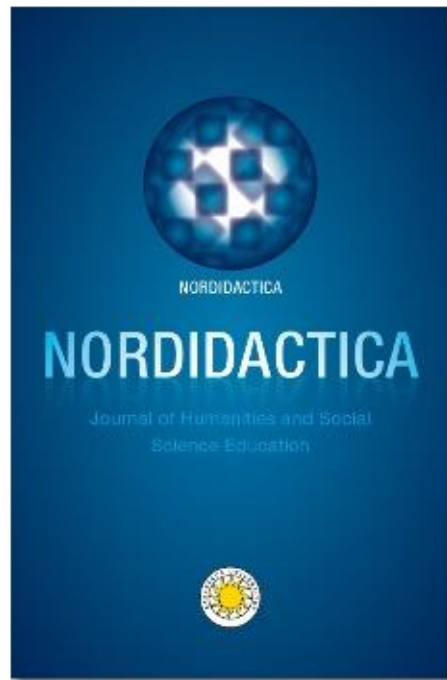


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Friendship, diversity and fear

Young people's life views and life values in a multicultural society

Gunnar J. Gunnarsson, Gunnar E. Finnbogason, Hanna Ragnarsdóttir & Halla Jónsdóttir

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Abstract: This article introduces initial findings from a study on young people's (18 years and older) life views and life values in Iceland. The research project is located within a broad theoretical framework and uses interdisciplinary approaches of religious education, multicultural studies and pedagogy. Methodological approaches are both quantitative and qualitative. The first part of the research is a survey which was conducted among altogether 904 students in seven upper secondary schools in the Reykjavík area and other areas of Iceland in 2011 and 2012. In addition to covering measures of background variables and religious affiliations, statements in the survey included themes such as views of life, self-understanding, relation to others, values and value judgments, religions, and diversity and social change. The article focuses especially on findings from the survey related to friendship, attitudes towards diversity, fear and insecurity in a multicultural society. The findings indicate that the participants generally have positive attitudes towards diversity. The majority of participants find it inspiring to have friends of different origins and find it important to respect different cultural and religious traditions. The majority of participants also have strong opinions against racism and bullying. Friends are important and most of the participants are of the opinion that friends are one of the things that provide security. At the same time only a minority is afraid of being unpopular, losing the confidence of their friends or being bullied. But when the fear is about disgracing oneself or about not being able to meet the requirements at school the proportion is higher. Although the economic crisis in Iceland seems to have an effect on the life of the young people answering the survey, most of them are of the opinion that the future holds a lot of opportunities. The results are useful for further discussions on young people's life views, self-understanding, and social and moral competence, for example in school context and in connection with subjects like Social Studies, Religious Education, Life Skills Education and Intercultural Education.

KEYWORDS: YOUNG PEOPLE, LIFE VIEWS, LIFE VALUES, FRIENDSHIP, FEAR, DIVERSITY, MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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Introduction

The languages, cultures and religions of Iceland's population have become increasingly diverse in recent decades and the ratio of non-Icelandic citizens to the total population has changed from 1.8 % in 1995 to 6.7 % in 2013 out of a total population of 321,857 (Statistics Iceland, 2014). Over the past few years there has been a rapid increase in the youngest age groups (Statistics Iceland, 2014). Immigrant children and youth consequently attend most preschools and compulsory schools in Iceland, creating new challenges for school communities which previously were more homogeneous in terms of students' ethnicity and languages (Ragnarsdóttir, 2008).

The purpose of this article is to present some initial findings of an on-going research project on young people's (18 years and older) life views and life values in a society of diversity and change in Iceland. The article attempts to answer the following research question: How do young people in Iceland experience friendship, diversity and fear in a multicultural society? The project started in 2011 and is planned as a three year project using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The project applies interdisciplinary approaches and different theoretical backgrounds such as religious education, multicultural studies, and pedagogy. The article draws from initial findings from a survey conducted in 2011 and 2012 where 904 students in seven different high schools in Iceland responded. In 2013-2014 focus groups have been established and are being interviewed. The focus groups are selected on the basis of reflecting the increasing diversity in Icelandic society.

A number of related studies have been conducted in Iceland. Most of them have focused on various aspects of young people's life style and health (Bjarnason, 2006; Jónsson, 2006; Júlíusdóttir, 2006; Vilhjálmsdóttir, 2008), and some on experiences of immigration (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b, 2008), but only a few on their views of life and values (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2007; Finnbogason & Gunnarsson, 2006; Gunnarsson, 2008; Jónsson, 2006; Júlíusdóttir, 2006). This project attempts to broaden the perspectives on young people's views of life and values in modern multicultural societies with special attention on the situation in Iceland. Based on findings from the survey, the article addresses issues of attitudes towards diversity, insecurity, fear, and friendship in a multicultural society where ethnic and religious diversity is increasing.

Theoretical framework: Friendship, diversity and fear

This research project is located within a broad theoretical framework and applies interdisciplinary approaches of religious education, multicultural studies and pedagogy. The broad theoretical framework of critical multiculturalism is an important basis for the project as it critically considers power positioning within particular settings, within or between societies, communities or schools and ways to ensure equality, empowerment and participation (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 2010; Parekh, 2006; Ragnarsdóttir, 2007a). Parekh (2006) notes that it is difficult to reach full equality in societies as each society has one or more majority languages and no language or society is culturally neutral. He emphasises that multicultural societies

need to find ways to develop equity through active participation of individuals and to find their balance with active communication of groups and individuals without losing the necessary cohesion. However, Cummins (2009) has noted that diversity has possibly become a normal state rather than a cause of tension for people in modern multicultural societies.

In times of social change and diversity it is of interest to explore young people's life views taking into consideration theories on individualisation and insecurity. Although some of these theories have been criticised (see f. ex. Chomsky, 1995; Ziehe, 1989) we find them useful in the Icelandic context as the Icelandic society has over the last two decades gone through rapid changes. According to Beck (1992) in times of individualisation, young people no longer depend on social relationships and society's norms as before. These changes result in increased social space for the individual, but also increased insecurity and fear as people are no longer born into a particular social role. The individuals must find their own guidelines, social network and values (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Bauman (2007) describes the consequences of this state as liquid modern times, where the social relationships of individuals become increasingly complicated as they choose groups, ideas, values and attitudes, which again are changeable. Similarly, identities can become hybrid and changeable (Giddens, 1991; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Bauman (2006), Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) all describe the new modernity as a risk society based on fear culture. It is also claimed that fear has become interwoven with the dominant culture in countries around the world. It concerns what is close to people's hearts, what they consider most important in life, and what they fear most of all to lose. Things like loss of freedom, sickness, natural catastrophes, economic crisis and terrorism are among causes of fear, together with the fear of losing someone beloved in the family or among friends. Svendsen (2007) claims that fear and insecurity is a part of the culture, also in school. Fear exists at all times but what causes the fear changes in time. In the 1950's and 1960's, many feared nuclear war and nuclear winter. Today, in our part of the world, many people fear incurable illness, terrorism or environmental accidents. We find the definition of H. D. Barlow (2002) that fear is a reaction to an imminent threat, useful, as he claims that fear can create insecurity, both with regards to what is feared, and also the choice of possible reactions. The life of the individual is influenced by fear, which is essential to avoid dangers. Therefore, the fear affects the activities of humans and the norms of the culture affect its manifestation.

The school can also be a place where young people experience insecurity, anxiety and fear. Starting school includes a lot of changes with new problems to tackle (Brooker, 2002; Ragnarsdóttir, 2008). By becoming a part of the new social world, the individual is introduced to various things, including new friends, peer pressure, bullying, etc. Socially, it is significant for young people to be approved and not marginalized (Sveinsson & Sigþórsson, 2012).

In school the students also meet different requirements. They quickly discover that their performance is evaluated and is important for their future. Students can experience assessment in both a negative and a positive way. The desire to achieve

success can act as an incentive to perform, but the fear of failure, however, may obstruct (Carlgren, 2002). This can be hard for many young people and school conditions therefore can cause fear and insecurity.

In recent years, the socialization role of the school, that is sharing values, norms and attitudes, has increased as can be seen in the *Icelandic national curriculum guide for compulsory school, general section* (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið/Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011). The school is to be a social and cultural community open for different opinions and where respect, solidarity and responsibility is predominant. It should also be a safe place where everybody is working systematically against all harassment, violence and bullying. However, the school sometimes can become a place of bullying and harassment.

In times of change personal networks are crucially important. Desire for interpersonal attachment, the need to belong, is a strong and a fundamental human motivation, among individuals in all cultures. People need few close relationships and that makes a difference for the person's health and happiness. According to Baumeister & Leary (1995), there are individual and cultural differences in the need to belong, but the relationship (friendship) needs to be stable and over a longer period of time in order for a person to experience its positive quality and support. Vanhoutte & Hooghe (2012), claim that people with similar backgrounds and with similar opinions are more likely to develop common bonds. Furthermore, they note that ethnicity is one of the strongest contemporary group boundaries and religion the second strongest. Keller (1998) has pointed out that friendship is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon and must always be considered in cultural and interdisciplinary contexts. Vanhoutte & Hooghe (2012) argue that more diverse communities will lead to more diverse networks. Their main results are that diverse communities are associated with some form of diversity in friendship networks. Friendship is a form of relationship that we find in all types of cultures and societies and friendship ties are ranked high among things that matter most in life (Keller, 1998).

Background and context: Multicultural society in Iceland

As introduced above, the languages, cultures and religions of Iceland's population have become increasingly diverse in recent decades with increasing immigration (Statistics Iceland, 2014). Religious diversity has also increased in recent years, with a growing number of religious organizations in Iceland. Fifteen years ago religious organisations in Iceland, recognised by the Ministry of the Interior, were 17, now they are 43. Fifteen years ago 90% of the population belonged to The National Lutheran Church of Iceland, now 75% and 5.3% of the population are not registered in religious organizations (Statistics Iceland, 2014).

According to research, one of the consequences of the social and cultural development in Iceland over the last years is that the life of young people in Iceland is uncertain in many ways. They are living in a field of tension between homogeneity and plurality; they are under the influence of growing diversity and of plurality at least

to a certain extent (Gunnarsson, 2008). A new report (Rannsókn og greining, 2014) introduces the main findings of a longitudinal study with young people in Iceland. The study was conducted in 1992-2013 and covers many parts of the young people's lives. An important finding from the research in our context is that the family has a strong and important role in the young people's lives and the connection between the young people and their families is strong. These are findings both for rural and urban areas. The findings also indicate that the schools are very important in building young people's self-esteem.

Findings from research with immigrant children in Iceland have indicated that many young immigrants experience marginalization (Ragnarsdóttir, 2007b, 2008). Furthermore, Bjarnason (2006, 2010) has drawn attention to the differences in the health and living standards of students of different origins in Iceland. However, in a recent study with young immigrants at the age of 15-24 (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011) where the focus was on their experiences of life and work in Icelandic society during the previous ten years, with particular emphasis on their school experiences and how they thought schools in Iceland could better support immigrant children, they describe themselves as cosmopolitan (Hansen, 2010) and transnational (Vertovec, 2009) individuals who see many opportunities as a result of their immigrant background and experiences from living in two or more countries. Questions in the interviews centred on their daily lives, their education and work, their social networks and friends, their connections with Icelandic society and their countries of origin, as well as their future plans. The main findings of the research indicate that the participants in the study have all successfully adapted to Icelandic society and take a positive stand towards it. They appear to have managed to use for their own benefits their experiences in a new society and the opportunities these provide, and they all have interesting future plans in work and education, both in Iceland and elsewhere (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011). They describe their identities in line with writings on cultural and hybrid identities (Bhatti, 1999; Hall, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

The financial crisis in 2008 has also affected the societal situation in Iceland over the last years with more insecurity and unemployment, especially among young people. In February 2004 the unemployment was 2,4% and in 2007 1,4%. In February 2009 the unemployment was 8,3% and in 2012 7,3%. If we look at the unemployment among young people (16-24 years), the proportion is much higher (February 2004: 6,3%; 2007: 5,4%; 2009: 16,1% and 2012: 16,2%) (Statistics Iceland, 2013). This situation has of course had its influence in the society. At the same time surveys show that trust in some of the institutions of the society has decreased over the last years, for example in Alþingi – The parliament of Iceland, the bank system, and the National Lutheran church (Capacent Iceland, 2013).

A study on young people's life view and life values in a society of diversity and change is important in many ways. The situation in Iceland has changed so much over the last one or two decades that it calls for research on the effect of these changes. How do young people in Iceland experience the increasing diversity? How do they see their relationship to others and the importance of friendship? What causes fear and insecurity in times of change? Knowledge in this area is useful for further discussions

on young people's life views, self-understanding, well-being and social and moral competence.

Method

The article attempts to answer the following research question: How do young people in Iceland experience friendship, diversity and fear in a multicultural society? The project started in 2011 and is planned as a three year project using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The project applies interdisciplinary approaches and different theoretical backgrounds such as religious education, multicultural studies, and pedagogy.

In 2011 and 2012 a survey was conducted where 904 students in seven different high schools in Iceland responded to statements, 491 girls (54,3%) and 413 boys (45,7%). Three of the high schools were in Reykjavik, the capital, four in other different parts of Iceland. The survey included 77 statements on which the students were asked to take a stand with range of responses on four point Likert (1932) scale with the response categories ranging from one (strongly agree) to four (strongly disagree). Then there was a fifth category, the possibility "don't know". The questions in the survey were developed and influenced by the authors' previous research and other research introduced above on related issues. They were also developed in the light of the situation in Iceland and in accordance with the theoretical framework and the aims of the project. The statements in the survey included themes such as view of life, religion, background and self-understanding, relation to others, values and value judgments and diversity and social change. The article draws on initial findings from the survey.

Participants

Table 1 shows the origins of parents of the participants. The parents of 89.1% of the participants are Icelandic, while 8.4% of the participants have one parent of non-Icelandic origins. Participants who have both parents of non-Icelandic origins are 2.2%.

TABLE 1

Origins of parents

Origins of parents		
	Number	%
Iceland	806	89.1
Iceland/Nordic countries	25	2.8
Iceland/Other European countries	27	3.0
Iceland/U.S.A. or Canada	8	0.9
Iceland/Other areas	15	1.7
Europe	11	1.2
Asia	5	0.6
Latin America	4	0.4
No reply	3	0.3
Total	904	100.0

Background information on first languages spoken in the participants' homes reveals that 92.1% of participants have Icelandic as a first language, while 5.9% of participants have Icelandic and another European language. 0.2% of participants mentioned Icelandic and an Asian language as first languages and 0.2% Asian language only, while European languages other than Icelandic are mentioned by 1.1% of participants.

Information given by participants on religious affiliation reveals that 59.3% of participants claim to belong to the National Church of Iceland (Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church) or Christian religion, while 23.8% of participants claim to be non-religious or not to belong to religious associations. 6.6% of participants claim to belong to other religious associations than Christian. However, 10% of the participants (89 participants) do not reply to the question on religious affiliation.

The overview of background information of the participants reveals that the participants are a diverse group in terms of origins of parents, languages and religions, although the majority are Icelandic and claim to be Christian.

Findings

In this article the focus is on issues of insecurity, fear, and friendship in a multicultural society where ethnic and religious diversity is increasing. A number of statements in the survey were related to these issues, i.e. issues of insecurity, fear, anxiety and friendship. Findings from these statements will be presented below in chapters on views on *culture, background and religions in the multicultural society, friendship and diversity and fear and insecurity*.

Culture, background and religions in the multicultural society

Responding to the statement *My culture and background is very important to me*, 84% of girls and 77% of boys agreed or agreed strongly to this statement. If we look at cultural background the young people having mixed or foreign background (89%) are more likely to agree or agree strongly to the statement than those with both parents as Icelanders (79%). Response to the statement *Taking different cultural and religious traditions into account is important* in table 2 gives a higher proportion of positive responses.

TABLE 2

Taking different cultural and religious traditions into account is important

Taking different cultural and religious traditions into account is important		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	451	50.2
Agree	342	38.1
Disagree	39	4.3
Strongly disagree	27	3
Don't know	39	4.3
No reply	6	0.6

M=1,58 SD=0,723

88.3% of the participants agreed or agreed strongly. Around 90% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly to the statement and 81% of the boys. Almost all (98%) of the young people having mixed or foreign background agreed or agreed strongly but only 79% of those with both parents Icelanders. Responses to these two statements may indicate that there is generally a positive atmosphere among young people towards different cultural and religious traditions and an understanding of the importance of taking different traditions into account.

However responses to a statement on the importance of diversity in Icelandic society are interesting and may reveal some insecurity towards the multicultural society and are in some contrast to the flexibility towards diverse cultural and religious traditions appearing in table 2. Around 62% of participants agreed or agreed strongly to the statement that *Diverse backgrounds or origins are important for Icelandic society*, while 18.5% disagreed or disagreed strongly. Around 20% did not know. Also, when the young were asked to take stand towards the statement: *All religions should have the opportunity to flourish and build their own houses of worship*, we see that although the majority (61.3%) agreed or agreed strongly to the statement, 24.4% disagreed or disagreed strongly and around 14% did not know.

Friendship and diversity

A few statements in the survey were linked to individuals and friends in the multicultural society. To the statement *I think it's important to have friends that have another mother tongue (first language)* only 24.3% agreed or agreed strongly but 45.9% disagreed or disagreed strongly (table 3). No gender differences appeared, but of those with both parents as Icelanders, 22.7% agreed or agreed strongly compared to 35.5% of the young people having mixed or foreign background. It is worth considering how many of the young people are not certain in their response to this statement or 29.9%. It is possible that they have no experience of having friends with another mother tongue.

TABLE 3

I think it is important to have friends that have another mother tongue

I think it is important to have friends that have another mother tongue		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	48	5.4
Agree	169	18.9
Disagree	209	23.4
Strongly disagree	201	22.5
Don't know	268	29.9
No reply	9	1.0

M=2,9 SD=0,942

Another related statement, *I find it instructive to have friends with different backgrounds* reveals very different responses (table 4). At the same time as half of the young people don't think it is important to have friends that have another mother tongue, over 83% claim they can learn from having friends with different backgrounds. Of these, 87% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly but only 75% of the boys. Only one of the young people having mixed or foreign background disagreed to the statement and none of them disagreed strongly.

TABLE 4

I find it instructive to have friends with different backgrounds

I find it instructive to have friends with different backgrounds		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	395	43.8
Agree	356	39.5
Disagree	35	3.9
Strongly disagree	14	1.6
Don't know	102	11.3
No reply	2	0.2
		M=1,58 SD=0,66

Somewhat fewer agreed or agreed strongly on the statement *Communication of people of different origins is important to me*. 61.5% of participants agreed or agreed strongly on this statement. Around 22% disagreed or disagreed strongly and around 17% answered that they did not know. It is of interest to compare these findings with responses to the statement *It is rewarding to associate with people who have different opinions than I have*. Around 90% agreed or agreed strongly on this statement, while around 4% disagreed or disagreed strongly and 6.6% claimed they did not know. Here the focus is on different opinions generally rather the different origins in the statement above and this could explain the difference in responses. However, the already mentioned responses to the statement *I find it instructive to have friends from different backgrounds* show that around 83% agreed or agreed strongly, while only 5.5% disagreed or disagreed strongly (table 4). Fewer participants agreed to the statement *Interacting with people from different backgrounds is important to me*, 61.5% of participants agreed or agreed strongly, while around 22% disagreed or disagreed strongly and around 17% are not certain. It is remarkable that at the same time around 80% of the participants disagreed or disagreed strongly to the statement *It's important for me to know about my friends' religious affiliation*, and 77% agreed or agreed strongly to the statement *I don't think about other people's religious affiliation*.

Fear and insecurity

In the questionnaire there were five statements directly about fear. They all opened with the words "I fear ...". Two of the statements had to do with friends and friendship. In table 5 we see how the young people answered to the statement *I fear being unpopular*. The minority of the young people, or 16.9%, agreed or agreed strongly to the statement and 76.1% disagree or disagree strongly. If we look at gender differences, 19% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly and 14.6% of the boys.

TABLE 5

I fear being unpopular

I fear being unpopular		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	30	3.3
Agree	123	13.6
Disagree	339	37.5
Strongly disagree	349	38.6
Don't know	59	6.5
No reply	4	0.4
		M=3,2 SD=0,816

If we look at the other statement about friendship and fear, i.e. *I fear losing the confidence of my friends*, also a minority agreed or agreed strongly, or 20.8%. The majority, or 70.8% disagreed or disagreed strongly. 8% did not know. But here we see even more difference between the boys and girls, 25.2% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly, but only 15.8% of the boys.

Although 16.9% and 20.8% (those who agreed or agreed strongly to these two statements) is not a high percentage, it is after all around one out of five. And when we have in mind how important the friends are to the young people this is something worth considering. Almost 92% agreed or agreed strongly to the statement *Friends are one of the things that give me security*.

One of the statements in the questionnaire was about the fear of being bullied. Almost 60% disagreed strongly to the statement *I fear being bullied* and 25% disagreed, altogether 82.7% (table 6). However 12.2% agreed or agreed strongly, 15.2% of the girls and 8.8% of the boys.

TABLE 6

I fear being bullied

I fear being bullied		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	33	3.7
Agree	77	8.5
Disagree	227	25.1
Strongly disagree	521	57.6
Don't know	36	4.0
No reply	10	1.1
		M=3,44 SD=0,811

The answers to two of the “I fear...”-statements, show considerably higher proportion of those who agreed or agreed strongly than in the previous statements. One of them was *I fear disgracing myself*. Over 42% agreed or agreed strongly to that statement and 52% disagreed or disagreed strongly. The girls (45.5%) were more likely than the boys (39.2%) to agree or agree strongly.

The other one was about meeting the requirements at school. The statement was: *I fear not being able to meet the requirements at school*. It is noteworthy that 46.2% agreed or agreed strongly to this statement (table 7). The gender difference is significant, 53.7% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly and 37.7% of the boys.

TABLE 7

I fear not being able to meet the requirements at school

I fear not being able to meet the requirements at school		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	139	15.4
Agree	278	30.8
Disagree	262	29.0
Strongly disagree	180	19.9
Don't know	40	4.4
No reply	5	0.6

M=2,56 SD=0,995

The questionnaire included some statements about the future and also about the situation in Iceland caused by the financial crises. It is of interest to find out if the crisis has influenced the views of the young people. One of the statements in the questionnaire was: *The thought of the future causes me anxiety*.

TABLE 8

The thought of the future causes me anxiety

The thought of the future causes me anxiety		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	84	9.3
Agree	202	22.3
Disagree	274	30.3
Strongly disagree	258	28.5
Don't know	78	8.6
No reply	8	0.9

M=2,86 SD=0,978

Although 58.8% disagreed or disagreed strongly to the statement, table 8 shows that almost one out of three think so (31.6% agreed or agreed strongly, 35.2% girls and 28.0% boys). On basis of the data we don't know if the financial crisis is among important causes here, but the response to two other statements could give us a hint. When the young people were asked to take stand towards the statement: *I think that the financial crisis has an effect on my life*, 53.8% of the participants agreed or agreed strongly and 41.4% disagreed or disagreed strongly. No gender difference appeared.

After the financial crisis the unemployment in Iceland increased a lot. One statement on the questionnaire was about the fear of unemployment. 32.1% agreed or agreed strongly to the statement: *A fear of unemployment has an effect on how I feel* (table 9). Here a gender difference appeared, 36.3% of the girls agreed or agreed strongly and 27.7% of the boys.

TABLE 9

A fear of unemployment has an effect on how I feel

A fear of unemployment has an effect on how I feel		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	93	10.3
Agree	197	21.8
Disagree	279	30.9
Strongly disagree	275	30.4
Don't know	51	5.6
No reply	9	1.0

M=2,87 SD=0,992

One of the consequences of the financial crisis in Iceland is a lack of trust. Surveys have shown that the trust in some of the institutions of the society has decreased over the last years. The question is if this has affected the trust between individuals. One of the statements in the questionnaire was: *I think that a lack of trust between people is a bigger problem than the financial crisis*. It appeared that 50.4% agreed or agreed strongly to the statement, and no gender difference appeared here. 25.2% disagreed or disagreed strongly. It is remarkable that 22.7% did not know.

However, many of the young people are of the opinion that the future gives a lot of opportunities. When we look at how they answered to the statement: *When I think about the future I feel that life gives me a lot of opportunities*, it appears that the big majority agreed or agreed strongly or 88.4% (table 10). No gender difference appeared.

TABLE 10

When I think about the future I feel that life gives me a lot of opportunities

When I think about the future I feel that life gives me a lot of opportunities		
	Numbers	%
Strongly agree	523	57.9
Agree	276	30.5
Disagree	43	4.8
Strongly disagree	14	1.5
Don't know	41	4.5
No reply	7	0.8

M=1,47 SD=0,67

Discussion and conclusion

In the article the focus has been on insecurity, fear and friendship in a multicultural society where ethnic and religious diversity is increasing. As discussed above, in recent years Icelandic society has changed rapidly from a relatively homogeneous to a diverse, multicultural society. Additionally, changes towards individualization and insecurity (Bauman, 2007; Beck, 1992) have been detected in Iceland, although findings from research indicate that the family is still very important in shaping young people's views and opinions (Finnbogason, Gunnarsson, Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2011). Young people are presently under the influence of international communication through the Internet and increasing travels. Such intercultural communication influences young people's identities (Banks, 2007).

The positive attitudes towards diversity in general which appear in the findings of this study are hopefully indications of a development of a strong multicultural society in Iceland. Active participation of individuals with different backgrounds in society may be lacking. According to Parekh (2006), active participation is important for equality in multicultural societies.

Responses to the statements on diversity in the study indicate that diversity is for many of the young people a normal state rather than a cause of tension (Cummins, 2009). Communication on the Internet on a daily basis and frequent travels of many young people in Iceland are likely to affect their views on diversity.

Around 62% of participants agree or strongly agree on the statement that diverse backgrounds or origins are important for Icelandic society and 88.3% agree that taking different cultural and religious traditions into account is important. 61.3% are of the opinion that *all religions should have the opportunity to flourish and build their own houses of worship*. However, the majority of the participants do not find it of importance to have friends with another mother tongue. Vanhoutte & Hooghe (2012) argue that people with similar backgrounds and with similar opinions are more likely to develop common bonds. It is also remarkable that religious affiliation or knowing

about friends' religious affiliation is not important for the young people. Maybe they see religious affiliation as a private issue and not important for understanding diversity. Some scholars have discussed privatization of religion as a distinctive feature of modern secularized or pluralistic societies (Luckmann, 1967), but over the last decade more and more scholars have pointed out that religion is playing increasingly important role in the society, both in dialogue between people of different religions and in the context of social tension and conflict (Weisse, 2010).

It is important to compare the findings to other findings of recent research in Iceland that reveal social exclusion and marginalization of young people with foreign backgrounds (Bjarnason, 2010; Ragnarsdóttir, 2008). The views on diversity vary between statements in the research introduced in this article. There are however some parallel findings in a recent study (Ragnarsdóttir, 2011), where young immigrants describe themselves as cosmopolitan (Hansen, 2010) and transnational (Vertovec, 2009) and describe various opportunities as a result of their immigrant background and experiences from living in two or more countries.

The findings from this research provide important indications of young people's views towards friendship in a diverse society which has recently become multicultural and is responding to economic crisis. Friends are important and over 90% of the participants are of the opinion that friends are one of the things that give them security. At the same time only a minority is afraid of being unpopular, losing the confidence of their friends or being bullied. However, when around one out of six is afraid of being unpopular, one out of five afraid of losing the confidence of friends, and one out of eight is afraid of being bullied, this is something worth considering, especially keeping in mind how important friends are to the young people. This kind of fear is about the relations in the peer group and research in Iceland has shown that many young people fear being left out in the peer group (see for instance Hjalti Jón Sveinsson & Rúnar Sigbórsson, 2012). Svendsen (2007) claims that fear and insecurity is a part of the culture, also in school (see also Bauman, 2006, 2007). The results of this study show that the fear of being left out and losing the confidence of friends is a part of the experience of some of the young people.

In two cases the proportion of those who agree to statements about fear, is over 40%, i.e. when the fear is about disgracing oneself or about not being able to meet the requirements at school. These results raise various questions about the school and also in what way the fear affects the young people, if it is incentive or inhibiting (Carlgren, 2002).

The economic crisis in Iceland seems to have an effect on the life of the young people. Over half of those who answered the questionnaire agreed to such statements and one out of three recognised that a fear of unemployment had an effect on how they feel. Also over 50% were of the opinion that lack of trust between people is a bigger problem than the financial crisis. This indicates that fear and anxiety is a part of the experience of the young people and of the culture (Bauman, 2006; Beck 1992; Giddens, 1991), not at least in times of changes. But at the same time almost 90% are of the opinion that the future gives them a lot of opportunities.

Some gender difference appeared and is of interest. For instance it is more common among the girls to fear of being unpopular, of losing confidence of friends or being bullied. When it comes to the fear of not being able to meet the requirements at school the gender difference is considerable where over half of the girls recognise such fear. Anxiety about the future seems also to be more common among girls and the opinion that fear of unemployment has an effect on how they feel.

These results of the study are of importance for understanding young people's life views and social and moral competence, generally, and in school context, especially in connection with subjects like Social Studies, Religious Education, Life Skills Education and Intercultural Education.

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