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How to have a long-lasting multicultural marriage? Introducing the accumulation theory of multicultural romantic relationships

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to analyze the factors enhancing stability of multicultural marriages in Finland. The main question set for the study was: What factors explain the stability of multicultural marriages described by the spouses themselves? This was further divided into two sub-questions of what phases long-lasting multicultural marriages go through and what the special features describing the stability of multicultural marriages are. This was a qualitative study, in which 11 Finnish spouses' interviews formed the data. The results describe the phases of a long-lasting multicultural marriage and factors enhancing the stability of a multicultural marriage, based on which the stability of multicultural marriages was further discussed. The possible conflicts and supportive factors can be located at various levels each contributing to the quality of the relationship. The accumulation theory of multicultural relationships is introduced as the conclusion.

Key words:

Multicultural marriage, immigrant spouse, Finland, multicultural relationship, long-lasting marriage

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1. Introduction

Factors explaining the stability of a romantic relationship have been studied abundantly, varying from spouses' personal characteristics and skills and mutual relationship (Rusbult, 1983) to the couple's social network and wider societal factors (Cate & Lloyd, 1993). In this study, we were interested in what the chances of success are and how to build a long-lasting multicultural marriage in Finland. The study focused on long-lasting multicultural marriages in Finland.

There are numerous well-known theories about love and its stability in romantic relationships. John Lee's (1973) well-known typology of love compared the forms of falling in love with the colors of a rainbow. Lee distinguished the primary three forms (erotic, playful, and companionable love) with secondary forms (manic, considerate, and unselfish love) that form numerous combinations. Other classifications about the phases or essence of love include, for example, Tzeng's (1992) octagon model, Shirley's (1983) a vector model, and Reiss' (1960) circle. Furthermore, there are a filter theory (Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962), ABCDE-model (Levinger, 1983), as well as balance, exchange, and equilibrium theories (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Similarly, Robert J. Sternberg (1998) tried to explain why people find someone attractive but not others and why some intimate relationships endure even if facing hardships but others fail. Sternberg distinguished 26 love stories which he categorized into five different types of story.

Marital satisfaction and happiness have also been self-evaluated (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000) in order to examine marital adjustment (Glenn, 1990) as well as marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The findings show that despite its hardness, it is important to accept dissimilarities and changes in the other (see also Nock, 1979; Vespa, 2014). Accepting changes requires compromises, flexibility, and bargaining but not excessively (see also Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012). A loving spouse and family do not suppress but, at their best, make one feel good and accepted as one is and, at the same time, give space to renew and develop oneself in a direction that one desires (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009). Numerous psychological theories (e.g., Gable & Haidt, 2005) emphasize the meaning of healthy self-respect in creating and maintaining satisfying human relationships.

According to numerous medical and psychological studies (e.g., Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014; Rohrbaugh, Shoham, & Coyne, 2006), satisfying romantic relationship also contributes to well-being. A crucial and ever-topical question therefore is how to create and maintain happy relationships. Our research on happy marriages along with work (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012a) summoned up seven principles of happy and long-lasting marriages: (1) The Ability to Turn Downs into Ups, (2) Activity, Creativity, and Imagination, (3) Tolerating the Dissimilarity and Change, (4) Patience, Flexibility, and Humbleness, (5) Acknowledgment, Support, and Admiration, (6) Commitment and Dedication, and (7) Self-Respect (see also Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013a; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012).

At their best, spouses are able to comfort, support, and encourage each other in the tumults of life. The relationship stays alive in times of trouble if partners are willing to slow down, soothe, stay by each other's side, introduce new views, encourage, and seek a better life arising from even the most intolerable situations (Carrère et al., 2000). Likewise, men and

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women engaging in more nontraditional gender roles in work and family domains has influence on the quality of relationships as well (Perrone, Wright, & Jackson, 2009).

Lamanna and Riedmann (2009) consider the stability of love and relationship as a sum of four factors: (1) recognition of the importance of relationship (one has to appreciate the relationship), (2) accepting and supportive communication, (3) reciprocal friendliness ("love should not hurt mentally or physically), and (4) humor and surprises that brighten the everyday life. But what are the special features of multicultural relationships? Are there any theories that reveal keys to a stable marriage especially between spouses from different cultures?

2. Special characteristics of multicultural relationships

Love processes are told to progress somewhat similarly regardless of age, gender, or cultural background (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013a). The beginning of a relationship is one the most important phases in the relationship development. While multicultural relationships often are based on freedom of partner selection, in other words on love, the risk of breaking up is higher in these relationship compared to monocultural relationships. This is partly due to the difficulty of combining both spouse's cultural values and expectations successfully (Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 1995; Heikkilä, 2011; Määttä, 2011).

Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1994) emphasizes the construction of the shared reality in multicultural relationships. Communication, rituals, and shared values are elements that have to be agreed upon in everyday life. Common habits should be created. As such, it is incorrect to argue that monocultural relationships would be more effortless when considering practical issues. Communication problems are always a salient part of relationship communication (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013b). When it comes to multicultural relationships, language, lifestyles, values, cuisine, or different ways mindsets can cause trouble (see Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Spickard, 1989).

Furthermore, life involves various stressful situations that are either family-bound or come from outside. The former refers to, for example, alcohol abuse or mental or physiological illnesses. The latter covers, for example, unemployment or negative attitudes in one's environment. Reuben Hill (1949) studied families' and couples' adjustment phases that always start from the individual, the nature of a crisis, and how the individual adjusts to the situation. The second phase happens at the couple level and reveals how the couple adjusts to the situation. The third phase involves the whole family and what new roles emerge in the family due to the crisis (Hill, 1949). Hill's model of family stress was complemented by Hamilton McCubbin and his colleagues (1983) (see also Boss, 1992; Lavee, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1985; Malia, 2007). They developed the ABCX model that emphasizes the salient role of resources in romantic relationships and families. This model also helps analyzing multicultural marriages, as it illustrates well how families function in stressful situations. In the model, A refers to the stressful situation, B to the resources the family possess, C to the family members' interpretations about the stressful situation, and X to the family adjustment. The theory is based on family system theories and family stress theories that all consider family adjustment as a dynamic and developmental process (White & Kline, 2008).

3. Method

The purpose of this study was to analyze the factors enhancing stability of multicultural marriages in Finland. One research question was set for the study:

What factors explain the stability of multicultural marriages described by the spouses themselves?

This was further divided into two sub-questions:

(1) What phases do long-lasting multicultural marriages go through?

(2) What are the special features describing the stability of multicultural marriages?

This was a qualitative study, in which 14 Finnish spouses who were married to a foreigner were interviewed. Of these interviews, 11 were used as data. What was crucial in this study was how Finnish spouses talked about their relationships and families. The interest was in their opinions on how a romantic relationship functions and how they describe their partners and themselves as well as their romantic relationships. The selection was made because interviews with Finnish spouses could be done in the Finnish language without the use of interpreters and further familiarization with the cultural backgrounds of foreign spouses in order to do interviews successfully. At first, it seemed that it was difficult to reach suitable participants for the study and have people talk about their marriages to a stranger, but these fears were unfounded.

The interviews were carried out across Finland among Finnish spouses who had been married to a foreigner approximately 15 years. The interviewees represented both women (N=8) and men (N=3), aged 32-51. The foreigner spouses' countries of origin or continents will not be revealed in this article in order to protect the research participants' anonymity. However, immigrants come from all over the world.

The narrative interviewing method was chosen to this study (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narratives are considered data that participate in forming and producing culture, identities, and political projects. Before going to asking how to do research with narratives, it is important to realize what narratives are and how narratives work in the social life (Bruner, 1986; Gudmundsdottir, 1996). For example, Koski (2007) divides the concept of narrative into four, partly overlapping juxtapositions: (1) singular, designated narratives vs. narrative as a theoretical concept; (2) narrative as a research target vs. narrative as a methodological tool for analyzing a phenomenon produced by narrating; (3) the definition of narrative based on its form vs. its content; and (4) narrative as a concrete expression vs. narrative as a mere metaphor describing human activity.

Narrative research has developed during past decades, but it cannot be seen as a coherent paradigm or method (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). Merely, narrative is a framework for research related to narratives. These studies share the position of narratives in transmitting and constructing of reality. It means that a narrator has a central role between the reality and narrative (Bal, 1999).

The data were analyzed with the methods of narrative analysis and analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis of narratives focused on analyzing the contents of narratives. The narrative analysis analyzed the data as a whole by categorizing by themes

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and types. Elements emerging from narratives were organized into a new, comprehensive narrative. Each interview were formed into a narrative and then these narratives were combined into a meta-narrative that was compared to the interviewees' stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). This resembled a combination of elements emerging from the data, forming a plotted narrative (Polkinghorne 1995). Analyses focused on differences between individual narratives and the meta-narrative: why do they differ and what do the themes tell about the phenomenon. Themed narratives cannot be considered all-encompassing, but they bring out the core contents from the data (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008).

4. Results

4.1 Phases of a long-lasting multicultural marriage

This results section illustrates the phases multicultural marriages according to the research participants had involved. Different phases give an impression about what special features typify multicultural marriages.

The first encounter is a memorable event, and the participants remembered it well in the interviews. They could describe the meeting in great detail. Indeed, these first encounters formed one of the core parts of the narratives because they include specific meeting time, place, and situation giving the trigger to the relationship. Both women and men remembered this first time equally well (cf. Eagly, 2013). Narratives included powerful, pleasant feelings that, for example, Robert Stenberg (1998) noticed as a part of the excitement of the phase of falling in love. Although one could assume that the Finnish participants would have had previous positive experiences of foreigners (cf., Khatib-Chahidi, Hill, & Paton, 1998), this was not accented in this study.

Usually the participants started the interviews by describing their first encounter with their spouse or talking about the time preceding the event. The first phase of the relationship naturally is located in the time of the first encounter and beginning of the relationship.

The second phase included moving to Finland among those spouses who had met each other abroad. They had to negotiate about which country they would be living in, and quite often, the Finnish spouses were unable to move abroad from Finland. The second phase of the relationship among those who had met in Finland also involved planning of the future together.

The third phase of the relationships focused on settling down in Finland. This phase was described very carefully in the interviews and influenced the next phases of the relationships either positively or negatively depending on how well or poorly the initial phases had succeeded.

“It would have been important to her to know where she was about to come...that people are not necessarily very responsive, and it is cold and dark...and oh, the language, how important it would be to know the language...” (Man No. 2)

“First, we moved in Helsinki [the capital of Finland] and everything went well there because we had jobs and everything... He made friends at work and the Finnish language

was not a problem because he did well in English... He started a language course but did not feel up to attending it..." (Woman No.2)

The previous data excerpts illustrate diverging narratives about the initial phases of a multicultural relationship. The spouses referred in these interviews present two groups of immigrants treated differently in Finland. The first group consists of western people who speak English as their native language, while the second group covers people coming from developing countries and without language skills. When arriving Finland, they are in unequal positions because representatives of the former group are not necessarily expected to know the Finnish language but the latter group is, especially when applying for a job. Johanna Leinonen (2011) concluded the same in her studies.

Moving to a strange country can be a cultural shock. For example, Lucy Williams (2010) reminds how life as a marital immigrant does not necessarily measure up to one's expectations, nor do immigrants always get relevant information about their new home country. This viewpoint by Williams was evident in the data of this study as well. The Finnish spouses described how moving to Finland was first experienced as something exotic. Immigrant spouses were fascinated by the beautiful and pure nature, exciting local people, and decorating the new home. The Finnish spouses helped with all practical matters; otherwise, many things would have been much more difficult to handle.

"Indeed, my spouse has been saying to me that how she would have handled everything without a Finnish spouse. Well, of course it would have been difficult – when you know nothing about anything and do not know the language..." (Man No. 2.)

The fourth phase of the relationship focuses more on the everyday life and the ways the multicultural couples manage to create shared daily practices and habits. Some couples also made their relationships official during this phase, while others had been married shortly after the first encounter. This phase could be especially prone to crises and spouses' roles could change many times during the phase. One example of the role change was unemployment and related changes in everyday life.

"Well, at first it was quite depressing when he had no job, and there was not any job available either. And let's say that he had unemployment periods first, and that is why he ended up in this school; just go there. So, he saw everything very negatively and blamed the Finns. And then he started complaining that he does not like it and seemed to just miss his home country..." (Woman No. 7)

The length of the fourth phase differed depending on a couple. For example, the start of the relationship and how fast the relationship had progressed as well as the initial status of the immigrant spouse influenced the length of the fourth phase. Spouses without the knowledge of the Finnish language had not been able to realize how important the language skills would be especially for job applicants. The situation caused frustration in many immigrant spouses, and they got negative experiences of Finnish people and society. Not only communication problems within a relationship due to the usage of a third language (see Breger & Hill, 1998), but also the strain the Finnish spouse has when being obliged to take care of all practical matters for his or her spouse (see Cools, 2011) put pressure on the multicultural marriages. The immigrant spouse became easily dependent on the Finnish spouse in many ways.

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“I took care of all insurances, bank accounts, and all phone calls... it started to be a burden... it became our typical cause of disagreement...” (Woman No. 6.)

As the immigrant spouses' reliance on the Finnish spouses could last for years, many interviewees had asked and begged their spouses to learn the Finnish language. Certainly, multicultural marriages involve unspoken discussion over how interaction changes and how spouses' beliefs, emotions, attitudes, values, behaviors, and identities change along with time (Liebkind, 2000). Outi Tuomi-Nikula (1997) refers to multicultural relationships in which acculturation takes place at the micro and macro levels. In the micro level, the immigrant spouse has to integrate in the new country and its society.

“Then we were just thinking that if he cannot find a job, he has to learn Finnish so well that he will find... and that is what happened.” (Woman No. 8)

However, at the second level, both spouses go through an acculturation process by familiarizing with and getting used to each other's expectations of their roles in marriage and values. One of the interviewees described how her spouse had found it difficult to adjust to the Finnish society and expected his Finnish spouse to follow the habits of his culture at their home. The fifth phase included the time after crises when the marriages and family roles had been molded according to the double-ABCX model (Hill, 1949, 1958; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). Family roles can be regarded as a continuum that can change even several times during one's life span.

4.2 Factors enhancing the stability of a multicultural marriage

Binding Daily Chores

Fluent everyday life consists of simple things as described by the research participants. Like in any relationship, also spouses in multicultural marriages appreciated basic, balanced everyday life instead of, for example, exotic trips to abroad or expensive presents.

“When we started to do things together and function as a family... everything changed... I noticed that it did me a favor...” (Woman No. 7)

Shared daily chores, such as washing dishes, cleaning, and minding children, represented these small matters referred by the participants. One of the interviewees told that their marriage was happy if they were able to find moments together in their everyday life, for example preparing a meal together, watching a film after children's bedtime, or something similar. Another Finnish spouse emphasized small trips together with the spouse; these breakaways were important to their relationship. Regardless of the way of finding time together, doing the effort for the relationship mattered. Interviewees described how important it was to show caring concretely and by doing things together.

“She likes presents, and I do not care about them much. I rather long for time together...” (Man No. 1)

"I like doing and going together. We do not need something, we, for example, cook together and chat... We have not ever been saying that you wash dishes and clean up, and you do this and that, but we both do always what is needed... and if I, for example, have a headache, he says to me that I should go to sleep and I will take care of it..." (Woman No. 4)

Noteworthy, every human being loves and shows love in his or her own way, and spouses should bother to find out each other's personal love styles. Everyday life can turn into a treasure land of love in multicultural marriages if spouses are willing to show caring by daily actions.

Caring and Loving Actions

Many interviewees talked about the importance of time spent together. While some of them appreciated little, daily honors, others preferred breakaways from the everyday life. Gifts or gentle gestures and favors were considered as manifestations of love. Physical intimacy and its importance to the quality of relationship were mentioned in all interviews.

"Of course, it [sex] cannot be the same any longer... passionate, like in the beginning... now, it is like; we can hold our hands and it does not always have to lead to anything..." (Woman No. 4)

In multicultural marriages, acceptance and intimacy can become tested for example in situations where spouses do not fully understand each other because of language problems. Likewise, cultural differences can cause difficulties if expressions of love are interpreted differently. Therefore, finding the mutual way of showing love and caring that suits both spouses is especially important in multicultural marriages.

Accepting and supportive communication

As a natural continuum to the previous element, it is important to realize that different ways of communicating and expressing ourselves make an important part of communication in relationships (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013b). Gestures, tones, use of space, and facial expressions are part of everyone's communication, and vary between cultures (Frame, 2004; Roos, 2009). When moving to a new country, culture-specific habits of what one can and should not say would be important to learn. Likewise, non-verbal communication (e.g., body language, positions, and movements) is different in different countries (Viertola-Cavallari, 2009).

Interviewees described many situations in which their spouses could have said hello to all oncoming people and when not being greeted in return, they considered Finnish people rude. One interviewee described the spouse's first visit to parents-in-law: the spouse had not looked the parents directly in the eye, which had made a bad impression and caused a conflict. These situations could have been avoided with sufficient familiarization of both spouse's cultures.

"We could have solved these issues if we had talked about them. But you cannot consider everything... so we have learned the hard way." (Man No. 2)

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When it comes to multicultural marriages, it seems all the more important to be aware of the various forms of communication. For example, Tuula Pukkala (2006) emphasized in her study on long-lasting Finnish relationships that the importance of quality communication for the stability of relationships has been known for a long time (see also Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013b).

“He is really talkative and open, which is probably that non-Finnish character. I realized that very clearly. We talked about everything and he kind of taught me to talk about all things. - - We have discussed how we handle this relationship. - - This negotiation is a really important element in our life, and I noticed that he does not do anything without negotiating with me first. And I have learned it from him, and in my opinion, it has become our strength and salvation in many possible conflict situations.” (Woman No. 1)

The previous data excerpt shows how important it has been to learn habits that foster the multicultural relationship. The spouse’s willingness to take into account each other’s opinions, characteristics, and habits and to appreciate them can turn into the footing of a relationship. This was important in the busy everyday life that was often referred to in the interviews. How to maintain positive atmosphere and friendly, constructive way of paying attention to each other was reflecting to the inner balance of the relationship, as described by the following Finnish spouses:

“Spending time together, paying attention... - - I started to address my husband more respectfully and thought more of what I say to him...” (Woman No. 3)

“Certainly, if you do not have any respect you do not have anything else either. That is the basic thing, right?” (Man No. 1)

Humor

When the interviewees were asked to think of advice they would like to give to other multicultural couples, many of them emphasized the meaning of humor. Without an ability to look at the funny sides of daily events, marriages would not have probably last. Humorous attitude helped to survive with various daily chores when even going to a grocery store necessitated thorough negotiations.

“You have to have a sense of humor. If the corners of your mouth are downward all the time, it starts to affect the family... and the relationship too... So we laugh a lot...” (Woman No. 7)

“...and you have to have humor. It helps to pass any time of trouble...” (Man No. 3)

Commitment, and ability to compromise and make up

All relationships have conflicts that usually can be solved. Multicultural marriages may require more conscious commitment to the relationship due to the various daily challenges that monocultural relationships do not necessarily have, for example, when the foreign spouse does not know the Finnish language. Spouses’ perseverance is tested when they have to find the right cultural combination in their relationship and life the everyday life in Finland. Conflicts occur inevitably, but it is the spouses’ ability to make compromises that

can help the relationship to develop. Likewise, the ability and active willingness to make up is the most important ingredient of a successful multicultural marriage. These elements were described in the data as follows:

“We had to stop before we would face a bankruptcy. That was crazy: we had to take loans to be able to pay loans and employ ourselves... I also tried to handle my other job elsewhere... now we think that what if we would move to a bigger place where there would not be so much racism either...” (Woman No. 3)

Support from others

Social networks that supported the spouses were considered important. In many cases, relatives lived faraway and practical help was not possible. Instead, mental support when available was seen crucial. Some of the interviewees told that their spouses had not been accepted as family members. Lack of social networks, disparaging and hostile attitudes toward the foreign spouse had caused tension also inside the family and relationship. These issues had to be discussed and solved.

“One thing is that we have always been along, depended on each other. We have not had any supporting network around us. We have not had grandparents to watch our children, and we have always had to find solutions by ourselves...” (Woman No. 2)

Many couples in this study had survived without friends' and relatives' help. Only a few had been helped by their circle of acquaintances. Lack of concrete support had created personal dynamics and systems in the relationships. Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1994) calls these kinds of negotiations as relationship work, which appeared as a strong element in the multicultural marriages in this study.

Lack of acceptance causes extra strain for the relationship, even though couples in this study had found ways to triumph over these adversities. However, friends' and relatives' acceptance can become important supportive factor for a multicultural relationship, as described one of the participants:

“My mom helped us... I do not know how we would have survived without her help...” (Woman No. 3)

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to find keys to long-lasting multicultural marriages in Finland. The narratives obtained from the Finnish spouses were quite lifelike and included concrete issues that support and test multicultural relationships in Finland. The phases of the relationships varied based on how the relationships had started and whether the spouses had already lived in Finland or moved to Finland from abroad. The initial status of the foreign spouse could become a determining factor of the relationship quality. Likewise, employment and the knowledge of the Finnish language defined how well the immigrant spouses integrated in Finland. The longer the marriage, the lesser cultural differences influenced the multicultural relationships. Instead, spouses' personal differences started to have a bigger role (see also Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006).

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Some common features could be found that especially describe the stability of multicultural marriages. As the interviews in this study showed, the possible conflicts and supportive factors can be located at various levels that, when considering as an entity, each contribute to the quality of the relationship. We call this the accumulation theory of multicultural relationships (see Figure 1). The theory has four levels that can enhance or shake the relationship, which is illustrated by the bright and dark sides of each level.

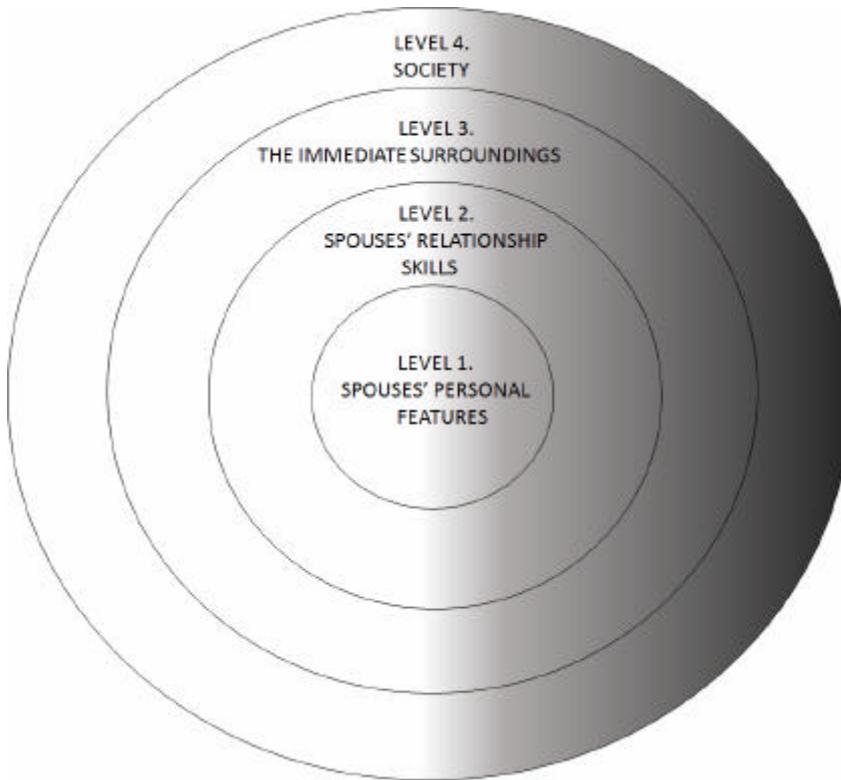


Figure 1. The accumulation theory of multicultural romantic relationships

The theory can be further opened by discussing how each level influences the multicultural relationship (see Figure 2). At the first level, the couple itself, the spouses' personal features, form the basis and the core of the relationship. Their fundamental features, accepting, tolerant, and adaptive features, form the foundation of a successful multicultural relationship. At the next level, the spouses' relationship skills have a significant role. This level covers the spouses' abilities and willingness to maintain and nurture their relationship by appreciating mutual everyday life. Positively-toned communication, love and affection, ability to compromise and tolerate disagreements all are features that support the relationship and its positive development. Without these skills, the multicultural relationship would not probably stay strong at times of facing for example threats or trouble from outside the family.

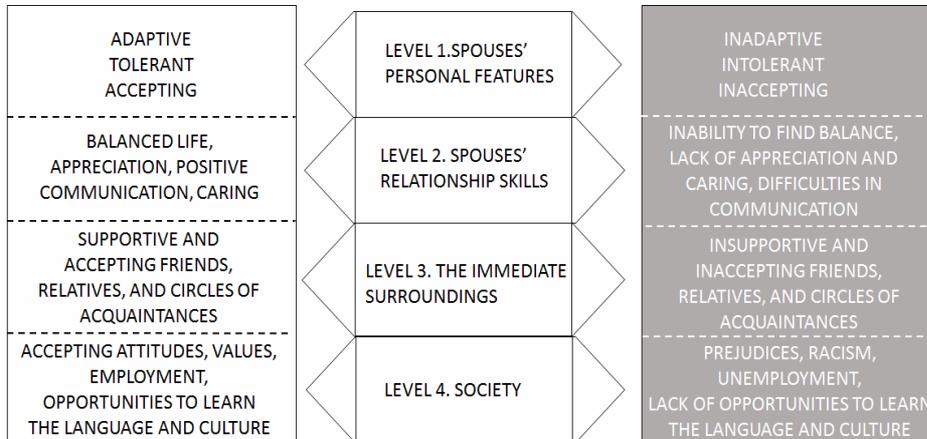


Figure 2. Positive and negative extremes of each level influencing multicultural romantic relationships

Indeed, the third level of our theory includes the resources that support the relationship from outside. Friends, relatives, and other circles of acquaintances represent social networks that contribute to the quality of a multicultural relationship in many ways: not only as concrete help but also as acceptance of the multicultural relationship and welcoming of the immigrant spouse.

The fourth dimension occurring from the data is the society. The surrounding society can provide resources that help the multicultural relationship flourish. Such resources are, for example, employment, accepting attitudes, and values. In addition, economic support can be seen especially important at the phase of settling in the new home country. Opportunities to learn the local language and culture enhance the foreign spouse's integration, as do fluent processes with immigration and other officials.

Naturally, all these levels are interconnected as well. Unwillingness to adjust to the society and learn the local culture can threaten the spouses' mutual commitment to cherish their relationship and make a lousy impression to the possible social contacts at the third level of relationship resources. On the other hand, lack of society's or social network's support can put strain to the relationship, but if the spouses are able and willing to maintain their relationship, the multicultural marriage can last. All starts from the individual spouses themselves, but as a couple they also form a unit that is a part of their intermediate surrounding environment and network of relatives and friends and the society and culture they live in. The ideal situation is the one where all these levels contribute to the relationship positively and supportively.

6. Conclusion

Although Finland has had cultural minorities for centuries, cultural encounters are more mundane today than before. It is important to understand events related to the phenomenon (Bras & Kok, 2005; Leitzinger, 1999). The group of immigrants in Finland is homogenous compared to other European countries, partly due to the strict immigration law of Finland (Fingerroos & Haanpää, 2011; Komulainen, 2012).

This study described the factors behind long-lasting multicultural marriages in Finland. As the results showed, integration in the new home country can be problematic to a foreign spouse and includes various phases (Williams, 2010). In Finland, multicultural marriages are often studied from the point of view of acculturation process, and immigration researchers are especially interested in immigrants' integration, identities, and adjustment, and marital acculturation (Tuomi-Nikula, 1997). Moving to a new country is always somewhat challenging, especially when an immigrant does not know the local language or culture. Likewise, Finnish culture and language can be seen challenging, if the immigrant spouse is not familiar with them before moving in Finland (Leinonen, 2011).

In all, it is worth remembering that attempts and efforts to integrate in the new home country do not mean that one should forget his or her own culture. For balanced life and healthy cultural identity, also in marriage, one should pursue balance with one's own and the spouse's culture. Multiculturalism in a relationship can turn into an empowering richness when the suitable balance is found (Padilla & Perez, 2003). However, the study also showed that especially in multicultural relationships, it is not just the individual spouse's and their fit but also the surrounding people and society can function either a supportive or challenging, even shaking, factor when it comes to the stability and successful development of a multicultural relationship.

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