

DEFINITION OF SELF IN THE WORLD OF MOBILITY
-MULTICULTURAL IDENTITY OF FINNISH YOUTH-

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<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>This study contributes to the further understanding of the self-conceptualization of young Finnish people with multicultural backgrounds by analyzing their life stories. While all the participants in this study positioned themselves as a multicultural individual, their life stories demonstrated different ways to ‘become’ multicultural while living mobile lives and interacting with diverse people. This finding supports the social constructionist view of identity; identity is constructed through interactions with the people they engage with in their lives.</p> <p>My analysis proposes two key contributing factors to the participants’ self-conceptualization as a multicultural individual: 1) a link between their identities and linguistic self-confidence and 2) a sense of belonging to mobile people. First, it became apparent that for the participants in this study, who are multilingual, their level of confidence in different languages affects their motivation to participate in the community, which could be a barrier to maintaining some aspects of their cultural identity; speaking multiple languages was an important part of their multiculturalism, which makes them desire to connect with new people through their use of language. Second, the participants tended to position themselves in multicultural settings, using the term “international community”, where they find people with whom they can share similar experiences in moving between languages and spaces. This finding indicates that young Finnish people who grew up in multicultural backgrounds feel a greater sense of belonging to a peer group with whom they could share similar mobility experiences, rather than to a community related to nationality or a common mother tongue. The self-positioning of people who have lived mobile lives is based on invisible factors such as their past experiences, which is an important theme that will require further investigation in the future. The participants’ life stories also demonstrated potential challenges faced by young Finns with multicultural roots. Such challenges indicated dominant discourses in Finnish society, including Othering and racialized “Finnishness”, as well as inadequate openness to inclusivity and a need for developing a global mindset. Among the participants in this study, those who did not conform to the traditional physical image of Finns shared their experiences of racism and othering in the interviews. This implies a traditional and limited definition of “Finnishness”, which results in the marginalization of multicultural youth in Finnish society who do not fit into such definitions. Shedding light on the voices of such multicultural individuals and exploring the realities they face will continue to be necessary to achieve a society in which multicultural individuals in similar circumstances can feel included.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

“Each of us involves identities of various kinds in disparate contexts. The same person can be of Indian origin, a Parsee, a French citizen, a US resident, a woman, a poet, a vegetarian, an anthropologist, a university professor, a Christian, a bird watcher, and an avid believer in extraterrestrial life and of the propensity of alien creatures to ride around the cosmos in multicolored UFOs. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person belongs, gives him or her a particular identity. They can all have relevance, depending on the context.” (Sen, 2005: 350)

With increased mobility across borders, people’s cultural identities have become more complex and multifaceted. Such a megatrend impacts individuals and their identities, creating new ones with a de-territorializing character, such as Global Cultural Identity (Džambazović & Gerbery, 2021). In Finland, a country that has witnessed a large influx of immigrants and has aimed at internationalization since the 1980s, a growing number of people are considered to have multiple cultural roots and thus develop multicultural identities while moving back and forth between boundaries. The constructions of such identities in intercultural contexts have attracted communication scholars (e.g., Dervin & Risager, 2014), encouraging them to recognize more fluid and diverse understandings of ‘self’. In line with such research trend, recent studies have paid much attention to the formation of bi-/multicultural identity in Finnish society, especially that of youth and young adults, including topics such as the experiences of Finnish young adults who grew up in a bicultural family (Vesamäki, 2016) and Othering faced by multicultural Finns (Yli-Saari, 2023). These studies emphasize the importance of the role of cultural identity in adolescence and its impact on their construction of ‘self’ by revealing such peoples’ internal conflicts regarding languages, cultural belonging, and discrimination based on cultural or ethnic differences.

The research method used in this study, the life story method, enables such individuals’ voices to be heard (Atkinson, 1998) and allows researchers to explore a social reality described by research participants in interviews. Employing the life story method, this study investigates the ‘lived’ experiences of young Finnish people with multiple cultural backgrounds through the lens of social constructionism. The participants in this study are Finnish youth under 29 years of age (according to the definition of ‘youth’ by Finland’s Youth Act), as this study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the formation of cultural identity—especially during their adolescence—, their influence on their self-perception later in their life, and social issues they have faced. By exploring these topics and documenting the results,

this thesis aims at adding to the existing body of knowledge on the identity formation of multicultural youth and, ultimately, leading towards the development of a more inclusive society.

This thesis begins by outlining the purpose of the study and the research questions. The following section presents a review of the literature on the key concepts of social constructionism and positioning theory, explaining the significance of these theoretical frameworks in this study. The methodology section then presents the research method, which is called the life story method, as well as the interview processes and the analytical approach, which is called dialogical constructionism. The subsequent section presents the analysis of common themes identified in six interviews, followed by a discussion of these themes in relation to the existing literature.

Keywords: multicultural identity, social constructionism, positioning, life story

2 AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the end of the 20th century to the present, the social situation in the world has shifted radically. Several factors have combined to change people's lives, including economic globalization and the fluidization of international relations. Such changes also encouraged cross-border movements of the working population, migration, and technological developments. In such a world, people experience 'mobility' at different levels, especially between languages and spaces, and develop complex cultural identities. This study explores such contemporary cultural identity construction by focusing on individuals' life stories.

In the 1980s, the prominent approach to cultural identity study was the functionalist approach (Martin and Nakayama, 1999), which generally views culture as a stable, harmonized entity and often categorizes it based on group membership. This perspective holds that cultural identity is a matter of group membership and is based on how strongly he/she identifies with a national, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and other groups (Tajfel, 1982). Such an approach, however, overlooks the aspect of social or cultural relationships and focuses solely on the affiliation of 'self' and group membership. To address this shortcoming, the second approach, the interpretive approach was established and became common in the late 1980s. Unlike the functionalist view, this approach argues that cultural identity is co-constructed, negotiated, and even reinforced within interactions with others. Several communication scholars from this standpoint believe that cultural identities are neither single nor stable but are flexible and constantly changing through communication with others. In other words, cultural identity includes all kinds of identities affiliated with social and cultural groups while not limited to frameworks such as nation or ethnicity. Resonating to this non-essentialist view, cultural theorist and sociologist Stewart Hall (1990) claims that cultural identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). His insight paved the way for the study of more complex cultural identities, including multicultural identities, in this modern world.

The idea of "being multicultural" was introduced as a "fluid, dynamic movement of the self, an ability to move in and out of contexts, and ability to maintain some inner coherence through varieties of situations" (Adler, 1976, p. 37). In other words, such a multicultural person is not naturally born, but rather, becomes one when they develop competence. According to Adler's (1998) essay "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism", such a

multiculturality cannot be measured by the languages they speak or the number of countries they have visited, but can be acknowledged by “a configuration of outlooks and world-view, by how the universe as a dynamically moving process is incorporated, by the way the interconnectedness of life is reflected in thought and action, and by the way this woman or man remains open to the imminence of experience (Adler, 1998, p.225-245)”. Acknowledging the significance of Adler’s concept of multiculturalism, however, I also recognize some critiques. For instance, Sparrow (2000) finds out in her study that some international students argue that Adler’s assumption is based only upon the perspectives of white men, and thus it does not resonate with their various intercultural experiences overseas; they rather describe themselves with alternative words such as marginality, in-betweenness, and uniqueness. Moreover, recent scholars like Benet-Martínez et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of paying attention to the bi-/multicultural individuals’ emotional suffering, arguing that the process of such complex identification either involves internal conflicts or can be a harmonized process. Therefore, in addition to abilities to become multicultural, such psychological aspects should also be considered when investigating cultural identity construction in modern times. This thesis thus attempts to contribute to an increased awareness of these issues by shedding light not only on the incidents narrated in the interviews but also on how the participants in this study felt when they experienced such events.

Another point to note in the preceding research is that cultural identity can be built on the determination of one’s own cultural roots, differences, otherness, and adaptation to the culture of the community (Pursiainen, 2011, p.257-258). Such recognition implies that cultural identity is also a matter of the significance of the ‘self’ in relation to the ‘other’. This may reflect the fact that the self/other dichotomy exists in Finnish society, as it does in other multicultural societies. According to recent scholarship from Finnish backgrounds like Koskinen (2015) and Rastas (2002), Finns with transnational roots (i.e., international adoptees) are made to be “other” and excluded from “Finnishness” by racialization. Judgments based on differences and stereotypes create the ‘other’ in Finnish society regardless of nationality, passport status, or self-perception, judgments based on differences and stereotypes create the ‘other’ in Finnish society. While the significance of such issues and their physical and psychological effects have been previously studied (e.g., Devadoss, 2020; Kirmayer, 2019), the cases of young people with multicultural roots living in Finland have received less attention compared to the cases in other multicultural societies. More research should be conducted in Finland on this topic, especially focusing on the case of youth who can be more vulnerable to the above-mentioned matters, to reduce judgments based solely on intrinsic factors and enhance their social and psychological well-being.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the contextual factors behind the formation of contemporary cultural identity among the research participants and the social issues they face. In this study, the life stories of young Finnish people from multicultural backgrounds are analyzed to explore these issues. Readers unfamiliar with life story analysis may question whether it is possible to discuss a social phenomenon by analyzing the personal experiences of the research participants. To answer this question, this study employs an analytical approach called dialogical constructionism (Sakurai, 2005), which allows us to explore the ‘lived experience’ of Finns with multicultural backgrounds as a social phenomenon. This approach is a

collaborative process based on interaction between the researcher and the participants, rather than on the participants' solo speeches. Through the analysis of the participants' life stories and self-conceptions, this study examines the following questions:

1. How do Finnish youth with multicultural backgrounds present their multiculturalism in interviews?
2. How do their life stories challenge, resist, or surrender to the social reality in Finland in the last two decades?
3. How do their experiences of mobility between languages and spaces influence their subsequent decision-making and self-conceptualization?

To answer these research questions, I conducted interviews with six young Finnish individuals who were aware of other cultural roots. All participants in this study were under the age of 29, which aligns with the definition of youth as outlined in the Youth Act (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). They were recruited through local communities in central Finland. This study follows a narrative analytic approach to elicit “interviewees’ reconstructed accounts of connections between events and between events and contexts” (Bryman, 2008, p. 559). Exploring these questions will help shed light on the realities facing multicultural Finnish youth within Finnish society. Such realities include the country’s inclusiveness over the past two decades and a lack of profound comprehension of individuals living among multiple cultures who have consequently developed complex cultural identities.

3 KEY CONCEPTS

3.1 Social Constructionism

Humans may take many things for granted and believe that there is a single, innate, and objective reality. Challenging such a conception of ‘reality’, social constructionists posit that ‘truth’ is neither single, absolute nor scientifically demonstratable, but rather a subjective interpretation that people create through interactions. The term social constructionism was first introduced by Berger and Luckman (1967) in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*. Their central idea is that individuals develop concepts while interacting with others in a social system, and in the end, such concepts turn into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. In other words, their interest is not in discovering the truth but in exploring how individuals’ different perceptions of the world are formed in society through culture, language, and interactions with others. One example of social construction is gender roles; the idea that ‘women should stay home and men should work’ is neither naturally generated nor an objective representation of fact, but developed by people in a social context; what people believe is eventually accepted in the community as fixed and unchangeable knowledge, which then creates social reality.

Similarly, even nations can be considered as socially constructed entities. Anderson (2006) views a nation as a socially constructed community that is imagined by the people who identify themselves as part of a group, and form and maintain their identities through shared cultural and religious practices. According to his concept of “imagined communities”, we humans imagine the nation while influenced by media and the print market, such as advertisements and posters; imagination is widely shared and taken for granted in society through language. As this process illustrates, language plays a central role in social constructionism, and thus this concept has been used in fields such as sociology, social ontology, and communication theory. Recent studies employing this concept discuss topics such as the constructionist view of race (Griffith, 2023) and the media’s capacity to reproduce and construct

reality (Ehondor & Edosomwan, 2021), exploring the interplay between language, culture, and thought. The findings in these studies demonstrate what factors can contribute to identity construction, encouraging the present study to pay attention to such factors.

In the Finnish context, recent studies have investigated the social construction of the Other in connection with race and ethnicity. For instance, Kingumets and Sippola (2022) examined how Estonians in Finland construct their whiteness through online discussions with other Estonian migrants; they position themselves in relation to the majority of Finns and racialized Others in Finnish society. Additionally, Leinonen and Toivanen (2014 in Hoegaerts *et al.*, 2022) observed that ethnicity and race can be constructed not only through visible features like skin color but also through audible markers, such as one's language and accent. It is crucial to acknowledge these findings in the present study, as they encourage the examination of these aspects when exploring the participants' cultural identity formation and its connection to socially constructed realities.

While social constructionism has been acknowledged in various fields, including race and ethnicity, sexuality, and other social science fields, it has also received numerous criticisms from other conceptualizations, such as realism and relativism. For instance, its anti-realist characteristic that does not view knowledge as a direct perception of reality is accused (Craib, 1997). Additionally, its inability to argue anything at all in terms of claims about the nature of language, objects, and reality (Stam, 2001) and its lack of attention to the fact that power is essential to the understanding of subjectivity (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999) are critically discussed. While considering these critical perspectives, this study uses social constructionism to explore identity formation at the individual level and to approach realities experienced by participants, focusing on their culture, language, and interactions with others described in interviews.

3.2 Positioning Theory

Interaction with others is an inevitable part of everyday life. From a sociocultural perspective, an individual's identity is shaped by their interactions and relationships with others. Stemming from such perspectives, the idea of positioning began developing from psychologist Hollway's (1984) work on gender difference, which argues that "Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people" (p. 233). This idea was further outlined by Brownyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) in a significant attempt to examine and explore the distribution, rights, and duties to speak and behave in face-to-face communication. The focus of this theory is thus the roles and deployments of discourse, such as word choice, metaphor, and rhetorical strategy in positioning itself and others. While emphasizing the significance of 'role', this theory differs from the Role Theory (Ralph Linton, George Herbert Mead, 1940s) which posits that the expectations of a person in a role are socially defined and the language spoken by the person in that role is often interpreted within the scope of that role (e.g., a mother and a child speak according to their roles in 'mother' and 'child'). Rather, the positioning theory focuses on the actual dialogue, positing that the self is created through dialogue with others, and it is possible to independently

decide what position to take in each dialogue (Davies & Harré, 1999). This means that, in the same dialogue, we can decide our position in relation to the other person, for example, sometimes as a ‘mother’, sometimes as a ‘member of society’, and sometimes as a ‘victim’.

The term ‘position’ in this theory does not mean a location or situation in which something or someone is placed. rather, it is defined as—based on the social constructionist view—a set of rights and obligations that is non-perpetual, situational, and disputable (Harré, 2012); individuals build up their identities through certain conversations and either identify themselves with others or put themselves in opposition to them. Thus, positioning is about how we use words and such discourses to put ourselves and others in a certain location, which can be multi-layered and ambiguous, as they project more than one position at a time and can be interpreted differently by different individuals (Davies & Harré, 1990). As more individuals grow up in multiple countries and multicultural environments, recent research on positioning has studied positioning for people living mobile lives, including topics like identity construction among third-culture kids (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2017) and self-positioning of individuals with respect to gender in transnational contexts (Trąbka & Wojnicka, 2017). These studies show how such people’s sense of belonging is constantly being challenged, reflecting on the tendency of the general public to interpret only a single fragment of such peoples’ identity (e.g., their passport country). Paying attention to such aspects is important when exploring the self-positioning of the participants in this study, as well as for investigating the social context in which such a sense was formed.

Focusing on the Finnish context, recent research has studied the collective positioning of “Finnishness” in relation to the positioning processes of people in minority groups in Finland. For instance, Karimi’s (2024) research investigated the positionality of a non-white person in Finnish society; Finnish citizens/residents with non-Western or non-Christian backgrounds may position themselves in relation to others who distinguish non-white individuals in a specific situation (i.e., avoiding alcohol due to religiosity). His research also found that the perception of ‘Finnishness’ can be reconstructed by excluding the Other; those who do not have a skin color and name that does not match the widely perceived image of Finn can be positioned as a stranger regardless of how they position themselves. Such research outcomes demonstrate that an individual’s positioning may be contested by others when their social behavior or physical characteristics differ from the majority in the community. Moreover, with the increased social media usage, minority members’ positioning on social media platforms has been studied. A study by Sippola et al. (2022) examined social media discussions in Facebook groups of two large minority groups in Finland (i.e., Estonian- and Russian-speaking people). They recognized the study participants’ endeavor to position themselves toward the “native” Finnish habitat; people in the two minority groups consider the ability to understand normative rules in Finnish society as the key to “correctly” positioning themselves. It is important to consider these aspects of positioning for this study, as they help to focus on two key areas: firstly, the impact of interactions between research participants and those with whom they interact; and secondly, how they strive to be incorporated and feel accepted in their positioning processes.

4 METHODOLOGIES

This study employs the life story method, a qualitative research method used for exploring individuals' life story narratives, as Davies and Harré (1990) acknowledge a strong tie between positioning theory and narrative structure. This section first presents the life story method and then describes the processes of life story interviews, including the sampling method and the backgrounds of the study participants. Finally, the analysis method section presents the narrative analytical approach called dialogical constructionism, explaining why that approach was chosen for this study.

4.1 Life Story as a Research Focus

First, the basic concept of life story is, according to Bruner (1986), that individuals' meaning-making for some experience is done through narrative modes of thinking. The 'meaning' here refers to linking and plotting two or more events, organizing experiences, and making sense of them. What is noteworthy in this perspective is that such meaning-making is not done for a single event or object but meaning 'emerges' after a context has been given by creating a narrative about the event. In this respect, cultural anthropologist Geertz's (1987) concept of 'Thick description' is significant. This concept does not simply indicate the richness of the description of the data; rather, it considers the intentional, communicative, and interpretative meaning of the behavior by asking why and how it was done, read, and used in which social codes. The researcher's attempt to describe the narrator's own meaning-making is therefore important in the data collection. Another point to note is life story research is a collaborative process based on the interaction between the researcher and the narrator. Sakurai (2005) recognizes that life stories are not constructed solely from the narrator's experience and representation of past events but from the interests of both participants and the interviewer in the interview scene. Thus, the researcher also participates in the research informants' life story process to construct a shared narrative.

Research focusing on life stories has been introduced for a relatively long time. One of the pioneers of life story research is a French sociologist Daniel Bertaux, who studied French

partisan bakeries, seeking to understand the artisan “boulange” as a sociostructural system in society as a whole. Shedding light on the voices of people in subordinate and minor positions in society, his study and other studies following his perspective challenge the implicit premise of episteme in quantitative research, including the idea that researchers are the ones who know enough to explain society and culture. The movement toward life stories, where we tell our own narrative in our own language, is founded by cognitive psychologist Bruner as a means of seeking validity for the narrative (1986, 1987, 1990, 1991 in Atkinson, 1998). Today, there are two major approaches to life story research methods generally accepted; one is called the realism approach, and the other is called the narrative approach. While the realism approach focuses on “what actually happened” and seeks a single truth, the narrative approach emphasizes “how people make sense of what happened and to what effect”. This study applies the latter approach, as it is based on the constructionist standpoint and used to understand individuals’ identities, worldviews, and local cultures (Sakurai & Kobayashi, 2005). In contrast to the realism approach, the narrative approach assumes that the world in which the narrators live is only the world insofar as it is told and accepts so-called ‘facts’ as being of such a nature. While the definition of narrative in the dictionary can be ‘story, talk, or telling’ and the verb narrate means ‘to tell or describe (in order)’, it is not simply about speaking about events and objects; it is a narrative with semantic cohesion and an inherent chronology of events, mental states, and characters (Minoura, 2002). In other words, the narrator speaks according to the “story” he or she tells while what is not in accordance with that story is, either consciously or unconsciously, not told.

The life story approach features a collaborative process in which the researcher also participates in the construction of the life story through interviews. Such an approach allows the researcher to understand and interpret the social phenomena surrounding the narrator. I find this method suitable, as a personal life story is referred to as “a tool for identity-making and self-representation” (Sakurai & Kobayashi, 2005, p. 213), and allows people to organize their experiences and realize a sense of ‘self’ as an intentional, continual entity through time. Furthermore, this method encourages researchers to identify a broader range of potential roles and standards within a human community through the analysis of one’s life story. This is therefore a valuable approach when studying the social reality of a community.

4.2 Interview

This study employs the interview method called the life story interview. This qualitative research method is used to understand individuals’ identities, worldviews, and local cultures (Sakurai & Kobayashi, 2005). The life story interview consists of three stages. The first stage is the planning or pre-interviews, where the interviewer prepares for the interview and, especially, understands why and how a life story can be beneficial to their study. Before actual interviews, I was already acquainted with the participants, as it is less likely to be easy for interviewees to tell a complete stranger (and a foreigner) a personal story (Plath, 1985). In addition, each participant was asked to briefly describe 1) why they thought they would fit

the criteria of this study (e.g., family backgrounds and studying abroad experiences) and 2) what made them think that “I am multicultural”. Such descriptions were collected via emails and electronic messages. The first question was important to grasp participants’ social, and cultural background, which encouraged further understanding during the interview. Meanwhile, the second question was helpful to make a comparison of the self-perception before and after the interview.

The second stage is the interview itself, in which the interviewer guides a participant to tell their life story and records it. Unlike standardized questionnaires, life story interviews are based on relatively free conversation, where the interviewer does not interrupt the interviewee’s speech, as the interviewee and the interviewer are “collaborators in an open-ended process” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 126). Although interviews were not recorded as videos, I wrote down the tones of voices and facial expressions of participants during interviews so that I could include them in transcripts later. Interviews were conducted between November and December 2023, and all interviews were conducted in one of the group work rooms in the library on Seminaarinmäki campus of the University of Jyväskylä. Each interview lasted about 40 to 60 minutes.

The final stage is the process of transcribing and interpreting the interviews. The transcript of the interviews should include not only the narrator’s oral language but also the interviewer’s questions and phrases. This is because the life story is a co-construction process of the interviewer and the interviewee. Transcripts of only part of the narrative within the whole interview or the narrator’s narrative to the exclusion of the listener should be avoided, as narratives have a sequence and dialogical constructionism emphasizes the interactive process and the content of what is said in the interview (Sakurai, 2005). According to Sakurai (2005), transcripts are not necessarily as detailed as conversation analysis but are described in such a way as to give context to the interview situation and the characteristics of the narrative, including interruptions, the narrator’s gestures, and facial expressions. Such information is integral to the process by which narratives are constructed.

4.3 Sampling

In this study, I conducted six semi-structured interviews to investigate the self-conceptualization of young multicultural individuals in Finnish society, as well as the social issues facing them. The informants of this study are Finnish youth under the age of 29, especially those who meet one of the following criteria:

- 1) Those who have lived elsewhere than Finland for at least two years in their middle childhood (6 and 12) or adolescence (10-19 years old)
- 2) Those who have a perceived multicultural identity (= “I am multicultural”)
- 3) Individuals of diverse cultural heritage (e.g., whose parents had different cultural backgrounds)

For the selection of participants, snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 124-125) was used to reach out to people who meet the criteria above. In addition to a recorder and field note, personal records such as emails and electronic messages will also be used because the importance of such records has been emphasized in the tradition of life story interviews and adds credibility to the research (Sakurai & Kobayashi, 2005). Interviews are transcribed and then analyzed following narrative analysis, which recognizes the structure, content, and function of written, or oral stories (Bamberg, 2012) and is concerned with the shared accounts of groups in which people live and form their identities (Murray & Sargeant, 2012). This analytical method would allow researchers to handle the construction and reconstruction of individuals' developmental processes, especially when approaching from a social constructionist perspective, which is more concerned with the analysis of 'small stories' that emerge from everyday communication (Bamberg, 2012). Amongst several narrative analysis methods, this study especially follows the analytical concept called dialogical constructionism proposed by Atsushi Sakurai (2005), a Japanese sociologist who mainly investigates the life stories of survivors of war and discrimination. Details are described in the following sections.

The participants in this study were recruited through a local and an international student community in Jyväskylä. Thus, all participants were in their early 20s and many were university students. The table below shows the participants' backgrounds and the reasons why they thought they would fit this study. Their background information is based on the short description given by the participants before the interviews. Participants are pseudonymized.

Table 1

Participants' Backgrounds and Reasons for Participation in the Study

	Backgrounds/Reasons for Participation
Erika	She has a Finnish mother and an English father and thinks that her background is sort of multicultural. She has only lived in Finland, but she did the International Baccalaureate Program and spent her high school time in a very international community.
Nina	She has Finnish parents and has spent six years of her childhood living in Belgium. She has spent more time with international people than Finnish people throughout her education because she attended a European school after moving to Finland at the age of 11 as well.
Emiliya	She has Russian parents and speaks Russian at home. Although both of her parents are from Russia, she thinks that Russia is a second home, as she was born and grew up in Finland.
Eithan	He was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Finland when he was 5 years old. He considers himself multicultural, as he and his parents have different cultural backgrounds (i.e., his father is Dominican, and his mother is Finnish).
Sania	She is originally from Pakistan but has lived in Finland for 10 years and is incorporated in Finnish. She considers that she is not that much like Finn

	while her activities are like Finn.
Nomi	Her mother is Finnish, and her father is Pakistani and Lebanese. She has lived in Finland since she was 5 years old, but she has, or at least tried to, keep up with her father's culture, too. She feels that she is multicultural even if she has lived here for quite a while. She is also adopted, which brings a whole lot of stuff into the mix.

4.4 Analysis Method—Dialogical Constructionism Approach—

The interviews were analyzed based on the dialogical constructionism approach proposed by Sakurai (2005). The distinctive feature of this approach is the categorization of the social contexts that appear in life stories into unique categories such as master narratives and model stories. The former defines cultural and historical meanings at the level of the whole society, while the latter is a narrative that recognizes norms and common sense knowledge at the community level. This study focuses on master narratives and examines how the research participants challenged, resisted, or surrendered to these master narratives. The social contexts to be categorized and examined are selected from the narratives of personal experience that use generalizing phrases such as “usually”, “definitely”, “never”, “must”, and “have to” as signposts. Thus, by focusing not only on the content of the narrative but also on the way it is told, the dialogical constructionism approach attempts to find the social context of norms and common knowledge within the life story itself and to understand the content of the narrative as a social phenomenon beyond personal experience. Moreover, this method posits that the narrative is constructed as a meaningful story during the interview; while traditional interview research focuses on the content of the narrator’s story (i.e. “what” they said), in life story interviews, much attention is paid to the mode of the narrative (i.e. “how” they said). In other words, the narrative of a life story is not necessarily something that the narrator has already kept and brought to the interview, but “is constructed through the mutual action between the narrator and the interviewer” (p.28).

When analyzing life stories, this method also focuses on the events told by the participants, their feelings, and their evaluations of those events. By carefully reading transcribed interviews and conducting inductive coding, the researcher identifies the common patterns and themes in those elements in different narratives that appeared in interviews. Those common patterns and themes are then categorized into master narratives, and how the participants coped with or surrendered to master narratives was also examined. Individuals’ life story consists of both their unique narratives and dominant master narratives, and thus telling a life story is a practice that people historicize the past by positioning themselves in relation to their community and society.

This study employs the dialogical constructionism approach because it is an effective framework for the following reasons recognized by Ishiguro (2007). First, this approach enables us to closely examine how people in multicultural relationships construct reality through language; this approach does not see the narratives in interviews as ‘oral facts’ but as ‘lin-

guistic representations that are constructed' in the interactional situation of the interview. Second, dialogical constructionism sees narratives in interviews not as 'oral statements of fact', but as 'linguistic representations that are constructed' in the interactional scene of the interview. This provides insight into how people living in multicultural relationships construct reality through language. Third, dialogical constructionism reframes the researcher's position in the interview from a 'neutral position' to that of a 'collaborator'. Such a shift in the analytical framework allows for a more careful interpretation of the multicultural relationships in which the narrator is involved. In these respects, dialogical constructionism can be effective for research that seeks to understand and explain the relationships between individuals and the multicultural situations surrounding them.

5 PARTICIPANTS' LIFE STORIES

This section summarizes the participants' life stories and anchors the themes I will discuss later. What all participants had in common was that they had 'experiences of mobility' between languages or spaces. In particular, they shared the common denominator of having grown up in a multilingual environment from an early age. Such an environment is, for example, where the language used at home is different from the language used at school, or where the father's language is different from the mother's language. In addition, children are exposed to living in places with different languages and customs from an early age, for example when their parents migrate or move from their previous place of residence to a new and unfamiliar place, or when they temporarily return home each time their parents go on holiday.

Such experiences of mobility are by no means a phenomenon found only in childhood or adolescence, rather, it is also possible for growing individuals to encounter situations in which they use multiple languages again as they grow older, or to meet others who have had similar experiences, which may recall childhood experiences of using multiple languages and make sense of these memories as new experiences. The six life stories of Finnish youth with multicultural backgrounds illustrate not only this language element but also other components of Finnish youth's self-conceptualization in today's world of mobility. Each life story opens with a quote from the participant's answer to the final question of the interview, "What makes you feel multicultural"? Several participants' responses were consistent with their self-description prior to the interview, but some respondents saw some changes in their definitions of being multicultural after they had finished telling their life stories.

5.1 Erika

The thing that makes me feel most multicultural is, if I'm, like, in a community. Like, if I'm in a Finnish community, I don't feel connected. I notice that there are differences in a way that I think because of the family background that I have, or because of the educational background that I have. But also, if I'm in a fully international community, I notice, "Okay, there are Finnish parts of me" that I feel like I want to connect more, or that I start appreciating when being in the exclusively international community. (Erika)

Born to an English father and a Finnish-Greek mother in Finland, Erika started developing different sides—linguistically and culturally—of herself. She mentioned that she started living with her mother after her parents divorced while keeping in contact with her father. She continued telling me about her childhood memories; when she was eight years old, she and her mother moved to a smaller city in southeastern Finland, as her mother found a job there. She lived there until the age of fifteen and then moved to the capital region since she wanted to go to a specific high school there.

According to Erika, the turning point in her life was when she saw the presentation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) school in the capital region; she was inspired by the school's atmosphere of "international community" and "open energy" shown in the presentation by that school. Recalling those days, she mentioned her desire to expose herself to a more rigorous academic environment, as she did not think that she was in an environment where people had a similar "studious" mindset to her when living in that smaller city. Impressed by the presentation, especially its Diploma Program (DP) that required a great academic commitment, she enrolled in that IB school and began her school life. She explained that the DP program also allowed her to be in a bilingual environment, as every student in that program studied in both their best language and in other languages taught as a requirement of the program. She also told me, in a positive tone, that she enjoyed exploring globally significant issues in different languages. At the same time, however, she also confessed that her first year in that IB school was overwhelming although her English skills were already pretty good at that time; for her, it was not always easy to understand different communication styles while she was confident in English since she had spent time with her English father and watched a lot of English content. She reflects on that first year as follows:

It was pretty overwhelming at first when I entered that school because I felt like, just it was a different culture, like just the way the people communicate (was different). (...) There was a lot of new stuff, just very different, like, culturally, socially. Um, in comparison to my previous school, I think people were also much more like, academic in a way and discussed things, uh I don't know, just [pause] I would say, (they) were like more curious people. (Erika)

Additionally, Erika mentioned that she sometimes felt left out when she recognized a gap between her and her classmates' family backgrounds and educational backgrounds. This episode emerged when she told me about her classmates with a sigh. According to her, a lot of her classmates' parents had worked in several countries before, and many of them had prestigious professions like a diplomat. This seems to have made her feel left out in terms of the amount of international experience since she had only lived in Finland. Moreover, she told me that there were also a lot of students from private international schools, and she found herself different from them because she had not been in such an environment before the IB school. As she became aware of those gaps between her classmates, she developed inner conflict regarding her identity and felt "I don't know where I belong". She stated that she also often asked herself questions like "Am I where I want to be?" and "Can I express my most authentic 'self' with these people?" She also mentioned that "It is important to have someone who understands you", but she did not feel that when she entered the IB school.

According to Erika, she started feeling that she belonged to that “international community” in a lot of ways once she got used to the environment where diverse people speak different languages. She said that she began to enjoy school, especially when discussing international issues like global nature. She considered this a significant change in her life regarding her sense of belonging because, when she was in a Finnish community, she did not feel connected with people around her; she often thought that her family and educational background seemed different from her Finnish classmates even though she was born and raised in Finland. She concluded that the IB school was thus a place where she saw herself as different from others and positioned herself as part of the “international community” where people have different communication styles. When mentioning the “international community”, she simultaneously showed a desire to connect with more people from all around the world, hoping to travel more, live in different places, and go on exchange. Her experience of interacting with diverse people at IB school has undoubtedly played an important role in her search for her own position from which to view herself; she identifies herself with the international community while also being aware of the English and Finnish aspects of her “self”.

5.2 Nina

It (what makes me feel that I am multicultural) is the language I speak, it's the friends I made. (Nina)

Unlike the case of Erika, Nina has parents who are both from central Finland. In the interview, she conceptualized herself as multicultural, as she spent six years of her childhood in Belgium, went to European schools, and spent more time with international people than Finnish people during her education there. As she explained, she lived in the capital area where she was born in the first couple of years of her life and then moved to Brussels when her mother got a job with the European Union there. According to her, she attended a European school there for six years and moved back to Finland. She also mentioned her school life in a European school in Finland; she studied there for seven years and then moved to central Finland after graduation. Recalling the multicultural and multilingual environments in her growing up, she described her feelings about the use of different languages in interacting with people.

Still, sometimes I feel like, in social situations, I tend to use English better [laughter] than Finnish, then I get along with people better. (Nina)

As Nina stated, the language she speaks and the friends she makes play key roles in her sense of being multicultural. Comparing her experiences in European schools and the Finnish school she attended, she explained how she developed such a multicultural identity. According to Nina, the European schools she went to emphasized multiculturalism and multilingualism and thus her friend group in those schools consisted of people from various countries, including, German, Hungarian, Italian, Greek, French-Finnish, and Finnish people. She mentioned that she enjoyed listening to different languages—especially French, as she knew it a little—every day. Such an environment allowed her to interact with diverse people and de-

velop her multiculturalism without having international parents or traveling to several countries. In the interview, Nina described her school friendships as follows.

It was really difficult for me to make friends. Of course, (it was) because everybody already knew each other and they weren't very open to new people joining and...[laughter]. That was something I was confused by, because I'd always be, at the European school, I was sort of everybody's friend. (Nina)

She described her slight sense of isolation when she started attending Finnish school. As she stated, she found it difficult to make friends with others (i.e., young Finnish locals when she came back to Finland and got into a Finnish school, as they had already known each other and did not seem to welcome her. Meanwhile, she told me that people in the European school were more open-minded and easier to get along with. According to her, she has gotten along with people better when speaking English, which indicates that the language (i.e., Finnish) was a certain barrier to getting into a new community. Another hurdle she mentioned in the interview was the gap between the two different types of school cultures. When she went to the first class in the Finnish school, she was surprised to find that the structure of the class depended on the teacher, as she was used to the European school system with its concrete curriculum. She vividly recalled some shocking moments, such as her classmates talking loudly during class as if it were a break, which she found very different from the lecture style she was used to. She said that such experiences in the school culture gap demotivated her to continue her studies at the Finnish school, and thus she started attending a European school again. At the end of the interview, she showed her desire to interact with more international people remained after she entered the university, and she worked as an international tutor for new students.

5.3 Emiliya

My family is from Russia and my both parents grew up in the USSR (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and I've visited Russia many many times and lived there for even a couple of months at that time, so I definitely feel like it's my second home even though I was born here in Finland. (Emiliya)

Emiliya was born in a city in southern Finland and is currently studying in central Finland. Although she was born and raised in Finland, she considers Russia as her second home since her parents are from Russia and some of her relatives still live there. She mentioned that having Russian roots is still something "really nostalgic and interesting" for her although she cannot visit them as often as she used to because of the current war between Russia and Ukraine. According to her, the Russian part of her identity is rooted in her childhood experiences, especially in popular culture such as cartoons, as she explained as follows.

I feel like my childhood was full of Russian culture, like the media because, especially before the school age, before I was introduced more to Finnish friends and cultures, it was mostly the Russian DVDs that we had movies and stuff like that. (Emiliya)

In addition to popular culture, she mentioned her memory of visiting her grandparents in St Petersburg and spending holidays with them at their summer cottage, which she described as “a really special place to me”. In addition to her grandparents, she remembered her Russian friend with whom she often talked over the fence. According to her, these memories symbolize her “pure joy of childhood and freedom”. Furthermore, her family language seems to have played an important role in the development of her cultural identity, as she would always speak Russian with her parents at home; as she has lived with her mother for a long time since her parents divorced, most of her family memories are with her mother, such as celebrating her birthday together and learning handcraft from her, which became her hobby later. Although Emiliya lived apart from her father, she said that she often visited him and did some activities together, such as watching Russian cartoons, which became her way of maintaining and strengthening her Russian identity—“Russianization” as she called it—with her friend when she grew up.

It’s been really, really meaningful to me to have someone that understands where I come from. (Emiliya)

Emiliya mentioned that, aside from her family, her friends with Russian roots also help her maintain the Russian part of her identity in Finland. As she said in the interview, what she values in her friendships is being able to share experiences and even culture, such as food and popular culture. According to her, Russia is still her second home and a country she feels nostalgic about. She mentioned that she and her friend sometimes “Russianized” each other by speaking Russian and watching Russian movies or cartoons, which is related to her childhood memories with her father. An important element of her cultural identity is not only her national culture or popular culture, but also her school culture in high school where she strongly identifies herself as a member of her school community, as she mentioned below:

It was definitely the right place for me, I felt like, I had, like the people around me were more of my people and we were serious about the school. (Emiliya)

Similar to other participants, Emiliya shared that she was dedicated to her studies; she voluntarily chose to attend a high school with a higher GPA standard, where she found “my people”. She mentioned that her high school years were also a “changing point” and one of the “crucial points” in her later decisions, as she came to realize what she really wanted to study in the future. “I really find myself in an international setting”, she said when she was talking about her university life. According to her, she thinks and feels that she gets along very well with international students while spending time with people from different backgrounds. While most of her tutoring experiences are positive, as the end of her talk was quite often drowned out by laughter, a slightly sad expression was seen on her face when she started to tell me that she was aware of a lot of hatred resulting from the war between Russia and Ukraine. She told me that such hatred made her think about with whom, what, and how much she could talk to new students about her own roots. Slowing down her pace of speech, Emiliya also said that even such popular culture that represents her childhood can bring a lot of hatred although it is a “very separate thing from the war Mixed feelings about her own roots will remain as long as the public trend of linking nation and culture continues. Nevertheless,

she showed her strong will to maintain relationships with people who share the same or similar roots, as well as to connect with more diverse people through her exchange program in the United States in 2024.

5.4 Eithan

I think it's the fact that I have, like been living abroad and my father is from another country. And because my father is from another country, half of my family is also from another culture, so I have a lot of influence from other than Finnish culture. So that's why I think I'm multicultural. And I also, because I speak two languages as a native, so that's also another thing. (Eithan)

Born to a Dominican father and a Finnish mother, Eithan considers himself multicultural. According to him, speaking two different languages, Finnish and Spanish, as his mother tongue has influenced his sense of being multicultural. As he explained, he spent most of his childhood with his father in the Dominican Republic because his mother was in Finland at the time. He described the feeling he had when he moved to Finland when he was about five years old as follows:

I remember when I came here [cough], I was like, I was more like open, open to others. I was like trying to make like the first, how could I say, like the first move, like trying to get to people, but then other children were pretty, pretty shy and didn't really [laughter], like connect with me, I could say. But [pause] yeah, it might be because I didn't speak Finnish that well. (Eithan)

Like the other participants, Eithan perceived a gap between himself and the Finnish people at his school in terms of openness and described it as “culture shock”. He mentioned that he did not even want to move to Finland at first because of uncertainty, as he did not know much about the country and the languages. According to him, he was also aware that his Finnish language skills served as a barrier to building relationships with others at a new school and he had a hard time making friends in his first year. However, he recalled in the interview that he “always had really good classmates” and that he was “really popular in the new school”. Such positive phrases were often associated with sports, especially football, throughout the interview. For instance, he mentioned that his class played football on the first day at the new school, and he scored an amazing goal, which he recalls as “a good start”. As stated by Eithan, his desire to play football more seriously grew in high school, and he spent a lot of his free time playing football, which also helped him integrate into a new community. Meanwhile, his confidence in Spanish remained a concern for some time, as he noted in the interview.

I wasn't really confident in speaking Spanish. So, I wanted to go there (Chile) and get the confidence back. (Eithan)

In Eithan's case, linguistic mobility occurred between his two mother tongues, Spanish and Finnish. According to him, no one spoke Spanish in the town where he spent his childhood although his Finnish was “not as efficient as the Spanish part” when he came to Finland; his Spanish was “stronger” because he had spent a long time with his father and spoke

Spanish in the Dominican Republic. However, he mentioned that the situation reversed years later when he learned Finnish and began to use it more. While he wanted to maintain his Spanish language skills, he did not join any Spanish-speaking communities because he was “so shy” and “embarrassed to speak the language”. As a bilingual individual, he perceived different character traits in himself when speaking different languages in the interview. As he mentioned in the interview, he may exhibit “stereotypically more Latin” characteristics when he speaks Spanish, whereas he may appear “a little bit more shy” when speaking Finnish. As he mentioned, his desire to enhance his Spanish proficiency was reinforced in a Finnish-speaking milieu, which prompted him to participate in an exchange program in Chile during his second year of studies. According to him, he made a lot of international friends as well as local friends during his exchange program. He posited that his immersion in a Spanish-speaking environment had an impact on his personality, as he recalled his feelings after the exchange program as follows.

And yeah, that was a really great experience. I think got back a little my, like my, open-mindedness from there (Chile). (...) When I came back from Chile, I think I was more outgoing. (Eithan)

Eithan’s expression “got back my open-mindedness” indicated that he associated his memory of the exchange program in Chile and his childhood memory in the Dominican Republic. As he stated, Chile has a rich natural environment, which he enjoyed exploring and engaging in excursions almost every weekend. Likewise, in the Dominican Republic, he was surrounded by nature and frequently engaged in activities such as playing in rivers and riding horses in a small village where his family resided. These similar environments, rich in nature, seem to have brought back his childhood openness to new experiences. Furthermore, he posited that the contrast in pedagogical approaches may have contributed to his perception. He mentioned that the lectures at the university in Chile were more interactive than those in Finland, as he engaged in a considerable amount of group work and group projects there. He noted that in Finland, there was a dearth of responses to questions posed by lecturers, which may have constrained his open-mindedness. Moreover, he mentioned that he worked as an international tutor and found some Spanish speakers after coming back to Finland and regaining his open-mindedness. According to him, his experience in Chile motivated him to affiliate with his Spanish-speaking community at home and provided him with a greater sense of self-affirmation as a multicultural and multilingual person.

5.5 Sania

I come from Pakistan and I have lived in Finland for many years, so I can incorporate a bit different cultures now (while) living in two cities. So if I were to move to a different country and different culture, I think I would adapt there now really quickly because I have now first-hand experience. (Sania)

Sania was born in Pakistan to Pakistani parents and moved to Finland when she was ten years old. Having lived in Finland for ten years, she now sees Finland as her “home” and Pakistan

as a “visiting country”. As she described in the interview, she and her family had a hard time adjusting to life in Finland during the first year due to a language barrier, a different communication style, and even racism in her neighborhood. She described her feelings when she started living in Finland as follows:

Honestly, in the beginning, I didn’t wanna be here. Like, I really missed my friends in Pakistan, I missed my family members in Pakistan, like my grandparents and my cousins and everyone. I would miss them all, and I didn’t like to be here. And at that time, it was also, like racism was a lot. (Sania)

As Sania stated, she vividly remembers her feelings when she left the country of her birth, since she was old enough to have memories at that time. In the interview, she rarely took a break when talking about her family and childhood, which seemed to indicate the depth of her emotional attachment to her original roots and her family. She also mentioned that, during her first year in Finland, she did not feel like “We belonged here at all” and felt that her family was not “welcomed”, especially when people told her and her family “Hey, you don’t belong here” and “You should go back to your country”. She also heard some racist comments like “You are brown” which, according to her, were often heard in her neighborhood and public spaces, including bus stops and shopping malls. Meanwhile, she recalled in the interview that the kids and teachers in her first school in Finland were “really nice” and “understanding”. She did not mention any racism-related experiences in the narrative about her school. Nevertheless, she still had other difficulties at school, such as making friends and feeling excluded from all conversations until she learned Finnish. After studying Finnish for about ten to eleven months in school, she started helping her parents with translation. She indicated that her proficiency in Finnish facilitated her interactions with local individuals, as it afforded her greater ease in communication.

Despite her proficiency in the Finnish language, Sania and her family continued to experience communication challenges for an extended period of time. According to her, this was due to the fact that the majority of people around them did not speak English at that time. One outstanding episode regarding language was about the time when half of her face was paralyzed for no known reason in her fifth or sixth month in Finland. She mentioned that she and her family were unable to request assistance in English at that time; despite her embarrassment and loss of motivation, she was unable to convey her condition to anyone, including medical professionals. Her family ultimately decided to return to Pakistan and seek care from local physicians for her facial condition. “I didn’t wanna be here (Finland)”, Sania expressed her feelings after having such an experience. Aside from the languages, she also mentioned that “understanding the privacy of Finnish people” was one of the barriers to making friends and getting into a new community. She contrasted communication styles in Pakistan and Finland as follows.

In Pakistan, we are like really open in conversations. We, no one feels, like, no one minds anything. You can say whatever you wanna say, like, no one would mind anything. But in Finland, if you say something you have to be careful with you are saying, what you are saying because things can get personal, and they might not even like it. So Finnish people are really really, like, conservative in that way that they will tell you stuff if they trust you. (Sania)

According to Sania, Finnish people have “personal boundaries” not only with international people but also with those close to them. At first, this seemed “weird” to her, as there are no such boundaries in Pakistan. “You can go say hi to anyone and they will be your friends”, said Sania, explaining that “neighbors are like best friends” in Pakistan. One episode that symbolized her and her family’s unconsciousness of such boundaries among Finnish people was when she tried to share food with her neighbors. She told me that most of the time her neighbors became confused when Sania’s family shared food and one of them even took their plate and threw it on the floor, saying, “You guys are weird”; while it was normal for Sania’s family to share food, as she called it “our culture”, it was unusual for Finnish people to share food with people who are not very close to them. As she stated, becoming aware of such boundaries took her a while. However, the teachers at her school were so supportive that she was able to learn “how we do it here in Finland”. She now appreciates the fact that Finnish people are more open to strangers when they know “you are a good person”.

As she became accustomed to the Finnish lifestyle, food culture, and communication style, her perception of Pakistan as her home and her feelings about the country changed. While her first visit to Pakistan in 2014 was “amazing”, as she “just felt like at home” and “everything was just nice”, she missed Finland on her latest visit in 2022. She described her feelings as follows.

Like I said, traditional food and traditional parties and whatever events we had, that was like, great. But yeah, it was like because of the weather and also like, humidity over there, it was like, I was like... yeah I just wanna go back to Finland. It’s like...Pakistan is great, but Finland is my home now, so. (Sania)

According to her, the primary reason she missed Finland was due to the living conditions, particularly the weather and hygiene. In Finland, for instance, tap water is drinkable and the electricity never goes off due to bad weather whereas in Pakistan people cannot live without fans and air conditioners and must be aware of bugs. Additionally, she listed other things that irritated her, including the incessant honking of cars, the late-night operation of stores, and the non-compliance with traffic signals. She mentioned that these were all normal to her before when she was living there, but she did not feel that way on her most recent visit. As she now considers Finland to be her “home” and Pakistan to be a “visiting country”, the roles of these two countries have been reversed as a result of her experience of mobility.

Despite her experience of mobility, she does not see any changes in her personality when speaking different languages or being in different countries. She described this as follows:

Like wherever I go, well in Pakistan as well, like I said I’m outgoing (and) extrovert, so it’s easy for me to go to Pakistan from Finland. I know how to control myself (stressed each word) as well. But still keep my personality. So I’m like myself in both faces. So I don’t, I don’t have any change in personalities if I go to Pakistan or in, stay in Finland. (Sania)

In contrast to other participants who demonstrated awareness of different characters or personalities when speaking different languages, Sania described herself as “I’m like just myself” wherever she goes and whatever language she speaks. Nevertheless, this does not negate her identification with Pakistan, as evidenced by her experience bargaining in Pakistan. She ex-

pressed excitement about bargaining at the market, a practice she had been missing for some time, when telling me about it in the interview. According to her, she felt accomplished when she was able to bargain down a 10-euro item to 50 cents and proudly showed it to her father, who was skeptical of her ability to bargain. Having overcome a number of difficulties, she now wants everyone, including international people, to “be happy” and “feel accepted” as she had been in that phase when she experienced racism and exclusion in her first year in Finland. Her direct experience of intercultural encounters provided her with the confidence to adapt to a different environment rapidly and motivated her to pursue a multicultural environment at the university.

5.6 Nomi

It’s just the feeling of like, fullness, kind of, for me. It feels like I have two, (or) many places that I made like, different kinds of homes for myself. And then they kinda just come together inside of me. This is super deep. (Nomi)

Nomi has a father of Pakistani and Lebanese background and a Finnish-Swedish mother. What differentiates Nomi from other participants is that she was not biologically related to her parents—she was adopted in Pakistan—which “brings a whole lot of stuff into the mix”. Given that both of her parents have multiple cultural backgrounds, Nomi has relatives in various locations around the globe; her grandmother is Finnish and is from Pohjammaa, while some of her other extended families live in Sweden, Lebanon, Pakistan, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, and her dad lives in Saudi Arabia. In the interview, she mentioned that she often “had to be a kind of translator”, as her mother’s English proficiency was limited, and her father’s relatives did not speak Finnish.

As she stated, she lived in the United Arab Emirates until she was five years old and attended a kindergarten where the education was based on the Montessori method and kids mainly spoke English. At that time, her Finnish grandmother sent her a lot of VHS tapes of Finnish children’s shows so that she could learn Finnish by watching them. Nomi mentioned that this helped her speak Finnish with her mother. According to her, in kindergarten, she often played make-believe, such as Peter Pan, with her international friends there, which later led her to pursue theater as a hobby. When her father found a job in Saudi Arabia, she and her mother moved to Finland because her mother would not move to Saudi Arabia. Even though she began living far away from her father at an early age, she vividly remembered the time she spent with him, including eating out and watching movies. In the interview, she described her father trying to show her “Pakistani side” by having Pakistani or Indian food with her in restaurants. She also mentioned that she had already acquired proficiency in Finnish when she commenced her formal education, yet she described the attitudes of local children as follows:

I definitely have the language on my side because I speak very good Finnish, which helped a lot. It was kinda hard, you know, children, children were um, taught to be kind of like, you know, xenophobic. (Nomi)

As Nomi stated, the residents of the town were not accustomed to interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds. The majority of the population there was Finnish, and some reacted negatively to her presence. She was the first non-Finnish person to attend school in the area in many years, as one of her Black family members had attended school there two decades prior. According to Nomi, her family was so supportive that, every time they heard somebody saying offensive things about her, they told her “No matter what anyone tells you, you are amazing, beautiful, just the way you are”, and would go to school, children, and even the parents to talk to them. As she entered high school and encountered people who were more aware of her situation, she had fewer of these negative reactions from those around her. However, she also mentioned that her high school period was also a time of identity crisis since she accidentally discovered that she was an adopted child. She had previously believed that she was “a mixed person”, “a mixed Finnish person”, or a “half Pakistani-Lebanese” individual until she found out that there was no biological connection between her and her parents, as she described herself as follows.

My dad is a dark Pakistani-Lebanese, but my mom is a very white Finnish person, so when you look at me, I was like “Yeah, it could make sense” that, like, there are children who would look like me kinda because I have pretty light skin um, but dark features otherwise. (Nomi)

According to Nomi, before the realization, she had somehow concluded in her own mind that she was of mixed racial heritage, based on her mother’s and father’s physical characteristics such as skin color. She was thus as shocked as if “someone had dunked her into *avanto*” when she realized that “I have no European elements at all” and started holding mixed feelings because she had assumed that she was “mixed” her whole life until that moment. While she continued to speak cheerfully during the interview, there is no doubt that this event thrilled her sense of ‘self’, as she perceived herself as an “overthinker” and could not help sharing it with her friends. She, of course, discussed her adoption with her mother and other family members for a long time, but it was her friend rather than her parents who sympathized with her deeper feelings; she did not really “share the same values” with her “strict” parents not only in her cultural identity but also in other aspects such as religion and her sexual orientation, especially after her mother did not understand struggles of “person of color” or her parents forced her to believe either Christianity or Islam while she claimed she was agnostics. Her diverse cultural heritage and experiences of the identity crisis led her to develop “different kinds of homes” for herself and encouraged her to study multiculturalism and multilingualism as part of her current degree program at the university.

6 ANALYSIS

This section first examines common themes and patterns demonstrated in six life stories of Finnish youth with diverse cultural backgrounds. Then it describes the master narratives that emerged from the interviews. A common thread among the participants was a desire to connect with the elements that form their sense of self, including their or their parents' cultural roots or with a more multicultural community. A significant factor in their desires was their childhood memories and experiences of being exposed to multicultural environments in their growing-up years. At the same time, two master narratives emerged in the interviews: the racialized Finnishness of the participants and the necessity for further openness to encourage inclusivity in Finland.

6.1 Common Themes: Desire to (Re) connect to Own Roots

6.1.1 Desire to Reconnect to Own Roots

As Sparrow's (2000) study showed, some people who consider themselves "multicultural" may associate their identity with rootedness, belonging, and a desire to reconnect with their roots. Such roots include the religions, languages, and ethnic traditions in which they were raised. In this study, this tendency was especially demonstrated in the life stories of Emiliya, Eithan, and Sania, who spent their childhood in places other than Finland. These participants had relatively clear memories of those places. According to their life stories, they have tried to reconnect with their own roots by using the languages they used in their childhood, in their families, or in the countries where they were born.

In the case of Emiliya, who has Russian parents but was born and raised in Finland, ways to connect with her (parents') roots were to spend time with her friends with Russian roots, speak Russian with them, and watch Russian cartoons. She mentioned in her interview that her childhood was "full of Russian culture", especially popular culture like "Russian DVDs" such as movies and cartoons before she was exposed to Finnish friends and culture. Such artistic products seemingly contributed to part of her 'self'. According to Gsir and

Mescoli (2015), consuming cultural products related to one's national roots, including food, clothes, music, movies, and books, contributes to defining a specific image of her 'self' and displaying it. Meanwhile, Emiliya's narratives also implied Anderson's (1998) concept of long-distance nationalism—a novel way of linking diasporas with a nation and creating a stronger sense of belonging through media—. According to Andersson, connecting with one's fellow people and imagining their homeland through (transnational) media allows them to maintain a connection to a 'nation' even if they are geographically distant from it; Emiliya maintains part of her 'self' that she inherited from her parents by consuming artistic products like movies and cartoons although she cannot visit Russia as often as she used to due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, she strongly emphasized that such artistic products are “a very separate thing from the war”. This implies people's tendency to easily associate a 'nation' with a 'culture'. For example, in her narratives about working as an international tutor at the university, glimpses of her sad experiences, such as the one she received just because of her “Russian roots” were uncovered. The tendency to equate nation and culture can also hinder someone's strong desire to connect with the roots of their own culture.

Meanwhile, Eithan's narrative demonstrated the role of languages as a tool to connect with his roots. He wanted to regain his open-mindedness by brushing up on his Spanish language skills after spending some years in Finland. This indicates that, in his case, language and identity are closely linked. As he told in his interview, he sees different personalities in himself based on which language he speaks; while he described himself as a “little more shy”, he could be “stereotypically more Latin” when he speaks Spanish. Just as he thought he could “regain” his open-mindedness by using Spanish, one's mother tongue plays a key role in reconnecting their roots and maintaining some parts of their cultural identity. Moreover, understanding the interrelatedness between language and identification is crucial, as, based on Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013), those who strongly identify with their heritage country (i.e. ethnic identification) and have a strong link with the destination country (i.e. national identification) tend to have positive experiences in several aspects of life, including psychological well-being, academic achievement, and family relationships. In the interview, Eithan mentioned that he does not have any memorable negative experiences as being multicultural—though some minor ones such as difficulty in making friends due to a language barrier were mentioned—; his positive attitude toward being multicultural and maintaining multiculturalism seems to reflect his understanding of the link between language and identity and his desire to (re) connect with both his country of origin and his destination country.

Sania expressed her excitement about using her mother tongue Sindhi, and practicing some of the customs common in Pakistan, such as bargaining down items in a market, as indicated in the narrative about her most recent visit to Pakistan; despite her father's initial assumption that she would never be able to bargain, Sania bargained down to 50 cents for a €10 item at the market. She mentioned that she loved and missed this “bargaining feeling” because, according to her, it does not exist in Finland. While she mentioned that “now I see Finland as my home” and “the roles (of home and host country) have been switched”, she still tries to reconnect with and maintain the Pakistani side of herself by using her mother

tongue and practicing common activities in her place of birth. This reflects the argument by Forbes et al. (2021) that an individual's "multicultural identity" is shaped by their social activities (i.e., bargaining), as well as their family history (i.e., her family is from Pakistan), and personal life scenarios (i.e., she was born in Pakistan and has lived in Finland for many years). Unlike other participants, she asserted that "I don't have any change in personalities if I go to Pakistan or stay in Finland" and "I'm just myself"; while most participants were aware of different types of 'self' depending on language or location, Sania had a relatively established self (i.e., an open-minded self wherever I go). At the same time, she also mentioned that she knows "how to control myself". In her interview, she clearly and immediately answered "no" to the question "Do you have any confusion regarding your language or identity?" A possible reason for her answer is the fact that she is as fluent in Finnish as she is in other languages such as English and Sindhi; she mentioned in the interview that she does not have to think about languages because "a word just comes automatically". While other participants have faced language barriers or created a different 'self' based on their confidence in languages, Sania was confident in Finnish even at school age, as she entered Finnish language school at an early age and learned Finnish together with her younger brothers. Moreover, she followed the general Finnish education system (i.e. she did not go to an international school) and had more opportunities to use Finnish in school life. Such an environment allowed her to develop confidence in Finnish and other languages she speaks, forming a consistent 'self' that is not significantly affected by her language skills.

Their multicultural identity was constructed in the interviews through discourses of reconnecting. They maintain some parts of their 'self' by consuming cultural products, speaking their mother tongues, and practicing the customs they were familiar with as children. Underlying such actions was their nostalgia for childhood memories and an awareness of the multiple roots of their 'self'. As these participants demonstrated, a realization of such factors would encourage their internal coherence and lead to positive outcomes in many aspects of their lives, especially in their psychological well-being, academic achievement, and family relationships.

6.1.2 Desire to Connect with More International People

In their interviews, some participants expressed a desire to connect with "more international people". They seem to have developed such a desire while strongly being involved in multicultural settings, for example by attending international schools or working as international tutors at the university: Nina mentioned "I just really wanted to have more international experiences with different kinds of people (so I became a tutor)", Emiliya said "I think I really find myself in an international setting (at the university)", and Erika expressed that "I really have the desire to connect more with people from all around the world in a way". A common characteristic of these participants is that they feel a greater sense of belonging in a multicultural environment and find their 'self' there. According to Van Reken (2017), the tendency of these to want to connect with more diverse people is a characteristic of those who grew up in multicultural environments; they can feel that they "belong here" when they are with others who also grew up between multiple cultures. In other words, their stronger sense of belonging

is not based on the unit of a nation (i.e., the country in which they were born, the country in which they grew up, etc.), but rather is associated with a group of people from similar multicultural backgrounds.

In Nina's case, spending more time in European schools allowed her to interact with culturally and linguistically diverse people. She therefore did not always share common interests with her friend group at the Finnish school she attended and at the university in Finland. According to her, in the European schools, the classes were mainly made up of people whose members were not very similar to each other while, in her current program at the university, all of her classmates are Finnish. Regarding the environment at the university, she mentioned in the pre-interview that it is often difficult to keep up with her Finnish friends at the university when she does not share common interests, such as Finnish music, TV, or Finnish celebrities, and thus does not feel like belonging to her friends when these are the topic of conversations. Similarly, Erika, who has only lived in Finland but has immersed herself in an international environment at the IB school in the capital region, described how she did not quite fit into Finnish society. She was aware of differences in her thinking and that of her Finnish friends, which she attributed to their different family backgrounds and educational backgrounds. In her interview, she made the following observation:

I also feel like, I don't feel very content just being like here in Jyväskylä or one city. Like, I really have a desire to connect more with people from all around the world in a way. I know a lot of my friends, they are pretty happy just like being here because this is like a comfort space. Like, this is what they know, and this way they feel like they belong the best. But I don't really feel that in the same way as them. (Erika)

As she stated, a lot of her friends are "pretty happy" just like being in one city because that is a "comfort space" where they feel like "they belong the best". Meanwhile, Erika does not feel that "Finland alone really fulfills my need or human connection". The cases of Nina and Erika demonstrate that such viewpoints are likely to have been shaped in international or Western curriculum schools, which Taylor (2013, p. 71) describes as "microcultures." In such settings, the process of acculturation and assimilation of other cultures occurs for students and teachers, allowing them to establish meaning. Therefore, experiences in such schools are crucial in forming their views and understandings of others as well as themselves (Taylor, 2013). In the meantime, Emiliya, who did not attend an international or European school like the former two participants, still immersed herself in international settings at the university while working as an international tutor. Her experience of supporting students from various backgrounds encouraged her to join an exchange program in the United States in 2024.

These participants' desire to connect with more international people is thus created based on their sense of belonging to an international community whose members do not necessarily share the same traditions and customs; rather, they do share the experience of 'mobility' and position themselves as multicultural. A major reason why they are able to share the experience of being multicultural is that, in such an international context, 'difference' and 'diversity' are common conceptions that are at least expected and normalized, if not always completely acknowledged and accepted (Benjamin & Kuusisto, forthcoming). Young Finnish people from multicultural backgrounds will therefore continually need spaces where they can share their own experiences of mobility with their like-minded peers.

6.2 Master Narratives

6.2.1 Racialized Finnishness

What emerged from the participants' life stories was the dominant narrative of racialized Finnishness in Jyväskylä and its neighboring areas a decade ago. The social context behind this was the rise of right-wing political factions, driven by increased immigration, and the debates about multiculturalism and racism that subsequently sparked racially motivated crimes against non-white people (Koskinen, 2015). Non-White people—whether immigrants or Finns—thus had to deal with these issues in their everyday interactions with the White Finnish majority population. Narratives about such racialization issues and 'how it feels to be seen as an outsider in one's home country' were remarkable in the stories of Sania and Nomi, who do not fit the traditional, dominant image of Finns, such as lighter skin color. According to Van Dijk (2004), in the process of racialization, those who are different from the dominant racial image can be stereotyped and exoticized with an essentialized, and possibly negative valuation. As a result, non-White Finns could be mislabeled as "immigrants" or "foreigners" although they may position themselves as wholly Finnish, which makes them suffer from an identity crisis that could affect their quality of life. Such struggles were presented in the life stories of Sania and Nomi.

Sania and her family experienced racism, especially when they started their life in Jyväskylä 10 years ago; local people would yell at them like "Hey, you don't belong here" or "You should go back to your country" in public places, such as bus stops and shopping malls. Such negative attitudes of locals can be associated with social backgrounds in Finland in the 2010s; at that time, compared to other Nordic countries, Finland was considered a relatively homogeneous country with just around 5% of the total population having a foreign background (Ministry of the Interior, 2013). Such an environment allowed Finns who did not fit the dominant racial image to be categorized as the 'Others' and to be marginalized in Finnish society. This process, Othering, is a form of social representation that is possibly associated with stereotypes (Dervin, 2012), which allows people to draw a line between in-group (i.e., Finns who fit the traditional image) and out-group (i.e., Finns who do not fit the traditional image). Furthermore, such ideas may lead people to construct the 'Other' as 'they the impure' or 'they the deficient' since they hope to maintain the image of 'we the pure' (Holliday, 2011). In the Finnish context, such categorization seems to be based on racial attributes or, more specifically, Whiteness.

Similarly, Nomi's life story revealed xenophobic attitudes towards people who looked foreign; she has often felt excluded due to her physical characteristics, such as the color of her skin, even though she has lived in Finland for many years and speaks fluent Finnish. As she said in her interview, what has been very supportive has been her family, especially her parents who always told her "No matter what anyone tells you, you are amazing, beautiful, just the way you are" whenever they heard someone saying offensive things about her. According to Nomi, her parents even went to talk to schools, children who offended her, and their parents when their comments or behavior was uncomfortable for her. Such actions played a significant role in securing her self-esteem because, according to Collier and

Thomas (1988), people can have more positive feelings about themselves when they feel recognized, accepted, and belong to a group. In this study, such a racism-related narrative was not explicit in the life stories told by participants like Erika and Nina, suggesting how the idea of Finnishness and exclusion is linked to the discourse of otherness and whiteness. In an increasingly diverse Finnish society, questions of “Finnishness” and “Who are Finns?” will require more diverse answers and public attitudes to understand.

6.2.2 Openness to Inclusivity and Global Mind

In interviews, terms such as ‘open’ and ‘open-minded’ were often used by participants, especially when they described different levels of openness in multicultural environments they have spent and in Finland as some extracts show as follows.

Table 2
Excerpts on Open and Open-Mindedness

Name	Extracts
Erika	My dad is like more open, and in a way, an extroverted and loud person [laughter] whereas I think a lot of Finnish families are like more quiet, like as a nature, more reserved.
Nina	The European school was more open-minded.
Eithan	I think I got back my open-mindedness (after my exchange in Chile).
Sania	In Pakistan, we are like really open in conversations. We, no one feels, like no one minds anything.
Nomi	They (my parents) are just like, kinda like, more strict whereas my friends are very open-minded.

According to the study by Genkova (2016), an individual with international experience tends to express higher values in open-mindedness. Several communication scholars have proposed models that include openness or open-mindedness as an important component of intercultural competence (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). These participants seem to have developed such attitudes through their intercultural encounters, including living in multiple countries and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds at school. More specifically, being open-minded means “a general openness for and appreciation of cultural diversity and an ability to encounter and deal with individuals from foreign cultures in an open, curious and unpredicted manner (Bertelsmann, 2006, p.8)”. As Finland has been diversified by accepting a significantly increasing number of immigrants and international students, such attitudes will remain crucial in the country. Another important aspect of openness is, according to Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2018), that it encourages individuals to downplay national affiliations and cultural differences through mutual social efforts to ‘neutralize’ them and to be more flexible. In other words, openness challenges the essential view such as ‘nation owns culture’ or ‘one nation, one people’. It is thus an important concept for further understanding of their other cultural identities that cannot be explained within simplistic frameworks such as nation and ethnicity. The Finnish young adults with multicultural backgrounds in this study

will contribute to the construction of a Finland that is more open to diversity and has fewer people who experience exclusion based on their backgrounds.

In addition to openness and open-mindedness, the research participants' life stories included narratives that evoked the concept of a global mindset. While definitions of a global mindset vary (Kossowska & Rosinski, 2021; Lima & Amelia, 2017), the one that best describes the narratives of the participants in this study is a definition by Javidan and Walker (2013), which describes a global mindset as a set of characteristics that help a person influence other individuals, groups, and organizations more than themselves. Such characteristics were indicated in the research participants' narratives about supporting international students coming from diverse backgrounds to Finland. In this study, most participants showed a strong desire to have a positive influence on others, for example by working as international tutors at university and mentoring new students from diverse backgrounds. Such a desire was particularly expressed by Sania as follows:

You know, when I came to Finland, there was like no one for me. So, I would want now every international student who's coming here to be happy and feel involved in everything, so. (Sania)

As Sania herself experienced discrimination and exclusion when she came to Finland, she is now able to understand how international people may feel in Finland and empathize with those who have similar experiences. She mentioned in the interview that the most important thing for her now is "everyone's happiness", which indicates her willingness to achieve inclusion in Finnish society.

However, the above two concepts were unfamiliar to the people around the research—even those close to them, such as family members—when they grew up. This was demonstrated in Nomi's life story. Nomi mentioned in her interview that her mother did not understand the struggles of a "person of color", and that her parents forced her to believe in either Christianity or Islam although she claimed she did not believe in any religion: it was not easy for those who with conventional views, it was not easy to accept flexible, complex, and multifaceted 'self'. The gap between their values may have affected Nomi's identity, as, values outline the groups to which individuals feel connected and want to belong (Van Bavel & Packer, 2021 in Benjamin et al., 2023).

Sania's case also illustrated how Finns with multicultural roots who did not fit the traditional, physical images of Finns were "not welcomed" and how different cultural practices (e.g., sharing food with neighbors) served as a barrier to integration. The attitude of not accepting what is considered "different" would have led to fewer opportunities for integration of those with multicultural roots in Finland, leading them to feel "We were not welcomed at all" and "They (local people) didn't want to welcome us or talk with us". However, as Emiliya mentioned in her interview "It's been really, really meaningful to me to have someone that understands where I come from", being understood and accepted is crucial to the construction of the 'self' of those with backgrounds. While the participants in this study already possess such openness and have the experience to contribute to this first step of inclusion—having a mindset of empathy and acceptance towards others—, Finnish society will continue to need people who are increasingly tolerant of diversity and who can promote the inclusiveness of Finnish society with a global mindset.

7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore 1) the contextual factors that contribute to the formation of cultural identities of Finnish youth with multicultural backgrounds, 2) determine the dominant narrative about the social reality surrounding the participants in Finland over the last two decades, and 3) how their experiences of mobility between languages and spaces influence their subsequent self-conceptualization. As Davies and Harré (1990) argue that individuals understand their positions in accordance with their own lived narrative experience—including beliefs, emotions, and subjective life histories—, this section considers such factors found in the interviews while answering my research questions. This section also considers the master narratives identified in the analysis section, as people may position themselves based on “a knowledge of social structures (including roles) with their attendant rights, obligations and expectations” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 42).

7.1 Contextual Factors Contributing to Multicultural Identity

Analysis of the research participants’ life stories revealed several contextual factors in the process of cultural identity formation. Discussing two main factors, 1) linguistic self-confidence and 2) a sense of belonging to like-minded people, I attempt to answer my first research question “How do Finnish youth with multicultural backgrounds present their multiculturalism in interviews?”

7.1.1 Linguistic Self-Confidence and Identities

In this study, all participants’ life stories included narratives about using different languages depending on situations and their linguistic self-confidence and its influence on their sense (s) of self. In the interviews, Erika, Nina, Eithan, and Sania particularly mentioned that Finnish or other languages served as a barrier to expressing themselves, making friends, or achieving a sense of belonging in their childhood or adolescence. In other words, the language influences how they position their ‘self’ (e.g., whether they are part of a community or not) in

relation to others in certain situations. This finding demonstrates what was argued by Davies and Harré (1999): self is created through dialogue with others, and individuals may privately decide what position to take in each dialogue.

Among those participants, Erika and Nina spent a few school years before the university in a more multicultural environment where they mainly spoke English and other non-Finnish languages (i.e., IB school and European school). Such an environment allowed them to feel more comfortable and confident in expressing themselves in English than in Finnish, which encouraged them to connect with more people from diverse backgrounds. However, it simultaneously served as a barrier to making friends, expressing themselves, and thus feeling of belonging when they got back to Finnish-speaking schools and the university. Thus, they positioned themselves in international settings, where they communicate with others in English, rather than Finnish-speaking contexts like interactions with their family members or their friends at the university. As language is considered an essential part of cultural identity that plays an important social function as a tool for communicating values, beliefs, and customs, reinforcing group identity feelings (Bakhtin, 1981), they positioned themselves with the group whose language they were more confident in expressing themselves.

The life stories of Eithan and Sania, who attended regular Finnish schools and used Finnish as their main language at school, also demonstrated the strong link between their confidence in languages and cultural identity. In Eithan's life story, it appeared that he was more concerned about the impact of his improved Finnish on his other mother tongue, Spanish; while his Finnish "wasn't as efficient as the Spanish part" when he was little, Finnish became the better language he spoke after spending most of his life in Finland. His lack of confidence in speaking Spanish, in turn, began to hinder his participation in new communities that could be relevant to his linguistic identity, as he stated in the interview as follows:

Earlier than university, I think I was so shy (about speaking Spanish). So, if I heard someone speaking Spanish, I didn't go to speak to that person in Spanish because I was so embarrassed to speak the language. So, that might be the other reason that I didn't find any, like, Spanish-speaking community. (Eithan)

Given that Spanish is one of his mother tongues, using Spanish is an important part of his identity. However, since moving to Finland and using Finnish as his main language, his confidence in speaking Spanish has decreased, which limited his access to Spanish-speaking communities in Finland despite his desire to improve his language skills; while his multiculturalism was described in the interview based on the fact that he speaks "two languages as a native", how his linguistic identity is attached to his sense of self was aligned with his competence and confidence in those languages. Moreover, Eithan's life story also demonstrated the previous research findings that bicultural-/bilingual people may present different linguistic behaviors in the two languages (Pavlenko, 2006), as he described himself as "more Latin", meaning that he is more open when he speaks Spanish whereas he could be "a little bit more shy" when speaking Finnish. In his case, the acquisition of Finnish seems to have added a new sense of self to him, as Finnish was the language acquired later than Spanish.

Meanwhile, Sania, who is confident in her skills in both Finnish and her mother tongue, mentioned in her interview that her personality is not influenced by the language she speaks. Her case demonstrated a characteristic of multicultural people introduced by Adler's (1976)

study; having the ability to move in and out of contexts while maintaining some inner coherence through a variety of situations, as she stated as follows:

Like wherever I go, in Pakistan as well, like I said I'm outgoing, extrovert. (...) I know how to control myself (stress each word) as well. But still, keep my personality. So, I'm like myself in both faces, so I don't have any change in personality if I go to Pakistan or, stay in Finland, so. (Sania)

According to Sania, who is studying in an international bachelor's program and has international classmates, the language she mainly speaks with her classmates is English. However, she also mentioned "I'm quite fluent in Finnish as well, so I speak it at the same level as English", as she is involved in a lot of activities and student associations where she also speaks Finnish. Her confidence in both two languages and her strong self-concept (i.e., wherever I go I'm outgoing and extrovert) seem to contribute to the coherence in her sense of self. As Sania's case demonstrated, those who speak more than one language do not necessarily recognize multiple senses of self; they can also establish coherence by gaining confidence in the languages they use.

The multicultural identity of the research participants was presented concerning their linguistic confidence. The interviews revealed that such confidence was developed in their interactions with others around them and influenced their cultural identities. This finding confirms the social constructionist perspective (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1967) of cultural identity; identity is formed through continuous interactions and negotiations among members of society. This also resonates with the previously proposed concept of 'being multicultural' that a multicultural person is not naturally born.

7.1.2 Sense of Belonging to Mobile People

Cultural identity often refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group, which is nowadays not limited to essential frameworks, such as nationality, ethnicity, and tradition. In this study, participants' life stories mostly consisted of their memories in school, as they were still in their early twenties and had fresh memories of school, which disclosed how the culture in the school community influenced their cultural identity construction. In this study, narratives about the relationship between a school community and a sense of belonging were prominent in the life stories of Erika, Emiliya, and Nomi.

Belonging requires identity shifts and transformations (Hughes, 2010), and thus it can also be newly developed in a new environment or through interactions with new people. Erika, who expressed in the interview a greater sense of belonging to an "international community", described the reason why she felt so as follows:

I was like really studious since I was young, so I was sort of inspired by that (the presentation by the IB school), and I felt like I didn't, I wasn't in a very like academic environment when I lived in (the name of the smaller city). So, I really wanted to, like, get into an academic environment where people have a similar mindset to me. So, I think that's why I felt like I wanted to um, be part of a community that I feel like I belonged. (Erika)

For Erika, a sense of belonging to an “international community” in the IB school appears to have developed while spending time with people who shared similar attitudes toward their studies. According to her, the IB school she attended was “academically very intense and very rigorous” but “definitely an environment that I felt like I belonged in a lot of ways” because she and her classmates shared the same school culture—being curious and motivated to discuss global issues—. Most importantly, Erika provided a clear response to the final interview question, “What makes you feel that you are multicultural?” Her response was, “The thing that makes me feel most multicultural is if I’m in a community.” This indicates that the process of becoming multicultural involves a sense of belonging to a group or community, although it is not necessarily limited to a national entity.

Similarly, Emiliya, who applied to a high school that had a high standard GPA, described a similar sense of belonging to a school community as follows:

It (the high school) was definitely the right place for me. I felt like, I had, like the people around me were more of my people and we were serious about the school, not like [laughter] people in the middle school. (Emiliya)

Describing her classmates at high school as “my people”, Emiliya positioned herself in school communities in high school where people were as serious about their studies as she was. Her use of terms like “we” and “my people” here demonstrates the process of positioning, which entails identifying oneself and others through the use of certain words (Moghadam & Harré, 2010). Like Erika’s case, she seemed to have formed a sense of belonging to a group of people who had positive attitudes toward their studies. Moreover, she also mentioned that, at the university, she belongs to another “international community”, a subject association of psychology. In the interview, she positioned herself in that community, saying “I think I really find myself in an international setting”; in that community, she found ‘her people’ that she was “really getting along with”. As presented in these two participants’ life stories, a sense of belonging can be developed through engagement with like-minded peers (Riley & White, 2016).

The life story of Nomi, who was adopted by a Swedish-Finnish mother and a Pakistani Lebanese, also contained narratives about her like-minded peers or a peer group, especially about the difficulties of finding them. Previous studies on international adoptive children and adolescents have revealed that the belonging of such people is constantly challenged, as they can be regarded as a minority group, such as “immigrants” or “foreigners” even though they fulfill all the socio-economic, ethnocultural, national, and linguistic criteria of belonging to their adoptive countries (Raaska et al., 2012, Högbäck, 2018). In the interview, Nomi described her feelings about expressing her ‘self’ in different communities, i.e., her family and her like-minded friends from high school:

You know, you find like-minded people (outside the home.). But it doesn’t mean that you love your family any less. (...) I feel like they (my family) can’t understand everything I go through, but they try to understand and listen, and they also share their experiences. It could, it’s just kinda like a nice community. My family is also a very nice community. My family would do anything for me, and I would do anything for them, but they are just something that you don’t talk with all with your family. (...) It doesn’t mean that I don’t love them any less, of course, but just, I can talk more freely with my friends. (...) I can talk about anything with them. (Nomi)

While describing her own family as a “very nice community” and appreciating her family’s supportive attitudes, Nomi mentioned that she could not talk about everything herself to them. As she said in the interview “My mom doesn’t understand anything about, like, people of color and stuff”, people trying to understand her are not always like-minded people to whom she could open up her mind and talk about everything. What she needed was a community that had people who understood the complicated dynamic of her cultural and racial background, including her identity crisis and her struggle as an adopted person. Her struggles with a sense of belonging resonate with those of Third Culture Kids (TCK), a term used to describe individuals who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside their parents' cultural context. As Van Reken (2017) notes, the sense of belonging among TCKs is often shaped by shared experiences and backgrounds, rather than solely by shared race or ethnicity. For Nomi, it took a considerable period of time to find a community where she could share her experiences and have them understood due to her uncommon background, namely international adoptions by multicultural parents. The case of Nomi, who was allegedly adopted in Pakistan and then raised in Finland, might not fit the traditional definition of TCK, yet her struggles in not sharing values with immediate people like her family is still a common issue faced by third culture kids. Finding “more open-minded” friends in high school was, therefore, an important event for her to develop her sense of belonging.

Participants’ life stories in this study demonstrated that non-traditional concepts of ‘culture’, including the culture of a school community, were also an integral part of their cultural identity construction. For the young participants with multiple cultural roots in this study, who have spent most of their lives in the school community, it is important to be able to share their experiences in ‘mobility’ rather than nationality, race, or ethnicity in that community in order to form a sense of belonging.

7.2 Challenge, Resistance, and Surrender to the Master Narrative

The analysis also revealed mainly two master narratives (i.e., dominant discourse shared by many people within a society or culture) facing the participants: 1) racism and 2) lack of openness/open-mindedness in Finland in the last two decades. This section first discusses these master narratives, referring to participants’ model stories (i.e., personal narratives that present how they challenged, resisted, or surrendered to these master narratives). The discussion then proceeds to the racism and Othering experienced by multicultural Finns and the openness of Finnish society as it relates to their sense of belonging.

7.2.1 Othering and Identity

While none of the participants in this study positioned themselves as a “Finn”, some of them had been exposed to questions such as what it means to be Finnish and who is a Finn—and if I am not, then what am I?—through their interactions with others in Finland. They have faced such questions especially when there is a gap between their complex self-perception and the

perception made by others based on a simplistic framework (e.g., being born and raised in Finland, having a Finnish passport, being familiar with “Finnish culture”). Such a gap seems to have threatened their sense of self in the form of an identity crisis. This simultaneously encouraged them to explore their sense of self by connecting with their own roots or people with similar experiences. These tendencies were particularly evident in the life stories of two participants who had experiences related to marginalization and racism in Finland despite their self-recognition of the Finnish part of the self. This section refocuses on their narratives and discusses how young Finnish people with multicultural backgrounds have dealt with racism and Othering in Finnish society.

Focusing first on Nomi, who always had to explain “What I am” when living in a small town in Central Finland where she rarely saw Finns with different cultural roots, as she mentioned in her interview as follows:

Like if you are different from someone else, they ask you to tell you, (...) like, they always ask you “What are you?”, and I’m like “Yeah, I’m this and this”. (Nomi)

As stated by Nomi, she was “one of the first, not completely but mostly, non-Finnish children there”; she was known as a girl who is biologically Finnish and Lebanese since she always explained so. Such a situation—constantly having to explain what you are—seems to have contributed to her positioning, as Moghaddam and Harré (2010, p. 2) stated that positioning is about “how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and Others”. Her experience of being forced to explain one’s identity demonstrates the discourse of racialized Finnishness. Nomi’s narrative resonates with the research finding by Rastas (2005); in that study, a 23-year-old woman adopted from Asia to Finland said she had to deal with questions that did not interest her as a person, such as “Are you really from Finland?”, “Are you half Finnish?” and “How can you speak Finnish so well?” According to Rastas (2005), seemingly harmless questions like ‘Where are you (really) from?’ may convey the message “I think you don’t belong here”. In such encounters, young Finnish people with multicultural/racial roots may be conceptualized by others as a stranger who needs to be positioned in another place regardless of their self-conceptualization and positioning. For Nomi, the difficulty in getting people to understand her vexation was not ameliorated since she was in an environment that was not considered racially diverse. However, such issue seems to have improved since she came to Jyväskylä for university, as she stated as follows:

A lot of people who are POC usually come from Helsinki, and they always complain like that there’s so little POC here (Jyväskylä), and there are so little the Jew. (But) I’m like “Oh my god, there are so many people who are like me!” And like, I was like oh my god, (...) no one has asked me what I am in like a week. This is amazing. This is such a, again, metropolitan, which is funny because I did live in LA and Dubai, then Jyväskylä was the metropolitan for me. There was, like really cool to see, like different kinds of people because before I [stress] was the different kind of person. (Nomi)

As she mentioned, Nomi had rarely been around a lot of multicultural people other than herself until she came to Jyväskylä for university. According to her, “a lot of people who are POC usually come from Helsinki, and they always complain like that there’s so little POC here, and there are so little the Jew”. Nevertheless, she thought that Jyväskylä was diverse enough not to be asked to explain ‘what she was’ for the entire week, compared to where she

spent her childhood and teenage years. As I describe in more detail in a later section, she always had to answer the question from those around her, “What are you?”, which, when repeated, could lead to racial microaggressions, “the everyday occurrence of contemporary racism” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272). For Nomi, it was a significant turning point in her life to meet a group of people who recognized her ‘self’ rather than superficial factors such as her cultural and racial backgrounds. According to her, this helped achieve her sense of belonging. In the interview, her face was full of pleasant surprise when she talked about meeting someone who shared similar backgrounds and life experiences, even though some time had passed since that time.

Similarly to Nomi, Sania also expressed her feelings when she was treated as the ‘Other’ at the beginning of her life in Finland:

It didn’t feel like we belonged here at all. Like we were not [stressed] welcomed at all. So, um, honestly, like the first year, or even (first) two years, I didn’t feel that I was welcomed here at all or I didn’t feel like my family was also welcomed here. So it was, like, really like, in that way we didn’t think that Finland is (was) a good country at that time. (Sania)

As Harré and Moghaddam (2015) argue that individuals may position themselves and others—or be positioned by others—in the act of storytelling or conversation, Sania positioned herself as the ‘Other’ while she stated the above. Her experience can be explained as a result of the practice of Othering, attributing negative features to other individuals or groups and thus positioning them as the opposite and inferior (Rohleder, 2014). Since Othering was traditionally associated with surface-level identities, including one’s culture or origin (Hummelstedt, 2022), ethnicity and class (Stahl, 2017), race, gender, or disability (Powell & Menendian, 2016), the locals judged to be the ‘Others’ based solely on the fact that she was not originally from Finland.

Was there then a system to ensure that people like Sania received adequate support regarding discrimination in those days? According to Rastas (2019), many of those who had discrimination-related experiences lack supportive communities where they can share their personal experiences and talk about racism. Furthermore, racism against non-White Finns has been particularly disregarded due to the narrow definition of racism available in Finland; racism is primarily seen as the only problem for immigrants and ethnic minorities (Rastas, 2002). Moreover, some anti-racism movements only focus on a single aspect, such as racism against immigrants, leaving the rest of society as a racism-free zone (Seikkula, 2020). Therefore, the discrimination against Finns with transnational roots has remained unsolved, and many of them have still been perceived and treated as the “Others” regardless of their self-conceptualization.

The current research recognizes that the research participants have not just surrendered to such a harsh social context. These two participants’ narratives of Othering indicated that they overcame their difficulties by finding people or communities with whom they could share their experiences and feel a sense of belonging; the more space they can share their experiences as a Finn with multicultural roots, the more diverse the connotations of “Finnishness” will become. Having such space is thus crucial for young people with multicultural backgrounds to construct their self-concept without being influenced by others who may im-

pose inappropriate positioning on them. Future research should continue to emphasize the importance of such spaces to ensure their right to self-conceptualization.

7.2.2 Conceptual Gap in Internationality

“Finland is open and international, rich in languages and cultures. (...) We have a rich linguistic and cultural heritage and we foster a bilingual Finland in accordance with our Constitution and values.” (Prime Minister’s Office Finland, 2015, 7.)

Despite such a statement in the Finnish Government Program, the life stories of the research participants revealed the challenges of integrating into Finnish society while having other cultural roots. They often associated this issue with a lack of openness or open-mindedness in Finnish society when talking about Finnish schools, communicating with local people, and a less sense of belonging. As these narratives are about their childhood or adolescent years, namely the 2000s to 2010s, this section discusses the social context of that time in Finland. The aim here is to identify conceptual gaps between Finnish youth with multicultural roots and the Finnish government regarding internationality.

When Finland joined the European Union in 1995, even increased immigration was welcomed as a signal or catalyst for the internationalization of a country that had previously been peripheral and backward. Nevertheless, some people were discontented with the loss of traditional sovereignty, growing immigration, and abandoning traditional values. Such agony led to political populism and neo-nationalism, an ideological framework that in Europe consists of components such as anti-immigration sentiments, as well as criticism towards the European Union (Saukkonen, 2018). The confusion of the public about the rapid trend toward internationalization was at the root of the attitude toward young Finns with multicultural roots. Moreover, the research participants indicated that such attitudes had provoked negative feelings, including a sense of not being accepted or belonging to the country where they were born and raised; they implied that Finland is a closed country to multiculturalism or internationalization. This resonates with the findings in previous research on the psychological impact of such emotions on growing youth living mobile lives (e.g., Miller et al., 2020; Moshanya & Kwiatkowska, 2021). Further research will be required in Finland to improve their well-being and to find concrete ways to support it, as the country will become increasingly multicultural.

In the interviews, the research participants used the term “international community” when they described the differences between such a community and Finnish society or schools. They frequently compared Finnish schools with more multicultural schools they had attended (e.g., international schools and European schools). They explained how they felt a greater sense of belonging in such international communities where people were more open. This indicates that, despite the lack of a clear definition of “international,” the research participants’ understanding of the term is closely associated with openness to diverse cultures and people. How, then, was such a concept of internationality formed among them? According to Benjamin and Kuusisto (forthcoming), there is an ethic in international schools that embraces the diversity of students and their various ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds; in such a context, ‘difference’ or ‘diversity’ is at least expected, if not always fully recognized and accepted. The participants in this study may have acquired such values while spending

their adolescence in international schools, growing up in multicultural environments, or being born and raised in a culture different from that of their parents. Focusing on what these individuals mean by “international” is crucial to shed light on the challenges facing them, the reality of inclusiveness, as well as their desire for a Finnish society that is open to more diverse ideas of Finns. The voices of these people in a multicultural context will help bridge the conceptual gap when their stories are shared with a wider audience.

7.3 Experiences of Mobility and Self

This section addresses the third research question, “How do their (participants’) experiences of mobility between languages and spaces influence their subsequent decision-making and self-conceptualization?” While the participants in this study had different backgrounds and distinct experiences, they shared some similarities in their childhood memories and experiences in terms of mobility in languages and spaces. As Lijadi (2018) posits, such experiences—being exposed to many cultures and growing up in a genuinely multicultural environment—certainly bring some benefits. For example, a multicultural upbringing of such people can be associated with higher levels of intercultural sensitivity and open-mindedness (Straffon, 2003, Morales, 2017). Such competence would influence the future decision-making of individuals with multicultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, these qualities are not easily acquired, as Nomi’s narrative about her exchange program demonstrated the unstable definition of self that accompanied the process.

It (an exchange program in Portugal) was about, like, integrating immigrants into the country. In a way, I’m an immigrant, but I’m not really because I had the privilege to learn the language. My mother is Finnish, but I didn’t live in Finland before the age of five. So, in a way, I’m an immigrant (laughter), but not really. I (unclear) also try to get, like my father to Finland, but it’s a really hard process and the Finnish government isn’t that um, great with um, these things. So, I felt really connected to that topic, and then I really wanted to go there to just discuss this topic. (Nomi)

As this excerpt indicates, Nomi positioned herself as an immigrant in some ways but not simultaneously. Such a multifaceted self-positioning and the difficulties in inviting her non-Finnish father to Finland seem to have led Nomi to explore the topic of immigrant integration. She mentioned that she ended up in her second-choice program and studied other topics during her exchange. Nevertheless, her episode clearly illustrated how her multicultural upbringing influenced her decision to pursue such a subject abroad and learn more about people in a similar situation to her. A comparable relationship between multicultural upbringing and the decision-making process was observed in Erica’s life narrative, where she describes her thoughts as follows:

I also was thinking about (...) study elsewhere too. I think I just feel that I need to explore everything that there (abroad) has to be offered because I don’t feel like Finland alone really fulfills my need or human connection in a way. (Erika)

This excerpt indicates that her upbringing in a multicultural environment may have fostered her interest in different environments and more diverse cultures. Her assertion, “I don’t feel like Finland alone really fulfills my need”, reflects her educational experience in an international community within the IB school, which also seems to have contributed to her decision to explore different worlds.

Another important point to note is that their self-conceptualization is not yet complete. The research participants mentioned memories of past interactions with others and memories of customs from their childhood as elements of what they considered to be multicultural about themselves. In other words, their self-conception is based on their ‘lived experience’, which will continue to be updated as long as they live. Future possibilities of updating their self-conceptualization were indicated in the interviews, as some participants’ narratives about their decisions showed as follows:

I’m going to the US, to North Carolina. (...) When I applied to different places, I really wanted to get out of Europe. I feel like I want to really put myself to (in) a different setting, and different culture, go somewhere far away. (...) I think it’s amazing that you can go somewhere where you [laughter] don’t know anyone and go for an extended period of time. And I’m really looking forward to kind of feeling at home there or kind of creating that sense. (Emiliya)

In her interview, Emiliya described her experience of studying abroad in the United States as an opportunity to gain a new perspective on life outside of Europe. She expressed a desire to immerse herself in a different culture, meet new people, and learn about different ways of life. Her thoughts seem to reflect her openness to exploring new environments and her willingness to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Along with Emiliya, the participants in this study demonstrated that they acquired important qualities in cross-cultural contacts during their mobile lives. Their identities and sense of self are constructed through interactions with the people around them.

8 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

To assess the decisions made about qualitative research like the current study, the reliability of the study should be considered (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). The following section thus evaluates the reliability and generalizability of the findings by examining the methodology and research process of the study, as well as the validity of the ethical considerations involved.

Firstly, the sampling method in this study is a significant strength, as it ensures that the findings are representative of the diverse backgrounds of Finnish youth with multicultural roots. However, it is important to note that the findings in this study may not be generalizable to all Finnish youth with multicultural roots. The primary reason is that the participants were recruited exclusively in Jyväskylä, Finland, and all of them were in their early 20s, despite the stated criteria for participation (i.e., under 29 years of age). Consequently, the majority of their life stories comprised narratives about their schools and childhood memories, with other contexts such as their working lives being absent from the study and thus not examined. Despite this limitation, this study identifies several important factors contributing to participants' various definitions of being multicultural, as well as the social reality they face and how they cope with it. Furthermore, this thesis acknowledges the interconnectivity between these factors and theoretical frameworks, as well as findings in previous research that have examined similar topics.

As for the research method, this study followed Sakurai's (2005) life story method, which required attention not only to the participants' words but also to details such as facial expressions and tone of voice during interviews. Based on his life story method's characteristic of 'targeting also the interviewer's own speech', I asked questions relatively freely in semi-structured interviews in line with the participants' narratives, contributing to the construction of their life stories. Some elements of general life story research, such as interviewing the same participant multiple times, may not be sufficient for this study. However, the current study identified shared themes in the life stories of young Finnish people with multicultural backgrounds. This is a significant achievement in discussing issues such as racism, Othering, and inclusivity in Finnish society. The analytical approach employed in this study was dialogical constructionism, which focuses on the site where narratives are mutually constructed between an interviewer and an interviewee. This

approach has not yet gained significant international recognition, as it was proposed and used mainly in social studies in Japan. However, I believe this was an appropriate analytical approach to answer my research, as it not only focuses on the micro-level perspective of the process of constructing an individual's life story but also sheds light on the dominant social context called master narratives.

The final point to note is ethical considerations for the research participants. Before they participated in the study, all subjects were informed of the purposes of the study, the voluntariness of their participation, the procedures involved, and the potential benefits of the study. This information was conveyed via a research notification. Second, a privacy notice was prepared and distributed to participants, informing them of how their data would be handled. Finally, participants in this study are anonymous, and pseudonyms are used to protect their privacy. These ethical considerations clarified the aims of the study for the participants while obscuring factors that could identify individuals.

9 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While several studies have acknowledged the complexity of modern cultural identities, less attention has been paid to the cases of young Finnish people from multicultural backgrounds compared to other multicultural societies. To address this knowledge gap, this study explored contextual factors contributing to the development of multicultural identities of Finnish youth by focusing on their life stories. In the light of the concepts of multicultural identity, and the theoretical framework of social constructionism and positioning, this study recognized some aspects associated with the participants' multiculturalism: linguistic self-confidence and a sense of belonging to mobile people. This study also identified master narratives about Othering and a conceptual gap in internationality. Such narratives demonstrated that the research participants did not just succumb to adversity; they overcame their difficulties by finding people and communities with whom they could share their experiences and feel a sense of belonging.

In this study, the participants' multicultural identity was found to be particularly associated with linguistic self-confidence and a sense of belonging in communities where they find peers with whom they can share the experience of being multicultural. Focusing first on linguistic self-confidence, the research participants' life stories included narratives about the use of different languages and the emotions associated with various linguistic activities. Some participants demonstrated the awareness of multiple selves (e.g., different personalities) when speaking different languages in different communities or places, depending on their level of confidence in using those languages. Lower confidence in a language reduces motivation to participate in a particular community (i.e., friend groups in a Finnish school or Spanish-speaking communities in Finland) even though such communities are essential to maintaining part of their cultural identity. As a result, they could feel a reduced sense of belonging to a community where they cannot adequately express themselves in a particular language. In such a situation, they began to desire a connection to a more international community or one that relates to their other roots. Meanwhile, this study also found that individuals who speak more than one language may form a relatively cohesive 'self' if they have the same degree of confidence in those languages. One of the research participants described herself in the interview as "I'm like just myself" wherever she goes and in whatever language she speaks. She showed her confidence in the language she mainly

speaks at school (i.e., English) and the language she uses with her Finnish friends (i.e., Finnish). She articulated that she knew how to control herself (i.e., she could adjust her behavior to fit different linguistic and cultural contexts while still keeping her personality). Such an ability—“to maintain some inner coherence through varieties of situations” (Adler, 1976, p.37)—is one of the characteristics of a multicultural person. This study confirms that the skills of being multicultural or a multicultural person are neither innate nor naturally acquired, but rather are developed through experience and competencies.

Focusing next on a sense of belonging, the research participants tended to show a greater sense of belonging in a community where they found peers with similar experiences in mobility between languages and spaces rather than groups that share the same nationality, ethnicity, religion, or tradition. For instance, some participants who had attended international schools in Finland, including an IB school and European schools, demonstrated a stronger sense of belonging to such “international communities” than their friend groups consisting of their Finnish peers. Moreover, higher education institutions in Jyväskylä that offer multicultural environments were also identified as communities where the research participants could feel that they belong. This was described in the narrative about working as an international tutor and supporting new students from diverse backgrounds. Such findings align with those of previous studies (e.g., Van Reken, 2017; Benjamin, 2017), which indicate that individuals who have experienced mobility tend to position themselves in relationship to others of similar backgrounds, rather than solely based on shared race or ethnicity alone. Therefore, providing spaces where young people from multicultural backgrounds can achieve a sense of belonging through interactions with peers with similar life experiences is crucial to ensuring an important factor that contributes to their cultural identity.

The current study also determined master narratives, which are dominant narratives that reflect the social backgrounds of the participants. In the interviews, some participants’ life stories demonstrated their struggles against adverse circumstances, namely, racism and Othering in Finnish society. Such narratives were prominent in the life stories of those who might not fit the supposed traditional physical image of Finns despite speaking fluent Finnish and having lived in Finland for many years. Their negative experiences reduced once they learned the Finnish language, yet, there was a gap between their self-conceptualization (i.e., multicultural Finn) and perception made by others (e.g., immigrants or a stranger). Furthermore, their life stories revealed that their cultural identities were often questioned or even threatened by local people’s attitudes, being yelled at, “You don’t belong here” or being asked, “Who are you?”. In those days, they lacked sufficient support to improve their situations because, according to Rastas (2002, 2019), racism against non-White Finns is especially disregarded due to the narrow definition of racism available in Finland and thus many of those who had discrimination-related experiences lack supportive communities where they can share their personal experiences and talk about racism. In order to ensure the self-conceptualization of Finnish youth with multicultural roots, it is necessary to adopt a wider definition of racism, including microaggressions directed towards non-White Finns, and broader ideas of Finnishness.

Another master narrative identified in this study was inadequate open-mindedness in Finnish society. This was frequently described in interviews as a significant obstacle to

integration into new communities in Finland. This finding aligns with Genkova's (2016) study, which indicates that individuals with international experience tend to express higher values in open-mindedness. Throughout the interviews, the participants often used the terms 'open' and 'open-minded' to emphasize the differences between the more culturally diverse communities they had previously belonged to and the communities in Finland with which they had attempted to integrate. For instance, participants who were not originally from Finland or who had attended international-type schools during their formative years found it difficult to make friends in Finnish schools. This was mainly attributed to the perception of a language barrier and the observation that local students had already formed friend groups. Furthermore, the reluctance of local people to embrace diverse cultures was evident in the participants' life stories, including stories about sharing food with neighbors but being rejected. This was also identified as a contributing factor to the participants' description of a lack of open-mindedness in Finnish society. Raising open-mindedness in Finnish society toward diverse cultures and the modern, complex 'self' requires continuous efforts.

I conclude this study by presenting how the above-mentioned factors have influenced the participants' self-concept in later life. Firstly, none of the participants in this study associated their sense of self with a specific/single nation, national culture, or language. This tendency demonstrates and supports a non-essential understanding of cultural identity that is not limited to what is traditionally and popularly referred to as 'culture'. Their process of self-conceptualization occurs in a state of mobility between multiple languages and spaces, and their experiences. Secondly, their process of self-conceptualization has not yet been completed. In the interviews, participants expressed a strong motivation to study and work in multicultural environments. This included a desire to study at a school with people from diverse backgrounds, to gain more international experiences, and to connect with more diverse people through exchange programs. Their attitudes will lead to further encounters and interactions with new people and will continue to influence their self-concept formation. Their journey in search of the definition of self is a lifelong process; such a definition is thus not necessarily bound by memories or the conditions of one's birth. As this study included only participants from a single city, it would be beneficial for further research on this topic to be conducted with more diverse samples, including those who live in different parts of Finland. Such an approach would add an even more diverse definition of "Finnishness" and facilitate a greater awareness of the limitations of our—often essential—understanding of cultural identity.

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