EXPLORING GIRLHOOD

Girls' Cottage in supporting the identity and growth among girls from a Muslim background.

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Thesis, Fall 2011
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ABSTRACT

Tiina Smith. Exploring Girlhood - Girls' Cottage in supporting the identity and growth among girls from a Muslim background. Järvenpää, Fall 2011, 68p.

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During autumn 2010 and spring 2011 the author did two practical placements in the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Helsinki. The new Girls' Cottage-venture run by the association had just taken its first steps. Therefore, this thesis was written to support the project. The objective of the venture was to establish a low threshold free time place only for girls from all backgrounds in eastern Helsinki.

The aim of this research was to describe the concept of the Girls' Cottage and raise awareness of the venture, further the significance of the girl-focused work. In addition, the purpose was to introduce the working methods which have been included as a fundamental base of the Girls' Cottage. Moreover, this study was pointed out to present thoughts related to girls' identity growth for the future realisation of the venture.

This research has a qualitative approach. Interviews and observation were used as methods for collecting the data. A thematic analysis method was used when analysing the data.

The results of this thesis presented the multiply dimensions of identity. Different cultures, habits and backgrounds affected the comprehension of identity, what the attained identity includes and how identity of the girls from a Muslim background could be supported. The research also strengthened the need of the 'Girls' Cottage' in the area of eastern Helsinki, further the activities which they would wish to organise.

Key words: girl-focused work, gender sensitive work, peer support, culture, identity growth, support, qualitative research

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

During autumn 2010 I did a three month practical placement at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Helsinki. I found out about the association through my previous placement connections, since I was looking for work with the youth, young immigrants and deepen my knowledge about project work. The most essential part of the placement was to complete my own project within a bigger project. This was also the wish of the YWCA. It was suggested that I start a background survey as my project to support a new venture of the associations. The background survey included finding out the future prospects and challenges of the youth in eastern Helsinki area further, observe their interests of taking part in planning the contents. The venture called 'Girls' Cottage' (Tyttöjen Tupa), which aim is to open a free time place only for girls, had just taken its first steps. Therefore, I was eager to face the challenge. At the beginning of the placement I had accepted to write my thesis related to the venture. Owing to this fact I did my next placement at the YWCA in spring 2011, continued the background survey and focused on the venture as a whole in a deeper level.

When I heard about the new 'Girls' Cottage'-venture that is run by the Christian association I became interested in being part of it. My attentiveness arose due to the multicultural nature of the venture combined together with an approach of Christian based values. The question, how to involve people from numerous ethnic backgrounds without frightening them away by the word 'Christianity', was demanding. In addition, the question which was stated above includes one of the main features of community development work, involvement. I recognised several aspects of community development work in the venture that I will discuss later on in the chapter three. For me building a bridge between cultures and community members through broadening common understanding about living conditions, wellbeing and equality sounded intellectually challenging. Furthermore, after having a background of working with children and their families I was content with developing my knowledge especially concerning multicultural youth- and family work.

The official time table of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture is 2011-2015. The background survey was conducted on behalf of the association and me in early 2010 and the aim is to stabilize the concept of the 'Girls' Cottage' by 2015. Although the target group covers girls from all nationalities, in this study I concentrate on girls from a Muslim background between the years eight and fourteen, and their families. Since a frame around the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture is strong but the more specific content of activities is under planning, the objective of this study is to give some ideas for future realization for the 'Girls' Cottage'.

This thesis presents the concept of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture and centralizes on pondering the issues connected to identity questions, particularly relationships between identity growth, culture changes and adaptation into a new society. Furthermore, what could be done to support the identity development of girls from a Muslim background without causing the feeling of loosing their fundamental roots. The aim of this study is to provide new material in order to support the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture. By supporting I convey to raise awareness of the venture and its objectives, further reach the target group and their families. All gathered information will be used to promote the need of the 'Girls' Cottage'. This thesis consists of two different parts. The first part is a theoretical part where I introduce the key concepts and literature. The second part focuses on the research process, main findings and my professional development.

2 'GIRLS' COTTAGE'-VENTURE

In this chapter I will introduce more carefully the background of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture, the association behind it, what the venture is all about and what it is aiming at. In addition, I will discuss the areal reasons why the venture is taking place in a specific area and how I chose my target group to be girls from a Muslim background. In the last section I will also delve into a challenging question of terminology related to the target group that I faced during the process.

2.1 Background of the association behind the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture

The Young Women's Christian Association is an old, ecumenical and international association which has widespread during centuries to 90 different countries around the world and has altogether more than 25 million members. The notion 'ecumenical' emphasises a connection and social relations between all Christians. (Finnish Ecumenical Council) The most essential aims of the world wide association are, for instance, to improve the wellbeing, future and quality of life of women and girls by offering better education for them and promoting their human rights. Furthermore, a significant part is to defend the status of immigrants, migrants and refugees as well as encourage individuals for peace and non-violent actions. In Finland there are 25 local associations which organise various activities for girls and women of all ages. One of these local units was situated in Helsinki in the late 18th century.
(Nuorten Naisten Kristillisten Yhdistysten Liitto ry 1996, 15, 22-24.)

Since 2006 the YWCA of Helsinki has concentrated on youth work and all above girl-focused work by developing and reviving its activities with new inspiration. The first project towards their dream was the 'Pearl-Project' which took place between the years 2006-2010. The main goals of the project were to offer low threshold club activities for girls and youth such as camps, action days and events. In addition, the aim was to encourage other associations and local sectors into action by networking with them.

The outcome of the 'Pearl-Project' was the common remark made by partners that there are not enough easy access free time activities in eastern Helsinki. At the beginning of the project activities were offered within broader regional scale around the metropolitan area. Regardless of this, the focus was laid on free time activities in eastern Helsinki, particularly Vuosaari-Meri-Rastila area, because of the high demand for activities.

This above mentioned five-year-project showed clearly the alarming situation of youth and children in the area. Furthermore, it stressed the lack of inexpensive low threshold activities which are open also for those children and youth who does not have a possibility for a hobby owing to cultural, social or economical reasons. I will discuss these three reasons later on in this chapter. Together with support from its partners the YWCA of Helsinki started planning a new venture, starting in 2010 that would strengthen and advocate girl-focused work done in eastern Helsinki. The common idea is to develop activities provided by local sectors and survey girls own wishes and needs for activities by taking their cultural background into consideration. The idea is also to include girls and their families into the project as an active way. Therefore, they will become more aware of multi professional knowledge. (Katri Mäki, personal communication 15.12.2010.)

2.2 'Girls' Cottage' as a multicultural meeting place

Painting, dancing, swimming, handicrafts, fashion shows, cooking, board games, theatre plays…values of love, tolerance, friendships, girlhood and womanhood. Here were some examples of approximately 150 activity wishes and values I gathered from the girls during my placements.

While promoting the 'Girls' Cottage' together with other representatives of the association in the same event with local sectors, I met numerous youth workers and discussed dreams with girls. I listened to their suggestions and saw the excitement in their eyes followed by a slight disappointment when they realized the 'Girls' Cottage' does not exist yet. However it seemed, according to many reactions

how welcome a place for girls would be in the area. To my question: "What would you think about the idea if there was soon an own meeting place only for girls?" I got an answer as follows:

> Sometimes it's good to be just among girls, boys would disturb us anyways. (A girl 11 years)

In order to be more specific, the main objective of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture is to open a free, low-threshold and multicultural place for all girls of eastern Helsinki between the years eight and fourteen. When discussing multiculturalism, I denote to point the' Girls' Cottage' as a place where girls can learn to appreciate different values, cultures, habits and personalities by getting to know individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. In addition, it offers opportunities for interaction between several backgrounds and not only ways to accept dissimilarities. One of the main principles of multiculturalism is to respect human rights, spread tolerance and oppose prejudices. (Cantell, Lappalainen, Salmio & Varis 2000, 9-11.) The venture emphasizes the above-mentioned age scale in the beginning but it is flexible to move towards each direction if needed. One of the reasons to choose this age group is the fact that many parents do not allow their children to travel, for instance, to the centre of Helsinki for leisure activities. That is understandable and gives a reason why it is even more significant to create some special meeting place to the Vuosaari-Rastila area.

What gives a positive drive to run the venture also in the future is the success of other similar places all over Finland. A vision behind the 'Girls' Cottage' is based on the resembling contexts with Girls' Houses in Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Oulu and Kuopio as well as a Girls' Cottage in Tampere. On account of the fact that Girls' Houses are created by Setlementtiliitto ry and the Girls' Cottage in Tampere by Setlementti Ahjola, the YWCA of Helsinki cannot use these previous names for their creation. The 'Girls' Cottage' is a work name before a concrete place has been established and a name decided together with important service users, the girls themselves. At this point I wanted to clarify possible name confusion in order to avoid misunderstandings and be fair towards other sectors. Therefore, when I discuss the 'Girls' Cottage' in this thesis I will use quotation marks.

Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick and Anita Harris (2005, 5) who have been surveying femininity and girl power, arose the meaning of girlhood and girl culture by emphasizing the changes in attitudes between the last decades. Nowadays being a girl and growing up to be a young woman are not only classified as biologically normal process but also valuable phases of life. Girls have created their own culture which can include nearly anything important issues or symbols for them. (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005, 5.) In general, it is significant that girls have a place where to handle issues related to their girlhood without distractions from boys furthermore, have a possibility for peer support. Then again a multicultural place with employees from different ethnic backgrounds offers broader services and opportunities for girls. Since girls from different ethnic backgrounds face similar and varying challenges in their lives there is an increasing need for guidance, support and knowledge also for particular and sensitive gender-based questions. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 14-15, 102.)

The vision of the YWCA is that in the 'Girls' Cottage' girls from different cultures as well as from Finnish population could gather together and spend time only among girls. Some girls are not allowed to be in the same premises with an opposite gender due to their own cultural background. By offering activities only for girls, also those girls would have a possibility for a hobby. Furthermore, there is a need for small group activities for girls coming from different life situations and backgrounds. The idea of the 'Girls' Cottage' is to be a place where girls can find themselves comfortable and be exactly who they genuinely are without being worried about of other people's opinions about them. (Katri Mäki, personal communication 15.12.2010.)

Since the 'Girls' Cottage' aims at promoting culture awareness, it is important to reach as many girls from various ethnic backgrounds as possible. At least after visiting a place, girls can decide if it is for them or not. Jasinskaja-Lahti & Mähönen (2009, 111) explain, how welfare between different groups, for instance, Finnish population and small ethnic minorities can be reached by spreading culture awareness and positive, realistic atmosphere. Due to rumours, misunderstandings and language barriers people do not have a truthful picture of some ethnic minority groups. These prejudices, fears or beliefs are often transferred from adults to children. (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Mähönen 2009, 111.)

The 'Girls' Cottage' would not only serve as a meeting place but girls would also have an opportunity to take part in group activities. By organising group activities, peer support, the 'Girls' Cottage' aims at supporting girls' individual needs, their body development and, identity- and self esteem growth. It is essential to transmit a message for girls, how everybody should be treated with respect and as equal, unique and valuable individuals. Girls who come from different cultures need connections with people from their own background but also connections to Finnish population, to learn habits in Finnish culture and reach the feeling that they are full members in this Finnish society. The same way Finnish population needs friends from other cultures to minimize negative attitudes and prejudices. (Katri Mäki, personal communication 15.12.2010.) When common atmosphere values cultural differences, skills and characteristics, therefore enriches instead of posing a threat to them, individuals can be genuinely different. In this case interaction between cultures is the most efficient. (Cantell 2000, 98.) Also communication between cultures affects on breaking conventional images which people have of other nationalities and cultures (Kaikkonen 2004, 136).

As principles described by Nuorten Naisten Kristillisen Yhdistyksen Liitto ry (1996, 15) a young person will be supported by the triangle principle of the YWCA as a physical, psychological and spiritual unit. Physical and psychological support stresses that a young person needs positive experiences and accepting atmosphere in order to feel free to express her own opinions and creativity. In a safe environment she can try new things, while using other girls and adults working there as mirrors. The spiritual support means accepting Christian approach that emphasizes and respects other world views and differences in religions. Instead of emphasizing any specific religion, Christian values can be seen behind daily actions. These values are, for instance, justice, love for one's fellow man and the idea about one's uniqueness.
(Katri Mäki, personal communication 15.12.2010.)

2.3 Why eastern Helsinki?

According to Helsingin Kaupungin Tietokeskus the number of families, children and youth from different ethnic backgrounds is increasing in Rastila and surrounding districts, for instance, in Vuosaari area and Meri-rastila. In 2010 the number of 8-14 year old girls was nearly 2000 when surveyed. With arising trend in the statistics all prospects look towards the number doubling over the next decade. (Helsingin Kaupungin Tietokeskus) In addition, within a year there have been general discussions and published articles in newspapers about decreasing level of Finnish population in certain areas in Helsinki, and how differences between suburbs are expanding. Helsingin Sanomat published an article related to the population of the same suburbs. In January 2010, 26,6% of inhabitants of Meri-rastila had some other language as their mother tongue than Finnish. In the suburb of Kallahti that is situated adjacent to Meri-rastila the percentage was 23,8%. (Pokkinen, Vähäsarja 2010, A13.)

Eastern Helsinki has been known for decades as a multicultural area where numerous cultures and ethnic backgrounds coexist and enrich one another. The YWCA of Helsinki has justified the area by stating that there are numerous girls living in eastern Helsinki whose cultural heritage and integration into the Finnish society should be supported. (Katri Mäki, personal communication 15.12.2010.)

2.4 Why girls from a Muslim background?

The reasons behind choosing girls from a Muslim background as the target group of this study are my personal interests, as well as the wish I received from the YWCA of Helsinki.

Various ethnic groups live in eastern Helsinki but one of the biggest increasing groups is families from a Muslim backgrounds. (Helsingin Kaupungin Tietokeskus) By raising awareness of the 'Girls' Cottage' among families from a Muslim background the aim is to get girls and families involved from the commencement. Because often girls from a Muslim background and other ethnic decent have principles due to their own culture

and religion (Tiilikainen 2007, 33), the objective of the 'Girls' Cottage' is to become a place where different cultural aspects would be equally taken into consideration. My personal interests are to comprehend thoughts about the concepts of community and integration girls and families from a Muslim background have. Then again the YWCA of Helsinki is wishing to find out through my study, what girls and families think about the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture and would they be interested in getting involved.

Through my previous background survey I understood that the situation of girls from a Muslim background has become stagnant in the area. There are girls who do not have a hobby, other adult contacts or role models outside home and school, in addition who might be in danger of withdrawal later in the future. Certainly, there are other considerable groups, for instance, Russians and Estonians living in eastern Helsinki and they are also part of the target group for the 'Girls' Cottage'. However, for me it seems that the cultural differences between Finnish and Muslim backgrounds are broader than with Russians and Estonians. Therefore, I decided to focus on girls from a Muslim background. Another reason was that larger amounts of other groups have already taken part in free time activities. Thus, I was interested in finding ways in order to increase the participation of girls from a Muslim background. In this thesis I also limited the group of Muslims by concentrating only on Muslims from a Somali orientation.

The factors which have been significant to me from the first steps of my survey are being honest about the purposes of my research and showing respect towards all parties, especially girls and their families from a Muslim background. I have had fruitful conversations about my aims, the objectives of the venture, cultural differences and mutual respect which can be shown in various ways. One of the most essential cornerstones while building connections and moving on with the process was to straighten out the question about used terms. By talking to my target group and studying carefully previous studies concerning my topic I decided to use the term 'girls from a Muslim background' instead of 'Muslim girls' or 'girls from an Islam background'. This is because my interest is more in cultural than religious aspect. When I discuss girls from a Muslim background I bring up the meaning of one's own cultural settings, habits and traditions. The notions 'Muslim girls' and 'girls from an Islamic background' stresses the religion and are rather labelling.

I received many questions about why do I have to classify people by dividing them under certain terms or setting them as a target group. I understand these feelings, how different nations are meant to adapt themselves into a new society if they are constantly considered as a separate group, as 'the others'. My accepted explanation was that in order to limit my study I need to focus on some specific group. My aim in the beginning was to find out from some members of the target group themselves how they want to be mentioned in this study rather than deciding it by myself. The same participatory and involving approach lies behind the whole study and the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture. I do not tell people what to think and how to be involved but on the contrary find out their feelings and interests towards the participation. Once more I would like to stress that my intension is not to offend or insult anybody by using certain terms or presenting my viewpoints and references as definite truth.

3 MULTICULTURAL GIRL-FOCUSED WORK

In this chapter I will present the main concepts of the thesis by opening their meanings and goals. I will also introduce several factors which are essential to take into account when running a multicultural project and working with girls from different ethnic backgrounds. First of all, I will describe the content of multicultural- and gender sensitive work with girls. Then, I will discuss the signification of peer support and aspects of culture and identity in girl-focused work. Moreover, I will explore the notion of support and, in the end, ponder the venture's relation to community development work.

3.1 Multicultural work with girls

Youth work as a whole has been classified as a significant working method for preventing withdrawal and including youth into a society. After understanding its value and perceiving its ramified but positive impacts on youth a new working method,

girl-focused work, was created as a part of general youth work. Since girls mature faster biologically and psychologically than boys, also their needs and interests differ from each other. (Honkasalo 2011, 95-98.)

In general, girl-focused work aims at passing a message that being a girl and a young woman, any kind, is valuable. Each girl is an individual with her own opinions, skills and needs. Everybody is allowed to show uncertainty and weakness nevertheless what other people think. Girl-focused work fights against stereotypes by empowering girls to examine their own heart, dreams and find their unique place as a part of a society. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 13.) Furthermore, it offers girls freedom to discuss with adults and other girls about issues concerning their life and becoming a young woman in a safe environment (Honkasalo 2011, 194).

I understand the girl-focused work as the way that creating an accepting environment is vital in order to build genuine relationships and understand each other behind different backgrounds or facades. Lina Laurent (2005, 34-35) crystallises well in her article "Nothing exotic" how the role of adults is to spread the importance of people living in a multicultural society and respecting other cultures. Hence, according to the collected data one of the most important factors in girl-focused work is to teach girls to recognise differences and similarities people have. In addition, to find peers and role models they could easily identify with.

Girl-focused work has definitely gained a foothold in growing communities all over Finland. When multicultural aspects will be added to a mixture, the variety of needs is also increasing (Eischer&Tuppurainen 2009, 102). The cornerstone of multicultural work with girls is not meant to categorize Finnish girls and girls from different ethnic backgrounds into separate groups. On the contrary to include everybody into the action by defining a list of needs, possibilities and common goals. The cause of emphasising girl-focused work is the fact that some of the most delicate matters concerning multiculturalism are related to position of immigrant girls and gender issues as itself. (Honkasalo 2011, 78.) The common remark of several youth workers in the research done by Honkasalo (2011, 80) was a small number of girls participating in youth house activities compared with boys. Naturally when girls stay away from youth houses,

they will become more alienated from its action therefore their needs won't become to awareness. (Honkasalo 2011, 80.)

Some cultures have also distinctions in gender policies as well as challenges in today's societies have changed. Aapola et al. (2005, 8-9) indicate that relations between males and females have not always been this loose, especially concerning equality issues. It is stated that new modern thinking of gender equality has caused increasing amount of freedom and possibilities for girls in many societies. At the same time freedom has brought further confrontations for young women, who suddenly have more opportunities in front of them than they can handle. (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005, 8-9.)

Since girls come from different backgrounds and cultures, it is essential to enlighten them about future- or work opportunities in Finland. Not to tell them what to do but empower them to make their own decisions. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 109.) Creating a place for girls, where girl-focused working methods are part of an action plan is vital. Fundamentally, for the reason that many girls from different ethnic backgrounds do not have time for themselves due to, for instance, house work therefore they might not have possibilities to discuss their challenges, worries or questions related to puberty. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 105.) According to the interviews, these house work responsibilities could be, for example, cleaning, cooking and taking care of younger siblings.

3.2 Gender sensitive work with girls

When the amount of youth from different ethnic backgrounds is increasing in Finland, gender sensitive work will be more significant than ever before. Families move to Finland due to various reasons, either voluntarily or under compulsion on humanitarian grounds for instance owing to war (Tiilikainen 2007, 50-53).

Gender sensitive work is a remarkable part of girl-focused work. It enables the situation when focus is only on girls, content have been built rest on girls and activities have been chosen on their own conditions. In general, gender sensitive work is seen as a specific work form that pinpoints separate and closed small group actions. (Honkasalo 2011, 91). Eischer & Tuppurainen (2009, 13-17) explain that the emphasis on gender sensitive work is to concentrate on those issues and questions, for example identity and womanhood, which are typical of that specific gender, in this case girls. Furthermore, the aim is to encourage girls to grow up to become unique young women by strengthening their self-confidence and support becoming visible in the community. When girls learn to appreciate themselves and womanhood, they will also respect more the other gender. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 13-17.)

3.3 Peer support

Peer support groups open new doors for getting to know oneself, broaden own world view and learning useful social skills. As Laimio & Karnell (2010, 11) states, sharing own experiences then being an expert of one's own life situation are the key notions behind peer groups. The authors' rhetorical aim is to remind that the meaning of peer groups is not therapeutic above all, it is striving for preventing action. The action underlines peer members' similar backgrounds and therefore they are able to support each other unique and individual way. Eischer & Tuppurainen (2009, 108) criticises the view that peer support groups do not have a therapeutic affect at all by pointing out that peer group members might share extremely painful and traumatic memories. As observed during the research both viewpoints can be seen within peer support groups because the person herself can decide how much she is ready to share with other group members. She can also decide to reveal only her exterior without going into details therefore others have to accept it. This shows that peer group members have a choice. They can take group activities as a therapeutic action by revealing their feelings thoroughly or set their own limits concerning their participation.

Supporting youth and their involvement into a society by peer group activities have become a remarkable method to decrease withdrawal and loneliness among youth. Peer group activities are based to offer supervised activities for youth outside school and home. Activities are mainly constructed together with a group leader and group members by keeping in mind the educational and developmental aspects of the pursuits. (Harinen, Heikura, Lehmus, Vallisto 2008, 17.) Peer groups seems to demand more commitment and own initiative from its members than many other free time activities or hobbies. It is vulnerable because of its small size, further the group is struggling to reach the set goals if some members are constantly missing. On the other hand group members learn to know the importance of their own participation and it follows that they start absorbing their individual and mutual responsibilities in order to make the group work. (Harinen et al. 2008, 18.)

There are various types of peers support groups and one of them is psycho-educational groups. Maaret Parviainen, a social worker of the Social Services Department of Helsinki, (2007, 210-218) describes how psycho-educational groups consist of children or youth who are similar age and come from comparable life situations. Often the children participating in the above-mentioned groups are in a circle of child welfare and have parents who struggle with mental health problems or substance abuse. An objective of these groups is to offer a child support, knowledge about the illness of her parent/s and methods to cope with one's feelings. The idea of the psycho-educational groups, such as many other peer support groups, is to use creative working methods, for instance, painting, music, drama lessons and pantomime in order to give a child a possibility to express her feelings. Parviainen emphasizes how significant it is that a child feels valued and is capable of creating positive pictures about her future. It is essential to name the feelings and make child's wishes and dreams concrete by using creative working methods. When the feelings and thoughts of a child have been made visible, she is more likely able to cope with difficulties in her life. (Parviainen 2007, 210-218.)

Working in peer groups is important part of girl-focused- and gender sensitive work. Firstly, it is challenging although often in the end rewarding and secondly, it has all needed potential and capacity either succeed or fail depending on commitment of group leaders and group members. The context of peer support has several definitions

similarly than reasons behind starting a peer support group differs from each other. Groups can be targeted, for instance, for solving difficult questions and handling problematic life situations together or spending time together by organising common activities. Peer groups can be started by one's own initiative when they are often called 'self-help'-groups, in addition by an organisation or professionals. (Laimio & Karnell 2010, 15-16.) Belonging to any peer group might give a lonely and shy person a chance to broaden her social circles. The feeling of being heard, understood, valued, accepted and appreciated is extremely vital sentiments for everybody. (Laimio & Karnell 2010, 18.) At the starting point of a peer group it is vital to discuss values by stressing tolerant atmosphere and mutual respect. Consequently, group members come into contact with prevailing differences, habits and living styles without judging each others. (Ilonen 2009, 22.)

Since the idea of a peer group is to encourage its members to open up, talk about their feelings and express themselves, the atmosphere of a meeting place has to be chosen carefully (Harinen et al. 2008, 62-63). Building a safe and girl-friendly atmosphere is one of the most significant steps when planning the 'Girls' Cottage'. For example, the Girls' House in Helsinki has used girl-friendly decorations such as beautiful furniture and soft colours (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 14). When I discuss girl-friendly atmosphere I mean an area which has been planned and decorated together with the girls. Therefore, it feels cosy, comfortable and pleasant to be there. Holm (2010, 52) draws attention to peer groups' surrounding environment by stressing its relation to one's personal experience about the meeting.

Girls from the same background who have similar experiences can understand each other in a deeper level. What it is like to be a girl in today's society, what are the challenges, expectations and pressures given by their culture, family, religion and community. Peer group has been described to have a mirror effect, in other words a member shares something important to her with other members, reflects it through the others and learns new about herself. Getting support and positive feedback from others builds one's self-esteem and is essential especially for those, who can't express their feelings or thoughts anywhere else outside the group. (Laimio&Karnell 2010, 18.) The meaning of peer support is highlighted by Eischer&Tuppurainen (2009, 106) especially, when working with girls from different ethnic backgrounds. This is because

often girls from different ethnic backgrounds feel that peer groups are only places where they can show both happy and sad feelings. In addition, express their thoughts, feel free to be themselves and accept other group members and adults to take care of them. (Eisher&Tuppurainen 2009, 106.)

When peers, girls, go together and earn each other's trust, they start empowering one another. Children and youth look up to adults, more often of the same gender who represents a safe adult, role model, easy to identify with and who they would aspire to be. This essential factor emphasises the relevance of having at least one of the group leaders from the same background than the girls. As Laimio & Karnell (2010, 18) note people can identify themselves with those who have similar life situation. As well as in this case, a peer group leader from a Muslim background will most likely get a deeper connection to girls from a Muslim background than a Finnish woman worker. Then again a Finnish woman is also an important role model as she is a representative of a Finnish society.

3.4 What is culture?

The word 'culture' arises several meanings within people depending on one's own life experiences and background. In consequence, culture can mean art, specific food or a consistent inherited way to act of a certain group. (Räty 2002, 42-43.) However, different nations have their individual definition for culture. I have noticed that some people often explain or justify their actions by bringing up cultural aspects. Owing to this remark it is essential to ponder over the term culture especially, while dealing with cultural differences and culture collisions.

Cantell, Lappalainen, Salmio & Varis (2000, 13-14) describe culture as follows:

> Culture includes all those issues that people and nations have learnt to do, value, believe and enjoy during their history. It is the certain way to think, feel, react and communicate by using common language and symbols. Culture is not unchangeable condition but in continuous change. (Cantell et al. 2000, 13-14).

In this study I emphasise culture as a behavioural model rather than anything else. In particular for the reason that after understanding various perspectives about culture one will become more aware of cultural differences. By recognising cultural differences and accepting them, one adapts easier into a new society and becomes part of it. Being a member of a group and culture is important. A child grows up to become a part of her own culture by learning those action models and social norms that are meaningful for the other members of the same culture. An own group where a child belongs to gives her a frame to understand surrounding environment. Furthermore, through her individual experiences and observations she revises her comprehension about culture. (Räty 2002, 43.)

According to the collected data for this research, in order to increase tolerance in communities and decrease hostility between nations, teaching culture awareness should be taken into consideration already at early age. Children are open-minded towards many issues if parents and other adults encourage them without passing their own prejudices. Children and youth might face fewer challenges to adapt into a society if discussion between cultures would be open, accepted and respectful.

Järvinen (2004, 30) discusses the connection between culture and a human being by studying if a human being is part of culture or the other way round. I would claim that there is no straightforward answer but it works both ways. A human has to be part of culture if culture is part of a human. How big part culture plays in a human is a different issue. Since Finland is growing as a multicultural country the amount of cultures is increasing as well as the number of people living between two or more cultures. Finnish people do not own Finland or "Finnish culture". Often the obstacle which hinders immigrants from integration and feeling themselves welcome is power relationships and the question, how people from majority culture approach a representative of minority group (Järvinen 2004, 38).

I am interested in the relation between culture crossings and identity growth. If members of a group have same or at least similar worldview when living in a country where culture is majority, for instance a family from a Muslim background lives in Somalia, what about a situation when the same family lives in Finland? Parents have

most likely inherited characteristics of their culture with support of their relatives but when their children were born and grew up in Finland, overlapping of these two cultures is inevitable. How to adapt into Finnish society and reach the feeling that one is a full member of the community without forgetting her own roots?

Living between two cultures has an influence on the identity of girls in addition the identity growth and development. As Räty (2002, 44-45) points out the feeling of belonging and likeness between other people or groups will be done by a person herself. This is due to the fact that usually people have individual reasons and grounds for belonging to some specific group or groups. (Räty 2002, 44-45.) If a girl from a Muslim background has been in contact with Finnish children or children from other backgrounds on a daily basis for years, it is likely that she feels likeness between more than one group. Unfortunately, years or decades in Finland do not necessarily guarantee unbroken identity or wipe out the feeling of being stuck between two cultures without fully or even half-belonging to either of them. By pondering the complexity of culture crossings I would like to stress that it is essential to find ways to support identity growth of girls from different backgrounds in order to guide their integration into Finnish society.

3.5 What is identity?

In this thesis I study identity from the postmodern perspective. According to Hall (1999, 21-23) postmodern subject of identity is based on a modern, continuously changing world that acknowledges multiplicity of the surrounding environment. This identity is not united or stable but rather shattered into several identities. Basically, a person forms and revises her identity depending on each prevailing situation and encircling culture. (Hall 1999, 21-23.) My interest is principally to comprehend relationship between one's culture, identity and adaptation into a new society therefore living between cultures.

As stated by Keltikangas-Järvinen (2003, 112) searching for identity and identifying with somebody goes hand in hand. When children grow up, they want to be the same kind of individuals as their parents are or other significant people they admire. In this situation children show their admiration by acting and behaving similarly with others, adapting their visions, opinions and characteristics. After finding a group of people children desires to belong to, their individuality develops within them. (Keltikangas-Järvinen 2003, 112.)

One definition of the concept of identity is as follows:

> Identity is permanence of oneself and a feeling that describes certainty, certainty about who a person is and whom a person is growing to. It is a unity of parts that include self image and ideas about oneself. (Keltikangas-Järvinen 2003, 12).

According to the definition identity is an enormous part of one's developmental process hence it has a considerable influence on one's later life. In spite of Keltikangas-Järvinen outlines how the base of identity will be built during early childhood relationships, I would like to remind about the meaning of other aspects. Although the base of identity has been gained at young age, it can still be developed in all directions owing to changes in surrounding environment. One part of the given definition is certainty about 'who a person is and whom a person is growing to'. Is the situation same for immigrant children, who move to different country at early age? They suddenly end up in the middle of a new society, culture, religion, habits and language. Their identity might have developed to the level that recognises specific behaviour patterns, values and rules.

Some viewpoints show how one's identity is composed of several layers. The heart designates unique characteristics, the upper layer family habits, next religion, language, food, way of dressing and living. Thickness and changeability of these layers is dependant on one's individual capability to survive through turning points of life. (Cantell et al. 2000, 22.) I find this model interesting since it emphasises one's own perspective towards his or her identity. Often it is difficult to change the deepest layer but the upper layers are more vulnerable for changes.

Kaikkonen (2004, 65) describes identity by dividing them into group identities and individual identities. Groups often request from its members, either consciously or unconsciously, specific ways to behave, language to speak furthermore follow certain principles. In comparable manner, individuals choose a specific group they would like to join concerning their personal interests, adopted habits and learnt value base. (Kaikkonen 2004, 65.) Fundamentally, group identities and individual identities are strongly linked together. An individual has to assimilate certain behaviour patterns of a group in order to get accepted as a member. Then again a group has to fulfil the requirements of an individual therefore s/he wants to become part of the group.

Ethnic identity emphasises one's personal ethnic background and awareness of being a member of some specific ethnic group (Cantell et al. 2000, 24). Multicultural identity stresses how a person can receive influences from other surrounding cultures. Multicultural identity is common particularly among immigrants and ethnic minority groups who are living in a new society encircled by majority culture. (Kaikkonen 2004, 94-95.) Dialogue between cultures and identities sounds confusing especially when I think about it from a child's point of view. Children have learnt the cornerstones of their culture and started to see themselves as a part of the specified group therefore their ethnic identity is growing. However, the environment outside home differs from learnt habits which do not meet with new principles that the majority follow. In addition, some other conceptions of identities, for example, culture-, gender-, immigrant-, or student-identity makes the process of identity growth and development even more multi-dimensional challenge (Kaikkonen 2004, 65-66).

3.5.1 The link between a place and identity growth

There are various factors which have an influence on identity growth. A surrounding community, acquaintance people and familiar living area increase the feeling of security hence these matters are significant for children, their wellbeing and identity development. Moreover, constantly changing environment is a threat for finding one's place in any society. (Kaikkonen 2004, 83.) Therefore, providing stable environment and free time activities for youth by including family as a whole to the action would

increase the sentiments of togetherness and security. The meaning of free time is extremely important especially, for youth from different ethnic backgrounds so as to broaden their social circles and be part of the Finnish community (Honkasalo 2011, 15).

When free time activities play a remarkable role in one's identity growth likewise does the connection of a place and space. Young people choose other youngsters around them who they want to identify with as well as a place or space where to spend time, find peers, feel welcome and become understood. This specific place has its own boundaries and atmosphere created by youth. Therefore, it becomes a unique area where the members can socialize and work on their identity. (Hopkins 2010, 11-13.) It is vital to understand the importance of a place and space above all, when discussing about integration of children and youth from different ethnic backgrounds. Balanced identity and the feeling of being accepted as a full member of the society are crucial keys for wellbeing and content adulthood.

3.5.2 Social contacts and new societal challenges have an influence on identity growth

I will describe thoroughly why friendships and social contacts at school and in free time are essential for child's identification and integration process. Young people utilize their friends and other contacts of their daily life as a mirror while developing their identity. In other words, all attitudes, messages and signs youth receive about their behaviour influence on their self-image. Being accepted as a normal 'Joe Black', who does not contrast too much with other people is consequently favourable among youth. (Lipponen, Talib 2008, 161.) In my opinion it is debatable and regrettable that today's societies and youth communities look askance at difference while they admire mass production. Especially when at the same time they speak for increasing tolerance and acceptance of other people.

Lipponen and Talib (2008, 161) emphasise how today's way of thinking has caused a lot of challenges for children and youth from different ethnic backgrounds. Today's world, youth culture and media encourage girls at very early puberty to take more responsibilities in life by fast-forwarding their childhood, act like small adults, stop

playing, be independent and become an active consumer. If children are expected to become adults too fast before they are psychologically and mentally ready, they will not be able to survive from difficulties. Constant failures and too high expectations danger a child's normal development and causes negative self-image. (Eischer&Tuppurainen 2009, 35-36.) Several personal situations affects on one's identity growth as well. These situations can be according to Cantell et al. (2000, 34) questions about body changes, cultural expectations related to adulthood, gender roles or life style, media's views about perfect self-image, in addition balance between cultures.

3.6 What do I mean by giving support?

When I discuss giving support I could likewise use the notion of empowerment. Support somebody is strongly connected to empower somebody. Empowerment means giving power to someone by strengthening and trusting one's own skills and knowledge. The main aim of empowerment is to guide a person to study herself in order to find her individual recourses and learn to use them in life management. In addition, empowerment is a well-known concept when working with immigrants or people from different ethnic backgrounds and their integration into a society. (Hautamäki, 2009.)

Therefore, by supporting identity growth of girls from a Muslim background I mean that the 'Girls' Cottage' would empower girls in physical and psychological level. The idea is to create a place where girls can find answers to their questions by studying themselves with support of safe adults around them. Hence, support in this case is being genuinely there for girls, face challenges together with them, guide them to solve problems and encourage living their lives.

Being present for girls from different contexts is essential so as to promote welfare of children and young people. The 'Girls' Cottage' is a good example how steps towards better society can be taken in a regional level. It fosters to support its service users by raising awareness of risk factors and protecting factors that children and youth face during their growth and development. Protecting factors, for example, health, identity, family relations and social integration are individual, relationship or environmental

characteristics that makes a person feel safe hence protects from risk factors. Then again risk factors are happenings, conditions or features that might cause fear and anxiety. (Helsingin Kaupungin Sosiaalivirasto) Consequently, quick changes and moving into a new country can be considered as risk factors. The situation in a family and family members' integration into a society has an influence on child's wellbeing, revises her worldview and identity.

Since girls' wellbeing is very much linked to their family circumstances, supporting wellbeing of both girls and their families from different ethnic backgrounds has to be taken into account. Living in a new society is challenging for the whole family. A young person is trying to balance between cultures, build her mixed identity and make choices in life without causing conflicts with her parents. In order to keep a family united there should be more discussions and interaction within families, although surrounding environment needs to respect parents and support them as the main authority of their children. (Kosonen 2000, 154-155.) Often young people and parents have varied attitudes towards young person's acculturation and self-image-growing process. Therefore, it is essential to be present and open for their questions, worries and possible arguments. Despite of contradictions, understanding environment and support from parents increase young person's self-esteem and wellbeing. (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2000, 112-117.) For this reason the 'Girls' Cottage' emphasizes involvement of girls' families into the action further is willing to have meetings and co-operate with them.

3.7 Community development work: integration or inclusion?

The 'Girls' Cottage'-venture includes several aspects of community development work. The need for a place for girls has arisen from various regional sectors of eastern Helsinki as well as the community itself. In order to make the venture successful it is vital to encourage service users and other parties to take part in planning and realization process. I have often heard how community leaders stress the significance of community members working together for the purpose of building a unified society. This is used especially while discussing the integration or inclusion of people from

different ethnic backgrounds. I wanted to ponder the meaning between integration and inclusion, is there any difference and how are they related to community development work?

Own local community is important for youth as they start creating their own boundaries and looking for a safe place to spend their free time. If young people feel that they are not welcome to a community, they have been labelled as hopeless and problems causing individuals by the majority they will act the given way. Consequently, to avoid divisions between different groups and express their importance to a community, young people need to be included to develop their environment. (Hopkins 2010, 118-122.)

According to Jeannotte (2008) social integration includes various policies and principles defined by a state that promotes communities' welfare, living conditions, security, fairness and involvement of inhabitants. The aim of social integration is to treat all inhabitants with same conditions despite of their ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, create unbiased atmosphere and offer parallel possibilities, for instance, education and health services. (Jeannotte 2008.) By taking a deeper look at the definition of social inclusion, differences between these two similar concepts can be found. Social inclusion demands more than only political principles of a state. When social integration intends to provide inhabitants all needed services specified by law, social inclusion focuses on wellbeing of people in a more concrete level. Therefore, the intention of social inclusion is to empower people to action in order to make them feel full members of the society. (Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg & Waller 2007.)

4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Girl-focused work is fairly new type of the youth work therefore the amount of its pioneers is only increasing. One of the pioneers is Veronika Honkasalo who discusses girls from different ethnic backgrounds, their status and girl-focused work from the viewpoint of general youth work. Honkasalo examines how girls from different ethnic

backgrounds are seen and spoken about in publicity as well as among professionals who work with girls. The fact that often girls from different ethnic backgrounds have been noted through worry, withdrawal or violence is not insignificant. Instead of emphasising multiculturalism as a reason of withdrawal it would be more essential to study relations between equality, age, ethnicity, culture, gender and Finnish society and its values. (Honkasalo 2011, 13-14.)

In the research of Honkasalo the significance of integration, free time and taking girls, their cultural and gender-based points into consideration are stressed. The question of how general youth work points out the importance of supporting girls from different ethnic backgrounds is current. Furthermore, what are girls' own opinions towards the girlhood, participation and being part of the society. (Honkasalo 2011, 38-39.)
The main aim of Honkasalo's research was to indicate that there is a lack in gender policies between boys and girls in youth work. In addition, she studies what challenges and possibilities multiculturalism creates. Honkasalo glanced at the topic of identity negotiation between a multicultural youth and society although it does not play the most essential role in her study.

The youth researchers Sanna Aaltonen and Päivi Honkatukia are also likewise than Honkasalo surveying the multiplicity of girls and girlhood in Finland. Through the collected articles they aim at discovering new aspects to study girls' lives and definition of girlhood related to the changes in Finnish societies. Their study is based on the societal phenomenon and gender focused point of view. Aaltonen & Honkatukia (2002, 9) remarks how girlhood can be thought as social, cultural and materialistic category in which it is significant to belong to some extent. Therefore, the foundation of girlhood has been created although it is developed, built and processed continuously in proportions to sexuality, ethnicity, age and society. (Aaltonen & Honkatukia 2002, 9.)

Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick and Anita Harris discuss girls from the point of view of femininity, not particularly focusing on the girl-focused work as itself. Social changes, increasing demands, possibilities and assumptions have had an influence on the way people see girlhood. According to their viewpoint expectations of people has multiplied the content of girlhood and given guidelines for the attained identity.

(Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2002, 1.) I found this interesting because these ideas give the base for the meaning of the girl-focused work. Therefore, it supports the points of Honkasalo, and Aaltonen and Honkatukia. The essential issues in developing girlhood and identity are friendships and the meaning of girl power. The concept of girl power stresses girls to find their own directions to grow up, search their identity and fight against generalized definitions about girlhood. (Aapola, Gonick &Harris 35-37.)

My personal interest in this study is to clarify the concept of identity and identity development from the viewpoint of the professionals of multicultural youth work, further mothers and girls from a Muslim background. My objective is to comprehend how they see the girlhood and challenges in puberty when living between cultures. When Honkasalo was interested in defining the relations between general youth work and girl-focused work, my aim is to find out the most significant contents of girl-focused work without comparing it with youth work. In this study I will also be proactive to point out the relations between integration, identity growth and societal challenges which girls from a Muslim background face. Therefore, in my research I have similar interests than Aapola, Gonick & Harris although I am not emphasising girl power as a concept.

When I discuss identity I address it from a cultural point of view. I was eager to survey how one's culture understands identity and what dimensions, expectations and regulations cultural aspects cause to each individuals identity process. Marja Tiilikainen concentrated her research on women from Somali decent living and raising their family in Finland. In addition, she studied their lives, daily challenges and family relationships from the point of view of Islam. The study was based on the experiences of women, particularly mentioned Muslim women and gives them voice as an ethnic and religious group. (Tiilikainen 2007, 14-15.) Tiilikainen discusses identity by stressing religion I am interested in culture. In this thesis the emphasis is on studying the relationship between the culture and identity. How living between cultures have an influence on identity growth.

5 RESEARCH PROCESS

In this chapter I will focus on the research process firstly by introducing the research questions and type of the research. Secondly by presenting the methods I have used during my study. Moreover, I will describe the data collecting analysis. At the end of this chapter I will discuss research ethics and validity.

5.1 Research questions

In the previous chapter four I described the prior research conducted about multicultural femininity- and girl-focused work. In addition, I presented later studies related to girls' identity development, my own interests and the purpose of this thesis. This section identifies my research questions which I used as a frame for gathering data.

What identity do the target group aspire to achieve?
What aspects attained identity include?
What could be the ways to support girls' identity growth?

5.2 Type of the research

The base of my research is qualitative approach. According to Ten Have (2004, 4-5) qualitative research emphasizes discovering unique connotations behind actions of people, further resemblances and contrasts within a small specific group. In other words the meaning of qualitative research is to concentrate on issues of a chosen target group without producing broad statistics as in quantitative approach. (Ten Have 2004, 4-5.) Although qualitative approach have been criticized to be too restricted and limited, and for this reason the results misleading further generalized (Gould & Shaw 2002, 9), I noted it was useful for my research.

Holiday (2007, 5) indicates the relevance and necessity of qualitative approach as follows:

> It is these qualitative areas in social life - the backgrounds, interests and broader social perceptions that defy quantitative research – that qualitative research addresses. (Holiday 2007, 5)

Due to the nature of my research, qualitative approach was beneficial considering the process as whole. Since my study aims at supporting the progress of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture, I needed to make limitations, concentrate on the specific target group and choose the most current themes to discuss. In this thesis the purpose was to find out feelings and wishes of the target group towards the 'Girls' Cottage' and collect guidelines for its future realization. The intention of this study is not to generalize viewpoints as thoughts of the whole target group. On the contrary, I focused on a few representatives of the community therefore the process of this study and its results have been analyzed according to the particular collected material. As Greene (1994, 7) describes, qualitative research stresses to give possibility for usually quiet people and marginalized groups to come out and express their thoughts (Greene 1994, 7).

5.3 Research methods

In this thesis I used qualitative research methods, observation and interviews so as to collect the data. These methods are clarified more specifically in the following sections.

5.3.1 Observation

> Observing is being there while the action takes place, participating in activities to a greater or lesser extent, by watching, listening and sometimes by speaking, writing or drawing
> (Dunne, Pryor & Yates 2005, 55).

Dunne et al. describe well in the nutshell the main characteristics and forms of observation. However, a researcher can use a vast creativity while observing the chosen environment, surrounding, people or whatever is in question. Observation is a common method used in qualitative research (Holliday 2007, 6). For the purpose of receiving as much as possible out of this practise, Baszanger & Dodier (2006, 11) state that the greater emphasis should be put on the action as itself than planning it. In the field a researcher should constantly be aware of different happenings around him furthermore have all senses active and follow his intuition. (Baszanger & Dodier 2006, 11.)

The period of observation took place during my placements in autumn 2010 and spring 2011. I used observation as a method for collecting data, further broadening my understanding of the environment where my study was taken place. The observation was divided into two locations, the suburb of Rastila in eastern Helsinki and a pilot girls' group. The reason behind choosing this specific suburb was the fact that the 'Girls' Cottage' is meant to be established there. In addition, the pilot girls' group of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture has been run in Rastila starting in 2010. Hence, I used participatory observation that is indicated by May (2002, 202) done within a specific group in their local environment by tackling their problems or finding out their perspectives related to a certain topic (May 2002, 202).

In the suburb of Rastila my observation was targeted at the surrounding environment and people while taking notes constantly as a passive observer. Outdoors I observed the girls and their families and mainly focused on where girls spent their free time and what did they do. I was also interested in seeing if there were behavioural differences between boys and girls. Conversely, my role in the pilot girls' group was more active since I was one of the instructors of the group. My objective was to observe girls' behaviour and interaction between each others further how they feel like being in the group. Keeping intensively eyes and ears open are therefore the most significant elements of participant observation (Ely 1991, 42). While leading the group together or in turns with another instructor my purpose wasn't to make notes while activities fundamentally, interact with girls. During interaction I was making observations and later on wrote them down. I made observations in the girls' pilot group in the regular basis during my placements whereas outdoor observations were conducted more

sporadically. However, I was aware of the aims of my observations therefore I had ideas of possible outdoor observation spots beforehand.

5.3.2 Interviews

> The motivation of qualitative interviews is to discover essential incidents, viewpoints and emotions of an interviewee by pointing out and comprehend the real significance behind the words (Warren 2001, 83).

I used interviews as a method to collect data because being in direct contact with people is rewarding and enables identify also hidden thoughts by perceiving one's manners, reactions and tones of voice during the discussion. Furthermore, direct interaction is inclined to be more accommodating since both an interviewer and an interviewee has a possibility to clarify the questions and influence on the direction of an interview. (Singleton Jr. & Strains 2001, 60-61.)

I conducted both individual and group interviews, all shortly after my placements had finished. The purpose of the interviews was to find out the interviewees' opinions about the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture, what thoughts arose related to it, would the service be beneficial and what could be the provided activities or actions that would support girls' identity growth. Individual and group interviews naturally have their own positive and negative aspects. Individual interviews have often described to be more natural and efficient way to collect data. This is due to the view which believes that interviewees speak more openly about sensitive topics in one-to-one interviews. Whereas group interviews might make interviewees feel uncomfortable and prevent participants to reveal their real feelings. (Morgan 2001, 150-151.) However, Silverman (2004, 180-181) outlines how the results of these two interview methods can be opposite. Sometimes participants feel more uneasy in individual interviews, if an interviewer is unfamiliar to them and they do not have other people present to support them. (Silverman 2004, 180-181.) I decided to use individual interviews with the professionals of youth work since it was easier to arrange and taking part in interview sessions was already familiar to them. Then again with mothers and girls I preferred group interviews

since I was not sure how they would react to me and my questions in a new situation. Therefore, I interviewed them with their peers in order to make them feel comfortable and less vulnerable. I had also received a request from the mothers and girls to be interviewed as a group.

From several possibilities I used half-structured interviews because my aim was provisionally to direct the interviews but simultaneously leave space for interviewees' questions and unplanned discussion topics. When structured interviews consist of the same questions for all interviewees, controls the time use, formula and subjects, half-structured underlines variability within loose frames (Fontana& Prokos 2007, 19-20). I had prepared a list of questions beforehand and made decision about a few themes I was interested in discussing with the interviewees. Denscombe (2003, 167) states that half-structured interviews emphasize open-ended questions and give an opportunity for an interviewee to speak more freely about the topics chosen by a researcher. Nevertheless, a researcher needs to be adaptable in order to let interviewees express themselves and have freedom to speak more about those topics which are meaningful for them.

5.4 Data collection

I started collecting the data during my first placement in the YWCA starting in September 2010 until the end of December 2010. During this period I collected the general data about the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture in a form of the background survey. I continued the data collection throughout my second placement from March until the mid-April 2011. Since the venture was new and broad with several possibilities to focus on, it took time to make a decision about the specific thesis topic. After finalizing the background survey in November 2010 I had chosen the subject. This late selection might have influenced the extent of the data collection.

My data collection was started by observation. I was observing the environment inside the pilot girls' group and outdoors in the local daily surroundings. As an instructor of the girls' group I concentrated on girls' behaviour, needs and common interaction.

My aim was to observe them being within a group and through that understand their inner reasons, meanings and feelings of taking part in the pilot group. Outdoors in Rastila I observed girls and families during different times of a day for instance, near schools, youth houses, shopping malls, subway stations, playgrounds and parks. My objective was to find out where they spent their free time and what did they accomplish. I was wishing to observe differences between actions of boys and girls in order to find more justification for the importance of the 'Girls' Cottage'. I wrote all observations to a notebook and later after conducting them I transcribed them. During the outdoor observations I wrote down thoughts and notes persistently and group observations I wrote down after the group sessions had finished. I decided not to take notes during running the group as I thought that my writing might have disturbed the girls and the group interaction. Each observation session took approximately from 1-3 hours.

Altogether I took part in 16 girls' group-sessions and I explored six outdoor excursions. In addition, I participated in a few events to promote the 'Girls' Cottage'. I also visited the local multicultural free time places for youth, took part in the steering group meetings of the venture which were jointly organised by the YWCA and the local quarters. I further organised a parents' meeting with the help of my placement supervisor. In April 2011 I represented the YWCA in the safety event organised by local authorities that took place in a Rastila primary school. The purpose of the day was to discuss regional safety and security issues with children by completing different physical education workshops. In the section that I was responsible for we constructed a giant board game to observe the understanding and knowledge of the areas safety and needs for improving the safety levels. We had 99 participants take part in our particular workshop. Due to this fact I was able to collect essential data about the children's perception of security in the area. All attained data was gathered in order to deepen my own understanding about the regional challenges therefore convey direction for my interviews.

I conducted the interviews between early May and mid-September 2011 in the metropolitan area. Overall I conducted five interviews with nine individuals. First I conducted interviews with three professionals who work with girls from different ethnic backgrounds. Two of them were from a Finnish background and one of them was from a Muslim background. Each of the three interviews were conducted individually and

recorded with using a tape recorder. The duration of the interviews was approximately one hour long. Next interviews were conducted with three mothers and three girls all from a Muslim background. They were separate group interviews and for their personal wellbeing were conducted in familiar surroundings for the participants. Especially, when interviewing children it is significant to choose a place where they can feel relaxed and secure. In addition, the feeling of security increases when children are interviewed with their peers. (Eder & Fingerson 2001, 183.) Both interviews proceeded for approximately 45 minutes. However, the three mothers did not grant permission for their interview to be recorded. This only not tape-recorded interview was documented by taking notes. The responsible guardians for the three girls gave a full permission for the interview to be recorded and it was done so. The interviews were conducted at random owing to some challenges which I will discuss later on.

I used the first interview as an experiment since the next one was arranged within two weeks. I was content about the schedule for the reason that I needed to make some changes in order to clarify the questions. The first interview also provided me with new perspectives and viewpoints related to the research questions. All interviews with the professionals were held in Finnish, moreover the two group interviews in Finnish and Somali with the help of an interpreter. Certainly, the interviews with an interpreter are challenging primarily because I am dependant on him and some significant interpretation might pass unnoticed. All interviews apart from the mothers' were transcribed from word to word before starting to analyze them. After interviewing the mothers I rewrote my notes therefore supplemented some missing words or feelings.

While my data collection process I faced challenges to find previous studies done with women and girls, reach families from a Muslim background therefore obtain the interviewees. Tiilikainen (2007, 22) remarks that there are only few researches done with this specific gender group and in general, women from Somali decent encounter difficulties being heard. It seemed to take a considerable amount of time to get to know their communities, become reliable and explain my aims further, the purpose of my study. Naturally, I was aware of sensitive approach methods while dealing with girls and their families from a Muslim background. In addition, since everybody has the right to decide if they participate or not in my research I did not expect them to agree to a proposal immediately.

Although I had a contact person from Somali heritage, who assisted me in contacting my target group, translating the meetings and finding interviewees I still struggled with suspicions and debates. Tiilikainen (2007, 95) reports that having similar difficulties in the beginning of her research before earning the trust among Somali families. Questions about real interests, written data and public results of the research became crucial. Furthermore, more than five years was required for stated to be approved and trustworthy. (Tiilikainen 2007, 95.)

The fact is that after I had decided my specific thesis topic I had less than a year to achieve my goals, collect the data and finalize my thesis. Unfortunately, the tight and rather inflexible schedule did not allow for broader field visits, longer discussions with the target group or deeper friendships. Unfamiliarity between the target group and I had an influence especially on the interview with the children. First of all, it was challenging to find mothers to take part in the interview but receiving a permission from parents to let their daughters participate turned out to be even more difficult. When I finally found the girls to interview to I did not have enough time to get familiar with them.

From the experience of working with children I acknowledge the importance of relaxed, secure and children-friendly atmosphere in the interview situations. Luckily I had a short moment to break the ice hence I managed to conduct the interview. I had taken paper and pencils with me therefore we were drawing while discussing. Unfamiliarity and a new situation affected the interview with the girls in a sense that occasionally it was difficult to receive answers from them. Therefore, the small amount of girls' opinions can be seen in the results. Owing to the truth that in Finland professionals of social services have got used to various studies done by different sectors and students, they have more knowledge about the procedures. Nonetheless, normal citizens from Finnish or other backgrounds do not necessarily know about the numerous studies and research that have taken place. This was seen when preparing my interviews. It seemed to be normal for professionals to participate in interviews whereas normal citizens found it uncomfortable. The interview processes reminded me how vital it is to be clear, explain issues thoroughly and use time, particularly amongst working with people from

different ethnic backgrounds. What is self-evident to me might be unfamiliar to someone else.

5.5 Analyzing the data

After I had collected the varied data by observations and interviews I started to work on it and study the most advantageous way to approach the data. Since I conducted the qualitative research I decided to use one of the most essential methods to analyze the data, thematizing. Thematizing means that a researcher examines the data carefully in order to discover different, but recurring themes within it. When the themes have been pointed out and placed into categories it is time for a second part of the analysis, the last findings. Obviously a researcher can influence on the themes by presenting the same questions for interviewees. (Ely 1991, 143-145, 150.)

Before conducting the interviews I had prepared a few topics which were significant for the research and I wished to discuss with the interviewees. The questions were rather similar than identical, furthermore it depended on the participants how long and deeply we discussed each topic. Although, I had some themes considered in advance I gave an opportunity for the participants to bring up their own thoughts and subjects. The themes I deal with are therefore based on the material that I collected from the interviews. I will present these themes, analysis and main findings in more detailed manner in the discussion chapter. Furthermore, I will also introduce the discoveries of the observations.

As Holliday (2007, 4-6) indicates qualitative research as well as qualitative analysis focuses on the particular issue among specific group in appointed settings. Qualitative analysis has several dimensions and possibilities to change directions guided by a researcher. (Holliday 2007, 4-6.) I pointed this out to emphasise that the results of the analysis are based on my personal interpretations done with the specific group and the arisen themes. In order to be clear, separate the interviewees from each other and keep their anonymity I have used codes when citing them and discussing the findings.

The codes are described as follows. The three professionals (P1,P2,P3), the three mothers (M1,M2,M3) and the three girls (G1,G2,G3). In the analysis I will also use notes from my observations which I gathered for this research. Thus, the code for the observation notes is O1.

5.6 Ethics and validity

In this chapter I will discuss issues related to ethical approach and factors during the research process as a whole. Furthermore, I will present validity and limitations of this study.

In this thesis ethical approach and thinking has been a cornerstone of the study. I have needed to be careful with collecting data especially, when analysing and reporting my findings in order to protect my target group. Due to the fact that I conducted this research in the small district among the specific ethnic minority group it was my responsibility to make sure that the participants of the research are treated with respect. The research process and published data should not cause any inconvenience or disruptions for participants further, interpretations connected with certain individuals (Oliver 2010, 15).

In Finland ethnic minority groups have not particularly been protected from numerous researches. Consequently, whoever can use them ruthlessly as a part of the study. (Tiilikainen 2007, 109.) I also received several sceptical questions about my purposes from my target group. For this reason, I had my contact person with me as an interpreter in the meetings as often as possible. Furthermore, I had the documents about interview permission translated to Somali where I explained thoroughly the aims of the interview, the topic of my thesis and shortly my background. As Oliver (2010, 77) points out that one of the most vital research ethics are confidentiality and to give an opportunity for an interviewee to present as anonymous. Therefore, in the same document I emphasized the voluntariness of participation, the right of staying anonymous and my intention to use a tape-recorder.

In today's societies interviewing children is seen acceptable and relevant, although ethical approach is required always when children are included in a research (Farrell 2005, 1-3). Children are vulnerable and they can easily be directed or controlled by an adult in interviews. They are often taught to follow the guidelines given by adults therefore a researcher should be aware of existing power relations. (Eder & Fingerson 2001, 182.) As I was not familiar with the girls in advance my scheme was to create an atmosphere where they could feel comfortable and in charge of the situation. Before interviewing the girls I requested their parents to sign the permission document for interviews. Next I once more confirmed from the girls if they are willing to participate. The question about the girls' participation based on their own choice was challenging. Occasionally I was wondering if they agreed because they genuinely wanted to or were they unintentionally pressured by me or their parents.

There were some limitations during the research process that might have an effect on the validity of this study. By discussing limitations and validity I emphasise the ways and methods I collected the data, further how I analysed them and made my interpretations. When gathering the data a researcher might face challenges which have an impact on the extent of the data. Therefore, the final analysis and conclusion are limited and the results should not be generalized. (Oliver 2003, 141.) Validity is essential issue since it shows the credibility and reliability of the research by presenting thoroughly the results of data collection that the research is based on (Peräkylä 2004, 284.)

The time I conducted the observations was limited further, carried out within a short time lag. In all probability I might have made broader observations and interpretations if I had occupied longer in the field. Surely, I was observing the surrounding environment through my eyes, experiences and background therefore my understanding directed the situation analysis and findings (Silverman 2004, 13-14). For the interviews I had planned the main themes before conducting them. However, I left time for the topics brought up by the interviewees themselves if there were something they wanted to share. Despite of the fact that I received feedback after the preliminary interview and clarified the questions, another preparatory interview would have been beneficial particularly, with the children. Unfamiliarity and inconvenient haste had an influence on their answers and openness. In addition, cultural differences, occasional language

barrier and the presence or absence of an interpreter gave me a challenge as well. An issue that also had an influence on the validity of this research is the small amount of the interviewees. I interviewed nine individuals therefore the findings are based on the data collected from them without generalizing the views.

6 "I AM BOTH FINNISH AND SOMALI—I THINK."

This chapter is divided into three sections and it includes the main findings and discoveries of the research. To begin with, I will introduce the viewpoints of identity defined and interpreted by the participants of this study in other words the girls and mothers from a Muslim background, and the professionals of multicultural youth work. Secondly, I will present the collected notions and thoughts of methods to support girls' identity growth between cultures. Lastly, I will discuss how the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture can benefit and advantage from the research results.

6.1 Various dimensions of identity

In this section I discuss aspects of identity defined by the participants of this study. I describe in a detailed manner those perspectives of the meaning and wishes of identity that girls, mothers and the professionals of multicultural youth work have pointed out.

Identity can consist of numerous elements depending on one's ethnic background and unique family culture. There is not a specific, general frame which would define the most significant, beneficial or ideal parts of identity. (Cantell 2000, 22, 24.) During my research process I got to know different people who all had their distinctive understanding of identity in spite of their country of origin. Although individual opinions sometimes differed I was still able to recognise uniting models of thinking among participants from the same background. Therefore, different cultures and religions seem to emphasise certain behaviour patterns which objective is to give guidelines for future life, responsibilities and identity.

> When discussing issues that should be taken into consideration while working with multicultural girls and understanding of their identity there is a lot of differences. For instance, it varies how girls and their families see the meaning of religion, how it is carried out and shown outwards. (P1)

> Each Muslim culture (Muslim-Iran, Muslim-Arab, Muslim-African) is one unit and then there is an own family culture as well. Although what connects us Muslims is Islam each family and individual has own knowledge and opinions about issues—those small unique characteristics. (P2)

The research, fundamentally, the interviews and observations aimed at finding out girls' and mothers' relation to living in a Finnish society and between cultures. In addition, how they see the importance of their own roots and what part youth work (Girls' Cottage) plays in the adaptation process. I was also interested in discovering which elements the ideal identity would include or is there such a concept existing. Another question about what is the identity that the participants would like girls to have caught my attention as well. In order to broaden the dimensions of the study I involved professionals who do multicultural youth work or – girl-focused work to share their viewpoints about the same topics. The intention behind my interest towards the above mentioned questions is to survey different opinions about issues related to identity in order to develop the 'Girls' Cottage'.

After I had categorized the discussion themes about identity I created a table and placed each group of the participants into the blocks and added their viewpoints according to the following topics: the meaning of own culture, what could be the activities or thoughts that youth work could stress in supporting girls' growth and what is the attained identity. So as to be more precise which components could be addressed and would be desirable to pursue for the purpose of offering girls good ingredients to build their identity. The following findings are based on the conducted interviews and my interpretations.

Next, I will present in the table participants' views about the earlier mentioned topics. More specific and clarified analysis is written below the table.

TABLE 1: The multiple face of identity

	Own culture	Youth work	Identity
Youth workers from Finnish and Somali decent	Own roots are important, also Finnish habits and language are valued.	The right of being a child is stressed. Organised activities could include being together while discussing, doing sports and having fun. Also useful skills (cooking, handicraft etc.) contained occasionally.	The idea of supporting girls "here and now ". Ideal to live in the moment as a child, slowly study oneself and search for own identity.
Mothers from Somali decent	Own roots and culture are in front line, although Finnish habits and language are valued.	Organised activities could include useful and developmental skills (cooking, handicraft etc.). Also sports and having fun are accepted.	The idea of preparing girls for the future. Ideal to grow to become a young woman who has useful skills in her possession, who knows how to take care of own family and later become a good wife.
Girls from Somali decent	Both cultures are important, the order changes depending on a social situation. (school vs. home environment)	Organised activities could include having fun and learning useful skills. The question of what is acceptable when living between cultures is present.	Having two identities and being between two cultures. It is difficult to say which one is more dominant. Continuous identity negotiation.

As it is shown in the above table there are similarities and differences between the participants' views. The professionals of multicultural youth work noticed the significance of one's own background as well as assimilating the Finnish cultural habits. They also emphasised the meaning of pleasant free time activities when a child can relax, have fun and discuss her life with adults. Learning useful skills were also considered essential but not the primary activities. The professionals had quite westernized and individualistic perspectives about child's rights to be a child, living "here and now" and little by little a child can study herself, learn responsibilities and start building her identity in her own terms.

> Sometimes I have encouraged the mothers whose girls participate in our girl's club activities that being here is also time and a place where girls can be exactly their own age—when they do not need to do house work or take care of their younger siblings. If a girl is 13 years, here within a group she has a right to be 13 years old. (P1)
>
> Activities for girls from different ethnic backgrounds are important. There are several girls from Somali decent who go straight home from school and probably stay at home a lot and help with house work. (P3)

The professionals were aware of cultural differences, for example, related to the amount of house work and respected the families' habits and parents' upbringing. However, they wished to encourage parents to give their daughters a possibility to take part in activities and get to know other girls. Hall (1999, 23-24) cites how changing world therefore modern societies have an influence on one's cultural identity. Similarly, Geert Hofstede (1980, 24) has examined the cultural dimensions by observing individualistic and collectivist societies. In westernized and individualistic community the bonds between other community members are loose. Thus, everyone takes care of oneself and immediate family. (Hofstede 1980, 24.) In other words the individualistic and modern approach prepares girls to respect other people and different cultures further, focus on

own identity development by choosing the directions in life and make personal decisions and choices.

> In Finland identity development among children and youth has more individualistic characteristics compared with some other cultures where a community itself has the greater meaning. (P1)

The mothers' approach was rather traditional with the hint of modern thoughts. They appreciated their daughters to value both cultures although the meaning of own culture was high. Traditional societies respect past and symbols since they contain a large amount of knowledge and experiences from all generations (Hall 1999, 24). Mostly the mothers wished that the girls would learn useful house hold skills, however having fun and other free time activities were also accepted. Their perspective of one's identity development was collectivist. Hence, it is significant that girls learn to respect other people and their own community by absorbing useful skills in order to run a household and take care of other family members later in the future.

> Hobbies and activities are good—cooking, baking, sports, sewing and Somali language courses as well. There could be also more camps and short educational trips in the future. (M2)

Collectivist perspective underlines how a person has been strongly a part of her community since birth and the whole extended family is responsible of upbringing a child (Hofstede 1999, 24). Therefore, part of the girls' identity is already built for them by mothers and other community members who pass forward the principles of being a female (Tiilikainen 2007, 179). Helander (2002, 110) draws attention to women and girls from Islamic countries who have a remarkable role in a societal level by cherishing traditional values and culture. Since gender roles are essential in the community of Somali decent especially, the girls and young women form an influential league concerning the future prospects of their community. (Helander 2002, 110.) In addition to gender roles, also oral tradition, for example, story telling is included as a highly

esteemed part of one's identity. A talented story teller is respected within the whole community therefore this cultural aspect is valued. (Tiilikainen 2007, 28.) The mothers admitted to face challenges sometimes when raising up their daughters and trying to teach habits and all-around education from their own culture.

> Once my daughter was telling me about Finnish singers and literature and I asked her to mention if she knows any comparable artists from Somalia—I have been teaching her special features from Somali culture— she has to know the basics. (M3)

The girls were balancing between two cultures. Therefore, they were trying to weave through several expectations and obligations stipulated by both communities.

> Sometimes I do different issues at school and with my friends than at home. If my friends can do something that I do not it is okay. (G2)

> I am allowed to have hobbies and meet my Finnish friends but I also go to the Koran school to learn important things and meet other community members. (G1)

When we discussed free time activities and hobbies the girls looked thoughtful. They mentioned and scaled issues they like to do between those ones which are not appropriate. It was difficult for them to define their characteristics according to the nationality or background. At the same time they felt that they are both Finnish and Somalis, consequently both cultures were significant part of their lives. The girls clarified that although they have two identities one of them is often more dominant depending on a situation. At school they speak Finnish and play mostly with Finnish friends reciprocally at home they speak Somali and follow the habits from Somalia. In spite of the fact that girls attend the school, get Finnish friends, learn the Finnish language and draw influences outside the Somali culture, they have extensive family roots. Girls from Somali decent have cultural creativity in order to be able to deal with changing roles and cultural conflicts between family traditions and local reality. This creativity has affect on girls' ethnic identity. Girls create their ethnic identity by studying themselves as outsiders thus, examine the qualities which both communities

value. From the valued features they choose the most significant ones and revise them. (Helander 2002, 110-111, 123-124.)

Living between two very different cultures sound demanding and challenging but these girls who I interviewed did not sound pressured or stressed but rather used to the continuous dialogue and negotiation between cultures and identity requirements. After finishing the interview one of the girls who was the oldest from the group stated how challenges will be found ahead of their lives. In addition, I captured some other comments from the girls that will be shown next.

> It is easy now but just wait and see—I know. (G3)

> I am both Finnish and Somali—I think. (G2)

> When I have free time, for instance, after school I am sometimes with my friends or then I have hobbies. Usually I also help my mother at home, it is important too. (G1)

One's background and parents' typical traditional or modern way of upbringing their children seemed to have an influence on girls' identity. However, the duration of family's adaptation process affect also the situation (Tiilikainen2007, 175). It was interesting to hear how some opinions and attitudes differed depending on the fact that how long mothers and girls had been living in Finland. All three mothers had moved to Finland from Somalia over ten years ago with the exception of one of the individuals who has been residing in Finland for nearly twenty years. They were content with their lives and fairly positive about Finnish society, education for children and free time activities. The one mother living in Finland for the longest had the most modern and affirmative thoughts about the future prospects, upbringing the children and accepting culture differences within her family. The other two mothers acknowledged living between two cultures nevertheless they wished to move back to Somalia in the future. From the group of the girls, two of them were born in Finland when the third one was born in Somalia but moved to Finland at the young age. All three girls thought Finland as their home country although they were aware of the roots of their family. The girls did not know if they would like to live in Finland or move back to Somalia later in the

future. As Helander (2002, 116) underlines changes in culture has an influence on family relationships. Family members integrate into society in individual time schedules what can cause challenges within the family. Particularly, it is demanding for youth to balance between cultures and at the same time adapt into new culture, find identity and own place in a society. (Helander 2002, 116.)

> When parents feel that they are part of this society and they know Finnish language maybe then some Finnish habits are not seen anymore as a threat or risk. Perhaps there are fewer misunderstandings when parents can explain issues to their children and not just ban them. (P1)

> Living in Finland is easier and better after learning Finnish language. Children definitely need to learn Finnish too but at home we speak Somali. (M1)

One purpose of this study was to discover if there really is contradiction in living between cultures and if balancing between cultures cause conflicts to a young person's identity development. I collected a few answers from the professionals and mothers. The girls did not answer to the question.

> A large number of girls have always been living between cultures and got used to the fact that there is Finnish culture present, further own family- and community culture. Therefore, there are not necessarily contradictions between cultures—then rather challenges between generations. (P1)

> Adaptation into the Finnish society is less challenging for those children who have been born in Finland whereas for those ones who have moved to Finland later in their lives. Anyways we live in Finland now and everything is normal. (M2)

> It might be tough—it depends on how we immigrants live, how much we are afraid of being part of the new society and limit our family's connections to outside world. I have been living in Finland now nearly 20 years and I don't know if I am more Finnish or Somali, I am both. But it is different for youth. Each of them has to find themselves. (P2)

To conclude this section and before describing the methods of supporting girls' identity growth in the next section, I shortly summarize some of the findings. There are several issues, for instance, culture, religion and family habits which have an influence on one's identity. People from different backgrounds use varied lenses to approach identity furthermore their understanding of the valued and attained identity differs. Especially, when people live between cultures old and new viewpoints and habits mix with each other at least to some extent.

Hall (1999, 23) asserts that individuals do not have only one permanent identity conversely several identities mingle with each other. Accordingly, Hall's idea of identity strengthens the view of Hopkins (2010, 9) that a person has different identity, for instance, at home, school, and work, furthermore in their free time. The girls who participated in this research were not sure yet about their identity but they adjusted themselves depending on the situation. They were continuously negotiating between cultures and trying to find their own place. Likewise the mothers were understandable and accepted the fact that their children might grow up willing to have two nationalities although own ethnic roots are wished to be cherished. As Kaikkonen (2004, 95) acknowledges that the first immigrant generations face culture differences, identity crisis and living between old and new society in more challenging level than the next generations. When discussing children, young immigrants and their identity growth, I do not mean that their identities should be changed after moving to a different country. On the contrary, I stress the significance of supporting them to find their identity in order to cope with those challenges they face in this society.

6.2 Ideas to support girls' identity growth

In this section I describe the methods and practises to support girls' identity growth when living between cultures. Before discussing the ways to support the girls in a personal level I open the matter of reinforcing girls by involving their family as a whole. Furthermore, in the end of this chapter I introduce the results of observations in a deeper manner.

6.2.1 Supporting girls by involving the family

In Somalia a family and relatives form a tight network and community hence, they are basic components to secure social and economical aspects of life. Especially, the relationship between mothers and children has been described essential and close. (Tiilikainen 2007, 30-32.) Family relationships and being respected within one's own community are vital for girls from Somali decent, also for the ones I interviewed. In a case that parents or the community feels insecure and possible threatened in some situation the meaning of tightening the boundaries increases. (Helander 2002, 110-111.) For this reason, it is significant for youth workers who run activities to be in contact with girls' families and include the family members into the action.

One of the most important and pointed issues which came up in all interviews was exactly to give a possibility for parents to be included in their daughters' every day life. If parents are aware of where their children are in free time and what they are doing, the parents are more likely to accept the activities.

> Because own family is very important for girls, good contacts between youth workers and girls' parents is essential. When girls value and respect their parents also parents should be supported in order to avoid conflicts and pressures. (P1)
>
> It is good if parents have an easy access and possibility to visit their children's activities. Therefore, they can get to know the place and the employees who run the activities without giving impression of secrecy. (P2)
>
> When I have several children I don't have so much time. It is good that children have hobbies but I want to know what they do and where they are. (M2)

Tiilikainen (2007, 179-182) addresses how mothers are constantly worried about their children especially girls who they try to reassure and protect throughout their childhood. The modern society has increased children's freedom of movement therefore mothers are worried that they children learn bad habits. In Somalia the whole community is responsible for the upbringing of children, not only the parents. Often parents wish to

get support for the parenthood and some safe and organised activities for children in their own living area where they can attend after school. (Tiilikainen 2007, 179-182.)

The idea of the 'Girls' Cottage' is to organise a broad type of activities for girls and also enable parents to visit a place in order to make a decision for their daughters' participation. When a girl knows that she has given a permission to be there also she can relax without feeling of causing unnecessary worry for her parents. The meaning is also to encourage mothers to take part in some activities as a volunteer instructor and organise occasional mother-daughter events in the 'Girls' Cottage'. To increase the wellbeing of the whole family by having discussions with parents and being in contact with them supports the girls' wellbeing and growth. When the viewpoints of parents have been taken into consideration, accepted and respected the girls might face less conflicts at home. When living in a majority society own community becomes an essential focal point in life that one cannot afford to loose. When dealing with families from a Muslim background it is important to respect the positive aspects of their culture, religion and traditions which increases the feeling of security and gives symbolic meaning in a new environment. Even if children were born in Finland and absorbed both cultural habits there is an extensive meaning to the family. (Helander 2002, 113.)

> When we work with families we always have to ask parents about their family rules and wishes because some families are stricter than the others—if they are strict they want to know everything as well as question everything—but in my opinion that is their right, no problems when we just know. (P2)

> For girls' own coping, wellbeing and identity development it would be important that we employees appreciated the family relations, settings of their culture, habits and values. It seems that girls respect and defend their family till the last point—those limits, boundaries and support given by parents are vital. Therefore, if we are thinking along the same lines with parents it is somehow extremely significant for the girls as well. (P1)

6.2.2 Supporting girls in a personal level

As it was described in the previous chapter one's family, its wellbeing and support given by parents and other family members has an influence on the identity development of girls from a Muslim background. Next I explain how girls' identity growth can be supported in a personal level.

In the interviews the professionals stressed how there should be unending conversation between the girls and the youth workers about the needed and wished activities. Nothing should be organised for girls but with them in mutual understanding. Honkasalo (2011, 88, 109) criticises that too often activities for youth from different ethnic backgrounds have been planned without listening to girls what causes declining participation. Because family cultures differ from each other so does the levels for supporting one's identity growth. (Honkasalo 2011, 88, 109.) Therefore, giving time and genuine attention for girls and important issues for them already strengthens their identity development. Cressey (2006, 35) advocates Honkasalo's view by addressing how the cornerstone of the girl-focused work is to follow the wishes and needs of girls, not the demands of parents or the youth workers. Hence, co-operation, showing respect and participatory working methods are essential part of the 'Girls' Cottage'. By emphasising the participatory method I mean that girls themselves are the key for planning action and activities.

> The girls are experts about their own life situation and due to their knowledge we ponder together wishes and needs. (P1)

When discussing the question of girls' adaptation process and finding their own place in a community I received similar thoughts from all participants. The professionals, mothers and girls listed the following aspects as essential tools in order to become a part of the society: friends, hobbies and the Finnish language skills. In addition, the professionals added peer support. Being part of the community of girls, broadening social circles, having time for oneself and getting to know Finnish habits while sharing own family habits with other people are significant base ingredients for the adaptation

and identity development process. For many girls from different ethnic backgrounds normal daily life is busy with school and other responsibilities at home. Therefore, girls might forget how important their own wellbeing is. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 105.) According to the professionals organizing activities only for girls indicates the value of the specific gender and how significant their welfare is for society. Helander (2002, 110) notes that girls from Somali decent have less free time and freedom of movement than boys based on the cultural traditions. Hence, girls might not even know that there are activities for them.

> Sometimes girls forget about themselves when their parents might be busy taking care of all smaller siblings—they might not have friends or hobbies—also difficult situation back in Somalia might worry them. I have never forced anyone to participate in activities, but often already being aware of possibilities helps. (P2)

An own place for girls and peer support groups open new doors for girls searching for their identity. Being with peers, changing views and sharing problematic and sensitive questions concerning own body, puberty and growing up between cultures offer new dimensions on a challenging journey towards a unique "me". In a small group and safe atmosphere girls can ponder their identity in the middle of different pressures and role expectations from outside world. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 105-107.) Girl-focused work and peer groups were topics which arose several times in interviews. The professionals' viewpoint pointed those activities as methods of identity support. Furthermore, the mothers were content to have activities for their daughters where they could meet other girls and make friends. Then again the girls could not wait to be among the girls, discuss girls' matters and do something that they could not do in the presence of boys.

If peer support groups are essential part of girls' identity growth, the youth workers or instructors of the groups have also an important role when being and discussing with girls. The professionals did not emphasise any particular working method as such but they stressed of being present, encourage and empower girls to find their own ways to solve the challenges. Therefore, the instructors do not offer ready models to behave or provide answers. One of the professionals pointed out the meaning of opening up and

sharing own feelings within a group. She explained how it is the aim of an instructor to support girls to identify their own feelings and express them. It is a new step towards finding own identity and getting to know oneself when a multicultural girl ventures to name her feelings and emotions (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 106).

> Our objective is to increase the feeling that difference is enrichment and not always a challenge. In addition, girls have no need to identify with a certain and same role model--sometimes I meet girls who do not want to speak their own mother tongue but only Finnish--then I try to make the point that there is nothing bad in your own background or mother tongue, conversely. (P1)

The present target group of the 'Girls' Cottage' (8-14 years) faces multiple challenges and joint moments during those years, for instance, the beginning of puberty and moving to upper classes or changing school. These years and changes have an influence on girls' self-esteem therefore identity development. Keltikangas-Järvinen (2003, 59) draws attention to the relation between self-esteem and identity by stating that empowering children in positive way strengthens their self-esteem.

> Girl-focused work is a good foundation for puberty. Participating hobbies or groups further, getting personal support might help with identity development compared with those ones who do not take part in any activities—I believe that the girls who have hobbies will gain more ability to deal with possible contradictions related to own identity and dissimilarities between the set of values in the future. (P1)

> Children build their self-esteem by reflecting how peers and other people see them. Furthermore, they observe how their surrounding community behaves towards them, reacts, respects and values their culture. When children feel accepted and appreciated individuals they are more likely to be proud of their own background and have positive self-esteem. (P3)

Puberty, growing up and searching peers and adults acceptance, further approval are significant joint moments. During the years 8-14 girls are vulnerable. Everything that happens around them are captured and reflected in order to find out who one really is and how other people see this person, this girl. It seems that girls who live between cultures face a large amount of expectations and are surrounded by numerous role models. Positive and negative feedback, other people's attitudes and expression towards

girls are all collected and analysed by girls. Some girls adapt into society faster than others and seem to balance well between two cultures and habits. Being part of a peer group should not be thought as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, by meeting peers girls might notice that they are not only ones who face similar challenges but all girls have questions related to the same topic, girlhood. According to Eischer & Tuppurainen (2009, 104) the aim of peer support groups is to strengthen girls' girlhood and enable them to discuss daily life issues and challenges with other girls. Discussions are essential ways to support girls' cultural background as well as help them to find their place in Finnish society. (Eischer & Tuppurainen 2009, 104.)

6.2.3 Observing the environment of Rastila and the pilot girls' group

All observations were conducted in the surrounding area of Rastila and in the girls' pilot group. My objective was to observe girls' behaviour and interaction outdoors, further within a group. Outdoors there were several children and youth spending their time near the shopping malls, metro station, local markets and parks. Where ever I walked regardless of the day or day time I saw children and girls interacting with each other. Of course there were fewer children outside in the evenings and if there were, girls were with their parents.

> It seems that school day is over and most of the children have finished their studies from today. A large group of girls is passing me giggling loudly, although soon they disappear to different directions. I am waiting for them to come back but later I saw only few of them going to a local supermarket. The number of boys has increased around the youth house and it looks busy inside the youth house. Towards the evening the boys occupy the surrounding environment but I keep wondering where the girls are. (O1)

After I had spent time in Rastila and visited the local youth houses a few times I started wondering the girls' participation. I had realized that there were more boys taking part in the youth house activities than girls. Honkasalo (2011, 84-85) notes that participation of girls from different ethnic backgrounds has always been problematic part of youth work although the reasons for not attending are not totally covered.

There were several possible activities for boys to do, for example, card games, pool, music and occasionally organised sports. Most of the time the youth houses were at least half-full, if not bursting full of boys. If there were girls they did not stay for long and those girls I saw were often Finnish or from some other background than a Muslim background. Girls attended to youth house activities if they knew that there were only girls present. In addition, I made another interesting observation concerning the youth house. During the day time, especially after school there were always some girls staying nearby the youth house although they did not go in. I am aware of the fact that in this specific area numerous services, shops and public domains are centralized in one neighbourhood in the middle of housing estate. Therefore, I saw girls who probably only passed a youth house on the way home. However, the amount of girls and their behaviour caught my attention, some of them walked alone whereas some in a group.

> Do girls in this are have hobbies or enough friends? There were girls who played catch with the other ones or seemed to have something to do—then those ones who walked alone and were ignored for one reason or another by the other girls. (O1)

Would those girls who I saw wished to be a part of the youth house activities or were they content to spend their time elsewhere. What about those girls I did not see or reach. Perhaps they were at home or then I did not see them going to the youth house. I admit that my time to observe was limited and these results do not present the whole truth.

Another target of my observations was the pilot girls' group of the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture. The atmosphere there was lively, vivid and frequently boisterous. All in all there were 20 names in the list of participants and approximately 10 to 15 girls attended each Friday. The girls came from all backgrounds although a large amount of them came from a Muslim background. The purpose of observing this group was to comprehend the meaning of being part of the team and see how girls communicate and interact with each other.

I was surprised in a positive manner when I first time stepped into the room and how girls welcome me with open arms.

> "Hello! Everybody come and see quickly we have a new instructor, cool!" (A girl 9 years)

The girls seemed to be excited when planning together the future activities and schedules for each semester. In addition, the ambiance was relaxed and full of enthusiasm.

> I was content to see girls' reactions while planning the activities. Several possible ideas were mentioned and some ideas, for instance, theatre plays, received a positive amount of votes. It was also good to see girls' own characteristics to come up after getting to know the group members and instructors—sometimes we had to calm the girls down when they became so excited and loudly defended their own ideas and opinions. This is a good and demanding group! (O1)

The girls suggested, for instance, dancing, acting and costume parties since they were something what they were not allowed to do in the presence of an opposite gender. For some girls it was also new to be asked to take part in conversations and share opinions and feelings. Of course no one was pressured to do anything but rather encouraged to participate whenever she felt she was ready and comfortable to do it.

In a group like this I understood the point of the peer support and spending time with peers. There was a time when one girl came crying from school and told how she had her feelings hurt because she was ridiculed by another girl. With her permission we discussed the issue within the group and then some other girls shared their experiences.

> The group discussion was very helpful, although some girls were first reserved and it took time for them to open up. The atmosphere within a group became tighter and it seemed that new friendships were formed. Furthermore, it was interesting to see how some girls looked surprise that they were not the only ones who had experienced, for instance, bullying or name calling. (O1)

I was content to listen to these conversations because most discussions handled multicultural issues and living between cultures. Girls expressed often indirectly how important the group was for them and how they were proud of being part of it. This attitude was seen when the group had already fixed together and then a new girl arrived. Some girls seemed distressed when a group instructor temporarily spent more time with a newcomer.

> Some of the girls knew each other from school even before the girls' pilot group was started. This caused occasionally tension within a group since new girls participated in the group. Today a front door slammed when one of the girls left home earlier—it is not the first time. Sometimes the girls seem to feel frustrated and jealous if the instructors are not present immediately or able to share attention equally to everybody or only for a one girl. (O1)

In these situations the instructor had a significant role. Within the group there have been discussions also about the rules and how everybody should behave towards each other and respect other cultures.

Since the group had not been gathering together for longer than a few months, there were issues in group dynamics that needed to be developed and solve together with the girls. Compared with the atmosphere of the youth house I was pleased to see girls laughing, debating loudly, communicating openly and standing up for each other. The first issue what girls asked when they came every Friday was "what nice are we going to do today?" and the last question before going home was concerning the activities the week after. A good conclusion for my observations towards the meaning of the group was to hear girls' disappointment when they realized that the group will not gather together next week because of the Christmas holidays.

6.3 How the 'Girls' Cottage' can benefit from the research results?

This research has been conducted in order to support the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture, raise awareness and provide ideas for its future realization. During the research process I met several families from a Muslim background, especially mothers and girls with whom I had fruitful conversations about their lives, challenges they face and girls' free time activities or lack of them. We discussed hopes and wishes mothers and girls have concerning organised activities, further how beneficial the 'Girls Cottage' would be from their viewpoint. In general, the feedback towards the venture was positive. However, I also received a few doubtful questions which are considered as constructive critique.

When discussing free time activities which the 'Girls' Cottage' could organise I received numerous suggestions. The mothers and girls all emphasised sports as wished activities. Since girls are not allowed to wear anything too exposing clothing in the presence of an opposite gender own sports classes would be welcomed. The mothers were worried about their daughters' physical wellbeing for the reason that the schools have not always been able to organise special arrangements during sporting participation. These difficulties have caused a declining number to take part in the activities. Especially, organising swimming lessons was problematic. Therefore, both mothers and girls wished that the 'Girls' Cottage' could take girls swimming occasionally in small groups. In addition, other popular activities were, for instance, cooking, baking, music, outdoor activities, trips and camps. When planning recreation time together with girls also parents' approval would be essential to maintain in order to avoid misunderstandings. Furthermore, mother-daughter activities or involving mothers as volunteer instructors might be advantageous in case some mothers are uneasy to let their daughters participate in activities. Otherwise girls were excited to have time of their own and spend time with other girls while receiving attention from adults. In addition, the mothers emphasised the meaning of school, studying and guiding girls with their home works, particularly, in the Finnish language.

One of the main issues I found out during this research was that the families and girls had positive feeling towards the 'Girls' Cottage' after I had convinced it has nothing to do with religion. Since religion, religious habits and belief is significant for numerous families from a Muslim background, parents wanted to clarify that the activities and action in the 'Girls' Cottage' would not be against their values. An open discussion about the action with the families is significant. Nevertheless, the venture is organised by a Christian association it was not a negative aspect when the reason behind the project was explained and justified thoroughly. It became clear that families want to keep their religion within themselves and their own community without discussing religious issues with non-Muslims. This is understandable, the idea of the 'Girls' Cottage' is not to interfere in girls' religious or traditional upbringing but rather raise awareness of culture conscious thinking and respective behaviour.

All professionals who I interviewed in this study emphasised open, genuine and respectful communication with the families. If there are any questions about the family habits or insecurity related to issues or activities a child might not be allowed to take part in, they should be discussed. Earning parents' and girls' trust and certify that the families are honoured takes time and effort but it is vital for the future relationships. It is important to ponder ways how to became more approachable and minimize those factors which increase a threshold for girls and parents. The professionals also stressed how numerous families from a Muslim background have been in contact with several authorities during they stay in Finland. Therefore, including parents as a part of action without externalizing a child from the family, creating easy and daily based communication could help the whole family to trust the instructors of the 'Girls' Cottage'. Both the mothers and professionals noted how sometimes parents are worried that their children might forget their own roots and replace old family habits with Finnish ones. These feelings are important to remember, take into account and discuss with girls and their parents. The 'Girls' Cottage' values girls' cultural habits and encourages girls to be content and proud of their own roots although the family habits might sometimes feel irritating or embarrassing. The girls' participation is a vital key in this venture simply because the 'Girls' Cottage' is for them. Working with girls needs time and effort in order to get to know them, find out their feelings and dreams. The girls are important therefore the aim of the professionals is to make them feel valued.

7 CONCLUSION

This research has introduced dimensions of the girl focused work and emphasised the importance of gender based working methods and peer support groups. Opening an own place for girls, offering activities only for them and stressing the tolerant, multicultural, accepting, encouraging, empowering environment and atmosphere is the corner stone when raising the awareness of the 'Girls' Cottage'. The idea of the 'Girls' Cottage' was accepted with open arms and positive attitudes, all though some doubtful questions arose. The 'Girls' Cottage' will most likely fulfil the needs for youth from different ethnic backgrounds and become a successful concept when the target group has been involved in the action from the beginning. In addition, when activities are organised and planned together with the girls based on the girls needs and wishes. Since the venture has multiple features of the community development work, the participation of community members should be addressed. The research process presented how challenging it was to find the families from a Muslim background and convince them to participate in the study. The main reason was the lack of time and there unfamiliarity of being part of such a project. Therefore, it is vital that in the future the girls and their families would receive more information about the venture within a longer time span. As discovered earlier something what seems clear to me might feel peculiar from another persons view point.

Ones background, culture, family habits and life have an influence on girls' identity growth. Girls' identity and the way they experience living between cultures, how they deal with challenges and various expectations are unique. Different cultures seem to have numerous comprehensions of identity and what aspects it includes. What professionals of multicultural youth work wished that girls' would learn to be proud of there own cultural background, individual characteristics and unique identity. Since today's societies try to generalise people and mimic each individuals' lives, an adult's role would be to teach children that cultural differences are enrichment. Supporting girls' own routes and giving positive feedback strengthens there self esteem. When girls' that other people accepts them as being part of both cultures they are less likely to face identity crises.

8 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This research process and participating in the 'Girls' Cottage'-venture have made me comprehend how significant, multiple and a broad field I am dealing with. Furthermore, how much possibilities and opportunities it offers to individuals with various skills from all backgrounds. Latest during this process I have convinced myself that working with people, encouraging and empowering them to increase their and the whole community's wellbeing is something I definitely wish to be part of also in the future. I have overcome a long process and gained a vast amount of expertise and knowledge. I have also proved to myself that I can work under pressure, conquer challenging situations and use the existing capacity for reaching my objectives. It has been a teaching voyage to be included in a complex venture such as the 'Girls' Cottage'. The process as a whole has been variable with surprises, deadlocks, challenges, questions, realizations and comprehendible amount of emotions. I was not sure what to expect during the beginning nevertheless the final results to some extent astounded me in a positive manner.

In addition, I was content to acknowledge how numerous elements of community development work were included in the venture that I needed to take into account during this project. Throughout my study years the meaning of community development work has been emphasised and discussed in numerous occasions. However, after conducting this research by using various research methods I broadened my horizons about what it means in a concrete level. The statement "not for people but with them" certainly is the cornerstone of community development work. Even the greatest project would not work if community members themselves were not genuinely interested in the goals. I definitely learnt new issues from each individual I got to know and interviewed during this research. Changing views gave me new dimensions concerning the project work and enhanced my spectrum for receiving innovative ideas. I commenced this project with all senses and mind open in order to draw knowledge from people I meet and it was worth it.

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