. On the one hand, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) link dialectical characteristics to contradictions, which distinguish them from conflicts, the struggle of contradictions being a dynamic and fluid process. They view the dialectical interplay between opposing forces as neither positive nor negative but absolutely necessary for change in any living system. Erbert (2000) also attempts to use relational dialectics to explain conflict, claiming that conflict is the outcome of the interplay of oppositional forces. However, whether conflict or contradiction, both are to be managed through the use of strategies. In addition, whereas contradiction used to be the main focus, this has changed. In 2004 there was a shift towards *dialogue* (Baxter, 2004), followed by a move to *competing discourses* (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). Relational dialectics as competing discourse do not see interpersonal conflicts as the equivalent of discursive tensions, but consider interpersonal conflict as a genre of communication that emphasizes person-against-person and therefore focuses on discourse-against-discourse. (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008: 358). Lately, specifically aimed at the context of marriage, discourse-against-discourse has changed to become *dialogical creativity* (Baxter, 2010). These shifts are signs of the evolution of the theory, of which I will write more in the next section on evaluation of the theory.

Change is characterized by the interplay of opposites, which results in ongoing fluidity or variability in any relationship. It also contains the idea of the existing dynamics of multivocal contradictions - inherent in a relationship - influencing the relationship so that it is always in motion, and alternating between the contradiction of stability - change. In addition, change from a relational dialectical viewpoint embraces the both/and presence of contradictions. Considering relationship beginnings, middles, endings and turning points, from a relational dialectics perspective, they acquire a different meaning. Instead of being considered particular stages in a relationship, they are seen as manifesting the continuous interplay of contradictions. They signify relationship forms in their own right, with their own particular features pointing to the dialogic complexity of the relationship process, which includes any movement of a relationship over time.

My concern about Baxter and Montgomery's seeming non-consideration of the aspect of cumulativeness (in the section on change in Chapter two), has

now been resolved. This means that it was hard to conceive of sustaining a relationship containing the aspect of the time-space chronotope. The time-space chronotope reflects the process in which partners jointly construct meaningful continuities and discontinuities among the past, present and future. Where Montgomery and Baxter (1998: 10) did not accept cumulative change as being present in the partners' communicative enactment, Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) re-establish the theory and offer various propositions concerning competing discourses. Regarding the cumulative effect, one proposition emphasizes that the "interpenetration of discourses is both synchronic and diachronic" (p. 353). Diachronic means occurring over time, and synchronic refers to one moment in time. Meanings emerge in interactional moments, and in this sense, they are, at least momentarily, fixed and stable. But meaning is also fluid, which means that it is ultimately unfinalizable and available in the next interactional moment. This shows that partners may jointly construct meaning to reproduce the old meaning, and they can jointly produce a new meaning etc. (2008: 353.)

Also when presenting her competing microcultural discourse of marriage Baxter (2010: 9-10) suggests the *proximal already-spoken* and the *proximal not-yet spoken*, where partners continue to face the discursive ownership of their relational identity carried over from prior utterances and encounters together, and they negotiate in the moment whether and in what ways that relational identity will be reproduced or overturned in a new relational identity. It becomes clearer when saying that "the preferred discourse of the couple is inherited from their past history of interactions together yet the present opens up an alternative possible meaning for the pair" (2010: 10). This shows how my earlier criticism of the missing cumulative aspect has been dealt with.

Praxis refers to the practical choices people make when dealing with contradictions in a relationship, i.e. the dialectical tensions. In praxis people create and re-create the dialectical tensions through active participation and interaction. In turn, the choices and actions themselves create, re-create, and change the nature of the relationship and hence the dialectical tensions. The central concept of praxis offered significant possibilities, one being the fact that various praxis patterns could be present in the communicative enactment at any given point in time. Although this phenomenon, of multiple ways of improvisation, has been explicitly articulated, observing this during the analysis process was truly rewarding. At the same time it also showed how relational partners may deal with different dialectics in different ways, illustrating the inherently imprecise and multifaceted process that characterizes relationships.

A fine and important aspect of praxis (and of the other central concept for that matter), which is at the same time ambiguous, is the concept of "embracing the contradictions". Praxis, or making communicative choices about how to deal with contradictions, was said by Baxter and Montgomery (1996: 60) to imply that relational partners should not regard contradictions as something to regret or to try to eradicate; rather, they should be embraced on their own terms. This, however, leads one to wonder whether relational dialectics theory is not

somewhat overstated and idealizes the ways in which relationships work in the real world. In a similar vein this concern crops up when Baxter writes that "Most important, from a dialogic perspective, discursive struggles are…processes to be nurtured… "(2010: 18). On the other hand, she writes that dialogical creativity is not likely to be a comfortable, feel-good affair, and she urges partners to be cautious about the seductive consistency and certainty afforded by monologue (p. 18).

Relational dialectics as an interpersonal communication theory

Considering the evaluation criteria of a theory (see e.g. Cragan & Shields, 1998, Littlejohn, 2002; Miller, 2002) I confine myself to the criteria of scope, heuristics, validity and utility, as they seem to be obvious and of the greatest relevance to relational dialectics. The scope of the theory, e.g. regarding the breadth, the descriptions and explanations of relational dialectic theory, is wide and it has been examined very thoroughly. The theoretical concepts have been described and explained. The foundations have also been presented properly and they have allowed the reader to situate the central concepts both in time and philosophically-historically towards the contemporary scene of communication in relationships. . The theoretical concepts and their explanations enhance the reader's understanding of the ongoing tensions in relationships and of the inevitable change that occurs during the life of any relationship.

Relational dialectic theory shows heuristic qualities as it suggests new directions for research and generates new thoughts and insights. Ever since Baxter and Montgomery's work (1996) many scholars have used relational dialectic theory in their own research, e.g. Baxter and Erbert, (1999), Baxter and West (2003), Conville (1998), Dindia (1998), Erbert (2000) and Pawlowski (1998). Also applications of relational dialectic theory have been evident in work on intercultural roommates (Miller, 2002), doctor-patient interactions (Gerlander, 2003), a group of actors (Kramer, 2004), and adviser-advisee relationships (Poutiainen & Gerlander, 2005). In addition, a number of handbooks and books on communication theories dealing with communication and personal relationships, e.g. Duck (1997), Littlejohn, (2002), Miller (2002) and Redmond (2000), have paid considerable attention to relational dialectics. Relational dialectic theory has undergone many developments and has generated ongoing research by Baxter, which can be seen from the overview of significant turns of relational dialectic theory by Baxter in 2004 (which I presented in the last section of Chapter 2).

The validity of relational dialectics lies obviously in the authors' work (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and additionally in the extensive research Baxter has conducted during the past 25 years. Validity applies to the methodological issues the author has carefully positioned in all her studies, and also relates to the fact that new research generated by relational dialectic theory relies on, supports and applies the main principles of the theory.

Utility refers to the usefulness and practicality of relational dialectic theory. Utility gives new insights into "relating" (the both/and characteristics), in other

words, into learning to accept the inherence of contradictions. It also supports the presence of contradictions as a normal part of relational life, and offers strategies to consciously manage the contradictions. However, here one could question the feasibility of utility; perhaps it is too ambitious in its attempt to view relationships from a dialectical perspective, and embraces the contradictions as too idealistic.

Regarding the idea that relational dialectic theory implies the notion of culture, Dainton (2003: 315) claims that external dialectics might reference the cultural context. She argues that Baxter's conventionality-uniqueness contradiction refers to the social pressures to conform to conventional ways of relating as prescribed by the culture as opposed to a couple's desire to create a unique relational culture. Uncertainty about the notion of culture within relational dialectics was expressed by Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) when writing: "One serious question about the dialectical perspective is whether or not it has pan-cultural application".

Also Fitch (1998) considers that the notion of culture within relational dialectics is not sufficient to conduct research into the cultural context of speech communities. She claims that the dialectical perspective on relationships, although committed to the interplay of culture and relationships, does not offer a descriptive apparatus for discovering and describing the particular dialectics (and particular instantiations of dialectics) that characterize specific speech communities (1998: 174). According to Baxter (2010), mainstream Euro-American culture clearly privileges a view of marriage as a dyadic relationship of two individuals, a conception rooted in the discourse of individualism (p. 5). She argues that this centripetal positioning of a dyadic view of marriage becomes evident when contrasted with other cultures that understand marriage as inherently part of a larger social structure. A socially embedded construction of marriage is also apparent in cultures where arranged marriage is a common practice. Then again, such a socially embedded conception of marriage can also circulate in mainstream Euro-American culture, through its roots in the discourse of community, e.g. in how couples distribute time. (Baxter, 2010: 5.) Examining the cross-cultural applicability of the dialectic perspective on interpersonal relationships focusing on friendships, Chen (2006) conducted an interview study of young people in Hong Kong. Chen's qualitative analyses confirmed the cross-cultural applicability of friendship dialectics in Chinese society. Chen nevertheless argues that however positive the conclusions regarding the cross-cultural applicability of relational dialectic theory (RTD), which was developed in the West, it would be inappropriate to rush to the conclusion that culture has no influence on interpersonal communication between friends in Hong Kong (2006: 29).

My aim of conducting this study by examining internal and external dialectics and of looking at the couples' praxis patterns coincided with the critiques of Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002). They claimed that most research focused on internal dialectics, whereas external dialectics and the interpretive role of communication in managing marital dialectics (praxis) had not often been looked into. Baxter

(2004) also saw relational dialectic theory as being too distanced from naturally occurring talk between relating parties and claimed it would need a firmer empirical base in talk between relating parties. Also the lack of longitudinal focus, i.e. studying relational dialectics through time, and of studying shifts and transformations in the dialogue of discursive voices, were seen as shortcomings.

In 2008 Baxter presented other critiques of relational dialectic theory. She urged that researchers should move beyond the listing of dialectical pairs, and, as she said in 2004, that they should engage in longitudinal studies. Later, in 2011, for the first time Baxter offered a set of methodological practices, a framework for research on relational dialectic theory, i.e. contrapuntal analysis. At its most general level contrapuntal analysis is a specific kind of discourse analysis. It focuses particularly on the interplay of contrasting discourses in spoken and written texts (Baxter, 2011: 151-180).

Looking back on how this study has been conducted, I can easily notice my own path responding to some of the critiques offered. I researched not only internal and external dialectics, but also the couples' praxis patterns. However, the results of finding intercultural relational dialectics turned out to be quite different from what I had thought. This concerns the decision to classify or compose the intercultural couples' relational dialectics in an intercultural context into *intercultural relational dialectical forces.*

The use of "forces" demands some explanation, as I mentioned in the conclusion in Section 6.3. Initially, I anticipated finding intercultural relational dialectics in the form of "neat dialectical pairs". However, this turned out not to be the case, as no such precise pattern of dialectical pairs emerged. This was challenging because of the fixed frame of dialectical pairs that mainly occupied my mind. After long reflection on the final term and after examining other research on relational dialectics I decided to call the findings intercultural relational dialectical "forces", as did Chen (2002). These forces include various dialectical meanings which cannot be translated into tidy dialectical pairs. Depending on the settings, that is, the topics of conversation, the place, time and actors involved, they have different dialectical meanings. As these intercultural dialectical forces emerge from various interrelated sources (internal & external relational dialectics, the salience of the couples' different cultural backgrounds and intercultural dialectics) they tend to change and cannot be fixed in dialectical pairs. This actually reflects Baxter's statement (2010: 359) that it means little to simply list dialectical pairs unless one takes the next step of rendering how competing discourses, i.e. the intercultural relational dialectical forces in my study, constitute meaning, which she realized in her latest work on: "Voicing Relationships" (2011) and presents the contrapuntal analysis.

Relational dialectic theory or "dialogical creativity" (Baxter, 2010) holds implications for intercultural couples in that it makes it possible to reclaim conflict along different lines: conflict can be seen as discursive struggles which are processes to be cherished (p. 18). Longitudinal studies are an important implication of this study. As discourses are living entities, longitudinal studies on intercultural couples might shed light on how changes in competing

discourses occur over time, and what particular or general factors provoke these changes. Practical implications of this study point for instance to counselling for intercultural couples. Relational dialectic theory offers a wide range of applications that can be incorporated into stories and illustrations of intercultural accounts, for instance. Couplehood, and all the other relationships we form in our lifetimes, are all evolving entities, and they are like relational dialectic theory: "like a living organism, never finalized and ever changing" (Baxter, 2011:180).

7.3 Evaluation of the study

The main goal of this qualitative research work was to describe and understand intercultural couples' relationships in Finland from the relational-dialectics perspective. My purpose was to find out what challenges the intercultural couples meet regarding the push and pull of relational dialectics in their relationship (internal and external dialectics), 2) the importance and relevance of culture in their relationship (how their cultural backgrounds are reflected in their relationship), and 3) their experiences of relational tension of an intercultural nature (the interculturally-related dialectics). As the study as a whole relies on a relational dialectical perspective, it attempts to bring out dialogical features throughout the research process, e.g. dialogue between the researcher and the reader, between the researcher and the participants in the study, and between the intercultural partners by highlighting as much as possible both partners' voices. In addition, I attempted to present an account of intercultural couples in Finland, as constructed by the participants themselves.

The intersubjective nature of this study, the importance of the intercultural couples' experiences linked to the researcher's position, bring out the interpretative approach of this study. The interpretive approach adopted in this study necessitates a particular way of evaluating the methodology and the research process. This section reviews the particular choices made throughout the research process and critically examines the particular methods of data collection. I will at the same time interweave reflections on the research process, as they are relevant. I will first look at the reliability of the study, the multi-method approach, then I will discuss my interviewing of the couples together and apart, and present the implications of cross-cultural interviewing.

7.3.1 Trustworthiness and generalizability

First of all, it is worth remarking that we can reject two criticisms that are regularly levelled at qualitative approaches to research, that is 1) the alleged lack of scientific "rigour" and credibility associated with quantitative research methods, which are seen as objective, impartial and value-neutral, and 2) the claim that criteria for evaluating qualitative research are not in an identical format as quantitative criteria are (see also Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba &

Lincoln, 1995; Horsburgh, 2003; Morse, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) that coincide with validity, reliability and objectivity, but it has been argued that qualitative research should be evaluated against criteria more consistent with its particular approach and aims (Fossey, Harvey, Mc Dermott, and Davison, 2002).

Here I concentrate on whether the intercultural couples' perspectives in this study have been authentically represented in the research process and the interpretations made from the information gathered (authenticity); and whether the findings are coherent in the sense that they fit the data and social context from which they were derived. As many of these issues have been explained throughout the study and especially in the research design in Chapter 3, I will limit the evaluation to questions of trustworthiness and generalizability.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be conducted in the sense of being able to demonstrate both rigour (concerning the research process) and relevance (regarding the results). This refers to thick description being the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action or behaviour within its particular context. Ponterotto (2006: 547) states that thick description of results presents adequate voice of participants. This means that long quotes from the participants or excerpts of interviewer-interview dialogue are to be presented.

Thick description is a term coined by Geertz (1973), by which he meant that a researcher has to document the way in which symbolic codes shape the behaviour of, or are used by, individuals and groups involved in some event; if the researcher is to convey the nature of people's actions, why they do what they do, he/she must provide a description of that context. In addition, background information and the socio-cultural relations that are operating among the people involved allow the researcher to understand what is going on. These all convey a multiple layering of accounts, producing "thickness". (Hammersley, 2008: 3-5.) According to Sullivan (2002), thickness accurately describes observed social actions and assigns purpose and intentionality to these actions by way of the researcher's understanding and clear description of the context in which the social actions took place. It also captures the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships among them. Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turns leads to thick meaning in the research findings, which leads readers to a sense of likeliness, wherein they can cognitively and emotively "place" themselves within the research context. (see Ponterotto, 2006). In my study I used thick description when describing in detail the participants and their background, the study procedure, and the results. The excerpts from the interviews were put into perspective when they were used as illustration. The rigour or precision of this study were established when I presented the researcher's reflexivity, and described in detail the context of the multiple methods of interviewing the intercultural couples in this study, which added clearness and transparency. In my attempts to establish confidence in the findings I used thick description in

the sense that I "led the reader by the hand" and let him/her in to all the decisions that were made and the justifications for them.

Trustworthiness leads to generalizability, and as the quality of a piece of research is related to the generalizability of the results, this in turn leads to more trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). Although it is often argued that generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research, it is hard to think of conducting research that does not have an effect. However, according to Horsburgh (2003), in qualitative research participants are selected by means of theoretical sampling, i.e. for their ability to provide information (and consequent theory development) about the area under investigation. Consequently, one can say that generalizability refers to the extent to which a theory developed within one study may be exported to provide an explanatory theory for the experiences of other individuals who are in comparable situations. In other words, the aim of generalizability is to make logical generalizations from a theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena rather than probable generalizations to a population (Horsburgh, 2003: 311).

7.3.2 The multi-method approach

This study has a multi-method approach since it uses three methods; theme interviews, concept map interviews and e-mail interviews. Why and how these interview types were administered has been explained in the section on the design of the study in Chapter 3. In this section I will look at the implictions of each interview study and at the combination of the three.

The theme interviews covered all the issues about which I needed information: the internal and external dialectics of their relationship as they emerged from the couples' accounts. Although the interviews worked well and I obtained plenty of information, the questions about external dialectics covered issues which were at times very difficult to explain to the couples. Also, although I had tried out the interview questions with a few peers, the actual interview situations showed that these were complicated issues, made even more complex by the fact that the couples were being asked to share things with me that they were not necessarily used to talking about. When I realized the partners did not always quite understand what I meant I tried various ways of re-phrasing the questions, e.g. using different words and giving examples. The good thing in face-to-face interviews is that there is room for seeking and providing more information when needed - room that was often made use of.

The form of the interviews also accounts for the interview process. This means that the theme interviews, which were in a theme interview format, with questions about particular themes, were to bring about discussions of these themes. As I aimed to cover the internal and external dialectics this turned out to be quite a large number of questions, which meant that the interviews were intense and demanding for both the couples and the researcher. Theme interviewing also allowed for follow-up questions during the interviews. Both the couples' stories and voices were powerful evidence of what it is like to be an

intercultural couple living in Finland. After the interviews themselves the transcribing and partial translating of the data had to be carried out – time-consuming processes. This will be covered in the section in this chapter on the implications of cross-cultural interviewing. Although the answers provided by the participants were rich, reflective and in-depth, I needed more information and more couples, and consequently I looked for another, different way of collecting interview data.

The concept map interviews came about as a natural result of having conducted the theme interviews. I wanted more participants and also a more open way of inquiry, using an instrument that would cover the research question about the intercultural dimension of relational dialectics, yet a mode of inquiry that would allow more space for the couples and might touch issues that had not come up earlier. A study conducted in educational sciences (Knevel, 2003) caught my eye as the author used concept maps as an enquiry for children.

The method and practices of concept mapping (see Novak, 1998) proved to be an interview method I could create and shape for using with the couples. I designed a concept map to be used with intercultural couples, and translated it into Dutch, Finnish and German. As explained in detail in the design of the study, I used the most recurrent theme interview concepts (22) as the basis. Before being administered to the intercultural couples the concept map was successfully tried out with a colleague. The concept map interviews worked very well as a method. It was interesting to see what topics the couples chose to talk about, and these interviews allowed me to see how they actually interacted with each other, in what language, about what topic, and how surprised they were. During the interview the partners read aloud the topics, then sometimes both, sometimes one commented and suggested a topic, for instance:"Oh, there's children, that's a good one".

The couples freely raised issues they wanted to discuss. From the concept map, which offered 22 topics in all, 20 were actually used and discussed by all six couples, in all the six interviews. The two concepts that were not taken up as such were expectation, and feasts and celebrations. However, although some topics were not explicitly taken up, they were almost all interrelated, and one topic led to another.

In this study this method was used in a novel and experimental way. The concept map interviews were very rewarding and provided in-depth information about the concepts discussed by the partners, but they also provided insight into the dynamics of the couples, how they talk about something, how engaged they are, what they agree and disagree about.

The objective of gaining more open interviews succeeded well. The information the participants provided was in-depth and intimate at times, and at the same time it often covered other topics that also appeared on the concept map. In comparison with the theme interviews the concept map interviews proved to be definitely more open, and they were not limited to relational dialectics. Novak's main objectives of concept mapping, thinking, feeling and activity, could really be observed with this method. The concept map seemed to

make the couples "spark" and allowed them room for discussion. As with the theme interviews, here too the transcriptions and translations needed to be carried out afterwards.

The last method used in this study, the e-mail interviews, was meant to throw light on the meaning of culture, and to give space to the individual spouses: they were given the chance to respond separately. Three open-ended questions were given to each of the couples via e-mail, and they were asked to answer them separately. Besides English, the couples were given the opportunity to answer in German or in Finnish. The decision to use e-mail interviews resulted from the two previous interviews. The concept map was supposed to shed light on the intercultural nature of dialectically relating but I was not totally satisfied. The couples did bring up interesting and relevant issues, and they did talk about the concepts on the map and beyond, but although I got some vague ideas from them, I did not get the essential information about what factors make a relationship intercultural. And as culture - although it was present in all its possible facets - had not yet really been nailed down, I needed a third form of enquiry. As the couples are the main agents I decided to ask them explicitly what they thought was the influence of their cultural background on their relationship. As I thought I had done enough transcribing, I made use of the internet and used email for their answers. As this enquiry was to be conducted via e-mail I made sure that I did not overload the people with too many questions to answer.

I was quite surprised to receive mail from all the seven couples. Though not every one answered separately, I received elaborate answers to my questions and some very intimate accounts of the couples' appreciation of their relationship. The e-mail interviews proved to be a well chosen method of enquiry. The partners gave detailed answers to all the questions posed, and even offered to write more if I wanted extra information. Transcription was not needed in this case, which was a bonus, but translations needed to be done as not all the e-mails were written in English; some were in Finnish or in German.

In this study I made use of multiple methods of data collection - theme, concept map and e-mail interviews. Each method was chosen according to the research questions posed. I could have applied the three methods to the same group of couples, and this might have provided more information about one particular group of intercultural couples. However, as the theme interviews were in fact very much in-depth inquiries, opting for different groups for each inquiry proved to be a better strategy. Moreover, having three different samples of participants seemed to be a natural development of the whole study: it reflects the emergence of qualitative research, and at the same time it allowed for more generalizability, in the sense described above.

The value of this multi-method approach when attempting to understand the world of intercultural couples is obvious. The three methods captured a broader and deeper range of the couples' perceptions and experiences than one single mode of inquiry could have done. One could ask whether these three different approaches, which allowed the couples to answer and to describe their perceptions, did actually give us more and clearer insights and understanding,

or if they were just "an extra something" added to the qualitative methodology. Although I consider the multi-method approach very valuable in this study of intercultural couples, it would be unreasonable to suggest it as a general method suitable for everyone. Several researchers who used the multi-method approach conclude that it is a valuable approach that offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through reliance on a single method of data collection (see Darbyshire, Mac Dougall and Schiller, 2005). Also, according to Collier and Elman (2008) integrating a multi-method in a research project can help researchers become more methodologically grounded and rigorous. The multi-method approach is not to burden researchers with methodological preoccupations to a degree that is counterproductive, but is to provide tools for addressing the substantive questions that make science a worthwhile enterprise (Collier & Elman, 2008: 791).

To conclude, I argue that using multiple methods was a valuable approach: not only does it produce data, but it also offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access by reliance on any single method of collection. Chamberlain, Sheridan and Dupuis (2011:1) state that the incorporation of multiple methods encourages creativity and innovation, it extends the scope and depth of data, demands time, forces reflexivity, deepens and intensifies relationships between researchers and participants, and raises issues for analysis and interpretation. Although demanding, substantial benefits can be obtained through working in this way.

7.3.3 Interview practices and implications

In this sub section I first discuss the procedure of interviewing couples together and apart and then move on to the implications of cross-cultural interviewing.

In both the theme and concept map interviews the couples were interviewed together. Initially when undertaking this study it seemed to be only natural to interview the couples together, firstly because they construct a shared reality, and then because I wanted to see their relationships through the lens of a relational dialectical framework and to present a dialogical picture of their accounts. There are various advantages in interviewing couples together. In the first place, this study is about relationships, and the theoretical basis of relational dialectics stresses *the both /and* view. Another advantage is that it adds to the relational dialectical perspective, which lies in multiple exchanges arising from varied positions or points of view. Thirdly, joint interviewing allowed me to see the couples actually interacting in the process of the negotiation and mediation that took place between them. Sometimes they supported and confirmed each other's account, at other times they contradicted each other's stories. When they needed more time to reflect on answers they jogged each other's memory, and they helped each other to explain something in detail. However, during some interviews, whether theme or concept map interviews, there were some tough moments (for the couples as well as for the researcher), when the partners challenged each other or loudly played down the other's

account, which sometimes ended up in loud disputes. So at times what started out as a fairly relaxed conversation about their relationship could quickly become a heated argument.

Although these interviews provided me with certain dynamics, e.g. detailed accounts and rich data, which would not have come to the surface with only one partner present, they also had their drawbacks. However rich the data that I might obtain, I never intended to be the reason for any intense arguments. Nor did the arguments reflect favourably on the partners; quite the opposite, as somehow it made them look more vulnerable. This raised an ethical dilemma: was I supposed to intervene in the argument, let things sort themselves out, change the subject, stop the interview for a moment, or what? These options all passed through my mind in a split second, and these were quite intense and uncomfortable moments. What usually happened was that things did indeed sort themselves out when the two partners somehow realized that perhaps this kind of behaviour was not so appropriate. During one interview I actually tried several times to get the other partner to speak, or I asked a slightly different question so that the heat would go out of the argument; and this worked to a certain extent.

Interviewing the partners apart via e-mail was a deliberate decision. As the questions did not initially deal with their relationship but with the idea of if and how their cultural background was reflected in their relationship, I reasoned that replying by email would give the partners more time to reflect (as they both in fact come from different backgrounds) and having to tackle separate interview data would be a new challenge for me as a researcher. Although, according to Valentine (1999), separate interviews can generate a lot of anxiety amongst people, because neither of the interviewees can cope with the feeling of being reproduced by the other, and because they might worry that they will be judged as a bad or mismatched couple, this did not in practice seem to be a problem. However, as I explained in the design of the study in Chapter three, only three of the seven couples actually gave separate accounts, and the four others answered the questions for both of them. Maybe the low return of separate answers after all reflects the anxiety-making or judgmental aspects, or then it might simply be a question of time or gender (three of the four "together" accounts were written by women). Although it did not turn out that I got 14 partners to write separate accounts, yet the individual as well as the joint e-mail answers provided me with very rich, detailed and sincere and moving accounts of their relationships.

In conclusion, although each way, together and apart, has its advantages and disadvantages, the decision to interview the couples together face-to-face in the theme and concept map interviews, and apart via e-mail interviews proved to be successful. Although every inquiry throws up practical and ethical issues, including whether to interview couples together or apart, what is the individual scope of each interview (its aim and questions) and how suitable the interviews are (a certain interview format for a certain medium and group of people), the interview types were well chosen and achieved their aim.

Implications of cross-cultural interviewing

As this is a study about intercultural couples living in Finland, and as this study was carried out within an intercultural context, with the couples and the researcher mostly having different native languages, some issues need to be clarified as they also affect the trustworthiness of this study. In qualitative research conducted in an intercultural context language challenges keep arising throughout the whole research process. As the researcher's and the participants' language skills influence the cross-cultural interviewing process, conducting the research also increases awareness of the language implications of the persons involved. One can question whether it is ever possible to carry out research into "others" with whom the researcher does not have immediate points of identification through a common language. Lately, however, since qualitative research has also been carried out with foreign language interview materials, researchers' mobility and the establishment of more international communities indicate that a multilingual approach to cross cultural interviewing (and in general to cross-cultural data collection and data analysis) needs to be taken seriously. A multilingual approach in cross-cultural interviewing involves the researcher conducting interviews in different languages, often alongside English (as this study did), or using interpreters to make conversation easier (see Kokkonen, 2010). It is definitely possible to conduct reliable research in a multilingual setting, but there is no doubt that it is more challenging and calls for greater awareness. (see Pietilä, 2010; Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004.) In this study the data collection procedure of cross-cultural multiple interviews offered five different language constellations for the researcher and the participants:

(MT=mother tongue, FL= foreign language, P = participant, R= researcher

1. P(MT)+P(FL)+R(MT) (9)
2. P(FL)+P(FL)+R(FL) (7)
3. P(MT)+P(FL)+R(FL) (2)

This shows that a third language was used most of the time by both the participants and by me, the researcher. Adopting the terms used by Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004: 227), this indicates that there were no moments of *linguistic equality* (when participants and researcher speak their mother tongue) during one and the same interview situation. There were some linguistic equal moments when code-switching was applied. Only constellation 1 is an example of *linguistic advantage* (as one of the parties is able to use their mother tongue), if only in moments. Constellations 2 and 3 are examples of *mutual linguistic challenge* (in which two parties operate in a second or third language). Constellation 1, when I speak the mother tongue of one of the participants, is exceptional as it only reflects the moments, and it actually is a mix of linguistic equality and linguistic advantage. This also means that during the data

collection process, the openness and cooperation of the interviewees, the richness and quality of the data collected, and I as interviewer/researcher, are all affected by language considerations. It is therefore worth discussing the language issue in the light of the lack of a common language in this study between myself and the participants, and how to deal with language issues in cross cultural interviewing. I now turn briefly to considering the effect of the researcher and the researched (the intercultural couples) using different languages in the pre-interview, interview, and post interview stages of this study.

Most challenging for me in the pre-interview stage was the wording of the interview questions in a form that was both linguistically correct and culturally sensitive. The questions for the theme interviews and e-mail interviews (and possible explanations and illustrations for the concept map interviews) in Dutch, English, Finnish and German were checked with native peer researchers. This meant that it was possible, at least to some extent, to avoid strange wordings and potential misunderstandings. With the actual interviews it was generally settled beforehand what language(s) would be used, but I always had various language versions of the interviews with me.

eople could not use multiple languages and deal with serious, intimate topics in what was for many participants and for the researcher herself a non-native language (as was largely the case here in all three interview types) unless they had a sense of comfort and security. Switching languages may also be challenging at the transcription stage. However, mostly the participants seemed very comfortable when using a non-native language, even to discuss the sometimes difficult topics that were presented to them, because happily I managed to establish trust between the participants and myself.

Some participants answered quite briefly, however, and I cannot really say whether this was because of the language or the topic, the way I asked the questions or the kind of questions I asked. For instance, theme interview four was, from my point of view, very hard and seemed to exhaust the couple and me. Also email interview four was very concise and succinct. These particular interviews were in a foreign language for all the participants and for the researcher, and this might be significant. On the other hand, other interviews in which the languages used were native to neither the participants nor to me worked perfectly well, and when any misunderstanding occurred we all just asked and probed and elaborations were made so that both parties (most probably) understood each other better.

There were differences in participants' language skills, of course, but this did not really constitute a disadvantage in the interview situation. However, when one of the couple was a native speaker in the language being used (which happened in interviews held in Dutch, English and German), there were issues of imbalance and power, as these people naturally had a very good command of their mother tongue and therefore took the floor (and the time) to say everything. This might well have influenced the amount and quality of data to a certain extent.

The use of various "Englishes" (see Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004: 233) came up once when a participant for whom English was a second language used it in ways which I sometimes found hard to follow. This concerned accent and other repertoires such as intonation, intensity and – as I thought – incoherence. Also, in most interviews there were many instances of code-switching, but this did not impede fluency or understanding.

After interviews are carried out comes the stage of transcribing and translating. I transcribed all the interviews in the original language of the interview and according to the principles presented in Chapter three on the design of the study. They were transcribed literally including grammatical and lexical mistakes. I used the original transcripts for analysis. As I am fluent in the interview languages I see no concern in analyzing the transcripts in their orginal language. In other words, I saw no need to translate them first into English before the analysis. Only when some part of the transcript was needed, e.g. to make a point or provide an illustration, did I translate that particular section into English, as this is the publishing language of this study. For this reason translations had to be made from Dutch into English, German into English and Finnish into English. The e-mail interviews, some of which were written in Finnish, were immediately translated into English, and were language checked by a peer researcher.

Data verification was done by sending the interview transcripts to the participants so that they could add comments, and change, check, and remove items they thought misunderstood or wrong. All the transcripts were returned to the researcher with only some minor corrections.

The presentation of transcribed data obtained from cross-cultural interviews requires some attention. As was explained in the design of the study (Chapter three), the presentation of the transcribed data conforms to certain requirements. The way I provided the illustrations, i.e. using both the original interview language and English, adds to the trustworthiness and analytic transparency of the research. A particular point concerns the researcher's right to correct participants' language, an ethical and political issue. (Nikander, 2010: 432-439). As mentioned in Chapter three, I did change the participants' language in the parts presented to illustrate certain points. For this particular research, which is neither linguistically oriented nor approached from a critical research design, I do not see it as a violation of good practice to correct some of the participants' grammatical or lexical mistakes. On the contrary, when I did it, which was on only a few occasions, I saw it rather as a way of protecting the participants' privacy.

Considering the trustworthiness of the research within this post interview stage, I still want to bring up the issue of reflexivity, which can be accomplished, according to Nikander (2008) by communicating and writing (reflecting) about the process of transcribing and translating, as I have aimed to do. This enables the researcher to understand and explain choices and decisions made about these processes, which are all features of good qualitative research.

Concerning the ethical principles of research (National Advisory Board, 2009), I took care that participation in this research was voluntary and based on

informed consent. All the participants signed a consent form. They were also informed that the study is about communication in intercultural couples' relationships, and they were told about the method of data collection and the estimated time this would require. Giving an account of one's relationship is inherently an intimate topic and participants are therefore in a vulnerable position. Consequently it is the researcher's task to avoid inflicting any mental harm on the participants, and the participants must be treated with respect. Reporting the findings in research publications also has to be done considerately and respectfully. This is also linked to the participants' privacy and protection. The participants were given pseudonyms so that they could not be identified in the published findings; no names of workplaces, educational institutes, places of residence or names of children were given. I will also maintain the confidentiality of the research data: the data are not being and will not be used or handed over for other uses besides research, and the audio-recordings are stored in a safe place. Ethical considerations concerning the researcher's position were presented in Chapter three.

Limitations and future implications

The findings of this study are of contemporary relevance as they affect our knowledge and understanding of relational dialectical communication in an intercultural context. The most important finding of this study is that the intercultural couples experience intercultural relational dialectical forces in the form of continual re-negotiations through which other intercultural relational dialectical forces are initiated, i.e. cultural identity and belonging, increased sensitivity to differences and similarities, social power and support, and uncertainty.

This study is, however, not without its limitations. Reflecting on the data collection, i.e. the interviews, I wonder whether the couples could and did talk freely. Obviously one cannot be sure about that, yet I certainly had the impression that the couples were rather open. Already agreeing to be part of an inquiry about their relationship shows a certain openness. Also, considering the vast variety of detailed data obtained, the actual interview situations where the couples both engaged in interaction, where they occasionally argued and disagreed with each other, and where they were at times very honest and told me rather intimate issues, show that they could talk fairly freely.

Studies on intercultural relationships often involve people from various linguistic backgrounds and inherently the language of inquiry is not monolingual. This can be criticized as a limitation to the trustworthiness of the study. However, I have shown transparency throughout this study in involving the reader in my choices and my explanations of issues of language. I believe this study is not limited or less trustworthy because there were various languages of inquiry between the researcher and the participants.

Methodologically, the study was broad in scope and offered various views from different angles. But also broadness requires detailed investigation, so its broadness contributes to its thoroughness. Relational dialectic theory proved to

be a viable framework for examining intercultural couples' experiences. The degree to which relational dialectic theory and the findings of this study are applicable to other intercultural couples is a subject for future investigation. With this study I addressed a need for scholarship on intercultural couplehood researched from a relational dialectic viewpoint. While it is important to understand how intercultural relationships are sustained by the fairly young couples in this study, future studies could examine relational dialectical tensions with older intercultural couples, or by conducting a longitudinal study. As the history of research on intercultural couples is still relatively young in general, and almost a novelty on intercultural couples viewed from a relational dialectical perspective in particular, a longitudinal take could offer new light on the dynamics in such relationships and how they might affect long-term commitment.

While the findings of this study originate in an interpersonal communication study, they could also be relevant in intercultural couple counselling. The main goal of counselling inherently lies in making a couple's or family's relationship harmonious while improving communication within the couple or family. Knowledge of intercultural relational dialectical forces is novel in that it admits and allows for couples to experience various relational tensions which are ever fluctuating and which must be considered important, as they are a part of relating.

Regarding the language use of intercultural couples, research on older intercultural couples could bring out important findings. Research conducted on older people living abroad due to their marriage with a "stranger" shows that the migrant partners in older intercultural couples form a significant proportion of those who use interpreting services. These older migrants include a small number of people who used to be proficient in the target language but have reverted to their first native language and are no longer able to express for instance their healthcare needs in the target language (Crezee, 2008). This implies the need for significant knowledge of the dynamics in older intercultural couples of language and its transformations over time. Of the utmost importance in the findings of my study is language as a tool for communication, since negotiations constitute a very important part of an intercultural couples' relationship. Continued work in this area, and particularly longitudinal studies on intercultural couples, would make it possible to explore how such couples could benefit from research into their relationships with their external networks and on transcultural care issues which affect the migrant partners and their networks in the respective target or home-country.

Winding up this study on intercultural couples reminds us how distinctive and complex intercultural couples' relationships can be: continual re-negotiations are inextricably linked with issues of adaptation, adaptation issues are enmeshed in issues of sensitivity to similarities and differences, which in their turn are tied up with issues of social power and support, and with issues of uncertainty. Cultural issues naturally also interrelate with issues of personal

and relationship history. In the end, the intercultural couples' refusal to accept simple answers and their determination to continue to discuss an issue till a midpoint has been found is what emerges from this study as most characteristic of intercultural couples. Their accounts reveal the kind of challenges explored in this study. Evidently, these are not just issues about food or clothes or funny mistakes, even if sometimes they are stories about food like jam on bread, about clothing and on occasion about funny mistakes. But none of these issues stands on its own: these topics of food and clothes, holidays and mixing up words are almost always linked to larger ones Discussions about appropriate clothing can stand for uncertainty about whether the family will think it good enough. The question of where to live implies a concern about who will take care of the parents when they are old, which points to issues of transnational care. What language to speak can reflect hesitation, issues of support and ambiguity about being in a disadvantaged position. In the end it probably refers to one's genuine willingness to be accepted in the new society. These examples show that these issues not only are of profound consequence to the couples in their dyadic relationship, but they also affect their children, their family, and their friends. All these issues include various dialectical forces which need to be seen to and discussed countless times through significant negotiations that seem to be never-ending. This is perhaps best illustrated by the following words of one of the intercultural partners who took part in this study: "*Our differences are just much more apparent and obvious so they just have to be discussed; we have become the mediators in our own cultures.*"

YHTEENVETO

Kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden relationaalinen dialektiikka

Yhä useammat ihmiset muuttavat elämänsä aikana ulkomaille esimerkiksi henkilökohtaisista syistä tai opiskelun tai työn vuoksi. Nämä lyhyemmät tai pidemmät ulkomailla vietetyt ajanjaksot sijoittuvat yleensä elämänvaiheeseen, jossa ihmiset etsivät elämänkumppania tai ovat perustamassa perhettä. Siksi nykyisin on paljon yleisempää kuin muutama vuosikymmen sitten, että puolisoksi tai elämänkumppaniksi löytyy henkilö, jolla on erilainen kulttuuritausta.

Kulttuuritaustoiltaan erilaisten henkilöiden parisuhteen erityislaadusta ei kuitenkaan ole paljon tutkimustietoa, varsinkaan Euroopasta. Tiedetään kuitenkin, että vuorovaikutus ja viestintästrategiat, jotka ovat keskeisiä kaikissa ihmissuhteissa ja parisuhteissa erityisesti, vaikuttavat parisuhteen osapuolten hyvinvointiin.

Tässä työssä kulttuurienvälisten parien elämää ja kokemuksia lähestytään Baxterin ja Montgomeryn (1996) relationaalisen dialektiikan (relational dialectics) näkökulmasta. Kyseistä teoreettista lähestymistapaa on perinteisesti käytetty kulttuuritaustoiltaan samanlaisten parien vuorovaikutuksen tarkasteluun, mutta tässä tutkimuksessa sitä sovelletaan kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden kontekstissa. Relationaalisen dialektiikan lähestymistapa eroaa varsin paljon sellaisista aiemmista tarkastelutavoista, jotka kuvaavat ihmissuhteita erilaisten selkeästi alkavien ja loppuvien vaiheiden avulla. Relationaalisessa dialektiikassa nähdään, että jännitteet (suhteessa ilmenevät ristiriidat) ovat keskeinen piirre ihmissuhteissa, joten ne eroavat siksi käsitteenä konflikteista tai ongelmista. Suhteita dialektisesti tarkasteltaessa ajatellaan, että kaikissa ihmissuhteissa on sisäsyntyisiä jännitteitä vastakkaisten tai ristiriitaisten voimien välillä. Nämä dialektiset jännitteet, ja se, kuinka suhteen osapuolet niihin reagoivat, ovat keskeisiä tekijöitä selittämään sitä, kuinka suhteet toimivat ja kuinka ne muuttuvat ajan myötä.

Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee romanttisessa suhteessa eläviä heteroseksuaalisia pareja, joiden osapuolet ovat kulttuuriselta taustaltaan erilaisia. Tämän kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen päätarkoituksena on kuvata ja ymmärtää kulttuurienvälisten parien suhteita Suomessa relationaalisen dialektiikan näkökulmasta. Tällöin tutkimuksen kohteena ovat ne haasteet, joita kulttuurienväliset parit kohtaavat. Työn tutkimuskysymykset ovat:

1) Mitä sisäisiä ja ulkoisia relationaalisia dialektisiä jännitteitä kulttuurienväliset parit kokevat suhteessaan?
2) Millaisia kulttuurienvälisyyteen liittyviä dialektisiä jännitteitä parit kohtaavat suhteessaan?
3) Kuinka kulttuurienväliset parit näkevät heidän erilaisten kulttuuritaustojensa vaikuttavan parisuhteeseen?

Tutkimuksen toteutus

Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään kvalitatiivista lähestymistapaa, jotta voitaisiin kuvata ja ymmärtää niitä kulttuurienvälisen parisuhteen ilmiöitä, joita edellä esitetyt tutkimuskysymykset luonnehtivat. Kysymykset tarkastelevat kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden sosiaalisen todellisuuden merkityksellisiä tekijöitä, kuten tietoa, ymmärrystä, näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia, joita osallistujat ilmaisevat haastatteluissa.

Aineistonkeruumenetelmänä käytettiin useiden erityyppisten haastattelujen yhdistelmää (multiple interviews). Useiden eri haastattelutapojen käyttäminen lisää mahdollisuutta saada monipuolisia ja kattavia tutkimustuloksia. Tutkimuksessa haastateltiin kulttuurienvälisiä pareja kolmessa ryhmässä, kutakin ryhmää eri haastattelumenetelmällä: teemahaastatteluihin osallistui 5 paria (10 osallistujaa), käsitekarttahaastatteluihin 6 paria (12 osallistujaa) ja sähköpostihaastatteluihin 7 paria (14 osallistujaa).

Haastattelujen aikana tehtiin myös havaintoja, kuten on tavallista haastattelumenetelmää

käytettäessä. Havainnot tallennettiin haastattelumuistiinpanoihin kunkin haastattelun jälkeen. Vaikka tutkimuksen pääasiallisena aineistonkeruumenetelmänä olivat erityyppiset haastattelut, muistiinpanoista saatu tieto auttoi muistamaan haastattelutilanteiden kulkua, ja siten havainnot olivat avuksi aineiston tulkitsemisessa myöhemmin analyysivaiheessa.

Tutkimusaineisto analysoitiin kvalitatiivisesti ja pääosin induktiivisesti. Aineiston pelkistämisen ja koodauksen avulla (Jensen, 2002; Lindlöf, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994) muodostettiin laajemmat teemat, jotka järjestettiin kategorioihin dialektisen näkökulman pohjalta.

Tulokset ja päätelmät

Tutkimuksen tuloksena nousi selvästi esiin, että kulttuurienväliset parit kokevat parisuhteessaan sekä suhteen sisäisiä että ulkoisia dialektisiä jännitteitä (internal and external dialectical tensions), joita ovat:

- sisäisiä dialektisiä jännitteitä:
  - liittyneisyys–autonomisuus (connection–autonomy)
  - ennustettavuus–uutuus (predictability–novelty)
  - avoimuus–sulkeutuvuus (openness–closedness)
- ulkoisia dialektisiä jännitteitä:
  - sisältyneisyys–eristyneisyys (inclusion–seclusion)
  - konventionaalisuus–ainutlaatuisuus (conventionality–uniqueness)
  - ilmaiseminen–salaaminen (revelation–concealment)

Nämä jännitteet vastaavat Baxterin ja Montgomeryn (1996) relationaalisen dialektiikan typologian jännitteitä.

Parien kertomusten pohjalta puolisoiden erilaiset kulttuuriset taustat näkyvät parisuhteessa esimerkiksi neuvotteluina, jotka koskevat a) lomia, ystäviä, uskontoa, perinteitä ja juhlia, b) lasten kasvattamista ja koulutusta, c) arvoja ja

sukupuoleen liittyviä kysymyksiä sekä d) sopeutumista. Lisäksi kulttuurienvälisiin parisuhteisiin heijastuu se, kuinka edellä mainittujen neuvottelujen päätökset hyväksytään laajemmassa sosiaalisessa verkostossa.

Aineiston pohjalta määriteltiin kuusi kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden dialektista voimaa (intercultural relational dialectical forces): 1) jatkuva uudelleenneuvottelu, 2) kulttuurinen identiteetti ja kuuluminen, 3) lisääntynyt herkkyys eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä kohtaan, 4) sosiaalinen valta, 5) sosiaalinen tuki ja 6) epävarmuus. Nämä voimat perustuvat 1) sisäisiin ja ulkoisiin relationaalisiin dialektisiin jännitteisiin, 2) kulttuurienvälisten parien näkemyksiin siitä, kuinka heidän kulttuuriset taustansa heijastuvat heidän parisuhteeseensa ja 3) kulttuurienväliseen dialektiikkaan, johon kuuluvia dialektisiä jännitteitä ovat esimerkiksi erilaisuus–samanlaisuus, yksilöllinen–kulttuurinen, henkilökohtainen–sosiaalinen, etuoikeutettu asema–epäedullinen asema, staattinen–dynaaminen ja nykyisyys/tulevaisuus–historia/menneisyys (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

Sisäiset relationaaliset dialektiset jännitteet

Sisäisellä tasolla sopeutumiseen liittyvät dialektiset jännitteet, kuten jännite sen välillä, ollaanko liiallisesti yhdessä vai pyritäänkö olemaan erillään, ovat yhteyksissä tuen käsitteeseen. Tuki voidaan joko hyväksyä, jättää huomiotta tai torjua, mikä aiheuttaa jännitettä suhteessa tukea tarjoavaan kumppaniin. Parit kokevat saavansa tukea sekä puolison että sosiaalisen verkoston kanssa käydystä vuorovaikutuksesta. Tämä tuki auttaa heitä hallitsemaan epävarmoja tilanteita ja selviytymään stressiä aiheuttavissa olosuhteissa (ks. esim. Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003). Tuki on äärimmäisen tärkeää erityisesti juuri kulttuurienvälisissä suhteissa, koska, kuten Copeland ja Norell (2002) esittävät, kulttuuriseen sopeutumiseen liittyy sekä aiempien tukiverkostojen hajoaminen että haaste kehittää uusia verkostoja.

Ennustettavuuden ja uutuuden väliseen jännitteeseen liittyen kulttuurienväliset parit luottavat suhteidensa kestävyyteen, mutta he myös ilmaisevat haluavansa spontaaniutta, yllätyksiä ja romantiikkaa. He kokevat epävarmuutta sopeutumiseen ja tulevaisuuteen liittyvissä asioissa, mikä vaikuttaa olevan erityistä juuri kulttuurienvälisille pareille. Parien epävarmuus omasta tulevaisuudesta näkyy eniten siinä, että heidän on vaikea tehdä päätöksiä siitä, missä asua, mistä etsiä töitä, kuinka ylläpitää perinteitä ja kuinka tehdä päätöksiä tai pitkän ajanjakson suunnitelmia. Näitä epävarmuustekijöitä kohtaavat kaikki parit, mutta kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden tietyt erityispiirteet voimistavat hämmennyksen ja ulkopuolisuuden tunteita. Nämä erityispiirteet liittyvät kulttuurienväliseen monimuotoisuuteen ja kontekstuaaliseen aika-tila kronotooppiin (contextual time-space chronotope). Esimerkiksi sen sijaan, että pohdittaisiin muuttoa kaupungista tai kylästä toiseen, kulttuurienväliset parit miettivät muuttoa kahden maan, tai maanosan, välillä.

Avoimuuden ja sulkeutuvuuden välistä jännitettä tarkasteltaessa kulttuurienvälisten parien keskinäistä avoimuutta voidaan pitää keinona saada tukea. Tämän jännitteen kautta voidaan myös päästä käsiksi kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden perusolemukseen.

Ulkoiset relationaaliset dialektiset jännitteet

Ulkoisella tasolla sisältyneisyyden ja eristyneisyyden väliseen jännitteeseen liittyviä tekijöitä ovat a) tarve saada tukea sukulaisilta, ystäviltä ja tuttavilta, b) sopeutuminen ja kuuluminen, c) parisuhteen vaarantava liiallinen osallistuminen sosiaalisiin verkostoihin, d) sosiaalisista verkostoista poissuljetuksi tuleminen ja e) sosiaalisten verkostojen ulkopuolelle jättäytyminen. Kulttuurienväliset parit pitävät elintärkeänä sitä, että heillä on monia verkostoja. Kulttuurienvälisillä pareillahan on yleensä lähettyvillään vain toisen puolison perhe. Siksi he eivät voi aina laskea samanlaisen tuen varaan, kuin mitä samasta kulttuurista tulevilla pareilla yleensä on. Tämä jännite, ja tunne johonkin verkostoon kuulumisesta tai kuulumattomuudesta, nousee joko kokemuksesta, että sosiaaliseen ympäristöön kuuluvat ihmiset eivät jollakin tavoin hyväksy, tai siitä, että ei ole sosiaalista verkostoa tai työtä.

Suhteessa konventionaalisuuden ja ainutlaatuisuuden väliseen jännitteeseen kulttuurienväliset parit pitävät itseään ja parisuhteitaan melko tavallisina, esimerkiksi koska he käyttäytyvät perinteisten parisuhdekäsitysten mukaisesti. Kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden ainutlaatuisuus liittyy näiden suhteiden rakentaviin ominaisuuksiin, kuten siihen, että erilaisuutta vaalitaan ja se nähdään myönteisenä asiana. Ainutlaatuisuus ilmenee myös siinä, että kulttuurienväliset parit eroavat yksikulttuurisista pareista ja että ulkopuoliset kokevat parien jotkut erityiset ominaisuudet, kuten vuorovaikutustyylin tai muut näkyvät piirteet, yleisestä poikkeavana.

Ilmaisemisen ja salaamisen väliseen jännitteeseen liittyen kulttuurienvälisten parien halua ilmaisemiseen motivoi heidän tarpeensa jakaa asioita ja nauttia seurasta sekä tarve luoda sosiaalisia kohtaamisia, joissa voi turvallisesti avautua. Tämä ei ole aina mahdollista parisuhteen sille osapuolelle, joka ei osaa puhua asuinmaan kieltä ja joka kokee sen haittaavana tekijänä. Parien päähuolenaihe tähän jännitteeseen liittyen on säilyttää ei-suomenkielisen puolison äidinkieli, koska sen ansiosta on mahdollista olla vuorovaikutuksessa lasten ja sukulaisten kanssa. Parien molemmat osapuolet ylläpitävät tietoisesti äidinkieltään, koska he ymmärtävät sen olevan ainoa keino jakaa asioita oman sosiaalisen verkoston kanssa.

Kulttuurienvälisten parien kulttuuristen taustojen heijastuminen parisuhteeseen

Kulttuurienvälisten parien kulttuuristen taustojen vaikutukset parisuhteeseen ovat moninaisia. Tuloksissa huomiota herättävintä, vaikkakaan ei yllättävintä, ovat kulttuurienvälisten parien käymät jatkuvat neuvottelut, jotka näyttävät määrittävän heidän elämäänsä niin sisäisesti kuin ulkoisestikin. Nämä neuvottelut vaativat toistuvaa päätösten ja kompromissien tekemistä lähestulkoon kaikesta. Lisäksi tuloksissa näkyy sopeutumisen ongelmallisuus, sillä sopeutumiseen liittyy kysymys vallasta ja epäedullisesta asemasta, kun toinen puoliso on aina heikompi osapuoli vuorovaikutustilanteissa.

Kulttuurienväliset parit kohtaavat toistuvasti kieleen liittyviä kysymyksiä. Kielitaidon puute ja uuden kielen opettelemisen välttämättömyys koettiin es-

teenä ja vaikeutena ei-suomalaisen osapuolen mahdollisuuksiin osallistua kokonaisvaltaisesti suomalaiseen yhteiskuntaan. Kieli ja sen heijastusvaikutukset näyttäytyvät kulttuurienvälisten parien jokapäiväiseen elämään voimakkaasti vaikuttavina tekijöinä. Näitä tekijöitä ovat määrätietoinen kielenopiskelu, vähintään kahden kielen käyttäminen päivittäin perheessä sekä oman äidinkielen menettämisen tuska. Kieliasioihin liittyi myös vahvoja tunteita tuen antamisesta ja saamisesta.

Parit kertoivat sisällyttämiseen, poissulkemiseen ja eristyneisyyteen liittyvistä kokemuksista ja he myös sivusivat kuulumisen kysymyksiä. Kuulumisen teema ilmeni esimerkiksi identiteetin etsinnän, näkyvyyden, erilaisuuden, juurettomuuden ja ylirajaisuuden kokemuksissa. Ei-suomalaiset puolisot pohtivat kulttuurista identiteettiään siitä näkökulmasta, että he ovat läsnä suomalaisessa kulttuurissa ja osallistuvat siihen, mutta kysymys koskettaa heitä myös heidän ollessaan kotimaassaan. Identiteetin etsiminen koskee myös parien suomalaisia osapuolia, koska he ovat kulttuurienvälisessä parisuhteessa ja he ovat oleskelleet puolisonsa kotimaassa ja kulttuurissa.

Jatkuvat uudelleenneuvottelut puolisoiden sekä parin ja heidän sosiaalisten verkostojensa välillä on tekijä, joka yhdistää parien kuvauksia siitä, miten heidän kulttuuriset taustansa heijastuvat parisuhteeseen. Nämä neuvottelut eräällä tavalla määrittävät heidän suhteensa kulttuurienväliseksi: mikään ei tapahdu neuvottelematta.

Kulttuurienvälisten parisuhteiden dialektiset voimat

Tutkimusaineistosta löydettiin kuusi kulttuurienvälisten suhteiden dialektista voimaa: 1) jatkuva uudelleenneuvottelu, 2) kulttuurinen identiteetti ja kuuluminen, 3) lisääntynyt herkkyys eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä kohtaan, 4) sosiaalinen valta, 5) sosiaalinen tuki ja 6) epävarmuus. Kaikki nämä voimat ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa.

Jatkuva uudelleenneuvottelu on kaikenkattava voima, jonka kautta kaikki muut voimat toteutuvat, mutta se on myös itsenäinen ja riippumaton. Tämä voima syntyy parin keskinäisestä viestinnästä, ja se määrittää heidän parisuhteensa kulttuurienvälisyyttä.

Kulttuurisen identiteetin ja kuulumisen voima liittyy uuteen ympäristöön sopeutumiseen ja erilaisten kuulumiseen liittyvien tunteiden kanssa elämiseen. Identiteetin etsiminen ja kuuluminen merkitsevät myös sitä, että etsitään tasapainoa parisuhteessa sekä perheen ja ystävien välillä. Tämä voi olla pareille ajoittain huomattava haaste.

Lisääntynyt herkkyys eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä kohtaan on luontaisesti tunnusomaista kulttuurienvälisille parisuhteille. Tämä herkkyys kehittyy, kun parit jatkuvasti neuvottelevat eroista ja yhtäläisyyksistä.

Sosiaalinen valta viittaa vallan ilmenemiseen puolisoiden välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa sekä parien ei-suomalaisten osapuolten ja heidän sosiaalisen verkostonsa välillä. Tämä voima osoittaa puolisoiden aseman eli sen, ovatko he parisuhteessa vahvempi vai heikompi osapuoli. Sosiaalinen valta liittyy kieleen ja kielenkäyttöön.

Sosiaaliseen tukeen kuuluu tarve saada tukea ja rohkaisua sekä puolisolta että parisuhteen ulkopuolelta. Se liittyy usein kieleen ja on osoituksena siitä, kuinka merkityksellisiä ovat ne kulttuuriset erot, joita ei-suomalaiset puolisot joutuvat käsittelemään.

Epävarmuus nousee kulttuurienvälisiin parisuhteisiin olennaisesti kuuluvista epävarmuustekijöistä. Niitä ovat esimerkiksi epävarmuus tulevaisuuden suhteen, päättämättömyys ja mahdottomuus tehdä pitkän aikavälin suunnitelmia.

Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksilla on yhteiskunnallista merkitystä nykyajassa, koska ne lisäävät tietojamme ja ymmärrystämme parisuhdeviestinnästä kulttuurienvälisessä kontekstissa. Tutkimuksen tärkein havainto on, että kulttuurienväliset parit kokevat erityisiä kulttuurienvälisyyteen liittyviä dialektisiä voimia, jotka ilmenevät jatkuvana uudelleenneuvotteluna ja sen kautta syntyvinä muina voimina. Tietoisuus näistä voimista tarjoaa mahdollisuuden syventää ymmärrystä kulttuurienvälisistä parisuhteista ja niihin liittyvistä kysymyksistä. Lisäksi tuloksia voidaan soveltaa kulttuurienvälisille pareille tarjottavassa ohjauksessa ja neuvonnassa.

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