

The influences of multilingual upbringings on the identities processes of young adults in Denmark - A qualitative study

“Actually ask me, and I’ll tell you: I’m Danish, my roots are Iranian.”

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Abstract

The present study came into existence partly as a result of the author's life events and the resulting curiosity in relation to the introspective and identity-forming experiences of her upbringing in a multilingual household. As such, the aim of the present study is to uncover, understand and discuss how the identity processes of young adults living in Denmark are influenced by an upbringing in a multilingual context. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, as well as focus group interviews, and is subsequently analyzed using a narrative practice approach, based on Bamberg's (2010) model of identity construction. Results showed that the identity processes of the young adult informants are affected in both positive and negative ways by being raised in multilingual households. On one hand, being multilingual is seen as a defining characteristic of the social group within which many of the informants are active, and is therefore effective in granting the informants a far-reaching and dynamic sense of self. Being multilingual in this context allowed the individuals to relate to one another, as well as to others, despite not exclusively speaking the same languages. Furthermore, humor is uncovered as a theme in relation to identity construction, insofar as it can both be seen as a defining characteristic allowing for in-group participation, but also because it can be wielded as a defense tactic, enabling the informants to retain control of their social situations where they might experience marginalization, discrimination or other othering behaviors or experiences. Language barriers are only overtly present for one informant. Overall, being multilingual is seen and discussed in a positive, identity-constructing light, though it is not without its obstacles. Speaking Danish in addition to at least two other languages enables the informants a strong sense of self in their early 20s, and is instrumental in allowing them to navigate today's global context, while retaining an intact and consistent sense of self.

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1.0 Introduction

Globalization and technological advancements have impacted society and culture in a myriad of ways, many of them too complex and widespread to be accurately and precisely conceptualized. Yet, chief among them, arguably, is a distinct increase in international mobility, and, with it, a greater number of both children and adults living cross-national, cross-cultural lives (Tan et al., 2021, p. 81). As such, as times have changed over the last decades, multilingual upbringing is becoming increasingly normalized. As children navigate familial and social environments, where at least some degree of multilingualism is perceived as the norm, our understanding of language, culture and context expands exponentially. Meanwhile, it further becomes imperative that these children, and in turn young adults, are considered able to adequately navigate in the space between having a home-language and a school-language, for example. Furthermore, these individuals necessitate a new understanding of how to navigate, express and understand themselves as Danish nationals, despite the differences between themselves and their monolingual Danish peers.

The author of this paper would herself be considered multilingual, and was fluent in three languages before the age of 4, spoke four languages fluently by the age of 10. Navigating growing up as a “third culture kid”, allowed me to adapt and observe in ways non-multilingual peers were seemingly not always able to. Especially as a person with an interest in linguistics, literature, and language in general, at an early age, I began to notice small things, like my sense of humor warping slightly, depending on not only the context, receiver, but also something as concrete as the language through which the humor was conveyed. Some words do not translate, some values are considered differently in different cultures, some jokes are no longer funny, should they be translated. As Feldman-Barrett (2017c) argues, the most effective way of increasing emotional intelligence is by broadening an individual’s emotional repertoire, learning new terms of emotion, both in a person’s first and/or any subsequent languages, expands the brain’s ability to construct more complex emotional experiences as well as easing future perceptions of others’ emotions (Dewaele, 2021, p. 341).

As such, it stands to reason that growing up with variable fluency in more than one language in childhood would allow for individuals to construct a sense of self that was largely dependent, or at least affected by, these languages and the contexts in which they are spoken and utilized. It is further hypothesized that being multilingual from childhood should infer an influence on the identity construction processes of young adults. From here, the following research question, that the present study will attempt to tackle, deal with and take into account, came to light;

How are the identity processes of young adults in Denmark affected by having multiple languages in the home since infancy?

2.0 Literature Overview / Relevant Literature

In order to obtain a general understanding and overview of the existing literature on the topic of research, a brief summary of both relevant empirical studies as well as theoretical understandings of the topic at hand will be outlined in the following. This chapter delves, non-exhaustively, into the following topics; Intercultural adaptation, “third culture kids”, multilingualism and code-switching. The aim of this overview of relevant existing literature is to better understand the existing knowledge in this field, as well as situate the present study within it.

In relation to identity, globalization and the changes it has brought with it, can be said to lead to a sort of amalgamation of national and personal identities, as well as the creation of “transnational identities” (David & Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 354). Cultural identities, in turn, can be comprised of a number of factors, such as gender, race, socioeconomic status and so forth (Clarke, 2008, p. 510), and can be considered one of the many ways through which we group ourselves and the people around us. Of note here, among a myriad of models, understandings and theories of identity, is Bamberg’s identity construction model (2010), founded in an understanding of narrative identity. In psychological literature, a difference between emotions and feelings is often made. According to Damasio (2002), for example, emotions are observable, neurophysiological, and transitory reactions to stimuli, whereas feelings are the non-observable, private experience of emotions.

2.1 Intercultural Adaptation

Of interest within multiculturalism as a research concept is the process of intercultural adaptation. This refers to how individuals who relocate to an unfamiliar cultural environment are able to establish and maintain a functional and stable relationship with the environment (Moore & Barker, 2011, p. 2). Early research on intercultural adaptation is based on the assumption that individuals who leave their home culture must first “unlearn” the culture they were born into, in order to “relearn” the new culture into which they are integrating or assimilating more or less permanently. This would mean the native cultural identity would be practically replaced by the newly acquired one. However, the newer model of intercultural adaptation allows for an individual to have a sense of belonging to two cultures, without compromising their sense of cultural identity, and without necessarily altering either their behavior nor their cultural identity (Moore & Barker, 2011, p. 2). As such, this newer assumption is also the one the present study is based on.

Alqarni and Dewaele (2018) established that bilinguals generally scored higher on emotional intelligence than monolinguals (Alqarni & Dewaele, 2018, p. 144), although the authors do note that this effect should be considered modest. Overall, the impact of multilingualism on emotionality and personality should be considered complex and multifaceted, especially in a global context.

2.2 TCKs and similar terminology

Third culture kids (TCK) is a term coined by social scientists John and Ruth Useem in the 1950s (Useem & Cottrell, 1996, p. 22) and refers to an individual who has spent their formative years (i.e., grown up) in a nation or culture which differs from either parent's heritage. The term "third culture" refers to the creation of a third and separate culture, that is neither that of the parents', nor the host culture, but rather, "the culture between cultures" (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009, p. 755). Other terms relating to this idea of cross or multicultural identities exist, such as *global nomad* and *cross culture kid*, but TCK has been selected by the author due to both personal preference, but also due to a perceived consensus surrounding the term and its meaning. Further, the imagery of the culture between cultures, the space that exists within which an individual can be considered both an insider and an outsider in these social contexts or their country of residence, is helpful in explaining the divergence between monolinguals and multilinguals, among other things. Velliaris and Frenzel (2014) have assembled a dictionary of sorts, spanning the numerous metaphors, expressions and terminology used to describe "transplanted children or students". These authors also point to a lack of greater empirical research on these populations (Velliaris & Frenzel, 2014, p. 6). However, it has been established that these populations of TCKs typically feel most at home among others like themselves. Further, navigating multiple cultural and national identities, especially during childhood and adolescence, which are particularly important for the identity construction processes, can lead to a clouded sense of identity later in life, or even bring up feelings of rootlessness (Moore & Barker, 2011, p. 3).

In order to address identity, and especially within the scope of culture and cultural identities, it is first necessary to briefly recap the concept of identity and its history within the field of psychology (and perhaps even social sciences in general). Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was among the earliest psychologists to take an interest in identity theory. Integral to Erikson's approach is the concept of *ego*, which, in a word, can be described as an individual's sense of continuity. While identity should be viewed as a lifelong process, it has been proposed that adolescence and young adulthood be considered especially integral to the identity process (Schmiedeck, 1979, p. 158). For this reason, young adults are often an interesting field of study when considering differing aspects of identity.

For a child developing any form of language at all, the first five years are crucial (Murphy, 2003, p. 26). Lanza and Svendsen (2007) further point out that language, particularly the first language learned or one's mother tongue, presents an integral part of collective identities, such as national, ethnic or cultural identities (Lanza & Svendsen, 2007, p. 275). It stands to reason, then, that this preliminary cultural identity is largely shaped by or dependent on the first language a child learns. Collective identities represent an integral part, not only of the question of multilinguals' shifting identities and identity creation, but also pertain to the psychological concept of identity as a whole (David & Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 354). The borders between individual identity and collective identity are constantly shifting, in such a way that the emphasis may be, at times, on one end of a sliding scale, and at others, on the opposite. In this way, identity should be perceived as a shifting and dynamic fluid process as opposed to a static certainty (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009, p. 757).

As such, a question arises as to whether language can help shift, influence, and shape solely collective identities, or can it also be true that language shapes personal or individual personality traits or even identities?

Pollock et al. (2017) explained that “the TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 27) and the authors point out that TCKs’ “sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background” (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 29); hence, TCKs identify with this shared experience, termed as third culture (Lanza & Svendsen, 2007, p. 276). TCKs, in addition to their immigrant parents, must not only adapt to new environments, but must also learn to navigate new interpretative frameworks; what may be considered appropriate in conversation in one culture is not necessarily applicable in another. The same can be said for humor, insofar as what is considered taboo may differ across communities or cultures (Vaid, 2006, p. 176). Further, Vaid (2006) argues that some knowledge or comprehension of these factors of appropriateness is a prerequisite for humor. If a person is unaware of cultural contexts, history or taboos, they are unlikely to be able to play around with, reference or poke fun at these concepts (Vaid, 2006, p. 156). This can be considered one of a myriad of factors that can alienate TCKs, as well as other multilinguals, in a host culture. Walters and Autun-Cuff (2009) even suggest that the greatest challenges TCKs face pertain to forming both their sense of identity as well as their sense of belonging (Walters & Autun-Cuff, 2009, p. 756). People traveling or moving to new places, countries or cultures as adults are susceptible to experiencing culture shock, but are in a sense less vulnerable to problems of identity and the like due to often already having a sense of who they are, or even where they belong (Walters & Autun-Cuff, 2009, p. 756). In contrast, because TCKs are exposed to culture shocks, changing cultures and contexts, *before* they often have a chance to construct a strong sense of self, this demographic is of particular interest to identity research on this topic. Fail et al. (2004) uncovered that TCKs often have multiple senses of belonging or even none at all. Factors such as moving often and attending many different schools during formative years can result in TCKs feeling rootless, at home everywhere and nowhere. Fail et al. (2004) further posit that TCKs sense of belonging may rely more on interpersonal relationships, especially with individuals in similar situations, rather than a geographical place (Walters & Autun-Cuff, 2009, p. 756).

Because of this, it is relevant to briefly summarize social identity theory, first posited by Tajfel and Turner (1979), as it relates to the intergroup dynamics known as in- and out-groups. In short, social identity theory refers to the human tendency to exaggerate similarities within what is considered a person’s “in-group”, meaning what particular social identity that is in focus in each particular interaction or context, all while minimizing differences to the purported “out-group”. These terms are dynamic, and an individual can easily simultaneously be another individual’s in- and out-group concurrently. This process can be termed categorization, and is of interest within interactional social mobility and perception (Hornsey, 2008, p. 217).

The idea of TCKs not feeling totally at home in either their host culture or parent culture is not new; some authors have even proposed that the identity of TCKs is entirely separate from

either of the cultures of nationalities they otherwise belong to. Instead, TCKs more typically build relationships in relation to each of the cultures and contexts in which they move around, without claiming full ownership or identity of any. Pollock et al. (2017) point out that “TCKs’ sense of belonging is in relation to others of the same background” (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 29). Of course, since by definition TCKs are minorities within the social contexts that they reside in, the opportunity or access to individuals to whom it would be possible to relate is limited. The idea that multilinguals, multinationals, never feel entirely at home among individuals who do not share these qualities is also not new (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009, p. 447), and it has been posited that multilinguals may represent a challenge to the general notion that social groups and contexts can be defined by the language in which they present.

Though only one of the participants in this paper fits the definition of TCK, i.e. having lived outside of the parents’ home country for at least 3 years between the ages of 8 and 18, the research surrounding TCKs, and their identity formation remains relevant in order to obtain a more general understanding of the topic at hand. To put it simply, TCKs are much more likely than the general population to be multilingual, and the precise definition of the term allows for more precise and relevant psychological or linguistic research.

Some respondents reported a preference for their mother tongue when relating personal anecdotes or funny personal experiences, yet no language preference in relation to telling or hearing jokes, teasing or expressing amusement (Vaid, 2006, p. 174). The author posits that some differentiation in regards to emotional expression through humor could be observed in bilingual individuals, though she further underlines the need for further research with larger sample sizes (Vaid, 2007, p. 174). Similar findings appeared in the present study.

Research suggests the interpersonal or psychological complications relating to bilingualism differ in relation to the number of additional languages spoken; meaning, bilinguals and multilinguals cannot always be considered within the same frameworks (Lanza & Svendsen, 2007, p. 277). According to Benzehaf (2023), language can in part be credited with helping an individual, particularly a multilingual one, construct their identities in relation to the community or context in which they find themselves. The more languages a person speaks or learns, the more identities this person can be said to have; the simple act of switching between them facilitates the interchanging of personal identities as well as the perspective from which one sees the world (Benzehaf, 2023, p. 1145). Therefore, it is imperative multilingualism be a separate focal point of study both sociologically and psychologically speaking, so as not to generalize between divergent populations (i.e., bilinguals and multilinguals). The added complexity of more than one mother tongue is of particular interest in the context of identity formation in particular.

The idea of self-perception or even identity changing with language switches can be attributed to multiple things. Dewaele and Panicacci (2017) wrote: *“What emerges from the literature is the dynamic nature of migrants’ sense of feeling different when switching languages, intended more as self-awareness rather than a real development of multiple personalities.”* (Dewaele & Panicacci, 2017, p. 420). This highlights this feeling of generalized “otherness” this diaspora can have, that also became apparent in the present study, and is one of the key notions in

multilinguals' creation of their perceived self. Because of this, the concept of TCK can be broadened so as not only to include a third "culture" but perhaps also understood to refer to an adaptable sense of self, personality and self-perception. Dewaele (2008) has also found that bilinguals recounting an emotionally charged event express more intense emotionality or affect when speaking the same language as the event transpired in (Dewaele, 2008, p. 1761). This points to the language in which an event or feeling occurs is relevant to how the individual later remembers, processes, and speaks about the event. As such, research into the emotionality of the growing population of multilingual individuals is pertinent when uncovering how personality, emotionality and language fluency interact.

Jean-Marc Dewaele, professor of Applied Linguistics & Multilingualism at Birkbeck University of London, has researched multilingualism and its effects on both emotionality and personality for upwards of three decades. Dewaele has published a multitude of papers on these topics, and has proved integral in understanding the correlation between multilingualism and personality in this context. In 2020, Dewaele and Botes (2020) published an article detailing their findings of 651 multilinguals from around the world who had responded to online questionnaires pertaining to how being multilingual can shape an individual's personality traits. The researchers used the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), which overlaps at times with the Big Five factor model. For example, one of the five variables is Cultural Empathy, which the authors compare to Agreeableness in the Big Five model; both variables describe an individual's sense of empathy and relating to others around them (Dewaele & Botes, 2020, p. 812). However, the Cultural Empathy variable also comprises a more general aspect of how an individual is able to relate to others from different cultures, or who have different social norms.

As such, there exists a plethora of ways to try and relativize, theorize and understand identity in and of itself. In the present study, the focus is partly on how multilinguals' identities are shifting, in such a way that they differ from monolinguals' identity construction processes. For this reason, a reasonable focus has been put on cultural identity, as well as identity construction more generally, as a way of including the concept of multilingualism, as well as the effects on interpersonal relationships and interactions, personality traits such as cultural empathy, and so on. Despite this, it remains important to note that identity is in this context viewed as dynamic, subject to change, and that it can be multifaceted. This applies to both individual, cultural and collective identities (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015, p. 286). It is further important to note that contact with language(s) is to be considered foundational in identity construction and negotiation. Beyond this particular lens of multilingual and multicultural identity construction, it remains of importance to utilize more general identity theories and understandings as a starting point. For this reason, Bamberg's (2010) model of identity construction will now briefly be summarized, in order to present the theoretical understanding necessary to coherently analyze and extrapolate from the data collected, as well as to position the current study within the framework of a narrative analysis.

Bamberg (2010) puts forth three main dilemmas, which he denotes as identity dilemmas, which are essential when an individual is in the identity formation process. These will be summarized in the chapter concerning narrative analysis (3.4).

2.3 Defining multilingualism

Defining terms like “bilingual” and “multilingual” is imperative in understanding how these factors operate within identity and personality metrics. Early definitions of bilingualism refers mainly to “native-like control” of two languages as opposed to one. Dewaele (2015) points to this definition being lacking insofar as it refers solely to linguistic components and ignores any remaining factors (Dewaele, 2015, p. 1). Dewaele (2015) further points to a double standard in relation to especially bilingualism in school settings; so-called “elite bilingualism”, referring to mainly stable, middle-class families actively deciding to teach their children more than one language in school, in order to achieve, among other things, a better professional profile for their child in the future. Research has, in fact, shown that employers value multilingualism and often reward it in their employees (Dewaele, 2015, p. 4). Conversely, children of, for example, immigrant families, have historically been encouraged to speak the host language in the home in order to facilitate the children’s social and academic adaptation to the host country. This represents a double standard, especially when considering the expansive research detailing the cognitive and social benefits of being multilingual from a very young age (Dewaele, 2015, p. 5).

Furthermore, research has shown that being multilingual can be beneficial in many aspects of an individual’s personality as well as their wellbeing and day-to-day life. Recent research has highlighted social, economic, and linguistic benefits, as well as more general psychological and cognitive improvements (Dewaele, 2021, p. 337). Research on multilingualism has had more of a focus on cognitive effects than psychological effects (Dewaele & Wei, 2012, p. 353). Even so, previous research has alluded to the possibility of language as well as culture influencing personality, and thereby affecting multilinguals’ self-perception (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017, p. 420). The Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) is among the first questionnaires to assess multilinguals’ sense of feeling different depending on which language is being spoken (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017, p. 421). Findings based on this questionnaire further points to informants’ emotionality and personality varying based on not only context, culture, but also language in itself. In emotionally charged situations, respondents to the BEQ felt more “real” in what is defined as their “L1”, i.e. the first language learned, and felt “fake” in any language learned later in life (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017, p. 421).

Dewaele (2015) further points to the differing emotional weights of the L1, referring to the first language learned, and any LXs, meaning any subsequent languages learned. The term LX is preferred by the author to the traditional L1, L2, and so forth, in order to avoid confusion about the possible meaning attached to ordering languages by number (Dewaele, 2015, p. 2). Emotionality expressed in different languages was equally different. Meaning, saying the phrase “I love you” or swear words in a person’s L1 had a greater emotional weight compared to saying equivalent words and phrases in other, subsequently acquired languages (Dewaele, 2015, p. 9). Further, the author also found that frequency of use of an LX to express emotionality was related to low age of acquisition of the language as well as low foreign language anxiety and naturalistic

or mixed learning of the LX, as opposed to formal instruction only (Dewaele, 2015, p. 9). Dewaele argues that multilingual individuals are uniquely multicompetent and open-minded, and concludes that their presence in a host country should be viewed as beneficial and in an overall positive light (Dewaele, 2015, p. 10).

2.4 Code-switching

Another term of interest in the field of multilingualism, personality and identity is code-switching. Code-switching refers to the process of switching from one linguistic code, such as a language or dialect, to another, depending on factors such as social context or conversational setting. Interestingly, bilingual individuals have shown both a deeper emotionality when speaking their L1 (Dewaele, 2015, p. 9), but also less embarrassment when speaking any subsequently acquired languages (Bond & Lai, 2001, p. 184). Having acquired any LX subsequently to a person's L1 means a greater likelihood of the LX being acquired in a more emotionally neutral setting, such as in school or educational contexts. This, in turn, points to the LX being less emotionally loaded, which allows for a greater degree of distance when discussing difficult, embarrassing, or high-arousal topics when compared with a person's L1 (Bond & Lai, 2001, p. 184). Bond & Lai (2001) had psychology students fluent in both their native Cantonese and the LX English interview one another in both languages, and found that English provided a distancing function which allowed to students to recall and share more details when speaking about emotionally charged, specifically embarrassing, aspects of the interviews (Bond & Lai, 2001, p. 179).

Summary

In summation, the field of study that exists between multilingualism, the individuals that fit this definition (such as TCKs), and identity construction should be considered broad and complex. The review of the above terminology and empirical studies have informed the approach of the present study, insofar as it helps shape the background understanding of a modern, globalized context. Furthermore, research within identity construction is also far-reaching, and has therefore been specified in order to focus the scope of the present study. That is, within the field of young, multilingual adults residing in Denmark in 2024.

3.0 Methodology

With key words defined, and thus having garnered a better understanding of current research related to the influences a multilingual upbringing can have on the individual's identity processes, the following chapter concerns methodology, before continuing onto the analysis. The following section will therefore outline research methodology, such as data collection methods and analytical tools, in order to outline how the research question pertains to the existing field of study.

3.1 The Narrative Approach

The narrative approach to qualitative research is specific because of its focus on the stories an individual tells in different contexts and situations in order to make sense of their own identity. That is to say, identity and sense of self are themselves grounded in narratives, and can become empirically visible (for example in research contexts) through such things as discourse, but also everyday activities (Bamberg, 2012, p. 10). The narrative approach can be situated within social constructivism, because these stories, or narratives, can be construed as a form of self-construction in relation to identity, in which the narrative itself is assessed as both a symbol and an active part of the social construction. Moreover, a narrative practice approach analyzes storytelling, or the creation and sharing of narratives, as a process of navigating and thereby managing identities (Bamberg, 2020, p. 244). This makes narrative research of particular interest to researchers occupying themselves with the question of identity in general - although its particular strength, one could argue, is in uncovering and analyzing the individual's own construction and reconstruction of identities. This is to be understood as the process through which an individual shares their own vision, or narrative, of who they are in a given context. This can include simple aspects, such as why a person may have acted as they did but can also delve deeper, and help uncover questions similar to; am I the same person in each language that I speak? For the present study, this aspect of having each person define themselves through their own words, and through actively choosing which aspects of their person were most important in each context, became integral. Bamberg (2020) describes the narrative approach largely in terms of three distinct dilemmas of identity that are integral to how an identity can be navigated by an individual. Namely, these three dilemmas are sameness/difference, agency/passivity, and continuity/change (Bamberg, 2020, p. 244).

Identity dilemmas should be first understood in the context that identity navigation (meaning how we manage to both integrate and differentiate our own sense of self in relation to others) occurs on a moment-by-moment basis (Bamberg, 2020, p. 249). This is because narratives are, in essence, interactional, meaning they are shaped by the context, history and particularity of each separate narrative interaction. This means a person's identity is still understood as shifting, and that it is imperative not to perceive language, and therefore narratives, as a veritable or objective window into reality. Language, experience and many other individual factors all affect how a person tells their story in each particular situation where they tell it. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that each instance of, for example, sameness and difference is variable. Meaning,

in one context, an individual may tell a story of themselves as a university student, and feel that is their identity. Meanwhile, in another context or situation, that same person can perceive and present themselves as something very different, like a strong tennis player, or a loving partner. Both identities can remain intact within the same individual at the same time, while allowing the person to make parallels to different people, or parts of people, depending on which narrative is presently being shared or discussed, as well as based on which context in which the interaction is taking place. That is to say, sameness and difference is something that each individual brings up, focuses on and makes relevant within each interaction.

The second dilemma of identity navigation is agency/passivity. This refers to, as the name suggests, to which degree and in which situations an individual feels highly agentive, like a victim, or even somewhere in between. This idea of *positioning* is central to Bamberg's approach to narrative analysis (Bamberg, 2012, p. 8). The dilemma of agency/passivity especially becomes apparent in how the individual positions themselves within their own narrative, i.e. "this is what happened to me" as opposed to "this is what I did".

The third identity dilemma relates to continuity/change (sometimes also referred to as constancy/change). As mentioned, temporality is one of the strengths of the narrative approach, as viewed through the lens of the individual's own meaning-making. Once again, positioning is integral here, as it allows the person telling their story to share where the story departs from stages such as beginning, middle, and end. Further, it also allows for a clear view of events that have had a particular meaning for the individual, because of temporality. For example, "before the divorce", or "after I finished school" are examples of temporality, and by extension, continuity/change plays a role here in how the individual presents themselves. This element of temporality allows for adding an individual perspective or focus to a narrative.

The particular strength of this approach is that the onus of making meaning of a particular person's lived experience lies in their own words, their own narrative. This is not to diminish the importance of how these narratives are then treated, analyzed and understood by researchers in a multitude of social science and humanities fields. However, Bamberg (2010) outlines the *narrative practice approach* as almost a new wave of the narrative approach. Integral to this approach is the importance of seemingly mundane or everyday stories that people tell, as well as stories told outside of an artificial interview context. These narratives are referred to as "small stories" to differentiate them from the more grandiose, further-reaching big stories, which are an example of a more historic understanding of the narrative approach. This approach is relevant to the present study, because of the importance of each informant's own words, own experience, and own meaning-making should be at the center of the research topic. As such, the collected data will be analyzed with this narrative practice approach in the foreground.

3.2 Gathering Informants

Informants were first found through online forums, where the author posted a short blurb describing the project and the desired profiles of the informants. This yielded 8 serious replies

from men and women between the ages of 17 and 39. The youngest respondent was not pursued, due to complications in relation to parental consent. Two others dropped out, leaving four informants; three men aged between 22 and 23 years, and one young woman aged 20 years at the time of the interviews. Further, one informant was recruited through word of mouth. This informant further recruited two more informants, both his friends. This is called snowball sampling and involves asking an informant to recruit others that he may know that could be relevant to the study (Browne, 2005, p. 48). This method was advantageous in this case due to the low number of referrals acquired through online forums and word of mouth. Further, TCKs tend to have a wider network of fellow multilinguals or other individuals with similar experiences (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009, p. 760), which can be useful for snowball sampling.

This group of young men, who were all amicable and had been roommates for the past 3 years, was interviewed together in the informants' shared home on a Friday afternoon. Initially, the informants were asked to be interviewed at the university in order to be in a relatively neutral environment, but one of the informants had temporary mobility issues, resulting in the interviewer traveling to their shared apartment instead. This change was made the day before the scheduled interview, and while not ideal, was preferable to the multiple rescheduling and cancellations that had come before.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the informant gathering, interviewing and fielding any follow up questions, there were various obstacles in regards to creating and implementing ethical research. Identifying and addressing my own preconceptions, especially as the topic was one that I personally related to, was necessary in order to avoid aspects such as the clouding of judgment and misleading data collection methods. It was also necessary to be acutely and actively aware that qualitative research is not created in a vacuum, and that personal ideas and even emotions could be at risk of affecting or influencing both the informants but also the data throughout the analytic process. Remaining a neutral observer and interviewer were both crucial to the integrity of the project, as well as a personal challenge for a multilingual individual who is very personally involved and passionate about the subject. This became especially apparent in the first draft of the group interview questions, as they initially made presumptions based on the author's personal experience. Conferring with colleagues as well as the author's advisor changed the formulation of the questions to become more open-ended and not presumptive.

Identifying and addressing my personal biases in general proved more challenging than expected. Being aware of the risk of going "full native" or similar circumstances in qualitative research, I figured myself exempt from this particular problem, partly due to my intricate and personal bond to the topics and areas explored. Instead, I found it increasingly difficult to remove "I" statements and extricate my personal inquiries and experiences from those of my informants. Reading about TCKs, such as "and then we moved, and then we moved, and then we moved", made it very difficult not to have moments of "that's how I feel!". To address this, I utilized a colleague, born and raised in Aalborg, and asked him to point out the themes of extracts of my

informants' interview transcriptions in order to have him seemingly audit them. In truth, it felt essential to me that someone other than myself, with my so heavily biased self and personality, was able to pick out some of the same themes and points as myself. This colleague proved indispensable in relation to minimizing or even removing biases, expectations and preconceived notions.

Next, informed consent was obtained from each of the informants. Anonymity was also provided, and the research followed GDPR guidelines on data treatment and storage.

3.3 Research Strategy

As mentioned, data in the present study was collected through different methodologies. Therefore, the different data collection methods will now be outlined, as well as the tools used for analysis of the empirical data, in order to create a cohesive overview of the overall research strategy.

3.3.1 Data Collection

The format of group interviews was originally selected due to the reflective nature of the research question. Expecting the informants to exchange stories, bounce information off of each other, and perhaps even be inspired by each other's answers to the questions was the main goal. Further, there was an assumption that the informants may feel seen, understood or even validated by being exposed to other stories close to their own. This was seen as a sort of "bonus" of the method of group interviews. As such, the author of this paper set up multiple qualitative group interviews, in a neutral setting, with seven young men and women between the ages of 20 and 24. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and multiple conflicting schedules, three of the seven originally selected informants did not complete the interview process. This resulted in the original group interview being downgraded to a focus group consisting of three young men aged between 22 and 23 at the time of the interview, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with the sole remaining female informant, aged 20. The female participant being interviewed alone meant that the advantage of shared perspectives and inspiration was lost, but this choice was made because the three male informants were already friends and lived together. Therefore, it was assumed that adding a fourth unknown person to this group setting would compromise the flow of the three friends, and this was prioritized.

In the following, the selected data collection methods (namely, focus groups and semi-structured interviews) will be outlined, and an argumentation for why these particular methods were selected will be presented.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews vs. Focus group

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method primarily used within the social sciences to gather clinical or exploratory data (Magaldi & Berler, 2020, p. 4825). This is favorable within identity research, as it allows informants to detail their own experiences in their own words, providing a more precise understanding of their lived experiences and sense of self. One of the

main benefits of its semi-structured form is that it encompasses both a structure, referring to predetermined topics and questions the researcher has formulated beforehand, in order to best guide the conversation to the relevant areas and topics of research. At the same time, this form of interview allows for more spur of the moment input based on what appears relevant once the interview has begun. A semi-structured interview is comprised of mainly open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to direct the conversation based on their personal experiences and answers, whereafter the researcher is relatively free to probe for supplemental information within the frame of reference (Magaldi & Berler, 2020, p. 4825). This allows for flexibility and for the information uncovered by the open-ended questions to partially influence which aspects are most important to their personal lived experience (Magaldi & Berler, 2020, p. 4825).

Although focus group methodology has historically been used in areas such as marketing research, in recent years, there has been a growing use of them within the fields of education and social research (Smithson, 2008, p. 356). Focus groups have been described, at their core and in their most simple form, as “an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics” (Beck et al., 1986, p. 73). Because focus groups provide the added advantage of being relatively naturalistic, considering it remains an artificially fabricated research environment, they are often thought of as a favorable choice of data collection within psychology (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 225). A focus group itself affords the participants a social context in which to divulge their own particular meaning-making processes, experiences and even opinions. This is typically done in a setting closer to how a person would discuss these topics outside a research setting; with other individuals who share these experiences. This tends to allow for less artificiality during the interview process compared to a one-on-one interview setting (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 226). Further, a focus group by nature attempts to shift focus away from the researcher and onto the participants. Being in a group situation or dynamic can be considered beneficial if participants are shy, introverted or uncertain of the validity of their experiences. Nevertheless, it is deemed imperative that the researcher attempts to shift focus from themselves, and from the artificiality of the situation, and lessen the implied need for reflection and academic validity, but instead aims to guide the informants to relay their own experiences in a way that suits the persons, but also the context, situation and subject of research.

Ideally, a focus group occurs in an informal setting and allows the informants to participate informally and in a way that allows for comfort and honesty. However, it remains integral to remember that the data collected in a focus group is just that; a group. It is not multiple, simultaneous personal interviews, but instead should ideally prompt an informal dialogue between the participants of the focus group, which should be the foreground of the empirical data collected, while the researcher remains relatively in the background. Ideally, a focus group would also entail an observer, who would allow for observation of non-verbal communications and interactions between the members of the focus group, as well as remaining relatively impartial in recording the verbal data (Acocella, 2012, p. 1126). During this project, this was not the case; instead, I as the researcher attempted to act both as coordinator, observer and moderator all at once. Because the focus group was relatively small, encompassing three individuals, this was deemed possible,

although it remained an issue, and I have no doubt some non-verbal communication has been lost in translation as a result.

The interactions that occur between the participants of the focus group are integral to this particular form of data collection and research. Researchers affirm that discussion among participants can prompt reciprocity and reflection among other participants (Acocella, 2012, p. 1126) as well as contrasting experiences, which can help garner a broader overview of the topic at hand. The group aspect can enable participants to reflect on aspects of their lived experience that may otherwise be dismissed as everyday or mundane. As such, focus groups are a favorable data collection method within psychological and identity research, because they allow for the informants' personal recountings of their lived experiences to be the focal point of the empirical data (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 223). Typically, focus group construction has two main aims; firstly, to facilitate interaction between the members of the focus group and secondly, to maximize both the quantity and the quality of data collected in the allotted time frame (Acocella, 2012, p. 1127). It is further recommended to create a relatively homogenous group to afford the participants most possible comfort in talking about possibly sensitive topics, including their personal experiences. This was less of a concern during the present study, because the three informants knew each other well and had been friends for years, since childhood. Potentially, this could become a concern in the opposite fashion, that is, the participants of the focus group could be too comfortable, particularly as the focus group took place in their shared home, in part to accommodate everyone's schedules and ease of transportation. The concern here was that the tone would be too informal, which, while providing the advantage of fueling an easygoing, informal setting where each participant feels at ease enough to share their personal thoughts and experiences, could also lead to moderating difficulties insofar as making it clear that this conversation should perhaps have a more reflective aspect than otherwise. Moreover, it was a benefit that these three young men were the sole participants, insofar as their particular tone of voice, shared history and experiences, and communal sense of humor could have created an exclusionary experience for someone outside their group, who could potentially have found the situation jarring or uncomfortable. This became a non-issue when transportation from Aarhus proved impossible for the preliminarily included informant and who dropped out as a result.

It should finally also be noted that neither focus groups nor semi-structured interviews are an ideal data collection method for the chosen analytical strategy; narrative analysis. A significantly less structured approach is favorable when analyzing narratives, because it allows the informant or interviewee the most space and freedom to share their narrative (beginning, middle and end) in their own words (Flick, 2018, p. 279). However, my own relative inexperience with qualitative data collection necessitated at least a bit of structure, conversely to a traditional narrative interview, in order to combat nervousness and having a formal procedure in place in case of one-word answers, or the always daunting "I don't know" in response to an interview question meant to spark debate or storytelling. In the following, I will briefly summarize the general aims of narrative analysis as well as clarify the reasoning behind the data collection and, especially, research analysis methodology.

3.4 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analyses are a type of qualitative data collection, analysis and methodology used less often than case studies, but which have the added advantage of maintaining the respondent or subject's personal vocabulary and, if well executed, lived experience (McAlpine, 2016, p. 32). As a general rule, narratives incorporate temporality as well as a social context to the collected data. Most importantly, there is a narrator, a protagonist, which is represented as an active agent in their narrative. This allows the protagonist, the individual, as well as the data, to come across as deliberate and allows narrative analysis a unique capability of looking into and understanding identity processes and identity construction (McAlpine, 2016, p. 33). For this reason, narrative analysis was selected as a data analysis strategy in the present paper, as its capabilities were congruent with the ultimate goal of this research paper; to further the readers' understanding of the subjects' constructions of identity processes. Due to the personal nature of the research question, insofar as it relates to the interviewees' lived experience being multilingual in Danish society, narratives can provide a valuable insight into how these individuals make sense of the events of their lives – and most importantly, of themselves as active agents within those events and social contexts. Longitudinally, this research method allows social scientists to follow variable ways of understanding identity (McAlpine, 2016, p. 40), and this can also, at least in part, be true of a singular narrative approach. Due to the differing methodological approaches of the present paper (focus group vs. interview), it is preferable to have a form of analysis that can transcend the specificities of data collection. This is arguably another benefit of the narrative analytical approach; the focus is on each individual narrative, and the contexts within, as opposed to a singular exclusionary context. Bamberg (2012) further differentiates between research *on* narratives, meaning narratives themselves are the object of research, as opposed to research *with* narratives, where narratives can be seen as the tools with which another aspect of human memory or experience is analyzed (Bamberg, 2012, p. 2). The latter is most akin to the research method selected for the present paper, due to the importance of each individual's experience of being multilingual, as opposed to the importance of *how* the informants speak on their experiences - it is the experiences themselves which are the object of study, and narratives are an important tool for understanding and exploring them.

Traditionally, a narrative approach would infer individual based analysis as opposed to the grouping approach of a thematic based analysis. In part due to the differences between data collected by focus group as opposed to through an interview, the researcher has chosen to maintain the immersion supplied by a thematic approach (i.e., grouping themes which overlap in the different data sets) while maintaining the individualistic focus of the narrative approach. This means elements of both a sociocultural narrative approach as well as those of a more naturalistic narrative approach have been merged to best interpret the qualitative data.

Bamberg (2010) introduced the concept of “small stories” to counteract the traditionalist idea that a narrative must be substantial or encompass an entire life story in order to count as a

narrative. Instead, the general idea is that small, everyday stories a person chooses to share can also give insight into internal processes such as identity. In the following, Bamberg's ideas of small story narrative research will be briefly summarized and related to the present study and data collected.

3.4.1 Bamberg: Small Stories

Narrative methodologies in general provide the advantage of an increased focus on the respondent's agency, as well as illustrating which imagery, traits, and experiences the individual themselves finds most telling of their identity construction. Within the context of narrative methodologies, Michael Bamberg has worked to adapt the research method to have a greater focus on the ways in which people typically use narration; that is, in everyday, mundane situations, when describing themselves and their lives, and how they place themselves and other "characters" in these narratives or stories (Bamberg, 2008, p. 379). Thereby using narrative methods to analyze and uncover a greater understanding of how individuals use storytelling (narration) to make sense of themselves and those around them in the context of the social world in which they live, as well as how we identify ourselves and each other. Narratives are seen not as tools through which experiences are seen, but rather as constructive in and of themselves in terms of identity research (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 379).

As such, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) have worked to increase focus on exactly these mundane, everyday narratives, which they have termed "small stories", in order to differentiate them from entire narrations that a person can have about who they are and what they see their own self as (which, in turn, can be referred to as big stories). This allows for more attention to be paid to these smaller, often overlooked stories and how they relate to identity construction.

The key elements of these small stories are threefold; I will briefly outline these elements in the following before applying the methodology to the collected empirical data. Firstly, small stories are distinctive because they are casual, and often emerge in day-to-day conversations held in everyday life. This means small stories can encapsulate anecdotes, ideas about the future, even hypothetical situations (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 381). Furthermore, unlike "big stories", small stories do not necessarily need to be told in the same traditional sense of beginning, middle and end, nor are they dependent on a clear plot or moral. This is helpful in increasing the flexibility and utility of the narrative approach, because small stories can be brief or fragmented in the way that they are told. Secondly, small stories can lack the overall coherence and structure typically attributed to traditional narratives. This means a small story can still be ongoing, or in the very recent past, and can still have value in terms of the person constructing their sense of self. Small stories can also be embedded within a larger conversation, and not necessarily the result of a narrative interview situation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 382). Finally, small stories should be considered interactional, meaning they are co-constructed in real time between the speaker and the listeners (whether real or imagined). As such, the meaning or significance of a

given small story can shift in relation to the context or conversation, as well as depending on which participants are involved (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 382).

In summation, the narrative approach has been selected as an analytical tool because of the focus on the informants' lived experiences, which, arguably, cannot be better presented than through their own words and narratives. Experiences themselves are shaped by the stories and narratives which we use to describe and make sense of them, and are therefore, to my mind, of particular interest to psychological research into how each individual perceives their own existence and experiences being who they are. This will be the main aim of the following section, as well as utilizing the narrative approach to try and consolidate and make sense of the collected data.

4.0 Analysis

The following is an analysis of the collected data and how it relates to the research question; *How are the identity processes of young adults in Denmark affected by having multiple languages in the home since infancy?* The main source of applied theory here is Bamberg's narrative practice approach, as summarized above, although at times themes will be highlighted in order to create cohesion in all of the collected data.

Introduction to the informants

The informants are made up of four individuals; 20-year-old Ria, born in the Faroese Islands and having lived in England, Denmark and the Faroes during her childhood and teenage years, Ria is fluent in Faroese, English and Danish. Abdi, 22-year-old student at Aalborg University, born in Denmark to Iranian parents, and fluent in Danish, Turkmen, Turkish and English. Bilal, 23-year-old student at Aalborg University, born in Denmark to Afghan parents, Bilal is fluent in Dari, Pashto, Danish and English. And finally, Christian; a 22-year-old student at Aalborg University, also born in Denmark, Christian is fluent in Danish, English, Arabic and Assyrian. Friends since childhood, Abdi, Bilal and Christian lived together just outside the city center, and were the participants of a focus group interview, which took place in their shared home and lasted about 90 minutes, while Ria was interviewed alone for just over 2 hours.

The transcription of both interview and focus group was then analyzed using a narrative practice approach, meaning attention was largely paid to "small stories", the everyday stories that people tell and how these relate to their own identity construction. The focus group took place in Danish, and the quotes used are therefore my own translation of the participants' words, translated from Danish to English. The interview took place first in Danish, but was switched to English at the urging of the researcher, when Ria mentioned feeling more at ease in English within the first 20 minutes of the interview. As such, all quotes from the interview are Ria's own words, not translated or manipulated in any way. All transcriptions can be found in the Appendix.

Disposition

Due to the differences between the chosen data collection strategies (i.e., focus groups vs. interview) it proved imperative to adopt a wide-reaching approach when considering, analyzing and merging the collected data. Both because of the thematics of the data, often (but not always) relating to identity processes, identity construction, as well as interpersonal navigation, narrative analysis in the style of Micheal Bamberg (2010) was selected as the primary analytical tool. Bamberg's (2020) focus on the importance of small stories (i.e., fragmented, everyday narrations) as well as his understanding of identity as a dynamic process that is variable depending on a multitude of factors, such as social context, were the main reasons for this particular methodology being selected.

In order to address the differences in the data sets, a level of thematic analysis was preferable in order to combine and integrate the important analytical points. Through an initial thematic analysis, several themes became apparent in both data sets; namely, identity construction, humor, and something else. Therefore, the following analysis is divided first into themes that appear integral to both the focus group data set as well as the interview data set, and thereafter delves into the differences between the two. *Identity construction: language as a tool for both unification and alienation in social contexts* and *Humor as a defense mechanism or in-group tactic* became apparent in the interview, while *Language as a moderator for social interaction* was highlighted mainly in the focus group.

4.1 Identity Construction: language as a tool for both unification and alienation in social contexts

Of the three languages she spoke more or less fluently, 20-year-old Ria had multiple narratives about what she would consider her “mother tongue”. Within the first few minutes of the interview, Ria shares; *“I learned English at the same time as Faroese, so they became kind of - interchangeable”*. She notes that, at home in the Faroes, strangers expect her to come from abroad, because of her accent, intonation, and difficulty with grammar. She jokes that strangers tell her, “either that, or you’re just terrible at grammar!”. This statement, expressed through humor as Ria often did, reflects a form of alienation, despite the Faroes being considered her home. Later, she expresses directly, *“Faroese feels like home.”* In this context, it is of note that Ria describes the language itself, as opposed to the country or geographical place, as her “home”. This alludes to the concept of third culture kids, where a third and separate social identity is constructed regardless of which languages are spoken at home, at school, in social contexts, etc., but rather, the feeling of alienation that being less than fluent in the native language can harbor in children that do not feel entirely at home in their native language (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). Interestingly, the young men who made up the focus group had little to say about “home”, especially in conjunction with language. Instead, attention was paid to the geographical location at the time of the question. That is, on vacation in Southern Europe, the three men would answer “where I’m from? Oh, Denmark” without a second thought as to how not-traditionally Scandinavian they might appear to others. Without missing a beat, Abdi shared with the focus group *“If I’m outside Denmark, like somewhere abroad, I identify myself as a Dane.”*¹ Both Bilal and Christian concurred, and Abdi added; *“Whereas when I’m here, in Denmark, I identify as... I mean I don’t feel like... then I don’t know.”* Abdi’s self-image or way of identifying changes depending on location, context or the environment he is in. This form of shifting identity is congruent with the idea that an individual’s language identity is not singular nor static, but is instead dynamic and can shift in relation to the contexts the individual is in. In this way, different aspects of a person’s language identity can feel more or less significant, depending on where, when and with whom the person finds themselves

¹ “hvis jeg er i udlandet så identificerer jeg mig som dansker, hvor hvis jeg er her så identificerer jeg mig som... så føler jeg mig ikke som... så ved jeg ikke” Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 26

(Shuck, 2010, p. 120). This view of identity as shifting is also in line with Bamberg's narrative identity theory (Bamberg, 2011, p. 17), and has thus been deconstructed in order to better understand the social constructions and situations that affect the identity processes as they relate to language. As such, Abdi and the other informants' experience of identifying themselves as more Danish outside Denmark than inside Denmark is consistent with earlier research in regards to the identity construction of multilingual individuals.

Although the language itself feels like a sort of "home" to Ria, the inhabitants of her home see her as, at least in part, a foreigner or a stranger. Speaking and learning multiple languages from before the age of 5 has resulted in her mother tongue being almost a sort of amalgamation of bits and pieces of the languages she speaks, as well as the contexts within which she had learned them. For example, Ria attended an international school in Denmark, resulting in her level of English being assessed through the lens of the Cambridge Levels of English, which are a group of tests and subsequent diplomas used by English language international schools all over the world. Instead of saying, "I speak fluent English", Ria shared "*I got the Cambridge Level of Proficiency in English*". In this way, the social context in which she had acquired her English language skills were important to the way she chose to build a narrative about her English language skill. It was seemingly crucial to her narrative, and therefore her self-image, that her level of English went above and beyond what could be expected of a typical young person living in modern Denmark - which is to say, a reasonably high level of English language understanding.

Further, after moving to Denmark and struggling to match her peers' mastery of the Danish language, Ria quite directly connoted struggling with the language to struggling with the interpersonal and social contexts and relationships. "*I spoke Danish weirdly, so it was just like, oh, okay, outcast*". She directly equates lower language skills with lower social standing, at least in a school context. At least in children, as Ria was at the time, language skills have been shown to affect social competence and even emotion regulation (Monopoli & Kingston, 2012, p. 1). Language ability and mastery - regardless of whether the child is monolingual or multilingual - is imperative when building social skills, because without adequate language skills, social interactions are in turn severely compromised. Peer acceptance is also recognized as an important part of social competence (Monopoli & Kingston, 2012, p. 2); Ria describing herself as others' viewed her as an "outcast" points in the direction of Ria feeling she is lacking peer acceptance. To her, this was due to her struggle with the language itself, regardless of external factors such as social codes, expectations, misunderstandings, etc. Even as a young adult, Ria described her "self" in different languages very separately. "*It does take strength, to keep up the Danish persona,*" she said. Of note here is Ria's use of the word "persona", as though she has constructed herself as an agent, and language, whether it be Danish, English or something else, as a tool she can use as she pleases. Ria very clearly constructs her identity depending on the social context in which she finds herself, she sees language as almost a costume or a shield between her true "inner self" and the world around her. This view is in line with a constructionist perspective on identity. Her choice of the word "strength" further points to a self-perception of an active agent, able to adapt and switch between personas, almost costumes, depending on who she is speaking to or how she feels.

Language is a means to an end, and is thus not the crux of her identity, but one of many things (like appearance, hobbies, etc.) she utilizes when expressing herself. Interestingly, it is not uncommon for bi- or multilingual individuals to feel more at “home” in their first language learned, L1, as well as having a higher degree of emotionality entwined in this language than in any others learned later in life (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015, p. 278). Both Ria and Abdi, Bilal and Christian all seemed to overall paint a narrative of multilingual being an asset, allowing them to be more adaptable, flexible and open-minded than some of their monolingual peers. Even so, Ria also talks of her struggles with never feeling completely comfortable in Danish, or feeling *“like a less interesting individual. And it sucks, and that’s why I stick to comedy.”* Later, she says speaking Danish leaves her feeling *“more fragmented”* and that she feels *“like a klutz”* when she speaks it. She says, *“I feel like I’m all over the place, um, I can’t really articulate myself.”* Her narrative here is about almost feeling incomplete in the Danish language, like parts of herself do not translate and are therefore missing when she interacts with the world in Danish. Later, Ria also described difficulty making friends with monolingual Danes, further pointing to an inner struggle: the way she was raised, how she sees herself, are not Danish. Therefore, despite speaking the language, it is likely she does not feel adequately at home in the Danish language and, accordingly, struggles with expressing her whole self, or creating fulfilling, complete, and unabridged friendships. There seems to be, in a way, a dissonance between the Ria she sees herself as, and the Ria she can adequately express herself and carry herself as, and thus share with those around her. Because her level of Danish is very high, it seems unlikely that her interpersonal struggles can be blamed on a language barrier, but could instead stem from what lies underneath; her cultural heritage and, by her own admission, who she perceives herself as not being translatable to Danish.

In contrast, both Abdi and Christian expressed language capability as somewhat removed from their own identity constructions. Christian in particular spoke of his multilingualism as a vague, undefined benefit, largely unrelated to how he perceived himself. When asked how he experienced others’ perception of his multiple languages, he shared; *“When it’s about language, it kind of just goes in one ear and out the other. Like, you’re just jealous you only speak Danish. But if it’s about, like, appearance or something, like my dark hair, we’ve all heard that many times. Or like, someone will say, ‘your name can’t be Christian, it must be Careem or Muhammed or something’.”*² Abdi agreed, stating; *“If someone makes a comment about how I speak another language than Danish, I mean, I don’t really care. It doesn’t bother me. But... if someone comes up to me and talks about my appearance or like where my roots are from... yeah, it would hit me a lot harder than when it’s about language. It affects me when people talk about something that means something to me.”*³ Seemingly, Abdi has severed himself, or his identity, from being

² “Det går ind af det ene øre og ud af det andet når det handler om sprog sådan du er bare jaloux du kan kun dansk. Hvis det er på udseende sådan dit sorte hår agtigt, det har vi hørt mange gange. Eller sådan, du hedder ikke Christian du må hedde Careem eller Muhammed eller noget i den stil. Der mange der ikke tror på jeg hedder Christian.” Christian, Appendix 1, p. 21

³ “Hvis der nogen der kommer med kommentarer om sådan ‘nå du kan et andet sprog end dansk’, jeg tror, altså jeg er virkelig ligeglad med det. Det kunne virkelig ikke gøre noget ved mig. Men... hvis der så kommer en og snakker om for eksempel mit udseende, eller sådan, et eller andet med hvilke lande jeg har rødder fra,

multilingual, or even multicultural. The choice of words equates “something that means something to me” with practically anything *other* than language; appearance being his example. Furthermore, instead of language, an argument could be made that other internal driving forces define and make up identity to Abdi, Bilal and Christian. When asked about cultural differences in humor, Bilal brings up a mutual friend; *“We have this friend, he’s from Spain. He acts like one of the homies. Even though he’s half Danish, half Spanish, his behavior is like one of us.”*⁴ The literal Danish translation of the phrase Bilal used, “en fra gutterne af”, would be closer to “from one of the boys”, but contextually, this translation has been chosen to better portray the sentiment that was inferred from this statement. Humor as a cultural and linguistic divide will be elaborated more on in the following section, but is brought up here in an attempt to highlight how different the processes in active collective identity construction are portrayed and referenced in the young men’s social interactions. Seemingly, in this particular social group, behavior carries more weight as an identity constructing process than language. Even so, Abdi brings up the notion of speaking multiple languages as being an advantage, *“It feels kind of exclusive, speaking a language not everyone speaks.”*⁵ It stands to reason that this subgroup of young individuals in Denmark would feel more comfortable around their peers (i.e., other multilinguals who master the same languages as themselves) in much the same way that third culture individuals feel most understood, and therefore most comfortable, around other individuals reminiscent of themselves (Moore & Barker, 2011, p. 3). This could be due not only to a similar worldview, but also because these individuals belong to the same in-group, allowing them to have, presumably, some of the same behaviors, values, and experiences (Moore & Barker, 2011, p. 3). This concept of exclusivity is quite conceivably one of the differences that makes these young, multilingual individuals feel as though they belong to a different social group than their monolingual peers, as quite directly expressed by Abdi during the focus group.

4.2 Language as a Moderator for Social Interaction and General Social Limitations

Abdi in particular felt it was easier, in social contexts, to share his experiences with friends like Christian and Bilal than some of his other friends, whose understanding of the cultural practices in his home life was often negligible. These differences in their home life expectations created, by their own admission, a sort of gulf between the monolingual Danes on one side, and the multilingual, multicultural, often immigrant families on the other. Abdi shared, *“If I have to, like,*

så tror jeg det vil ramme mig langt værre, end sådan “nå du snakker turkmensk”. Ja jeg tror det rammer meget mere hvis det er man går ud fra noget, der sådan betyder noget.” Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 21

⁴ “Vi har også en anden kammerat, der er fra Spanien af. Han opfører sig også meget mere, selvom han er fra Spanien af, han opfører sig meget mere som en der er mere fra gutterne af. Selvom han er halv dansker halv spansk så opfører han sig meget som...” Bilal, Appendix 1, p. 19

⁵ “Det føles sådan lidt eksklusivt at kunne snakke et sprog som ikke alle kan.” Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 18

explain to a friend why I'm upset, because, like, someone spotted me in town, like, maybe with a cigarette in my hand or something like I don't even know, and then, they'll be like "and so what?" Whereas... in contrast, if I come home and tell Bilal or Christian about what happened, they can for sure see why it's a problem, or like, why I'm upset... like it's about what they can relate to, which is much more, they have more of the same experiences." Once again, Abdi's narrative here emphasizes the advantage he sees in having friends with similar cultural backgrounds to his own. In this narrative, he aligns himself with Bilal and Christian, friends he has had since childhood, and distances himself from other friend groups, based on an assumption of ethnic and cultural similarities. This is not uncommon, especially for minorities or people of color living outside their parents' country of origin – such as Abdi, Bilal and Christian (all though it is worth noting all three men were born in Denmark) – who are more likely to have friends of a similar sociocultural and racial background (Hamm, 2000, p. 210). Abdi finding it difficult to explain the intricacies of the expectations, or even requirements, of his Muslim household to a monolingual Dane who has next to no experience with anything similar, is an example of why the above may be true.

Ria also explained how being multilingual sometimes stunted her social interactions or relationships. She shared, *"It's frustrating, when you can tell that there's a Danish person you could get along so well with, if you just spoke the same language."* This is an interesting point of view, because Ria's level of Danish understanding was very high, so "speaking the same language" is not a literal point, but rather a metaphorical feeling of missing something, of feeling misunderstood by peers with a vastly different background from her own. On the other hand, Ria disclosed that, when those around her realized she was not, in fact, bad at Danish, but instead spoke multiple languages at a high level, they were more likely to be kinder to her if there was something she did not understand. *"I think, like, I have more, like, leeway. They're like, 'okay, you're not from here, you're gonna be a bit different.' And when I don't get Danish, like, quotes, and jokes, and movies everyone's seen, then I ... I feel like I'm allowed to say 'I haven't seen it' or 'I don't know what that is' because then it's just like 'Haha, the funny Faroese person' instead of 'oh, you're an uncultured Dane.' Because, that's horrendous. But it's fine that, like, I was raised with English television, like I know about Teletubbies, not Hr. Skæg."* For her, externalizing her different background was not a source of marginalization, othering or discrimination, but instead helped her feel more at home, even more accepted, by those around her. It provided a deeper understanding for why she spoke the way she did, or acted the way she did, or even didn't understand cultural references one would expect her to. On the other hand, Abdi and Christian were in agreement, *"Where am I from? Denmark... oh, that's not what you meant? My roots are Iranian. But I'm Danish."* The implications of being from a different country as a person of color are very different from those of a non-minority individual living in a majority community. As such, it stands to reason that Abdi and Christian felt as though their Danish national identity was of greater importance than other collective identities, lest they not be perceived as belonging to the context and culture within which they had spent their entire lives. The narrative here is about being one thing, all the while acknowledging a smaller degree of otherness - the difference between "roots" as opposed to "being from" a place.

When describing the situation immediately after Ria's family moved from England to Denmark when she was aged about 7, she emphasizes feeling socially isolated and struggling to master the Danish language. In doing so, Ria shares a "small story" about her difficulty adapting to the new social contexts; *"there were some months, it was really, really hard to learn it. But I had a neighbor, she had a dad who spoke English, so my neighbor spoke English. Because she was 7. Um, but then there was this thing, where, I - I would keep visiting her and visiting her, because her dad could just, like, translate. And then, we would play with Barbie, where we would, like, talk through the Barbies to each other. Yeah."* Through her anecdote about playing with Barbie dolls, Ria is illustrating to the interviewer the normality of her early childhood, despite the focus of the interview being largely on the abnormality or difficulties that can be specifically attributed to growing up multilingual. She uses this everyday image, two young children playing with dolls, to both showcase how she was a girl doing girlhood things, but at the same time, her phrasing of *"there was this thing where"*, as opposed to perhaps, the more general "I used to" or "I would", Ria points to the specificity of her experience. That is, it was not every day that she met another child she could not only relate to but communicate with.

Similarly, 22 year old Bilal noted within the first few minutes of the focus group, *"I don't really think about the language thing ... unless I meet someone, who also speaks a language I speak, then I think it's really cool, but otherwise, no."*⁶ To Bilal, meeting someone who speaks the same language as himself is a cool, almost unifying experience. In a sense, he negates the importance of both being multilingual but also multicultural, because in everyday contexts, other social factors are noticed and appreciated first, like the above example of the Spanish friend's behavior being enough to integrate him into the collective identity "one of the homies". This can be related to the lived experiences of third culture kids, insofar as they tend to create or experience a third, separate culture or cultural framework entirely separate from their native tongue, but also separate from the host culture's language. To Bilal, meeting someone who spoke both Danish *and* Arabic, is a unifying experience, because his identity is less dependent on the Danish/Arabic language gap, but rather exists in the space where there is a reasonably high mastery of both languages (and contexts). After Bilal says his piece, Christian adds; *"we are a great example. Three friends who all speak variations of the same languages, but we always speak Danish together"*. This again points to their identities feeling separate from other Arabic-speaking young men in their age group, but also different from Danish-speaking people in their cohort. Instead, the identification is in the space between. Learning to navigate things like having a higher level of Danish understanding than their first generation immigrant parents, or having a different holiday culture at home than at school, and so on.

⁶ "Altså hvis jeg møder nogen, der også kan et sprog jeg kan, så synes jeg det er mega nice, men ellers er det ikke noget, jeg tænker over som sådan" Bilal, Appendix 1, p. 16

4.3 Humor as a Defense Mechanism vs. Ingroup Tactic

During thematic groupings of the collected empirical data, humor shone through quite often. Both as a defining characteristic of the social in-group the young men described, but also as a sort of defense mechanism Ria would use in order to feel more in control of social situations. As such, the informants' narratives as they relate to humor will be analyzed in the following.

4.3.1 Cultural contexts of humor

Humor can be considered integral to the human experience (Gordon, 2014, p. 16). We use it to relate to others, form intimate interpersonal attachments, to help make sense of ourselves and the world around us (Gordon, 2014, p. 16). As such, it stands to reason that humor would shine through as a distinct theme in both the thematic groupings of the focus group, as well as that of the interview with Ria, especially in relation to the space between language and identity.

From a resiliency perspective of psychology, humor can even be used to help process difficult or traumatic happenings in our lives (Kuiper, 2012, p. 476). Thus, humor can be considered universal, in the broader sense of referring to human existence and interaction, but there is also evidence to support cultural distinctions in humor practices (Jiang et al., 2019, p. 2). The informants of the focus group would appear to be in agreement with this understanding of differing humor practices in different cultural settings. All 3 of them alluded to humor in Danish social contexts being very different from humor in Iraq or Afghanistan, for example. Abdi shared with the group, *“When I’m in Iraq, I’ve noticed there is a big difference in which things are considered funny. And like, which jokes are made, which sorts of things that are humoristic, stuff like that”*⁷. This idea of different things being considered funny, or different jokes being made in different cultural contexts, is also indicative of not only the culturally divergent understanding of humor practices, but also illustrates Abdi’s narrative of perceiving himself as adaptable, willing and able to participate equally with both his Scandinavian and Middle Eastern counterparts. Abdi especially seemed to have created a narrative in which he had a surplus of social know-how, something that could only be achieved by growing up as he did, and learning how to adapt and interact in the different social contexts, like home vs. school, as he had. Abdi’s narrative was seemingly not about being alienated socially, discriminated against because of his appearance or accent, but instead about not only having but being proud of and identified by his not only linguistic fluency, but also his seamless cultural and social understanding. Abdi stated, *“It feels sort of exclusive to speak a language not everyone understands.”* The choice of the word “exclusive” in this context highlights his narrative of perceiving his linguistic and cultural upbringing and understanding as something cool, desirable and sought-after. Similarly, Christian also remarked, *“I’ve noticed my family in Afghanistan actually curses a lot more, but they curse in, like, this funny way. It’s like... it’s hard*

⁷ “Når jeg er nede i Irak, så har jeg lagt mærke til der stor forskel på hvilke ting der sådan er sjove. Og sådan hvilke jokes man laver, hvilke ting der er humoristiske og sådan noget” Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 17

to explain.”⁸This further alludes to the cultural differences in both language and humor that remain integral to the adaptive cultural and personal identities of both himself (Christian) and Abdi. Christian similarly has a narrative of “hard to explain” when describing the contextual differences between the two cultures or environments within which he navigates. This could be interpreted as a form of intercultural fluency, that delves deeper than language, and that had been achieved by a lifetime of navigating these contexts, thereby allowing for a sense of understanding of each context or culture, that, in turn, enables Christian, and perhaps the others, to meld them all in order to create a sense of himself within each context. This can be related to Bamberg’s (2020) notion of the second identity dilemma; agency/passivity. This small story of cursing in different cultural contexts denotes a relatively high level of agency in Christian’s construction of his multilingual and multicultural self. It is not something that happened to him, but rather, something he has the privilege of understanding and navigating due to his heritage, upbringing, and background, including that of the social group of other young men like himself.

4.3.2 Humor as a defining characteristic of the in-group

During the focus group, it became apparent that all three participants knew each other and interacted regularly, and had done so for many years. This meant they had established a certain way of using language amongst themselves. Social groups, such as the one the participants of the focus group belonged to, can, through repeated social interaction and collective experiences and shared knowledge create a “joking repertoire” that is specific to this particular social group. This form of joking should be considered embedded, interactive and referential (Fine & de Soucey, 2005, p. 2). This was clear in the interactions the researcher observed during the focus group, for example through several instances of joking behavior, but the young men also referenced it themselves. In fact, they saw their particular brand of humor as imperative to being a member of their friend group. Interestingly, this seemed to play a larger role in differentiating who they did and did not consider “in-group” than other aspects such as cultural background or shared languages. This is a fine example of how individual group characteristics and expectations can be in practice. As Mulvey et al. (2016) suggested, making friendships and entering or creating social groups during adolescence is part of a heightened awareness of the young person’s own social awareness of their own racial group membership and social identity (Mulvey et al., 2016, p. 1379). As such, it could be assumed that these particular young men, having been friends since school age, created this understanding of their racial and social identities within their own social group. Within the framework of this in-group dynamic, it became apparent that speaking languages other than Danish in the home helped shape the boys’ perception of themselves and others. Being able to communicate in languages other than Danish, supplied them with a feeling of exclusivity that meant they were more likely to identify themselves with each other than with monolingual Danes. Abdi explained, *“I like speaking Turkmen, like, not a lot of people speak it... so I like speaking it*

⁸ “Jeg har lagt mærke til, at min familie i Afghanistan faktisk bander meget mere, men de bander på sådan en sjov måde i forhold til... det sådan... det meget svært at forklare (griner)” Christian, Appendix 1, p. 17

with the few people I meet who speak it."⁹ This alludes to the sort of exclusivity the young men have built up as a sort of identifying factor of their particular in-group. Bilal added, *"It's pretty cool when you can be like, 'she's really hot' to your friend, and then not everyone understands what you're saying."*¹⁰ Abdi had a similar example of speaking Danish with his brother when they were in Iraq, and vice versa in Denmark, so that only his brother, the intended recipient, could understand what was being said. In this way, the young men, more than Ria, saw being multilingual as an advantage, even a cool, determining factor in regards to their belonging. It is worth noting that the interview setting and methodology differed substantially, as Ria was interviewed alone, while the three men made up a focus group. As such, it is feasible that different factors would come forth had the men also been interviewed alone, or that Ria would have concurred with what the focus group agreed on, had she been a part of it.

Both Bilal's narrative of surreptitiously sharing opinions in a group setting, and Abdi's narrative about sharing information with his brother without his extended family's awareness, reflect a perception of being multilingual as something additional, something desirable, even something deliberate, as opposed to feeling less-than than perhaps more traditional, monolingual Danes and their social groups. Their narratives point to the informants not necessarily feeling like they are missing out on social groups or contexts of monolingual Danes, but instead allude to feeling exclusionary towards their peers, in such a way that it is, in fact, *the others* that are missing something. Whether it is a sense of humor, willingness to take a joke, or even cultural understanding, the young men have a clear narrative of not feeling different, but instead feeling that they have something in addition to any other Dane. Seemingly, their narrative is not about them missing out on something, being less Danish than other Danes or similar, but instead, it is about monolingual Danes missing out on their particular social group dynamic, and having a lesser sense of humor. Abdi even explained that some of his monolingual Danish-speaking friends would become *"sort of half-offended when you say something about them"*¹¹, but that *"there's pretty much nothing I could say to Christian, where he would think 'okay he actually means this'".* The narrative here is that monolingual Danes are comparatively thin-skinned, and therefore cannot be interacted with as freely as the young men in the focus group could communicate. This is in line with Bamberg's narrative identity theory, insofar as the narratives each individual would share with each other would differ in a different group setting. Thus, not only is the identity constructed through the narrative, but it can also be seen as something that each person actively does.

Further, the young men's experience of having a deliberately multilingual in-group became especially apparent through multiple inside jokes. Abdi named a mutual friend, and at only the mention of this person's first name, laughing ensued from all three parties, and disrupted the focus group for several minutes, until Christian attempted to bring focus back to the task at hand; *"So yeah, we've experienced stuff like that from people our age. But mostly it's older people, plus you*

⁹ "Jeg kan godt lide at snakke turkmensk, sådan, det ikke så mange der snakker det, så de få jeg møder, kan jeg godt lide at snakke på turkmensk med dem." Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 16

¹⁰ "Det er fedt nok når man kan sige sådan til sin kammerat 'hun er mega lækker' og så er det ikke alle, der forstår det." Bilal, Appendix 1, p. 16

¹¹ "De bliver sådan halv fornærmet når man siger noget over dem" Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 19

learn not to take it too hard."¹² The narrative here is not about eschewing racism or discrimination, but rather in the resilience they have curated, by "not taking it too hard". While it is seen or described as something to be expected, it is also not portrayed as something necessarily harmful or detrimental. The male informants' narratives about feeling alienated or different from their peers because of the languages they speak paint a picture of acknowledging cultural more than linguistic differences.

Even when referring to how others perceive them, the informants bring forth positive aspects. When asked directly whether they feel their multilingualism is perceived in a positive or a negative way, Abdi says, *"Yeah, like, you can communicate with more people. I don't feel like people, like, see me differently because of it. On the contrary, people think it's pretty cool actually."*¹³ Despite this expectation of sometimes feeling othered or being perceived as "not Danish" or different, Abdi has maintained a narrative that describes his multilingualism (and even multiculturalism) as a positive aspect in his day-to-day life. It is portrayed as something that garners respect, something others think is "pretty cool". Interestingly, Abdi had nearly only positive things to say about speaking multiple languages; the negative aspects were instead in being perceived as different, or even marginalized, because of his skin color, culture or religion. Further, Ria and Abdi both clearly expressed or insinuated using humor to deflect awkwardness that could ensue either from *feeling* like the odd one out because of language level differences, or actively being left out of certain contexts or situations for the same reason.

Abdi jokes, *"It happens. Hygge-racisme"*. He laughs as he says it, and adds, *"I once heard someone say, 'I'm only a part-time racist.'"* The others join in, and laughingly, almost mockingly, share examples of lightly veiled racist or othering remarks they have encountered in their day to day; in a bus, working at a supermarket, walking down the street. To them, it is the most natural thing in the world that anyone who looks like they do would have experienced things like these. Being able to laugh about it is the group's way of reclaiming control, of saying to themselves, each other and anyone else; I am okay with this, this does not make me less-than.

On the topic of humor, Bilal stated very clearly, *"I can't really be as funny, like, without my whole vocabulary. Like I feel funnier with someone who speaks my own language, like, so I can mix the languages, in a way."* Abdi immediately concurred, *"Yeah, it's the same for me. If I'm gonna be really funny, you gotta understand both, like, languages and cultures. A lot of it is not like - you can't be like 'this is the literal translation' or whatever."* Once again, Bilal's narrative here is of others, who unlike him, don't have the natural advantage of having multiple languages and cultures, "missing out" on how *actually* funny he is. It is such an ingrained part of his identity and self that he considers his "vocabulary" the entirety of the languages he speaks. As such, he does not feel hampered when communicating with monolingual Danes, but rather, he feels they are handicapped by the fact that they do not speak the languages he does. In this excerpt, "my own

¹² Så ja, vi har oplevet det fra folk på vores alder, men det er mest de ældre, der sådan, tager det lidt mere tungt" Christian, Appendix 1, p. 22

¹³ "Man kan kommunikere med flere, jeg føler ikke folk sådan ser på mig anderledes pga. Det, tværtimod synes folk det er fedt nok" Abdi, Appendix 1, p. 17

language” does not refer to Turkish, Turkmen, English or Danish, but instead refers to the fluency of all four languages. His narrative of his “own language” does not actually refer to a language, but rather an amalgamation of all the linguistic and cultural fluency he possesses.

Where Abdi and Christian describe feeling a sense of connection, of sameness in Bamberg’s (2010) terminology, through humor and jokes, Ria felt somewhat opposite. She described her social interactions as feeling hampered by the Danish language, despite her objectively high level of fluency (which was high enough to be studying a Bachelor’s degree in Danish at Aalborg University), and she instead felt humor was a defense mechanism of sorts. She shared, *“I just feel like the connections I make with people [in Danish] are more superficial, because I don’t feel like they truly get under the skin. It’s just me saying words and saying noises, making small talk, and never really connecting and seeing each other.”* Ria’s story here is about the gap that language creates in her interpersonal relationships. Everything appears more superficial, especially when compared to the high degree of sentimentality and emotionality she described when using her “home” language, Faroese.

“I’ve found a way to make my lack of understanding lighthearted, so that it doesn’t tie to me, but ties to a language.” Ria’s narrative is about how language is a tool, as opposed to a constant aspect of her identity. By making jokes about misunderstandings or missing cultural references, she feels she is regaining control of her constructed self and identity. *“[...] Which does make me seem like a less interesting individual. And it sucks, and that’s why I stick to comedy.”* By allowing herself to remain in control of the discourse of her social interactions, humor is a strength that allows Ria’s narrative to remain about herself as unique, strong, and with an unwavering sense of self that others cannot pick away at. Instead, she allows the level at which she speaks each language (Danish in the present example) to be affected, but not her deeper sense of self. This could also be viewed as a defense mechanism in relation to her identity construction, because being less than fluent in Danish, does not equate to an identity crisis, in contrast to being less than intelligent, for example, or otherwise inferior to those around her.

5.0 Discussion

Furthermore, there exists a multitude of differences between Ria and Abdi, Bilal and Christian, many of which are necessary to discuss in order to account for them in the collected data. Among them are gender differences, social mobility differences, as well as differences in the research settings. The following will attempt to portray and discuss these differences, as well as pose an argument for why both areas are relevant to the present study, and why the collected data, while divergent, still illustrates a tendency that can hopefully be considered of interest to the field of psychology, and more specifically to the study of identity construction processes in a globalized, multicultural and multilingual world such as ours.

5.1 Solidarity within a social group leading to less problematic sense of belonging

Ceginskas (2010) studied 12 multilingual and multicultural adults whose parents had differing dominant languages and had thus been raised in more than one language and culture since birth (Ceginskas, 2010, p. 212). The author found that those who grew up among other multilinguals were less likely to struggle with their identity as well as a sense of belonging. The first group had, largely, negative connotations to their multilingual and multicultural upbringing and heritage, often sharing anecdotes peppered with fear of discrimination, and describing feelings of rootlessness and otherness (Ceginskas, 2010, p. 215). On the other hand, the second group had a vastly different discourse, and described their multilinguality instead as a “bonus”, something additional and positive that helped shape and describe their sense of self (Ceginskas, 2010, p. 216). Ceginskas’ (2010) findings are strikingly in line with the data presently collected from the young men of the focus group. Having been friends since early school-age, and therefore by definition having been exposed to peers with similar backgrounds and experiences, the men often seemed much less bothered or negatively affected by their identity negotiation and language perception when compared with Ria, who had moved around a lot, but had not lived among other multilinguals for an extended period of time (she only attended an international school for six months). Ceginskas (2010) posits that being exposed to other individuals since childhood who share a similar cultural background or upbringing are less likely to feel different or excluded, because, by definition, they are not the only ones in their social circles with their experiences. In Ceginskas’ (2010) study, this is often due to having attended international schools, where students have a multitude of backgrounds and nationalities. In the case of Abdi, Bilal and Christian, however, it seems as though being friends, and having many other friends of similar cultural backgrounds in the neighborhood, allowed them to mirror themselves and their experiences in each other and other students at their elementary school. This could, arguably, have allowed them to see themselves as part of a positive subculture, where the members are able to interact with both Danish nationals as

well as individuals of immigrant backgrounds seamlessly, thereby allowing them to construct a collective identity, largely associated with a feeling of togetherness, solidarity, shared past experiences, and a sense of humor. It stands to reason that this difference in environment during the developmental periods of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, so crucial to identity construction processes, allowed them to adapt their perception of their own otherness as, instead, a togetherness, and all in all, a positive thing.

5.2 Differences in the collected data sets

First and foremost, differences in the research settings, methodologies and collection processes are flagrant. It is unusual to collect data from one set of informants through focus groups, and from another through a semi-structured interview. Nevertheless, while these methods were chosen in part due to organizational constraints, they also proved at times favorable in terms of the data collected. Being a white young woman living in a majority country for all her life, Ria could have been expected to feel out of place during much of the largely racially charged discussion pertaining to discrimination and integration that took place during the focus group. Vice versa, the young men may have felt less comfortable in the presence of someone who did not share their skin color, and could therefore not relate to some of the experiences they had had because of it. This, in turn, could have incurred a risk of self-censorship of the male participants, resulting in less exhaustive data and potentially less honesty and openness. In this context, it becomes relevant that the researcher herself is of African descent, thereby allowing the room in which the focus group took place to be made up solely of brown skinned individuals.

During the focus group, this felt especially relevant. When recounting how he felt more inclined to confide in Bilal or Christian as opposed to some of his monolingual Danish friends about family or home issues, Abdi seemed to group me in with them, as one of “us” and not one of “them”; the Danes who had no past experiences in common with himself. It seemed to me that Abdi expected me to understand and relate to his experiences to the same level as Bilal and Christian – I’m brown, I should get it. I *am* brown, but aside from an estranged grandmother, neither I nor my immediate family is currently or has ever been Muslim or religious in much any capacity. And yet, superficially, almost subconsciously, Abdi expected me to be closer to himself and the others, whereas in the specific scenario he described, my understanding would be closer to that of a monolingual Dane; willing to listen and empathize, but unable to relate my own concrete experiences to his. In a sense, the unifying quality of the friendship group made up of Abdi, Bilal and Christian was the color of their skin, in addition to a shared history and background. It is my interpretation that Abdi had become so accustomed to individuals that looked like himself, such as myself, having that same understanding of their collective identities, sense of humor, and so on, that it became an almost automatic response to include me or others like me, despite having no evidence to support that they should be included. I would speculate that being a member of this friend group is so ingrained in Abdi and his sense of self-identity that the cultural background itself becomes a sort of union in and of itself, a way for these young men to make sense of the world

around them. The sameness of the shared color of our skin weighed heavier on his own identity construction than other things like nationality, gender, age, interests, and so on. This seemed to affect his own narrative of how he perceived himself in the world, as unique but nonetheless as a member of a group larger than himself. In the same way, it felt at times as though his perception of his own cultural identity was so steadfast, so flagrant and clear in his self-perception, that he projected it onto others despite, for example, differences of circumstance.

The in-group dynamic of the social group which Abdi, Bilal and Christian belonged to also highlighted the exaggeration of sameness both interactionally, as posited by Bamberg (2020) in relation to his first identity dilemma of sameness/difference, as well as within the more general social identity theory. Though the focus of in-group sameness exaggeration is presented as less interactionally dependent than with Bamberg (2020), it is nonetheless remarkable that this theory can also help explain, or at least offer a possible interpretation of why the sameness of, for example skin color, more than shared language, seemed so important to Abdi especially. In this narrative, this was the defining characteristic by which the men constructed their identities. Assuming I had a similar background understanding of growing up with Middle Eastern parents in Denmark is furthermore also a fine example of exaggerating similarities, and minimizing differences, based on perceived in- and out-group dynamics, as social identity theory describes.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that comparing empirical data from a young woman, interviewed alone, and three young men, who participated in a focus group, is not without its obstacles. Most glaringly, the differences in methodology and data collection strategies represent an incongruence both in terms of analysis but also potentially in terms of validity. These differences and the resulting difficulties will now be examined and discussed.

5.2.1 Gender differences in the collected data

Another difference of note in the collected data is gender. As discussed, while theoretically and methodologically challenging to have separated the men and women from each other during the data collection processes, other differences related to gender could also be posited. Furthermore, it is worth noting that research does suggest that focus groups comprised of mixed genders tend to positively affect the quality of the discussion (Nyumba et al., 2018, p. 22), meaning, different data could have come to light had the settings been different.

Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for gender differences in general to come to light during qualitative identity research, including in relation to the present topic of multilingualism and identity processes. Tannenbaum & Tseng (2015) found that gender affected some aspects of TCKs' sense of identity in regard to language. In their study, female TCKs were typically more affected than male TCKs by the language spoken in terms of both emotion and personality (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015, p. 287). Other studies have found similar differences between the genders, though it should be noted that these effects are often modest and non-significant. For example, Dewaele and Stavans (2014) found that female participants in their study of 193 Israeli residents scored slightly higher on several personality scores such as cultural empathy and social

initiative (Dewale & Stavans, 2014, p. 16) when compared to their male counterparts. Devens (2005) similarly found female teenage immigrants were marginally more likely to be depressed than their non-multilingual counterparts; this effect was larger for the girls than for the boys, though present in both genders (Dewale & Stavans, 2014, p. 3). In terms of the emotional stability of multilingual individuals, conflicting data has been found. For example, in Dewale and van Oudenhoven's (2009) study, women scored slightly higher on emotional stability, while the reverse was found in the study of Peltokorpi and Froese (2012), where men scored higher on this same variable. This could be interpreted as socialization differences between young men and women, though it is notable that the same effect was found in the present study; overall, the young men appeared to have less inner turmoil than the young woman in regards to their multilingual or multinational identity. Notwithstanding the other aspects that differed quite remarkably between the participants, such as participating in a social group which was largely defined by its multilingualism, as well as number of displacements in their childhood and teenage years. Overall, it would be difficult to conclude that gender is a differentiating or defining factor either way, both because of the various differences that existed between the participants, but also simply because of the very modest sample size. To my mind, gender differences in multilingual identity processes would be an interesting field of study in the future.

5.2.2. Research setting and atmosphere differences

Further, it is worth noting that while all four participants were studying at university at the time of the study, Ria was the only one studying within the field of social science. It stands to reason that part of her self-reflective nature was brought forth by a vocabulary acquired through psychology study. This allowed her to make very precise observations about her own experiences with being multilingual and how it affected her perception of her identity. Further, the one-on-one setting of a semi-structured interview allowed her to dictate in large part which aspects were most relevant to her own experiences. The tone of the interview was of two women sharing experiences that overlapped somewhat, within a field they both studied and therefore had a precise vocabulary for.

Because focus groups and semi-structured interviews have different strengths, it would have been preferable to have eight participants, who were first placed in a focus group context, and thereafter perhaps had a chance to follow-up with more personal anecdotes in a one-on-one setting, such as a semi-structured interview, where they may have been more inclined to share personal histories or experiences they may have been uncomfortable sharing in a group context. Snowball sampling was in this context in fact a benefit, because it allowed all of the male participants to already be very at ease with each other, since they were used to speaking every day. A stricter moderator would, however, perhaps have been preferable at times, because the discussion did divulge into joking about mutual friends, allowing for slightly less relevant data. The group dynamic between the young men and the in-group they had created was allowed to flourish, allowing for interesting and relevant data in terms of the social aspect of identity

construction, but at the same time perhaps diminishing more personal introspective aspects of the topic.

In general, the atmosphere during the focus group and the interview were quite different. One-on-one, the researcher and the informant were both young women studying a humanistic subject, the interview felt serious, reflective and intimate. Whereas the focus group, because of their preestablished intergroup means of communication and mutual understanding of where they came from, their shared history, created an atmosphere that to me felt almost artificial when they spoke about this subject. Almost like their way of handling the issues related to creating and maintaining an identity as a multilingual or TCK person was by very openly *not* speaking directly on it. But instead, simply existing in a space where the norm revolved around being one and the same, enabled the young men to almost forego the otherwise inevitable identity crisis so often entwined with growing up with one culture at home and another outside the home. This was especially apparent when the similarities between researcher and informants seemed to be more important than any differences. This also meant that it became a challenge not to comment, relate and share on the same level as the participants of the focus group, because at times I did in fact have similar experiences. Yet as simultaneous researcher and moderator, it is of course *not* my role to share my experiences, but rather to attempt to remain impartial and instead facilitate dialogue between the participants - as opposed to between myself as the researcher and the participants.

5.3 Varied identity construction in social contexts

Another difference of note between Ria and the male informants was how they expressed their identity to other people who asked them about it. Ria described people's assumptions ranging from her being from Southern Jutland to another Scandinavian country; she explains that she *likes* telling people she's not from Denmark, because, in her words, it affords her "more leeway", resulting in her feeling less judged should she make mistakes in the language. Conversely, being people of color, Abdi, Bilal and Christian all agreed they would start by answering "Aarhus" if someone asked them where they were from. As Abdi put it, "if you *actually* ask me, I'll tell you: I'm from Aarhus, my roots are Iranian." To them, the main point was which city in Denmark they were from when asked, almost as a way of underlining; I am from Denmark, I am as Danish as you or anyone else, it is just my *roots* that are different. Abdi did not have the same sense of relief at explaining that he is not necessarily 100%, traditionally Danish. He himself is Danish, his roots may not be, but he himself is. This is an important distinction to him and to Bilal and Christian as well. While Ria does not see herself as Danish - and therefore she is not Danish, but the boys all do. It is of interest that of the four, Ria is the only one who was not born in Denmark, the young men were all born in and around Aarhus. In relation to the concept of intercultural adaptation, it would appear as though the young men better fit into the early assumption that in order to assimilate or acquire a new cultural identity and context, one must first leave their native cultural identity behind. Of course, because the men were born in Denmark, this is not entirely accurate. It further seems as though, perhaps in order to forego the identity crisis of belonging to two different

cultures, this concept of having *roots* in one culture, but feeling *belonging* to another is a way for the young men to establish one singular wide-reaching cultural identity.

Originally, the plan had been to conduct the interviews in Danish, based on the assumption that that would be the language the informants would be most comfortable in. However, once the interview with Ria began, she herself mentioned feeling less comfortable in Danish and more at ease in English, so the language was switched during the interview. This allowed Ria to speak more freely, and may even have helped the alliance between researcher and informant, because it was quite quickly picked up on, that the language was not the correct medium for the interview to be conducted in. It was in many ways an advantage, that I as the researcher am fluent in multiple languages, because when recounting examples of feeling out of place due to language difficulties, Ria used a Danish example while speaking mainly English, but quoted those around her (in this situation, her roommates) in the Danish that they had spoken, and none of this created a language barrier between her as the informant and myself as the researcher. Instead, it allowed Ria to communicate in the necessary mix of mostly English, with some Danish words or expressions mixed in, without ever stopping or affecting the flow of the interview.

5.4 Results as they relate to the research question

Overall, multilingualism and language in general had been selected as the topic of study, because of the assumption that it would be a less visible indicator of otherness in the general Danish population than perhaps more obvious factors such as race or religion. It was therefore somewhat surprising that the focus group members mainly shared discussion points relating to racism and discrimination. Of course, Denmark is a relatively homogenous place, where being perceived as “foreign” or “different” is likely to be noticed, if not necessarily directly addressed in many social contexts. This came to light in Abdi, Bilal and Christian’s experience as well; they had a surprisingly nonchalant attitude towards describing uncomfortable situations that someone less accustomed to being teased about their skin or hair color may have found troubling. Meanwhile, they agreed, “you get used to it”; that is to say, being perceived as different by some Danes did not seem to affect their own perceptions of themselves as very, truly Danish. It had been my assumption that by focusing on the effect of specifically language on identity, it might be possible to bypass some of the typical questions of racism or discrimination experienced by black and brown individuals in a majority white community, like Denmark. While this could be considered naive wishful thinking, it remains relevant that a person like Ria, who, by looking at her, one would have no idea of the history of rootlessness, feelings of otherness and identity conflicts within her, had so much to say on the topic.

The original research question of how identity processes, in young adults, are affected or influenced by growing up with multiple languages in the home, is, of course, multifaceted and overall a far-reaching question in terms of pulling more general conclusions from empirical data,

even considering the large body of literature and research that already exists on this topic. Overall, I would argue that I have found multiple ways in which one could argue the identity processes of these young, multilingual adults residing in Denmark are affected by their cultural heritage, identity and background. Chief among them would be the importance of being one-of-many; that is, how protective the simple fact of belonging to a social group with a - likely not identical - but similar upbringing, background, heritage, even sense of humor. The seemingly simple fact that Abdi, Bilal and Christian had been friends since childhood allowed them to forego many of the identity conflicts and even crises that Ria expressed in relation to her own multilingual identity. It even seemed as though this multilingual identity was something Ria had actively reflected on and spoken about to a higher degree than the other informants; she even said as much during the interview; *“I’ve been talking about exactly this for a long time with, like, so many people so I’ve had time to really analyze it and think it through.”* In comparison, Abdi, Bilal and Christian required more nudging to stimulate reflection on the topic; they had fewer readily available anecdotes and examples from their own lives to share. While this may be because other factors such as, for example, religion had been at the foreground of their identity dilemmas up to this point in their lives, it remains an interesting question of whether membership in a social group where multilingualism or multiculturalism is the norm helped shape their easy-going approach to their own multifaceted identities. Further, humor became an apparent gateway, both towards meaning-making and solidarity within the aforementioned social group, but also as a tool for taking ownership of one’s own identity and thereby further foregoing some of the issues that many multilingual or multicultural identities face during young adulthood. Humor allowed Ria to turn translation difficulties or linguistic misunderstandings into bonding moments with her peers. This, in turn, allowed her to resolve an identity construction that was not dissimilar to those around her, while still maintaining the uniqueness of her own experience. Nevertheless, overall the importance of acknowledging and accepting one’s identity is as important, if not more, for multilingual young adults, as it is for any others. The experience of being a minority in a country as homogenous as Denmark is not without its valid difficulties in relation to creating and navigating an identity and could also warrant further study. The experience of being a minority proved more integral to the young men’s sense of self than that of being multilingual or multinational, while the same could of course not be said of Faroese Ria.

In summation, categorization was a tool described by each informant, in order to maintain an overview of their whole self. English is for academia, Danish is for social gatherings, and the other language (respectively, Faroese, Turkmen, Arabic and Pashto) is for sentimentality, emotionality and familial bonding. And yet, it remained important that each linguistic identity made up only one part of each individual’s sense of self, so that not one of the informants felt they would have been who they are today, had they not grown up with the languages, contexts and cultures that they did. The men described mostly advantages, they felt adaptable, and bonded within their social context, because they spoke languages other than Danish, despite few of these languages overlapping exactly. From this, one could argue that having a social group or identity, that not only accepts, but celebrates being multilingual is imperative to fueling a fully developed

sense of self, that is mostly free from identity conflict. Furthermore, the male informants in particular had narratives that were generally positive in regards to their multilingualism; there were multiple instances of it being presented as “cool”, “exclusive” or “something extra”. This allowed the informants to construct their identity in such a way that they did not feel less than (less Danish, less fluent, less comfortable, less intelligent, less at home, and so on) when compared to monolingual Danes, but instead, they felt they had something in addition to their monolingual counterparts. As important as it was to their identity, that they were all three born in Denmark and very much Danish, Ria’s narrative diverged; she was *not* Danish, but had instead constructed an entirely separate narrative that allowed her to navigate these same spaces, also without feeling conflicted about her heritage. It would appear that two separate “methods”, so to speak, or narratives were constructed, but arguably all to the same end; to integrate an overall identity construction that had room for being Danish, being in Denmark, and being something else, or something more.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was carried out in order to highlight the identity construction processes that are active in multilingual young adults residing in Denmark. Through a narrative practice approach, it became apparent that the identity construction of the informants were multifaceted and varied often and depending on both context, situation and interaction.

First, language and its correlation or overlap with identity processes was reviewed as a theme in the collected data sets of both a semi-structured interview and a focus group interview. A focus on language as both a tool for unification, but also as an instrument of alienation in social contexts, became apparent. Depending on the social context, informants described feeling their multilingualism was, at times, a defining characteristic of the social group within which they were situated, allowing them to navigate this not as feeling “different” or exclusionary, but instead as united, as though the simple fact of having multiple languages in the home led to a feeling of closeness, solidarity and bonding. Meanwhile, at the same time, informants describe feeling discriminated against, talked down to, or generally treated in a manner different than they were used to, once their multilingualism came to light in certain situations. In these situations, humor is used both as a defense tactic, in order to regain a feeling of control of the social situation, all the while sometimes being perceived as exclusionary in and of itself; multilinguals and multicultural individuals can, in this narrative, “take a joke” to a greater degree than monolingual Danes. This allowed for a positive connotation of their multilingual selves, often rooted in a sense of belonging to a subgroup of Danes in their social circles, who, while not all speaking the same languages, all shared a sense of speaking “more than Danish”. This allowed for a view of being multilingual as not taking away from the informants’ Danishness, but rather, that they had something in addition to other (monolingual) Danes.

Because identities are constructed dynamically, and the focus can shift from one situation or temporality to another, it became important to these young people that they feel at home both within their social group, but also outside it. To this end, all informants describe seeking out other individuals that share some of the same history, heritage or characteristics as themselves, in order to better navigate feeling at home both inside and outside their typical social contexts and situations. While there are divergences in the present data set relating to both gender, social context, ethnicity, and social mobility, overall, growing up multilingual was seen as, often, a positive aspect of their identity, while in some situations, tools (such as humor, or having homogenous friend groups) were used to navigate feeling different or marginalized in the homogenous Danish community.

In relation to Bamberg's (2010) identity dilemma of sameness and difference, it became apparent that it was neither the shared fact of speaking Danish, nor another language, that was defining for the male informants' identity construction, but rather, it was the act of finding other individuals, who spoke *both* Danish and another language, and who often had other similarities, like religious background or ethnicity. At the same time, for the female informant, it was more specifically meeting other individuals from her place of birth (the Faroe Islands) that helped shape her sense of self.

In summation, multilingualism can be said to affect the identity processes of these young adults residing in Denmark in multiple ways; among them, by creating a lens through which they found other individuals to relate to, and thereby reinforce their own sense of self, and furthermore, by fueling their feelings of uniqueness, sameness, and difference, all at once.

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