THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INTERCULTURAL COUPLES' ATTACHMENT TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SUCCESS OR DISSOLUTION OF THEIR MARRIAGES

by

Emmanuella Etienne Denis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of intercultural couples' devotion to their cultures and how it influenced the success or dissolution of their marriages. The theories guiding this study included cultural attachment and intersubjectivity. The cultural attachment theory helps couples explore their childhood experiences because not all attachment is solid and dependable. Intersubjectivity theory suggests that every person is influenced by their friends, family members, and surrounding culture. Worldwide, when couples enter a relationship straying away from their culture instead of staying connected to their native culture, intercultural couples face a dilemma. However, when intercultural couples' maintain some degree of involvement or connection with their respective cultures, there is minimal research into partners' experiences. Via purposeful sampling of individuals who have been in intercultural marriages, the study examined the lived experiences of 14 individuals' attachment to their respective cultures and its influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages. This study primarily targeted intercultural couples living in the United States; however, due to the advancement of technology, the study was opened virtually to others on social media. This study gave insight into the advantages and disadvantages of intercultural couples' choices of devotion to their respective cultures in their relationships, which facilitated developing procedures and models to encourage an equitable level of connection to one's cultural background in an intercultural marriage. Data collection for this study included demographic surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group interview, and a reflective journal. After the data was collected, it was analyzed using Hurssel's transcendental framework.

Keywords: intercultural marriage, success, dissolution, phenomenology, degree of involvement, cultural differences, challenges

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my wonderful husband and best friend Emnel. Your

support and understanding have made it possible for me to complete my doctoral journey. I

would also like to dedicate this to my mother Denise, my sister Jessica, and my fur baby Scooter.

Acknowledgement

Dr. Boyd, you have been a source of inspiration to me. Your words of encouragement helped me persevere when I wanted to give up. Thank you for making yourself available at any given time to answer my questions and to address my concerns. To the fourteen participants who volunteered for the study, your contribution to the completion of this dissertation has been noted.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, … (LGBTQIA+)

United Kingdom (UK)

United States of America (USA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This phenomenological study explored the influence of couples' attachment to their respective cultures on the success or dissolution of their marriages. This study examined how intercultural couples' experiences impacted their marriages and explored how the couples' family of origin influenced their relationships. This chapter includes a brief context background and recognizes a gap in the literature that this study attempted to fill. Furthermore, the researcher's motivations and biases were considered, the problem and purpose statements of the study were offered, the significance of the study was reported, the research questions were listed, and the definitions of terms were included at the end of the chapter.

Background

"The family system is where people learn how to love, behave, and interact with one another; it is also where they get their names, traditions from their specific culture, and eventually their identification" (McGoldrick et al., 2015, p. 2). The family comprises people willing to have a lengthy relationship with each other. When pondering who can be classified as one's family members, most people mention their siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, spouses, and children because they often hold shared cultural, religious, and moral values (Palermo & Simpson, 1994). Some people may even include their friends, and others insert their pets. When it comes to the definition of family, these differences ensure that everyone has a different upbringing, contributing to their characteristics and behavior (Martin et al., 2016). Consequently, everyone inherits distinct features and attributes from their upbringing that affix a special touch to their romantic relationships. Sometimes, some people would engage in romantic relationships with those outside their culture, faith, and ethnicity. In most cultures, starting a family with two

people legally coming together in marriage is normal. In these instances, the roles assigned to women and men tend to differ in cultures worldwide (McGoldrick et al., 2015). Therefore, gender role expectations vary across cultures, either positively or negatively, depending on the circumstances.

Marriage is when two people make an allegiance to share their lives in front of families and friends in a legally, socially, and often religious context, mainly based on love; this act calls the spouses to an entirely new and selfless life (Balswick et al., 2021; Thomas, 2015). There are many types of marriages: monogamy, polygamous, same-sex, mixed, arranged, and common-law marriages. Monogamous heterosexual marriage is between two people, a man and a woman (Köstenberger & Jones, 2010). In this type of marriage, the partners dedicate themselves to living out the rest of their lives with one person unless they end up divorcing or one of the partners dies. In a polygamous marriage, people have more than one spouse. Polygamous marriages may seem discontinued, but it is still considered normal or expected in some cultures; it is when a person, most likely the male, marries multiple partners (Rahmanian et al., 2021). Same-sex marriage is when two people of the same gender get married; for example, two men or two women marry. In a mixed marriage, two people of different races or nationalities come together to become one; for example, a Black person and a White person (Nina Yolanda et al., 2021). In an arranged marriage, the families of the bride and groom or elderly kin plan the union (Chawla, 2007). In this kind of marriage, the bride and groom often do not know each other or have a choice of whom they get to marry. While this may be the dream for some people because they have trouble finding someone they connect with, for some others, this is a norm in their cultures, and they would like to move escape it. Common-law marriages are when two people

decide to live together without legally marrying (De Rosa, 2021). Intercultural marriages are between two individuals from different cultures (Silva et al., 2012).

Regardless of the type of marriage or commitment, a married couple will experience difficulties during their union. Some of the trials they encounter can either break them up or make the relationship more substantial. Couples face many threats and risks that may undermine the relationship's stability once they get married, such as losing interest in their spouses, going outside the marriage for sex or intimacy, embracing bitterness, and entertaining resentment. Some things that may increase the stresses in the relationship such as trying to change one's spouse, money problems, the meddling of friends and family members, and having the unrealistic expectation for the marriage to remain in the honeymoon phase perpetually.

Some couples show their best attributes and put forth their finest efforts in every situation at the beginning of the relationship before getting married (Eggrichs, 2004). Others use this time to fulfill their partner's desires and discover their significant other's likes and dislikes. Couples learn about the authentic person with whom they have decided to spend the rest of their lives in marriage; however, the quality of the marriage will depend on the communication the married couples utilize (Wright, 1992). In addition, marriage allows the couple to engage in new roles, such as husband and wife, mother and father, and brother-in-law, or sister-in-law (Balswick et al., 2021). The couples may have only imagined these roles until this point, but these functions would be emphasized after marriage. In intercultural relationships, these differences can be magnified exponentially (Balswick et al., 2021; Wright, 1992). The level of acculturation by both people, their attitudes on marriage, the impact of societal attitudes regarding their intercultural marriages, the support of their respective families, their views on gender roles, and

individual traits significantly influence the relationship. Many obstacles faced in marriage can impact the quality of their relationships and may even lead to divorce.

In their recommendations for future studies, scholars have suggested that future researchers further investigate various couple relationships to capture the impact of cultural differences on their relationship satisfaction (Kaya et al., 2019). In addition, more research is needed on how intercultural couples develop areas of intercultural communication competency to bridge their differences (Tili & Barker, 2015). Finally, researchers are encouraged to examine the intercultural couples' processes of building a third culture. Some individuals tend to face the predicament of straying away from their respective cultures once they get into a relationship with someone from a different culture; thus, the idea of building a third culture focused on that couple alone may incorporate part or none of their cultures of origin (Del Rio, 1998).

Theological Foundation

Throughout history, the concept of marriage has encountered many changes worldwide (Gibson, 1996; Moreno-Duany, 2020). In the United States, the marriage institution and family have been influenced increasingly by Hollywood's standards, which seldom portray a perfect marriage or family standard (Sternheimer, 2008). These standards are based on unrealistic and scripted expectations, which tend to damage perceptions of this sacred institution established by God since the foundation of this world (*King James Version*, 1769/2017, Genesis 2:24). Many people do not view marriages as what it was designed to be, but they see it as overrated and as just a piece of paper with no importance attached to it. According to the Bible, marriage is an institution between a man and a woman. Genesis 2:24 notes, "therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Intercultural couples are not only leaving their parents, but they sometimes feel obligated to move away from

their culture of origin; nevertheless, today's society defines marriage as a natural institution and

a socio-cultural reality in which each group of people should determine its importance and level

of reverence according to their context (Azariah, 2015; Lessing, 2010; Onuorah, 2018).

According to Ahua (2019), every institution, society, and culture has the right and authority to

choose the marriage arrangement that best suits and works for it. Marriage is something that God

sanctifies. Genesis 1:28 shared:

> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish
>
> the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of
>
> the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (*King James Version*,
>
> 1769/2017).

Cultures historically held specific societal values regarding marriage; however, these values have

been reevaluated, and some have been set aside. The culture of the United States used to hold

high regard for marriage and believed that the nuclear family was the primary unit of society;

nevertheless, many now choose to have children outside of marriage, and some of these children

are born because of a romantic entanglement between a single person and a married person.

More people are willing to raise children independently and bring them into this world through

assistive reproductive technology. Both heterosexual and homosexual couples live together

without marriage because cohabitation has become the norm (Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Cohan &

Kleinbaum, 2002; Ishizuka, 2018).

Proverbs 1:7 says, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise

wisdom and instruction" (*King James Version*, 1769/2017). No matter what a couple goes

through, it is refreshing to know that multiple resources and support systems are available today,

such as pastoral or Christian counselors, professional counselors, licensed marriage and family

therapists, and the Bible. These community services are available to assist people in dealing with the issues in their relationships. Couples of all ages need to be instructed to have a positive mindset when entering marriage which will produce opportunities for it to last and for each partner to be fulfilled (Wright, 1992). Shared values amongst marriage partners are essential components of resilient and long-lasting marriages

God created human beings to desire companionship (*King James Version*, 1769/2017, Genesis 2:18). The couple must complement each other physically, mentally, and socially. When couples spend years together and love each other as God intended, they most likely feel like an extension of each other because they become one (Genesis 2:24). In 2 Corinthians 6, the Bible talks about not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. However, marriage does not extinguish individuality; it is about blending two lives into one flesh. The Bible warns about the difficulties couples will face in achieving the oneness God envisioned for an ideal marriage if there is a broad division in values and beliefs; nevertheless, it can be challenging when couples attempt to bridge significant differences (Nguyen et al., 2016; Stopford, 2009).

Historical Context

The concepts of the historical context of intercultural marriages and some misconceptions about coalescing with people outside of one's race and culture were eschewed previously due to geographic isolation (Miller, 1982). However, intercultural marriage has evolved tremendously, partly due to the advancement of technology. Before social media and the internet, humans were accustomed to relationships only with those closest to them. Later, the difference in class and gender became more prominent than ethnic and cultural differences (Moreno, 2001). As a result, intercultural marriage has been viewed as a more socially acceptable notion; nevertheless, some

people were ostracized for marrying or falling in love with someone from another culture (Nabeshima, 2005; Romano, 2008).

Throughout the years, significant changes have occurred in intercultural relationships and marriages worldwide. In the United States of America, interracial and intercultural relationships were condemned. Even though it has been prevalent for quite some time, it has never been encouraged. Proficient knowledge about different cultures has inspired individuals to start having positive contact with those from different cultures, motivating them to consider intercultural relationships. This insight also prompted people from different cultures to view themselves as more alike than dissimilar, even though outsiders may sometimes think otherwise, which makes the possibilities to meet, interact, and marry greater than ever before (Silva et al., 2012). In the United States, the most racially and ethnically diverse country, intercultural marriages have increased from 3% to 17.5% as of 2017 and only became legal 50 years ago (Fonseca et al., 2021).

Histories, narratives, and myths passed down can shape peoples' impressions, interpretations, and desires for intercultural relationships. Based on what they have learned in childhood, intercultural couples' memories and ideas about other cultural groups can influence younger generations' perceptions through stories, jokes, or subtle messages about cultural groups (Piller, 2011). Historical memories and myths can influence family stories about other cultural groups, which may not be based on actual experiences but were passed down from generation to generation without any factual basis. These myths and narratives can become the root of direct prohibitions by family members to not date individuals from specific racial or intercultural groups.

Social Context

Society has a profound impact on intercultural couples' marital qualities and satisfaction. A worldwide population migration is happening, creating many social changes that intercultural couples have encountered in their relationships. In the United States, as recently as 1966, many states have rarely encouraged and even prohibited intercultural interactions (Martin et al., 2016). Because racial differences can be considered as cultural differences in some societies, the mixing of race, ethnicity, and culture was prohibited to prevent the end of racial differences and sustain the purity of one race in the country with the anti-miscegenation laws that were enforced across the United States (Martin et al., 2016; Sian, 2021; Silva et al., 2012). McGoldrick et al. (2015) noted that 50% of Americans marry people outside of their racial and cultural groups, and Kim et al. (2012) found that this social movement reflects the country's continuous progression toward prominent cultural diversity. Social barriers have prevented people from marrying each other; however, intercultural couples have successfully managed to overcome obstacles by demonstrating confidence in their relationship (Fulton, 2001). There is societal pressure for intercultural couples to conform to the dominant culture, and they frequently conform to certain societal pressure of gender roles associated with that culture (Iwakabe, 2019; Koide et al., 2019). Intercultural couples often find it challenging to deal with societal attitudes toward intercultural marriages or relationships. Because of the negative societal mindset toward intercultural marriages, many people find it hard to initiate one because they are concerned about their families and friends (Yahya & Boag, 2014a). There are many challenges that intercultural couples experience in their marriages, including integrating their partner's culture, religion, different methods of parenting, their families' interaction with each other, and the conflicts that arise from these interactions. In order to overcome some of the couple's challenges in the marriage, the couple

will need to get more involved in each other's culture and work as a team (Inman et al., 2011). A healthy relationship values the self as well as the other person simultaneously.

Theoretical Context

Intercultural couples frequently experience marital problems differently and more profoundly than other couples. These problems are caused because many individuals in their families or friends circles have doubts about the relationships; these groups may even question why they got married or if the relationship will last (Leslie & Young, 2015). Parents seem to accept their children's partners when they enter more into their spouses' culture and lose connection with their own culture; therefore, they are expected to assimilate more with their partners' culture. For example, they are to speak more in their partner's language and adhere to the dress code of their partner's culture; otherwise, they will be considered outsiders (Moriizumi, 2011). Unfortunately, there is no research on the impact of intercultural couples' attachment to their respective cultures on marital quality and satisfaction and whether this will play a significant role in the success or dissolution of the marriage. There are a few researchers who have examined intercultural couples' relationships functioning, acculturation, the challenges of intercultural marriages, and intercultural language and communication (Cools, 2006; Fonseca et al., 2021; Frame, 2004; Kaya et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2004; Muller, 2004; Rosenblatt & Stewart, 2004; Silva et al., 2012; Skowroński et al., 2014; Tili & Barker, 2015). There is even less empirical research regarding the lived experiences of intercultural couples worldwide (Pitiakoudis, 2013; Salama, 2012; Yang, 2019).

Pitiakoudis (2013) suggested the need for future research on cultural combinations, which would be tools for comparing similarities and differences in intercultural couples' lived experiences. Because of the gap in the literature associated with the experience of intercultural

couples and the influence of their attachment on the success of the dissolution of their marriages, this study addressed the lived experience of intercultural couples and the influence of their attachment on the outcomes of their marriages in the United States of America. As suggested by Tien et al. (2017), this study included couples living in a country that is neither of the partners' countries of origin, and it included the experiences of couples who have been married for various lengths of time. This study will continue to develop the essential themes of the previous research, such as the challenges and the benefits of being in an intercultural relationship and the impact of maintaining involvement in an intercultural relationship.

Kyle Killian stated that the theories associated with intracultural couples and families failed to meet the standards required to recognize and understand the unique experiences of intercultural couples (Gurman et al., 2015). Though they experience the same type of relationship conflicts as married couples with partners from the same cultural backgrounds, they often experience distinctive challenges and circumstances requiring more in-depth consideration and research. Furthermore, applying cultural attachment theory and intersubjectivity theory could be beneficial in examining intercultural couples' experiences and the impact of their attachment on their relational outcomes through a phenomenological qualitative study. Rubalcava and Waldman (2004) stated how intersubjectivity could be used to reveal the underlying organizational principles with foundations in a culture that influence individuals' views of their spouses. Awareness of how individuals unconsciously culturally organize principles will ensure couples receive the help they need to understand their differences. Cultural attachment theory can help researchers use cultural understanding to acquire knowledge of nonshared values and beliefs and maintain individual responsiveness (Carlson & Harwood, 2003).

Situation to Self

The researcher's motivation for conducting this study was predominately educational because of what she had witnessed and had inquired about for quite some time. The researcher befriended numerous intercultural couples, many of whom discussed the benefits of being in an intercultural relationship. However, none of the intercultural couples mentioned the setbacks of being in a relationship with someone from a different culture. Couples tend to portray the glamorous side of everything, especially on social media, but fail or refuse to display the ugly or the whole truth. When discussing their reasons for getting together, many of the intercultural couples encountered mentioned rebellion as a cause, even though most typical couples would mention their similarities. A person who marries someone outside of their culture out of rebellion does so consciously or unconsciously to protest something in their own culture (Wright, 1992). Others would mention their differences as the reason for their intercultural marriages. The differences in intercultural relationships are often overlooked initially and are considered merely surface issues and challenges that make the relationship more intriguing and exciting

The researcher also taught many students at the elementary level whose parents are in intercultural marriages or committed relationships. These parents tend to adapt to one partner's culture or create one entirely different from both cultures. Humans utilize culture to garner bonds with others and to derive meaning in daily life stated Kyle Killian (Gurman et al., 2015). Kyle Killian shared that "when some couples neglect a culture to adapt to another one, this could imply experiencing conflict or feelings of ambivalence and inadequacy regarding their own culture" (Gurman et al., 2015, p. 517). There are many adjustments that couples in intercultural relationships must make for the relationship to work. "These adjustments are communication, values, and gender roles, with gender being the expectation for how men and women should

conduct themselves within the larger group culture" (Yarhouse & Sells, 2017, p. 446). Adapting and creating another culture are also ways that intercultural couples try to adjust in the relationship.

This phenomenological study examined the impact of being culturally conscious on the success or dissolution of the couple's marriages. The researcher's personal, professional, and philosophical experiences inspire this study. Her philosophical assumption concentrated on the belief that problems may arise when one partner appreciates their own culture, which could be implicit or explicit over the partner's culture. According to the constructivist viewpoint, the cultural principle conceptualizes how a person's cultural experience is the bedrock upon which they organize and give meaning to their personal experience (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). When the individual partners bring their unconscious cultural influences into a marriage, this may help the individual integrate the many differences and co-establish a definite relational culture. The researcher endeavored to describe the essence of intercultural couples' realities regarding the acceptance of differences and the influence of fierce loyalty to their respective cultures' values, practices, and assumptions on marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction in this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

The researcher anchored this qualitative research on three philosophical assumptions grounded in social constructivism. The goal of social constructivism as a worldview is to rely entirely on the participants' views of the circumstance because every person tends to develop subjective meanings of their experiences, which are formed through cultural and historical norms that control the individuals' lives (Creswell, 2013).

Ontology

Ontology is the form and nature of reality and what is known about it; thus, it becomes the

fundamental framework in which cultures are formed, and an explanation of culture and

intercultural relations cannot ignore the issue of ontologies and the methodology of their

explanation, which is one of the most critical projects for anthropology in a complex

multicultural world (Gagnon, 2011). The ontological assumption centers on establishing whether

the data collected is a single reality or multiple realities (Alogaily, 2021). Qualitative researchers

embrace the notion of the participants' subjective experiences of the phenomenon as reality

instead of the notion of a universality of experience (Creswell, 2013; Cuthbertson et al., 2020).

Consequently, each participant can have a different description of the phenomenon they

experienced because every person subjectively interacts with the world, giving way to subjective

experiences, meanings, and interpretations relative to their experiences (Cuthbertson et al.,

2020). Creswell (2013) suggested using quotes and themes in the participants' words and

providing evidence of different perspectives. The researcher must enter the participants' world

and elicit personal descriptions and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological

The epistemological assumption centers on the nature of the collected data, whether it is

obtained from an objective or subjective perspective (Alogaily, 2021; Saunders et al., 2019).

Epistemology considers what constitutes knowledge as a construct tied to the subjective

experience of a phenomenon; it is also about the connection between the acquired knowledge

and the person acquiring it (Creswell, 2013; Cuthbertson et al., 2020; Mack, 2010). Knowing

this, the researcher must accept and validate the account of their experience while lessening the

distance between them. In a qualitative study, the researcher must try to get close to the participants being studied with the epistemological assumption (Creswell, 2013). Creswell and Poth (2018) advised researchers to ensure that the participant's description of the phenomenon determines what it represents.

Problem Statement

The problem was the lack of research into intercultural couples' experiences, and the challenges and benefits of maintaining involvement with their respective cultures in the relationship were the rationalizations for this study. Intercultural couples worldwide face the dilemma of building a third culture instead of staying connected to their native cultures. Awareness of the differences in cultures and the different activities and characteristics considered the norms in certain cultures and not others is essential to understanding how and why people do what they do. In addition, knowledge about the influence of intercultural couples' attachment to their own culture on their marriages is crucial for the pair to recognize the indication of a long-lasting relationship or one that will eventually end in divorce. Depending on the couples' perspectives and attitudes, the same attributes and characteristics that can lead to marital satisfaction can also lead to marital failure. Unfortunately, very few researchers have focused on the contributing factors of successful intercultural marriages. Few studies have focused on declining intercultural marriage determinant factors while missing crucial aspects, such as gender roles and family support. In the same sense, a few researchers have attempted to combine the two, as in this study.

This study addressed the gap in the literature regarding an understudied population worldwide, intercultural couples. Despite the increase in the number of intercultural couples and marriages, there is a moderate amount of empirical research on intercultural experiences and

sensitivity for individual people; there are even fewer empirical studies about intercultural couples (Fonseca et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017). The articles utilized in this study addressed the issues that arise in an intercultural relationship. Findings from this study can positively affect intercultural couples' marriages provided they are willing to work at understanding the venture of marrying outside of their culture. This study can also help illuminate divorce, which has been increasing in recent decades (Sadeghi & Agadjanian, 2019). The researcher believed it would be beneficial to understand this contributor to divorce. With the growing number of intercultural marriages worldwide, it is unfortunate that this topic is still not being researched more in-depth. This study built knowledge about this topic with few previously published sources significantly impacting the research field. The lack of literature on the experiences and impact of intercultural couples' decision to consciously or unconsciously be more inclined to their respective cultures' norms, traditions, and customs on their relationships prompted this study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of intercultural couples' devotion to their respective cultures and how it influenced the success or dissolution of their marriages. This study primarily targeted intercultural couples living in the United States; however, due to the advancement of technology, it was opened virtually to others on social media. At this stage in the research, intercultural marriage will be defined as a marriage between two people of different nationalities and cultures, which may or may not include differences in race, ethnicity, and geographical regions (Silva et al., 2012). The theories guiding this study are the cultural attachment theory and intersubjectivity theory. Therefore, this study will give insight into how intercultural couples' experiences impact their marriages and the benefits and challenges of maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage.

Furthermore, this insight facilitated the development of procedures and models to encourage and promote an equitable connection to one's cultural background in an intercultural marriage.

Intercultural couples often face unique challenges that threaten the foundation of their relationship. Some intercultural couples try to incorporate both cultures into their homes without validating one over the other. In other intercultural marriages, one person will often assimilate more with the other's culture; therefore, it is the one culture they use in the homes. The third category is when the couple finds it best to create a third culture that focuses on and describes the family they have formed. The success of an intercultural marriage depends on whether both partners' needs are being met. Both people must want the relationship to work and respect each other's culture (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Knowing whether their attachment to their respective cultures can impact their future is crucial as this influences the need to create a learning environment to foster and nurture multicultural interactions (Kaur-Colbert & Colbert, 2022).

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological study may benefit intercultural couples in their relationship as it presented whether couples' attachment to their respective culture influences the success or dissolution of their marriages. This study is crucial because it poses the question of whether intercultural couples' attachment to their respective culture could impact or threaten the future of their relationship. Some couples tend to disassociate or completely lose connection with their native cultures to move toward the majority culture (Del Rio, 1998). Therefore, it has become increasingly important to question and research the challenges and opportunities intercultural couples face and overcome when they keep an attachment to their respective cultures.

In certain cultures, such as Japanese or Asian cultures, even though intercultural marriage is not shunned anymore, especially in recent years, it has been expected for the couple to prevail over their culture's views on marriage and gender roles (Iwakabe, 2019). Many still find it challenging to engage in cross-cultural relationships because they prefer to meet and marry someone with a similar background; however, some are willing to forego difficulties and even cut ties with their family members and social groups to maintain a cross-cultural relationship or marriage (Yahya & Boag, 2014b). In addition, some people are willing to enter a relationship with someone from a different culture or with another faith system if they will not be forced to change who they are or their beliefs. For example, Christians are more inclined to engage in interfaith or intercultural relationships than Muslims and Jewish people. Even though people usually find similar standards with someone from another culture, intercultural couples struggle to manage other cultural differences they face in the marriage (Kaya et al., 2019). Some of the challenges that intercultural couples will undoubtedly experience cultural differences; however, acknowledging each other's culture and respecting it and what comes with it may eventually help the marriage. The couple can disregard the conflicts caused by cultural differences; however, the consequences can sometimes harm both people (Kuramoto, 2018).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do intercultural couples' experiences influence their marriages?

From the beginning of time, marriages have been about two people or two families uniting to become one. The world has been evolving rapidly in recent years, and technology is making advancements to connect the world; therefore, more people are marrying outside of their race, ethnicity, or culture (Nguyen et al., 2016). Intercultural couples and marriages are a growing population. When a couple is in an intercultural relationship, they will encounter many

difficulties because of their differences; they should study each other's cultures, traditions, and manners to avoid obstacles caused by not knowing one's partner's culture. People believe in honoring their past and their cultures. Many people will do so by marrying someone from the same culture and with the same belief system. However, when a couple is in an intercultural marriage, it is normal for them to become better accustomed to and identify with their partner's culture more than their own throughout the relationship (Kaya et al., 2019).

SQ1: What benefits do intercultural couples face in maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

Culture constitutes the beliefs, traditions, and values that a group of people shares; this group can be identified by their location, behaviors, customs, and language (Williamson & Harrison, 2010). Culture is allotted, structured, and historically duplicated because the upcoming generations learn different practices, skills, and knowledge from the older generation, such as grandparents and great-grandparents (Gone, 2011). Couples in intercultural marriages may be divided into two distinct groups; some may want to preserve what they have known throughout their lives as the epitome, and others may wish to imitate or fully emerge in the influencer's culture. Attachment to one's culture considerably influences socio-economic status, marital satisfaction, and the reproduction of offspring (Wheatley, 2012). Cultures also have a significant role in couples' communication style, behavior, and expression of emotions, which can positively or negatively impact their marriages (Tili & Barker, 2015).

SQ2: What challenges do intercultural couples face maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

Intercultural couples are believed to have higher stress levels than intracultural couples (Holzapfel et al., 2018). Many intercultural couples feel ashamed for not meeting their parents'

expectations of marrying or being with someone from the same cultural background. They feel

shameful because they have let their families down and may have humiliated them in front of

everyone (Iwakabe, 2019). Intercultural couples frequently experience marital problems in a

different way than other couples. Many of these problems are caused because their families or

friends doubt their relationships. Nothing can predict whether a marriage can survive with one

hundred percent accuracy; however, these types of behavior can heavily impact the relationship

or the marriage.

Definitions

1. *Culture*: Rieger (2022) developed the working definition of culture: the expected

   behaviors, understandings, and being in service of members within and outside a group to

   communicate better. Even though these understandings and behaviors are commonly

   practiced among the members, they regularly evolve from situations, events, and

   everyone's contributions (Mironenko & Sorokin, 2018). Culture relates to organizational,

   social, or other cultures instead of a specific area or region (Rieger, 2022). Culture has

   hundreds of definitions because it is a complex and nuanced topic that is continuously

   growing. Frame (2004) noted that culture is a set of people who share values, habits,

   customs, and rituals.

2. *Intercultural Marriage*: Marriage between two people of different nationalities and

   cultures, which may or may not include differences in race, ethnicity, geographical

   regions, or religious backgrounds (Silva et al., 2012; Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005).

3. *Interfaith Couple*: A relationship made between two people with different belief systems

   (Van Niekerk & Verkuyten, 2018).

4. *Marital Dissolution*: A distressed marriage in which the couple ends it all and divorces,

which could be an agreement between the spouses on separating their estates, the

children, and finances (Gottman & Silver, 1994).

5. *Marital Success*: A combination of marital satisfaction, commitment, and stability

(Colgan, 2001).

6. *Phenomenology*: This method of study offers equal attention to collective life's personal

and social aspects, and it helps researchers explore challenging settled assumptions while

finding out what is true or works by covering information that may lie outside the current

field of study or in areas of science where little progress has occurred (Owen, 1994;

Spiegelberg, 1970).

7. *Qualitative Research*: Research that aspires to find the roots of concerns and issues in

everyday contexts; it brings up issues that are rarely thought of or talked about but matter

(Smythe & Giddings 2007). Qualitative research is an interactive process that lets the

researcher get close to the phenomenon being studied while improving an understanding

of the scientific community (Brown-Saracino, 2021). Despite the many attempts to find a

definition for qualitative research, most researchers tend to present their

conceptualization of that method.

Summary

This chapter detailed many characteristics that can cause an intercultural marriage to succeed or

dissolve. This phenomenological study addressed the issue of this understudied group in society.

Thus, this study aimed to understand the influence of couples' attachment to their respective

cultures on the success or dissolution of their marriages. Within this chapter, the researcher

revealed the background of the study, the research gap in the body of literature, the researcher's

motivations for conducting this study, the theory's philosophical assumptions, and the study's

significance. The research questions with analytics tied to literature were conveyed to illuminate the participants' experiences and how they describe their relationship with their married, separated, or divorced partners. The chapter concluded with definitions of the different terms related to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on intercultural marriages and the couples' experiences within the relationship and the outside world. This chapter includes the characteristics that make up a thriving marriage and the ones that can cause a marriage to dissolve. If these elements are not used properly or addressed with precaution, they can cause the relationship's downfall. When people from two cultural backgrounds meet in a marriage, the relationship can be enhanced; however, the difficulties must be identified and addressed. Intercultural couples must learn about each other's culture and compromise when necessary because they grew up in two different cultures with different values, customs, and priorities. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significance of existing research and discloses the gap in the literature this study attempts to cover.

Theoretical Framework

The topic of intercultural couples is an understudied area; therefore, many previous theories about couples and the family have failed to accept and clarify the unique experiences of intercultural partners (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Nevertheless, the following approach helped shape this research. This transcendental phenomenological study of the intercultural couples' experiences and the benefits and challenges of their cultural attachment to their marriages was grounded in the cultural attachment and intersubjectivity theories.

Cultural Attachment Theory

Cultural attachment theory refers to individuals drawing comfort and refuge by building an emotional connection with their cultural group (Phua et al., 2017). Being part of a cultural group gives people a sense of validation for their existential values and meanings, prompting

them to form an attachment to that culture. Cultural attachment theory specifies that someone can cope with life's stress if they form a secure attachment to their native culture.

Cultural attachment theory is in couples and marriage therapy since individuals' experiences strongly influence their way of relating to others later in life, including their significant others. This theory can help couples explore their childhood experiences in historical, social, and cultural contexts because not all attachment is solid and dependable (Strand, 2020). Secure attachment gives the family members the freedom to be away from each other without feeling guilty that they will forget them or will not be there when they return. "Attachment security has shown to be a powerful predictor of life's success because it affects people's relationships throughout life" (Garland, 2012, p. 204). Attachment can be manifested differently in different cultures (Strand, 2020). Cultures influence practices, norms, and values; therefore, it is crucial to consider these concepts regarding each culture, such as collectivism and individualism as well as differentiation and enmeshment.

Cultural attachment theory was developed from the childhood and adult attachment theory of John Bowlby to understand how individuals build an emotional bond with cultural groups (Hong et al., 2013). Childhood attachment theory refers to children's relationships with their caregivers, and adult attachment theory refers to adults' relationships with their significant other. Both attachment theories focus on the aspects of secure versus insecure attachment. Secure attachment is characterized by the ability to form a relationship without worrying about being abandoned. On the other hand, insecure attachment is characterized by people's anxiety about being left behind, so they sometimes avoid intimate relationships altogether. Therefore, it is essential to understand the couples' experiences and their attachment to cultural groups in intercultural relationships. Culture can be defined as shared values, beliefs, and norms amongst

groups of interconnected individuals from the same nation, racial, cultural, and ethnic background. Cultural attachment theory can be assessed through a self-reported questionnaire or interviews.

Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity was coined by the philosopher Edmund Husserl and suggests that everyone is influenced by their friends, family members, and the culture they are surrounded by; as a result, these aspects can significantly impact individuals' actions and how they connect with the world around them. Intersubjectivity can help intercultural couples comprehend that their existence is copresent in intentional communion and that this sense of community exists in every human (Moustakas, 1994). The term intersubjective suggests that every human's experience is subjective, unique, and personal and that people's membership in the human community depends on their significant others (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). "subjectivity includes both the process, the activity of organizing experience, and the product, the organization of experience, as relatively enduring configurations that shape and limit a person's future experience and activity" (Orange, 1992, p. 190). Humans define their reality and shape their experiences, most frequently unconsciously, through psychological principles (Waldman & Rubalcava, 2005). A culture's norms and values are transmitted through a person's caregivers and experiences in the broader world and community.

<div align="center">

Related Literature

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Marrying someone outside of one's ethnic or racial group is increasing worldwide. According to the United States Census Bureau, intercultural and interracial married couples have increased from 964,000 in 1990 to 2,340,000 in 2008, which accounts for 1.8% and 3.9% of the total married couples in those years (Rico et al., 2018). Many people are leaving their motherland

to study, visit, find employment, or establish relationships, which has influenced the rapid

increase of intercultural couples in the past decade (Frame, 2004; Gurman et al., 2015). Many

multicultural families, especially in Korea, have a hard time because outsiders threaten them;

therefore, Korea legislated the Multicultural Families Support Act in 2008 to help multicultural

family members enjoy a stable family life, contributing to the improvement of the quality of life

of their family members (Song & Kim, 2022). Article 18 of the Act stipulates that "the

government can act against institutions that do not ensure the wellness of foreigners; their goal

should be to ensure that Koreans and foreigners in Korea understand and respect each other's

history, culture, and institutions" (Song & Kim, 2022, p. 142).

Acculturation Gaps

Acculturation is a change in a person's values, beliefs, and behaviors due to prolonged

contact with a new culture (Halford et al., 2018; Sun & Geeraert, 2021). Acculturation can also

happen when two or more cultures meet and influence one another to form another intact culture;

this process occurs without the original cultures losing their identities because their constituent

elements can still be traced (Gaputra, 2020). Regarding intercultural couples, acculturation is

among the main problems they experience among the many issues that come with deciding to

spend the rest of one's life with another person (Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, the pair should

understand the cultural differences, including the differences in values, expectations,

interpretations, and behaviors (Kim et al., 2012).

When a couple from different cultures gets married, greater marital satisfaction correlates

to higher levels of acculturation in one culture. When both people use more of the same

language, it leads to marital success (Cruz et al., 2014). The couple must find the right balance to

avoid neglecting their respective cultures while building and employing one distinct culture

specific to themselves in the home. Usually, intercultural couples demonstrate a higher level of consciousness and openness regarding other cultures and ethnicities, which makes them more prone to engage in opportunities to be honest and unreserved with others. In addition, a higher level of openness and consciousness plays a significant role in the willingness to discuss their relationship since they will be more conscious of their partner's feelings and ideas. They also show an elevated level of acculturation compared to couples from the same culture or ethnic group (Lee et al., 2017).

Intercultural couples tend to face more problems than other couples. Many of these problems cause acculturation gaps amongst the partners. These problems can be in terms of behaviors, language, or identifications which are associated with more conflicts between the partners and a lower level of relationship satisfaction (Lee et al., 2017; Rapaport et al., 2021). The spouses can identify and be aware of these common problems amongst intercultural couples, which will significantly impact their marital quality; they need to put aside their differences to deal with their conflicts more constructively (Tili & Barker, 2015). The world is getting smaller due to the advancement of technology, including social media and different social websites where people meet others worldwide, which can be called globalization. Therefore, many marry someone outside of their race, ethnicity, religion, and culture; consequently, they will find themselves in interracial, interfaith, or intercultural marriages (Fonseca, 2020; Frame, 2004; Lee et al., 2017). Intercultural marriages can help couples to learn more about other cultures and traditions. However, intercultural marriages have many problems that severely impact marital satisfaction and quality, and there is limited empirical research addressing these issues (Lee et al., 2017). These difficulties can play a significant role in the relationship's energy, ranging from acculturation, language and communication, societal attitudes, gender roles, religion or

spirituality, expression of emotions, conflict resolution, and household financial responsibilities.

There are many acculturative stressors in interracial and intercultural romantic relationships;

these could be language barriers, learning about another culture, difficulties relating to lack of

support, having different styles of communication, help from the families, and difficulties in

acculturation (Rastogi, 2009; Skowroński et al., 2014). When intercultural couples attach

themselves to their culture, this can lead to the success or failure of their marriages. In addition,

attachment to one's culture significantly impacts the couples' understanding of responsibilities

taken around the house; the importance is given to education, child-rearing, and conflict

resolution. To understand these differences in intercultural relationships, one must study

different cultures to know how things are done and thoroughly understand their influences on

marital satisfaction and longevity.

Intergenerational Cultural Conflicts

Intergenerational cultural conflicts occur when there are acculturation gaps between two

generations (Liu et al., 2019). These conflicts can cause many problems in an intercultural

marriage because the parents and the children may have different viewpoints (Johnston-Ataata,

2019). The children may be quicker to experience the changes to their values and ethnic

identification due to acculturation than those from the older generation, especially if they are in a

relationship with someone from the host culture (Johnston-Ataata, 2019; Pham et al., 2020). Less

conflict may happen between the two generations if the younger people show signs of

maintaining their cultural identity because this would mean that they have not lost touch with

who they are. More significant conflicts may happen if the younger generation prefers their

partner's culture's values, attitudes, and behaviors over their own (Wang-Schweig & Miller,

2021). "When the members of a family from different generations can work together and

accommodate the developmental changes occurring, this is essential for the functioning of the family" (Williams et al., 2014, p 163).

Many people value family traditions and expectations over personal needs, especially those from cultures that practice collectivism; therefore, intergenerational conflicts caused by not preserving their families' traditions and customs may affect their well-being and lower their relationship satisfaction (Balswick et al., 2021). Conflicts may arise when what the parents want differs from what the children may not even want to consider or are unwilling to do. In many cultures, such as Japan, grandparents and parents get involved in the child-rearing process, which can cause multigenerational conflict because the older generations may have different values from the couple (Iwakabe, 2019). Nevertheless, grandparents may show signs of understanding and affirming the grandchildren's efforts to shape their identities in beneficial ways but also worry their parents (Garland, 2012). Parents, grandparents, and children must be willing to find and accept resources to strengthen their bonds.

When someone wants to date or marry someone from a different culture, they often perceive wanting to gain something from that person; these reasons can connote financial or social opportunities (Gurman et al., 2015). The older generation believes that the intercultural couple will experience fewer conflicts in the marriage if they are from the same culture and share similar norms and values (Zhang & Allen, 2019). When a couple from different cultures gets married, greater marital satisfaction correlates to higher levels of acculturation in one culture; when both people use more of the same language, it leads to marital success (Cruz et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017). The couple must find the right balance to avoid neglecting their respective cultures while building and employing one culture specific to themselves in the home. One of the

best things to do when a couple finds themselves in a situation where they must disagree is to use assertive communication strategies, which are the most effective.

The Success of a Marriage

The success of a marriage or a relationship depends on many things that contribute to satisfaction in an intercultural marriage, such as language and communication, attitudes toward marriage, societal attitudes, and family support (Skowroński et al., 2014). The factors that affect marital success depend on cultural influences, even though marriage is habitual in every society (Cheraghi et al., 2019). Couples must be willing to adapt to new cultural norms, beliefs, and behaviors. They must communicate effectively by learning about the perception of criticisms and the expression of emotions in each culture, which will help them resolve conflicts relating to language and communication (Tili & Barker, 2015). Some significant characteristics that can influence the success of an intercultural marriage are the couples' ability to control their emotions, effective communication and conflict resolution skills, personality traits, and sexual activities. Powerful communicators express their thoughts politely, considering other people's opinions; respect all values, beliefs, and ideas; and speak calmly, making non-threatening eye contact. Despite the many challenges that intercultural couples may face, there are quality characteristics and strengths that can sustain their relationships even with their cultural differences (Lee et al., 2017).

The United States has immigrants from all over the world seeking a better life or freedom, and each group brings its culture, norms, and values (Dauscher, 2021). Among these groups of immigrants are Africans from all over Africa. Before getting married, African American immigrant couples living in the United States consider the rest of their family's impression of the marriage (Taylor et al., 2012). They think about what their families will say

about their choices and union expectations. Higher expectations for the marriage from the rest of the family will imply higher marital satisfaction (Ngazimbi et al., 2013). The Chinese culture believes in hard work and building together as a family in their homeland or the United States. When the husband or the wife is not working, this negatively impacts their marriage and, in turn, decreases their marital satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2011).

Disengagement Versus Enmeshment

Disengagement is the level of connectedness and distinctiveness among family members (Manzi et al., 2006). Disengagement is when members' lives overlap, but each has their own life outside their home (Balswick et al., 2021). Enmeshment is when families lack a sense of separate identity or individuality; the family members are overly invested in each other's lives and barely have any independence (Balswick et al., 2021). Enmeshed families tend to have diffuse internal and close external boundaries, which prevent other people and information from penetrating the family's close bond while intruding into each other's personal space and privacy (Williams et al., 2014). Katharine Gratwick Baker suggested that when utilizing Bowen family system theory, people establish high levels of independence and boundaries to have healthy relationships (Gurman et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2019). At the same time, relationships are about the partners being emotionally connected. Kyle Killian stated that both disengagement and enmeshment preferences are conditioned by cultures (Gurman et al., 2015). Intercultural couples are called to have some cultural considerations and to communicate about their boundaries, especially when they are dysfunctional. Learning about the disengagement and enmeshment constructs and how they relate to cultures will prevent people from judging others on how human beings should relate to one another.

Individualism Versus Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism are two essential cultural dimensions adopted worldwide (Dion & Dion, 1993; Guo et al., 2022). These concepts imply different ideals of how individuals should be ingrained in social relationships (Heu et al., 2019; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). The countries that embrace individualism are in the continent of Europe, Australia/Oceania, and the United States of America (Fatfouta et al., 2021). Individualistic cultures and countries ascribe success to a person's ability (Binder, 2019; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Cultures that adopt an individualistic approach tend to focus on everyone's desires and needs. These societies highlight personal freedom, valuing loyalty, conformity, customs, and traditions (Halford et al., 2018; Nikolaev et al., 2017). They prioritize personal goals over collective goals, encouraging individuals to select their life paths (Fatfouta et al., 2021). Cultures with increased individualism tend to steer toward greater individuality, self-sufficiency, and autonomy, establishing the foundation for mutual trust, interpersonal cooperation, social solidarity, and dependence (Binder, 2019; Guo et al., 2022).

Cultures with a collectivist outlook focus on the group, and individuals are considered part of the group (Binder, 2019; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). The countries and cultures that embrace collectivism are in the continents of Africa and Asia. These societies discourage conformity and individuals from excluding the group; they do so through restrictive social norms that disable individual achievement in favor of collective solidarity and traditions (Nikolaev et al., 2017). At the same time, cultures that adopt a collectivistic approach tend to have individuals pledge loyalty to the group and often receive protection from extended families, which would show unquestionable loyalty (Guo et al., 2022; Halford et al., 2018). In addition, the group's interests frequently precede personal or individual interests (Nikolaev et al., 2017; Oyserman & Lee,

2008). Collectivist cultures and countries ascribe success to groups' efforts (Binder, 2019).

Individualism in Marriage. Individualism in marriage prioritizes the self and autonomy over the partner (Irby, 2016). Because of the increase in divorce and cohabitation, marriage has lost meaning and has become a place where individuals expect their desires and needs to be met (Michalka et al., 2017). Individualism in marriage can be associated with the willingness to be open to change (Binder, 2019). The individualistic approach in marriage is said to be the cause of couples not fulfilling their calls to holiness because it allows individuals to be selfish and permissive and the tendency to abuse freedom; it is also the leading cause of the decline in marital satisfaction (Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013; Ostenson, 2022; Randles & Avishai, 2018). The question is whether individual happiness within marriage benefits the individual or both partners. Recently, people prioritized individualist marital norms centered on interpersonal satisfaction over traditional marital standards of self-sacrifice and self-obligation (Randles & Avishai, 2018).

"The rise of the industrial revolution worldwide made way for individualism in the marriage and the family, which made work an individual instead of a household or family pursuit" (Garland, 2012, p. 32). Families are giving up sitting around the table every afternoon and recounting how the day went to individually microwaving food and eating alone. Unfortunately, technological advances entice the desire for privacy from the surrounding community. Each family member requires stability from the community in which they grew up to develop individual growth and maturity (Yarhouse & Sells, 2017). There is a need to balance personal experiences and social relational context, which will take place in a nurturing environment allowing individuals to flourish (Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013; Michalka et al., 2017).

Collectivism In Marriage. Collectivism in marriage values the partners as one and is associated with security and collective action (Binder, 2019; Irby, 2016). In certain cultures, the younger generations are moving away from collectivism to individualism because it promotes women's compliance with their parents and encourages women to be submissive to their husbands and look after their aging sons (Song & Kim, 2022). Partners in collectivistic cultures are less likely to be lonely in their marriages; however, they are more likely to take family support and marriage for granted, which would benefit them less from their expectations of them in times of need (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2022). Cultures and countries still holding the tradition of arranged marriage are considered collectivist and community-oriented, where women's compliance and silence are virtues (Song & Kim, 2022). Nevertheless, one crucial thing that should be remembered is that individualism and commitment are not usually opposed.

Many cultures and countries that believe in a collectivistic view also practice arranged marriages which takes away individual freedom and conjugal choices (Tahir, 2021). Arranged marriage is when the groom and bride are selected by other family members, most likely the parents, without the participants' consent (Chawla, 2007). Recently, there has been a migration from arranged marriages to love marriages, which is viewed as progress because many happier and healthier marriages have resulted from that change (Tahir, 2021). However, some may argue that collectivism gives people a secure base where their needs are met, and they have a sense of belonging, even though it is losing its ground in today's societies because more people are choosing individual energy and free choice and progress and modernity, which signifies improvement and that things are moving in the right direction (Garland, 2012; Song & Kim, 2022).

Emotions

Throughout their relationship, couples will exhibit varying levels of flexibility. Closeness makes partners feel emotionally connected; flexibility helps them adapt different aspects of their relationship to their current circumstances (Eggrichs, 2014; Gurman et al., 2015). In times of stress or adversity, it is normal for couples to experience extremes on these dimensions. Nevertheless, the ability to return to a healthy, balanced state differentiates resilient relationships (Gottman & Silver, 1994; Gurman et al., 2015). The balance will look different for every couple at different points in time. Couples must understand the factors contributing to their current situation and adjust after a period of imbalance. There are a few aspects that couples need to consider when owning their feelings. The first is acknowledging and identifying their emotions instead of trying to ignore, bottle up, or minimize them (Masumoto et al., 2022). Second, they take responsibility for their emotions instead of blaming someone or something else for causing them, which requires self-reflection and internalizing how they experience their feelings, what triggers them, and why (Fahd & Hanif, 2019). This ongoing learning experience leads to better emotional intelligence and increased self-awareness for most people.

A balance in feelings and actions, both positive and negative, is vital to ensure marital stability. It is crucial to have a higher level of positive emotions and actions (Saeed Abasi, 2017). It is essential to know how to keep one's composure during conflicts, and having the ability to resolve developing disputes will ensure a lasting marriage. Even though reshaping someone's personality to satisfy one's desire can be impossible, perpetuating a positive discernment regarding one's partner will play an essential role in securing and finding pride in the relationship. Partners in an intimate relationship will provoke each other and may experience

anger toward the other partner. Willie Davis Jr. suggested that couples understand that anger is a normal response to a circumstance if expressed appropriately, and the person should not remain angry forever (June et al., 2011). When the person continues to live with anger, it will inhibit forgiveness and prevent them from working through the anger. Forgiving will positively affect marital satisfaction, making the couple closer to one another (Bell et al., 2018).

People's emotions start with their thoughts, and it is evident that how someone thinks about someone is how they will treat them, which can have tremendous consequences in marriage because it can determine the state of the marriage's health (Gottman & Silver, 1994; Gurman et al., 2015). Marital problems will arise when the partners' thoughts and feelings are distorted. It can be easy to develop assumptions about one's spouse and even the relationship in intercultural marriages. Most people trust their feelings and intuitions, and it is difficult to recognize when their stream of consciousness is distorted (Gottman & Silver, 1994; Williams et al., 2014). However, whenever there are positive and negative emotional events, the relationship's satisfaction and stability can be greater if the partners respond constructively; this can differ depending on the culture because people show and provide support differently across cultures (Fonseca et al., 2021). Therefore, intercultural couples must be culturally conscious and literate to know how things are done to thoroughly understand their influences on marital satisfaction and the longevity of marriages as suggested by Kyle Killian (Gurman et al., 2015). There is the non-verbal vocalization that is consistent across every culture, which are laughs, cries, sighs, and screams; nevertheless, they are more likely to be recognized if the partners are from the same cultural group, which proves that there are some cultural factors that can help shape nonverbal expression (Yoshie & Sauter, 2020).

Communication

Communication is the most crucial component of a successful marriage (Romano, 2008). Communication of one's thoughts, opinions, or emotions significantly influences the couple's marital satisfaction (Balswick et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2014). Couples struggle to express themselves wholly in certain cultures, especially in Asian cultures (Hiew et al., 2016). Being indirect can be seen as a positive attribute in some cultures and be looked down on in others (Chen & Wang, 2021; Halford et al., 2018). For example, in the Asian culture, straightforwardly expressing oneself can be a newly acquired way of communicating for many wives. Couples can help their marriages by changing their perspective and sharing openly to find the roots of their marital problems (Tili & Barker, 2015). Many men were not allowed to express their feelings or emotions growing up (Balswick et al., 2021). Therefore, they do not know how to communicate effectively and sometimes hide their feelings. Counseling would require this couple to work on effective communication, and they will have to use their active listening skills. Communication is vital in any romantic relationship or friendship; therefore, a lack of it can result in disagreement, hatred, and even divorce or separation.

For successful marriages, intercultural couples must remember these concepts: understanding, awareness, acceptance, open-mindedness, and the willingness to learn new things. First, they must understand their culture and be willing to learn and accept their partner's culture. Many couples find it helpful to create a third culture that fully incorporates both cultures (Ruebelt et al., 2016). Kyle Killian encourages the pair to be open-minded and aware of the differences between the two cultures (Gurman et al., 2015). Differences in cultures do not make any of them better than the another. The way that the couples learn and accept the other person's

culture will ensure that no one surmises that their culture is better than their partner's or that it should be the main one being projected in the household. Finally, intercultural couples must understand that communication is distinctive within each culture (Fonseca et al., 2021). Good communication is also about being a good listener, which is essential for couples to handle the conflicts that will arise in the relationship. There are two steps that couples can follow to evaluate their practical listening skills. The first step is to make sure they hear everything their partners have said, and the second step is to interpret what the speaker has said accurately (Williams et al., 2014).

Communication is crucial to any relationship. However, problems will arise in the relationship when communication is only to transmit or acquire information. The couples must learn that effective communication must have three parts: receiving, sending, and interpreting the messages (Williams et al. 2014). According to Willie Davis Jr., all three components must be done clearly and concisely to prevent conflicts, and couples must continue communicating if they want to resolve an issue (June et al., 2011). Communication can also happen through verbal and nonverbal cues. Different cultures have different ways of interpreting nonverbal cues, which couples in intercultural relationships must recognize (Allen et al., 2003; Frame, 2004; Williams et al., 2014). The couple must also ensure that their verbal and nonverbal messages are congruent. Since nonverbal messages are under less conscious control, they will more accurately reflect what the person is feeling or thinking (Williams et al., 2014). In certain cultures, people tend to gesture more than others; simultaneously, the same gestures may have different meanings in different cultures (Romano, 2008).

Personality

The relationship quality is essential when the couple is married and throughout the relationship. Many concepts support the success of intercultural marriage, such as personalities, sexuality, and religiosity (Frame, 2004). The relationship starts with the courtship stage, the moment before the couple becomes official (Wright, 1992). The couple's marriage will most likely last if they have a deep connection to each other during courtship, which will ensure that they experience fewer conflicts (Wilson & Huston, 2013). Intercultural couples are encouraged to get to know each other better before making lifelong commitments to spend the rest of their lives with each other, ensuring this may prevent major marital conflicts (Gurman et al., 2015; Wright, 1992).

Personalities play significant roles in any relationship. Humans can learn some character traits, such as forgiveness and patience, and some traits are innate, such as curiosity and modesty (Prinz, 2008). The big five model is the classification of individual personalities: neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness, which positively affect a marriage (O'Meara & South, 2019). Being kind to one another and lessening one's selfish reactions in the relationship will most likely be essential to a long-term partnership (Thomas, 2015). Couples from different cultures experience financial problems, division of labor, cruelty, sexual issues, and childrearing disagreements; however, being kind to one another through everything can help alleviate the obstacles. In addition, being kindhearted will ensure that both people find fulfillment in their roles as husbands and wives (Dillon et al., 2015).

Kyle Killian recommends couples to accept that some cultures have different views regarding marriage. Some may perceive it as a union between people who love each other, and others perceive it as a social or political agreement between two families (Gurman et al., 2015).

Different views on the value of marriage from one family will impact their boundaries regarding

their families' involvement in the marriage. Family support is another aspect that is very

important to the success of the marriage. If the extended families object to the marriage, this will

strain the couple. Therefore, their traits play an important role in how they interact. When

conflicts arise in marriages, there are two strategies couples can use to help manage them:

building friendships and integrating each other's culture into the relationship. They can learn

from each other and are called to appreciate and celebrate each other's culture (Seshadri &

Knudson-Martin, 2013). For successful marriages, intercultural couples must set boundaries with

their family members regarding their spouses; they must possess traits that evolve from

biological, environmental, and cultural factors to do that.

Sexual Activities

Attractiveness is essential for many people to ensure a lasting relationship. People

associate attractiveness with true love; this is not important in some cultures, as many marriages

are settled through arrangement (Derbyshire, 2008). In intercultural marriages, many couples cite

that true love is the primary reason they got married, even though this is not a valid reason for

marriage in many cultures. However, many intercultural spouses marry against all odds, most

likely without the blessings of their friends and families, and they would take on the extra

challenges of diversity in their intimate lives (Gurman et al., 2015; Romano, 2008; Wright,

1992).

Sexuality is crucial to consider in a family because it leads to family development.

Married couples are expected to share their most intimate parts without shame; this deepens their

intimacy. In certain cultures, "sexual activities for females are considered mainly the reason for

procreation" (Donat & D'Emilio, 1992, p. 9). Intercultural couples must know and be mindful of

their spouse's outlook on sexual activities as they sometimes do not expect sexual problems (Frame, 2004; Romano, 2008). In certain cultures and countries, such as Japan, women tend to lose their sexual attractiveness younger than men (Iwakabe, 2019). Intercultural couples must remember that each partner is the product of the conscious or unconscious sex education passed down from the previous generations; therefore, learning about their and their partner's cultures is imperative (Romano, 2008). Each culture has its own set of values and beliefs when it comes to several sexual practices, such as "menstruation, masturbation, circumcision, virginity, fidelity, public display of affection, hygiene, premarital intercourse, contraception, and homosexuality which are just a few of the many sexual issues that can drive a wedge in an intercultural couple's relationship" (Frame, 2004, p. 223).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship (Gottman & Silver, 1994, Gurman et al., 2015). The crucial thing that couples can do is be aware of each other's conflict styles and the best strategies to resolve the inherent conflicts in the marital relationship. All couples, including intercultural couples, do not resolve conflicts the same, which could be "volatile, validating, or conflict-avoiding" (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 28). However, if there is a five-to-one magic ratio of positive to negative feelings and interactions between the partners, the marriage will survive despite the difficult moments. Volatile couples believe in individuality as they see themselves as equals, validating couples usually pick their battles carefully, and conflict-avoidance couples resolve their issues by minimizing or avoiding them at all costs. People in cultures that value collectivism tend to prefer a more conflict-avoidant approach; in contrast, people in cultures that value individualism prefer a direct approach to their conflicts (Dsilva & Whyte, 1998; Tjosvold et al., 2010).

The stability and satisfaction of marriage depend significantly on how the couple interacts, communicates, and deals with conflict resolution (Kaur, 2016). Couples can use many effective conflict resolution strategies to avoid sabotaging their relationship and ending up in divorce (Parsons et al., 2020). Practical and constructive conflict resolution strategies, such as having dialogues and being loyal to one another within a marriage, can lead to increased marital satisfaction (Kuncewicz, 2011). Moreover, destructive and ineffective conflict resolution strategies, such as exiting the room and showing signs of neglect, can lower marital satisfaction. The ultimate advice for both people in the marriage is to avoid the inevitable conflicts and accept and embrace their differences, thereby keeping the marriage healthy and prosperous (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Couples can improve communication in their relationships while learning to calm themselves down so that their words can be perceived, listen, speak non-defensively when discussing, and continuously validate each other. Improving their communication strategies skills will ensure that the couples employ effective conflict resolution strategies, which will, in turn, impact their marital quality.

Areas of Adjustment

After getting married, couples are prompted to make some marital adjustments, which are signs of progress believed to be necessary to achieve a functional relationship (Whisman & Li, 2015). Intercultural couples face many problems which cannot be solved easily; this may prompt them to want to make some adjustments, while others may not want to make any changes (Wright, 1992). There are many areas and phases of adjustment to life for intercultural marriages. One or both partners may have to adjust to a new physical environment; nonetheless, adjustment differs from cultural norms and practices (Méndez García, 2020; Wright, 1992). Other adjustment areas include gender roles, values, political views, finances, illnesses, deaths,

and behaviors. The couples must contradict the solid emotional attachment to their culture to be able to make some adjustments (Wright, 1992). In addition, the couples' home culture characteristics may affect their ability to adjust (Phua et al., 2017). Sometimes, couples may realize they cannot make any adjustments and must make one of the most complex decisions in their lives, which is to commit to each other even though they will never see everything in the same way or to quit and accept the dissolution of the marriage. Eggerichs (2004) developed the pink and blue glasses analogy to insinuate that men and women are very different; they hear and see things differently. Nevertheless, by recognizing this, couples may resign in a position even if they do not understand it (Romano, 2008).

According to Kyly Killian, intercultural couples frequently experience marital problems differently than other couples (Gurman et al., 2015). Countless issues are caused because many people in their family or friends groups have doubts about the relationship, even questioning why they got married or if the relationship will last (Leslie & Young, 2015). Couples who encounter disappointment and disapproval from their family members due to intercultural marriages experience anxiety and fear (Frame, 2004; Killian, 2001; Skowroński et al., 2014). They may fear disclosing the relationship at first. The family members might tell them that they will most likely experience disapproval from society once they see the connection. It is hard for many intercultural couples to initially experience validation from their family members. This disapproval will often impact the families' interactions. Sometimes, it will be from just one set of parents; other times, it will be from both sets of parents (Bell & Hastings, 2015). Disapproval from friends and family may make it easier to make the necessary adjustment.

The Dissolution of a Marriage

Some marriages will, unfortunately, end in divorce (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Some concepts that can contribute to the failure of any marriage, including intercultural marriages, are attractiveness, conflict resolution, household financial responsibilities, religion and spirituality, and personality. In addition, stereotypical gender norms and expectations may end the marriage, especially if the couple is from different parts of the world and have powerful contradictory beliefs about appropriate gender roles (Frame, 2004). Child rearing is another aspect that can affect cross-cultural marriages (Okihiro et al., 2017). The divorce rate has been rising in every culture and society; therefore, many researchers are searching for what tears a marriage apart (Akpan & Ezeume, 2022; Arpino et al., 2022; Balswick et al., 2021; Gottman & Silver, 1994; June et al., 2011). Many of the following characteristics that cause the dissolution of marriages hold for intracultural and intercultural marriages. Findings have identified differences in personalities, attractiveness, household responsibilities, communication, religion and spirituality, and conflict resolution. These attributes lead couples to destructive feelings, drifting apart, and gut-wrenching actions and reactions. The couples' cultural differences may be apparent and cause too many struggles for them to continue their journey together. They may encounter irreconcilable differences based on their cultural values. After exhausting all their resources, some intercultural couples may find it difficult to remain married, although they love each other very much, ultimately leading to marital dissolution (Romano, 2008).

The big five personality traits, neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, can predict a marriage's end (Spikic & Mortelmans, 2021). Negative feelings, such as anger, self-doubt, and emotional instability, may lead to divorce; openness to experience will ensure marriage duration and satisfaction (Amani et al., 2019). In

some cases, the utterance of positive words and being kind will prevent marital failure. When a couple takes pleasure in communicating aggressively, they will likely experience less marital satisfaction. Marital kindness will lead to long-term partnerships (Dillon et al., 2015). Couples must be kind and speak with love and care, even during conflicts. They must be willing to balance each other out regarding their respective personality characteristics. Financial stability is equal to marital satisfaction for some couples, especially in a relationship with only one wage earner, who will most likely be the husband. Therefore, economic discomfort strongly correlates to marital dissatisfaction (Celenk & van de Vijver, 2013). Money management is another aspect that can impact the couple's marital satisfaction (Skowroński et al., 2014). Financial struggles often lead to distress and persistent protestation. When the couples are constantly arguing and fighting, the couples' marital satisfaction will decline and may result in separation or divorce

Household Responsibilities

Being an effective communicator is essential in an intercultural marriage. The couple must identify communication techniques to influence the union positively (Kuramoto, 2018). When the couples refuse to share all the household responsibilities and feelings by withholding things from each other and not prioritizing their intimate relationship and family over their jobs, the couple will enter a downward spiral, and the connection will fail (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012). Household responsibility can be tied to gender roles that differ between cultures (Pinto & Ortiz, 2018). Some cultures have a transparent difference between the gender roles in the family. Certain cultures are prominent in male dominance, while this concept is more subtle in others (Alsarve & Johansson, 2022; Schrijner & Smits, 2020). In many cultures, the wives are expected to perform specific duties in the home, while the husbands perform other ones, most likely outside the house (Pinto & Ortiz, 2018). The women usually take care of the children, the

household, and the bills, while the husbands go to work to provide for the family. The children

are always the responsibility of the mothers, even when the fathers are present. As a result, some

wives will take on the role of caretakers for the children, the husbands, and their partners' family

members, even though they will most likely experience a lack of respect for them or feel they do

not belong amongst them (Okihiro et al., 2017). Intercultural couples can be benevolent,

implying shared household responsibilities (Cooper, 2020; van de Vijver, 2007). When the

couples share all the duties in the house and their feelings by withholding nothing from each

other and prioritizing their intimate relationship and family over their jobs, the relationship will

solidify (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012).

In certain cultures, men are viewed in society as the patriarch, head, and family muscles

(McGoldrick et al., 2015). From a young age, men are expected to show no emotions, work with

their hands, care for things, and be the protectors and providers for their families. However, with

things changing, more men are taking care of household work and the children. Financial

freedom is another thing that has impacted families today since a single paycheck used to be

enough to take care of the family. A modern family unit needs two paychecks and even more to

survive, which can impact the time spent with the children and the bond of the family (Scott,

1984). Parents are stressed that they must provide for the family; however, they feel guilty when

they miss many of their children's milestones (*Anderson's yearbook program*, 2011). The

couples must assign household responsibilities to everyone and clearly understand disciplining

the children in the house. If the couple's parents are in the phase where they need a substantial

amount of help, family members should discuss this.

Communication

Many intercultural couples' relationship distress is caused by cultural differences in communication (Halford et al., 2018). In intercultural marriages where the wife is the dominant one, the couple will most likely have lower marital satisfaction; in contrast, greater marital satisfaction will be experienced when the husband is the dominant one or when both spouses are on the same level (Davis, 2005; Gray-Little, 1982). Marriages are contracts signed by two parties for a lifetime of service and love (Garland, 2012). Couples may not be able to properly show their love for one another because they have unrealistic expectations of how their partner is supposed to behave in the marriage, which may come from what they have learned from their cultures (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Marriages call individuals to "become servants of each other's welfare" (Thomas, 2015, p. 165).

Each person needs to perform a self-intervention and understand themselves for their relationship to succeed (Wright, 1992). How one learns and processes information impacts their relationships. Some people may be willing to compromise, and others will be ready to adjust (Silva et al., 2012; Wright, 1992). Each person needs to learn about the other's communication style, be willing and open to listen, understand, and have realistic expectations (Williams et al., 2014). Problems relating to effective communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution usually bring couples to counseling (Gurman et al., 2015). According to Willie Davis Jr., communication is critical in any relationship, whether friendship, courtship, family relationship or romantic relationship (June et al. 2011). When people do not communicate with each other, it strains the relationship (A. Harden, personal communication, April 4, 2021). Solution-focused couples' communication programs can enhance communication and marriage quality because it helps to effectively communicate one's view without feeling the need to be disrespectful or put

down other people's views and beliefs. The couple should express their disappointments, frustrations, and fears as they convey gratitude, appreciation, and admiration for one another (Gottman & Silver, 1994). Healthy communication between the partners will ensure greater marital satisfaction (Vazhappilly & Reyes, 2018).

Intercultural couples face many challenges in their relationships, such as cultural differences in communication (Elliott & Chen, 2019; Rosenblatt & Stewart, 2004). The couple may present with differences in communication style and linguistic abilities, which can become an obstacle and prevent them from effectively discussing their personal feelings (Iwakabe, 2019). Couples engaging in more understanding and empathetic communication will increase relationship satisfaction and overcome cultural differences (Machette & Cionea, 2022). Intercultural couples can "include crucial aspects of their partners' cultural histories and identities; they can value their differences and learn how to express themselves in ways that make them feel heard through nonverbal and verbal communication" (Gurman et al., 2015, p. 515). Couples must know that each person varies in processing and interpreting information when conversing.

There are two different communication styles: internal and external processing (Williams et al., 2014). For example, a person who is an internal processor will normally not communicate what they are feeling or thinking until they are sure, which means they think about everything down to the last details before articulating what they want to say. Conversely, a person who is an external processor will begin to communicate their ideas or message before they are entirely formulated in their heads, which could mean their words cannot be straightforward as they create a new draft while speaking. Intercultural communicators must keep in mind that along with words, language may affect the balance of power in the relationship (Romano, 2008). Kyle

Killian affirmed that if both partners live in a different country, the one who is more fluent in the country's language and has superior speed and vocabulary may take the lead in every conversation; this partner may even manipulate the conversation to their advantage (Gurman et al., 2015). It would be helpful if couples could understand each other's preferred style and its impact on their communication.

Religion and Spirituality

Intercultural marriage could sometimes mean being in an interfaith relationship with the couple having different backgrounds regarding religion or spirituality (Fonseca, 2019). However, the couple must support each other's faith to ensure marital and family harmony (Nolte, 2020). In an intercultural marriage where each partner belongs to a different religious group, one partner may convert or practice their own religion without imposing on their partner. Sometimes, the partners may abandon or move away from their religion and create a third one when the above approaches fail. Couples must be aware of religion's powerful influence and how it can impact other aspects of their family lives, such as gender roles, sexuality, holiday traditions, and child-rearing (Frame, 2004).

Historically, religion or spirituality has proven necessary and has always been the source of strength and hope for many people (Balswick et al., 2021; Köstenberger & Jones, 2010). Usually, the father is the head of the household and guides the family to ensure that every family member is grounded in faith and is in touch with their spirituality (Balswick et al., 2021). Religion or spirituality comes with morals that believers implement in their daily lives, such as forgiveness, hope, connectedness, and experiences of a sense of meaning (Ingersoll, 1996; Mahoney & Graci, 1999). A strong sense of morals plays a crucial role in marital satisfaction; intercultural couples living in the United States have higher marital satisfaction when their

religious or spiritual well-being is unblemished (Vazquez et al., 2019). Religion gives people a

reason to live no matter what they are going through because they believe in a higher power and

promotes forgiveness and conflict resolution (Dollahite et al., 2019). Religion and spirituality

usually entail being part of a community of believers, giving people life's essence. A support

community can help people thrive spiritually and inspire hope for the future (McGoldrick et al.,

2015). Many people believe that having shared beliefs can ultimately be helpful for the couple;

nevertheless, it will be up to the couple to decipher what is best for their family to have a

successful marriage.

Religion and spirituality are vital components of family development and have an essential

role in the success of the marriage (Balswick et al., 2021). Religion can affect everyone in the

family (Dollahite et al., 2019). Certain religions promote inequality within marriage by

insinuating that a husband is above a wife. Some researchers, parents, and family members

discourage couples from entering interfaith marriages; they found that married people with

shared religious beliefs have greater marital satisfaction and personal welfare and are less likely

to get a divorce (Feuer, 2004; Hakak, 2016; McGoldrick et al., 2015; New Film on Interfaith

Marriage, 1959). Depending on these belief systems, partners with polar-opposite faiths will

encounter many difficulties. The marriage will eventually dissolve if both partners are not in

congruence regarding these values. Some couples find a way to make it work; however, many

faith incongruences result in marital failure. Some families even cut ties with a person if they

marry someone outside of their religion. Many couples have claimed that being part of the same

religion or having the same faith has helped them overcome multiple other differences in times

of crisis and life transitions by supporting them and eliminating potential tensions between them

(Romano, 2008). Many couples tend to confront spiritual and religious issues before they get married; they would either reach some agreement or break off the relationship.

Conflict Resolution

Every couple goes through occasional periods of disagreement and dissatisfaction; one must know oneself and the person with whom one has chosen to spend the rest of their life (Gottman & Silver, 1994). "The difference between successful and unsuccessful marriages is how the couples handle their differences" (Gottman & Silver, 1994, p. 66). Dr. Eric Scalise mentioned that destructive confrontation is an in-the-face monologue, and good confrontation is a face-to-face dialogue. Conflicts are discords that threaten the relationship between partners. Constructive and positive conflicts can preserve a relationship, but destructive and harmful conflicts could destroy the relationship; these two types of conflicts could determine the steadiness and the quality of a marriage or relationship (Kaur & Sokhey, 2010). There are many conflict management styles, and couples must learn which one is appropriate for a given situation; otherwise, they risk the dissolution of the relationship. Willie Davis Jr. encourages couples to develop conflict awareness, which is not the denial of a conflict but its knowledge; by doing so, they will ensure that they can quickly resolve the issues whenever the continual conflict disrupts their peace of mind (June et al., 2011).

The mismanagement or the avoidance of conflicts in any relationship can be detrimental. Therefore, couples must identify perpetual and resolvable conflicts. "Resolvable conflicts can be addressed and resolved and will most likely not reoccur in the relationship; meanwhile, a perpetual conflict will resurface from time to time for a couple" (Williams et al., 2014, p. 195). For intercultural couples who are fundamentally different in personalities and values, most of their conflicts will arise from perpetual problems (Gottman, 1994). Furthermore, individuals

often respond to conflicts differently by being proactive or reactive (Bahri Korbi et al., 2019; DeBoer, 1995; Gerstein et al., 2021). People who react proactively to conflicts usually use their knowledge of victories from the past to solve the present problem. In contrast, people who respond reactively to conflict typically do not anticipate it and tend to act based on their emotions, they will show poor decision-making skills, and it will seem as if they have no control over the contention stated Willie Davis Jr. (June et al., 2011).

Couples from the same culture usually know and can comprehend their partner's way of handling conflicts. For intercultural couples, this may not be the case. The partners may not understand or misinterpret their partners' behavior during a conflict (Blume, 2017; McNair, 1996). As a result, they may react inappropriately or negatively until the situation gets out of control (Romano, 2008). Their situation may become so unmanageable that it calls for the dissolution of the marriage. Every time they get into an argument, the issues they do not resolve will resurface from years of intolerance and misunderstanding. Intercultural couples may find that they may never be able to alter or condone each other's way of handling conflicts.

Parenting Practices

Parenting practices are another aspect of intercultural marriages that is important to examine because they may clash because of cultural differences (Frame, 2004). Cultures have different considerations rooted in cultural values and experiences regarding parenting styles (Bustamante et al., 2011; Frame, 2004). Raising children today is more complex than ever before in every culture (Kalapa, 2010). Therefore, it is more urgent for parents to shape their children's character as they are confronted daily with values that differ from those of their parents. Differences in cultural norms and values shape parental cognition and practices (Neoh et al., 2021). Intercultural couples are more likely to face marginalization. Couples who experience

much marginalization are more likely to create their own cultures (Yampolsky et al., 2021). As a

result, they are less likely to integrate their cultural identities into their relationship and are more

likely to want to disconnect from their culture. On the other hand, when intercultural couples

integrate their respective culture into their homes, this is associated with considerable

commitment, investment, and marital satisfaction.

A couple's cultural background dramatically influences how they raise their children

worldwide because parents automatically revert to their childhood to find a model for parenting

(Frame, 2004; Perel, 2000; Romano, 2008). Diverse cultures have different ideas about how

infants, adolescents, and young adults should be handled. There could be discord before the

children are born when religion, language, and names are brought up; parents must consider how

each culture will influence these aspects in the children's lives (Romano, 2008). The parents may

have different ways of showing children affection, which may cause the children not to have one

consistent role model for showing love to other adults or peers. There are different disciplinary

styles which are authoritarian, authoritative, unpredictable, and permissive.

> Authoritative parents are responsive, empathic, and warm; authoritarian parents are firm,
>
> but they have a deficiency of empathy and warmth; permissive parents are loving, but
>
> they do not demand mature behavior from the children; and unpredictable parents create
>
> a dysregulating and an unstable environment for the children (Gurman et al., 2015, p.
>
> 474).

Despite the many differences between cultures and the challenges that parents may face,

parents from various cultures remain the best protection against the risky behaviors their children

are exposed to daily. Although parenting is not an exact science and there are no guarantees of

success, parents who spend the maximum amount of time with their children will be more likely

to influence and prepare them for adult life (Children's Defense Fund, 1995; Sarwar, 2016; Schrader et al., 2005). Intercultural couples need to know that their cultural differences do not have to indicate conflicting values, and their children may benefit from being exposed to both systems (Romano, 2008). Intercultural parents must understand how practices, traditions, and cultural beliefs impact their children's well-being and infer some parenting styles from certain cultures and communities (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2021). When couples from different cultures have children, many issues that may have been previously worked out will resurface and must be confronted, proving how well they have learned to handle and manage their differences over the years (Romano, 2008). The quality of the parenting practices the parents employ with the children and the relationship between the two will significantly influence the formation of attachment associated with their emotional regulation and development (Neoh et al., 2021).

Summary

Intercultural couples' marriages are influenced by cultural, religious, social, and economic variables because global demographics change and evolve, allowing different cultures to be exposed. However, there are some concepts that intercultural couples can adopt to enhance their marital quality, such as communicating openly and honestly, having a good sense of their cultural identity, and finding a way to incorporate their cultures into the marriage or creating a new one that will work for both partners (Mcfadden & Moore, 2001). Cultural practices shape people's characters and everyday emotional exchanges. Individual culture substantially impacts romantic relationship quality; therefore, it is crucial to consider the influence of cultural practices in shaping people's interpersonal relationships, especially in intercultural romantic relationships. People from certain cultures may show detachment, argumentative behavior, and appear distant

from people from other cultures; this would not mean that their partners are more dissatisfied than others (Fonseca et al., 2020).

Intercultural couples demonstrate a higher consciousness and openness regarding other cultures and ethnicities, which makes them prone to engage in opportunities to be honest and unreserved with others. In addition, a higher level of openness and consciousness plays a significant role in their willingness to discuss their relationship since they will be more conscious of their partner's feelings and ideas. They also show an elevated level of acculturation compared to couples from the same culture or ethnic group (Lee et al., 2017). Intercultural couples may feel that their differences will turn them against each other over time. The factors contributing to the success or the dissolution of an intercultural marriage are the couples' commitment to the relationship, ability to communicate with each other, sensitivity to each other's needs and culture, conflict resolution skills, parenting practices, sexuality, personalities, and religion and spirituality.

Many quantitative studies are based on public records examining intercultural couples' challenges and investigating how they encounter stress during their relationships (Neoh et al., 2021). Many books and articles have addressed the complexity of an intercultural marriage and the unique issues of religiosity and parenting practices resulting from an intercultural relationship (Romano, 2008). This study addressed a gap in the literature by studying how couples' attachment to their respective cultures can contribute to the success or dissolution of their marriages. In addition, this study attempted to illuminate how intercultural couples' many challenges contribute to relationship quality. As countries become more culturally diverse, it is essential to study how the couples' differences may affect the relationships' outcomes. Many factors, such as gender, ethnicity, environment, and religion, contribute to marital satisfaction.

These factors must be considered and assessed to overcome the many generalizations regarding

intercultural marriages (Fonseca et al., 2021). Acculturation, societal pressures, and gender role

expectations are some of the main problems that intercultural couples experience among the

many issues that come with deciding to spend the rest of one's life with another person.

Therefore, the pair should understand the differences between the cultures, including the

differences in values, expectations, interpretations, and behaviors (Kim et al., 2012). More

information is needed to understand intercultural couples' experiences and impacts on the

direction or strengths of the relationships in order to help counselors develop counseling

strategies (Paradis & Maffini, 2021).

    In certain cultures, members are expected to marry someone from the same culture with

shared values and norms; conversely, marriage within or outside the culture does not matter in

other cultures. Therefore, couples are encouraged to develop a solid foundation by learning

practical communication skills before committing to one another to ensure a longer-lasting

marriage (Ramisch et al., 2014). Marital satisfaction will, in turn, positively impact the

relationship between the parents and the children (Kouros et al., 2014). In addition, the family of

origin plays a significant role in their upbringing, impacting the quality of the relationship.

Therefore, having a balanced relationship with the in-laws may ensure outstanding marital

quality (Cheraghi et al., 2019).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Many intercultural couples face the dilemma of building a third culture instead of staying

connected to their native cultures. Still, there is scant research into intercultural couples'

experiences when partners maintain some degree of involvement with their respective cultures.

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the influence of couples' attachment to their

cultural identity on the success or dissolution of their marriages. In this chapter, the study's

design and research questions are presented, the factors leading to the participant selection are

discussed, and the researcher's role is explained. In addition, the research procedures, data

collection, data analysis methods, and trustworthiness of the study are explored. This chapter

concludes with the ethical considerations of this study.

Design

Transcendental phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl and focused on

seeking to understand human experiences by analyzing different interpretations to uncover the

essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative research study used transcendental

phenomenology as a research design to examine the influence of couples' devotion to their

culture and the success or dissolution of their marriages. This research design was appropriate

for this study because it focused on the conscious experiences in the participants' daily lives.

Worldwide, intercultural couples face the dilemma of building a third culture instead of staying

connected to their native cultures. There is limited research into intercultural couples'

experiences when partners maintain some degree of involvement with their respective cultures,

such as values, customs, and traditions, in the relationship. Therefore, this researcher determined

that this study could logically be conducted qualitatively since current research failed or

neglected to investigate the experiences of intercultural couples. Additionally, Moustakas mentioned that the transcendental phenomenological approach is excellent for studying a small group of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A transcendental phenomenological approach was advantageous for this study because it inquired about the lived experiences of 10-15 individuals who have been in an intercultural marriage and the influence of their attachment to their respective cultures on the success or dissolution of their marriages. This research used a series of questions to understand the influence of cultural attachment and the marital success or dissolution of intercultural couples. First, on the days leading up to the interviews, the researcher established rapport with the participants by providing her credentials and promising not to release their personal information to anyone. Next, the participants were asked to provide their email addresses to correspond with the researcher and the other people involved. Finally, the researcher sent the potential participants the demographic screening survey (see Appendix A).

The demographic screening questions allowed the researcher to extricate those not meeting the participation criteria and were used as selection criteria. Consequently, a person who does not meet the requirements was excluded from participating. Subsequently, the researcher scheduled the semi-structured interview with the participants. After the semi-structured interviews, the focus group interviews were scheduled based on the emerging themes identified during the individual interviews. Constant communication between the researcher and the participants was established to answer any questions or concerns the participants had regarding the questions asked during the interviews.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do intercultural couples' lived experiences impact their marriages?

SQ1: What benefits do intercultural couples face in maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

SQ2: What challenges do intercultural couples face maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

Setting

After filling out the consent form (see Appendix B) to participate in the study, every participant was asked to complete a demographic screening survey (see Appendix A) online via Google Forms with 10 questions in English which should take about five minutes to complete. Next, the researcher scheduled individual interviews virtually via Zoom with the participants. The individual interviews were structured with 23 questions, taking about 30-45 minutes. The semi-structured individual interview questions (see Appendix C) focused on the participants' lived experiences within the relationship and what they identified as being the benefits and challenges of maintaining involvement with their respective cultures. After the individual interviews, the researcher scheduled focus group meetings with participants with similar experiences.

Participants

After getting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher began recruiting participants via purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves choosing the participants and the site for data collection based on understanding the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual messages were sent to known intercultural couples on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. A recruitment post (see Appendix D) was utilized to ask for participation on several social media sites to

discover potential participants. The social media sites that were selected for the recruitment

efforts included the following:

- Together 4 Ever (Public Facebook group),

- Liberty University Doctoral Cohort (Private Facebook group),

- Liberty University Community Care and Counseling EdD Cohort (Private Facebook

  group),

- Intercultural Marriage/Relationship Counseling (Private Facebook group), and

- Marriage and Relationship Counseling (Public Facebook group).

After the researcher reviewed the potential participants' demographic responses to ensure

that they met the study's criteria, 15 participants who had been in an intercultural marriage were

selected for this study. Demographic data, such as length of the marriage, age, socioeconomic,

and education level, were recorded through a demographic screening survey created by the

researcher. This method was used because it allowed the researcher to classify the participants

into subgroups based on where they are located and other classifications, as previously stated.

The purposeful sampling methodology increases the accuracy of observation and lowers the

possibility of sampling bias (McNemar, 1940). All responses to the demographic screening

survey were kept confidential.

Once the potential participants were identified, they were contacted via social media to

provide their email addresses. Once an email address was provided, the researcher sent out the

consent form (see Appendix B). As soon as communication was established, the researcher

described the nature of the research. From the researcher's previously completed couples

interviews, they noted that either one partner answers most of the questions or the quiet partner

would try to answer some questions and look for approval from the other partner. Some people

would even change their answers upon the request of their partner. To prevent that from happening in this study, the researcher asked married couples to participate in the interview process individually so that their answers could be as honest as possible. Specific details of the study were discussed with the participants to ensure their understanding of the expectations for the study, such as their willingness to freely express their thoughts about their lived experiences based on their attachment to their respective culture and its influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages.

The Role of the Researcher

Researchers should reflect on the research topic's meaning and significance and consider critical reflexivity and bias in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Via bracketing, the researcher could set aside their assumptions and experiences to understand the lived experiences of the study's participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). For this study, the researcher determined that there would be no involvement or close relationship with any participants. The researcher's role includes following the appropriate procedures to ensure the reliability of the transcendental phenomenological study. The process involved obtaining the IRB approval from Liberty University; contacting various social media groups and individual participants on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat platforms; posting on the social media pages, including the link to the demographic screening survey; sending out consent forms to the chosen participants; scheduling and conducting semi-structured interviews; collecting and analyzing the data; and writing the textural, structural, and composite reports to present the nature of the phenomenon based on the collected data. The phenomenon of interest for this study concerned the influence of intercultural couples' devotion to the values, customs, and traditions they grew up in and their relationship quality.

The researcher and her husband are from Haiti and immigrated to the United States of America in their teen years. Sometimes, there is still an unconscious battle between them in their home regarding maintaining allegiance to their culture or adapting to the host country, the United States of America. Therefore, the researcher purposed to utilize this study to get insight into intercultural marriages and the consequences when couples decide to maintain involvement in their respective cultures in the home. For example, one time, the researcher and her husband were in the car going to work and doing the Seventh Day Adventist daily lesson. While her husband was driving, the researcher read the lesson in English, found the Bible verses in French, and answered the questions in English and Haitian Creole. One day, the researcher thought things would have been significantly different if she were with someone from a different cultural background who was not multi-lingual like the researcher. Even though the researcher is not in an intercultural marriage, she wondered how it would be in a relationship with someone from another culture because the researcher's culture is a big part of her everyday life, including food, music preferences, and holiday celebrations, such as Haitian flag day, Haitian Independence Day, and Haitian Mother's and Father's Day. The researcher pondered whether her strong cultural connection would have influenced the success or dissolution of my relationship.

Procedures

The first step in this research project was to obtain all necessary approvals before conducting the study. The IRB approval (see Appendix E) was secured. Then, the researcher sent out a request letter (see Appendix F) to some potential participants and got permission from Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp by sending them a request letter (see Appendix G). The researcher also posted it on some social media pages, such as Snapchat and WhatsApp (see Appendix D). The researcher included the link to the demographic screening survey as the

preliminary step on the social media platforms and sent it to the individuals contacted as potential participants. The researcher could eliminate those who did not meet the study's requirements from the answers to the demographic screening questions. The participants were informed that they could change their minds about participation at any point during the study.

The researcher requested email addresses from those who met the requirements of being married for at least three years, having been in intercultural marriages, and being at least 21 years of age. The researcher also interviewed three participants who had been married for less than three years for comparison data. The researcher sent out the consent form (see Appendix B) to the potential participants in the study. The researcher then scheduled the semi-structured interviews via Zoom with the participants qualified to participate in the study. The participants were instructed to attend the meeting individually to not allow anyone to dictate or influence their responses to the questions, allowing them to be as honest as possible and express their experiences from their perspectives. Married partners were also scheduled for individual interviews without their partners; however, two couples decided to participate with their partners. The researchers stayed in constant communication with the participants throughout the study to answer any questions or concerns regarding the questions they had answered. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher did not engage in conversations with the participants to help avoid aside any personal experiences and biases. Researchers should obtain objectivity and only allow their voices to be heard during the interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher identified the participants who shared similar experiences during the semi-structured interviews and invited them to the scheduled focus group interview. The focus group interview was conducted virtually via Zoom. The researcher kept a reflective journal during the individual and focus group interviews. Reflective journals are said to be a great source

of data collection that add trustworthiness and credibility to qualitative research while providing

a solid record of the meanings that originate from the data (Creswell, 2013). With the

participants' permission indicated on the consent forms, the individual and focus group

interviews were recorded using Zoom and an iPad for back up. Creswell and Poth (2018) advised

researchers to store and protect the data and the recordings with passwords on a computer. Then,

the recordings were saved on a computer and transcribed using the Sonix application. Sonix is

used for transcribing videos and voice memos into text. The transcribed data were transmitted to

a Word document, printed, and stored along with the reflective journals in a locked cabinet. The

data were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) suggestion. Combining the different methods

employed during the study helped develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon and

discover themes and patterns in the participants' descriptions and experiences (Creswell & Poth,

2018, Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

The data triangulation technique involves three data collection methods that add

trustworthiness to a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018: Moustakas, 1994: Patton, 2015). Data

collection occurred using a demographic screening questionnaire, semi-structured interviews,

and a focus group. Before collecting the data, the researcher got permission from IRB to conduct

the study. Then, the researcher sent out and collected the signed consent forms from all

participants who met the criteria to participate in the study. All the participants were fully

informed volunteers who were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The

researcher shared the purpose of the study and intended use of the data collected with each

participant in writing to obtain consent for the study.

The instrumentation included a demographic screening survey comprised of 10 questions, which took approximately five minutes to complete. The demographic screening survey should be sent out before scheduling the semi-structured interviews (Teclaw et al., 2012). The demographic screening survey that the participants filled out was on Google Docs. It contained ten questions that elicited information on the participants, including their age, marital status, length of current or last intercultural marriage, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and education level. The answers to the demographic screening survey were recorded in the participants' information table (Appendix H) and allowed the researcher to select the appropriate participants for the study. The participants were selected based on their age and number of years in an intercultural marriage, with a minimum of at least two years. In addition, the researcher asked about the person's gender to understand the different partners' points of view on the relationship. Finally, the questions about the participants' socio-economic background and education level allowed the researcher to determine if these factors influenced their lived experience and attachment to their respective cultures.

Demographic Screening Questions

Please answer each of the questions with one of the responses provided

1. What is your gender?

    Female   Male   I do not want to disclose that

2. What is your ethnicity?

    White/Caucasian/European American

    African/African American

    Spanish/Latino

    Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American

Middle Eastern

Multiracial

3. Which range below includes your age?

18-20   21-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60 or older

5. What is your socioeconomic background?

Upper-class,   Middle-class   Lower-class

6. What is your education level?

Less than a high school diplomat

High school diploma or equivalent

Technical or occupational certificate

Associate degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate

Professional

7. What is your marital status?

Married   Separated   Divorced

8. Are you currently married, and have you been married to someone from a different culture?

Yes   No

9. How long have you been married or were you married?

Less than three years   3-5 years   5-10 years   More than 10 years

10. If you are qualified, will you share your email address?

Yes   No

Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual interviews were the second type of data collected in phenomenology studies (Creswell, 2013). u and Dumay (2011) mentioned how the interview is the most crucial method of collecting data for a study. Interviews involve an interactive and informal process utilizing open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994). The semi-structured interviews allowed each participant to express themselves openly and discuss their experiences as a person who is or has been in an intercultural relationship. Schwandt (2015). Noted that during the interview, the researcher must view the participants as the source of factual answers to experiential questions. The goal of this qualitative study was for the researcher to collect data from the participants to understand their lived experiences of being in an intercultural marriage and discover the benefits and challenges of maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage from the participants' perspective. Therefore, this study uses specially designed semi-structured interviews to collect data.

When working to examine culture, it is essential to consider the importance placed on different concepts. For example, some expressions would be equivalent (Wagner et al., 2014). The interviews consisted of 23 questions that elicited information on the participants' marital quality and connection with their perspectives and partners' cultures. The questions were open-ended and solicited as many details as possible. In addition, the ambiguous questions were revised to ensure clarity.

Moustakas (1994) stated that the researcher is responsible for a climate where the participants feel comfortable, prompting them to respond honestly and comprehensively. Before each interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, the participants' right to

withdraw from the study at any time, and how their confidentiality would be protected.

Participants were allowed ample time to ask questions and voice their concerns before starting

the interview. Each interview was scheduled for approximately 45-60 minutes, and the questions

remained the same for each participant. The allocated timeframe gave the researcher enough time

to ask the questions and the participants time to answer thoroughly. The interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed after each interview with the Sonix application. The following is the

formal list of in-depth questions used in the semi-structured interviews:

Opening Questions

1. How would you describe yourself if we were meeting for the first time?

2. How did you meet your current or ex-partner?

3. When did the relationship turn romantic?

4. Was there a language barrier or communication difficulty?

5. Are there any children involved?

Questions Related to Their Lived Experience with Their Partner or Ex-Partner

6. Was there a problem with acculturation on anyone's part?

   A. If so, describe the problem in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

7. Did you have to overcome or get used to any gender role expectations?

   A. If so, what were they? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

8. What things did you wish you knew before marrying someone from a different culture?
   Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

9. Did you receive any support or opposition from each other's families?

   A. In what form? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

10. Try to remember the last time you were in a disagreement with each other. How did you resolve the issue?

    A. Does each of you have a different style of conflict resolution?

    B. What are they?

Questions Related to Their Connection to Their Respective Culture

11. How attached are you to your own culture?

    A. Do you incorporate many of the traditions and customs from your culture in the relationship?

    B. What are they? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

12. How has your culture impacted your relationship quality? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

13. What is your culture's view on intercultural relationships?

14. Would it be a deal-breaker if your partner asked you to completely stray from your culture and only show allegiance to their own?

15. What are the benefits of incorporating your culture into the relationship?

16. What are the challenges of incorporating your culture into the relationship?

17. Finally, is there anything you would like to add about your experience of being in an intercultural marriage?

Questions Related to Their Connection to Their Partner's Culture

18. Would you forgo everything about your culture and adopt your partner's culture if it means having marital stability and satisfaction?

19. Did you have to compromise your belief system and anything you were accustomed to in your culture?

       a. If so, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

20. Are there any parts of your culture you had to neglect or stay away from for your relationship?

       A. If so, what are they?

       B. How has that affected your well-being? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

21. What aspects of your partner's culture are deal-breakers if they were to be enforced fully by them? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

22. What are the benefits of incorporating your partner's or ex-partner's culture into the relationship?

23. What would you describe as the challenges of incorporating your partner's or ex-partner's culture into the relationship?

Semi-structured interview questions should be generated using the research questions and literature to ensure validity (Castillo-Montoya, 2017). The semi-structured interview questions for this study were divided into four categories. The first category was the opening questions, consisting of questions one through five. The second category was intended to be questions related to the participants' lived experiences with their current or ex-partners, and it consists of questions six through 10. The third category was intended to be questions related to the participants' connections with their respective cultures, and it consists of questions 11 through 17. The fourth category is intended to be questions related to the participants' connection with their partners' culture, and it consists of questions 18 through 23.

Question one served as an opportunity to build rapport with the participant. Establishing rapport with participants is critical to ensuring trust between both parties (Uhernik, 2017).

Questions two through five were used to understand the beginning of the relationship and if any children are involved in the marriage. Having a child in the marriage can give the participant a unique perspective on parenthood in an intercultural marriage (Cools, 2006; Johnston-Ataata, 2019). Questions six through 10 focused on the participants' experiences with their partners. These questions asked about problems with acculturation, gender roles, style of conflict resolution, and support from each other's families (Allison & Emmers-Sommer, 2011).

Questions 11-17 asked the participants about their attachment to their respective cultures, cultural impact on the relationship, and the benefits and challenges of incorporating their culture into their relationship (Paradis & Maffini, 2021). Finally, questions 18-23 were designed to capture information about the connection to their partners' culture, the things they had to forgo and compromise on in the relationship, and the benefits and challenges of incorporating their partners' culture (Hughes-Wiener & Wiener, 1986). Researchers are encourage to develop questions to evoke a comprehensive account of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, this researcher gathered information from participants in intercultural marriages and their connection to their respective cultures.

Focus Group

Focus groups were the third type of data collected. A focus group is a qualitative research method where a trained moderator conducts a collective interview with participants from similar backgrounds (Creswell, 2013). The researcher acted as a facilitator of the focus groups. Krueger & Casey (2014) recommended using participants who were part of the interview process in the focus groups to help improve the credibility of the research. As a facilitator, the researcher asked questions based on the emerging themes identified during the semi-structured interviews, especially participants with children, interracial couples, and participants who were cut off

entirely from their family of origin due to being in an intercultural relationship. Creswell (2013)

mentioned that focus groups should have about six to 10 people with similar experiences willing

to share their perspectives. The focus group allowed the researcher to gather data from the

participants while discussing the topic in a collaborative setting. The researcher used a question

guide to facilitate the discussion (see Appendix I). Krueger and Casey stated that the critical

questions during the focus groups guide the project. The researcher monitored the focus group

discussion to ensure that each participant could voice their opinions and that no one dominated

the conversation (Creswell, 2013).

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups were audio recorded using Zoom and

transcribed using the Sonix application. The participants were allowed to verify that the data was

transcribed correctly (Creswell & Poth, .2018). The participants were given additional

opportunities to add or refine their accounts by suggesting follow-up meetings. The researcher

was the participant's contact point and could be reached via email to update the dates and times

of the meetings.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the semi-structured interviews and the focus group data. The

researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and allowed the participants to fact-check the

transcriptions for accuracy. Creswell (2013) referenced three strategies for analyzing data in

qualitative research: "preparing and organizing the data, reducing the data into themes, and

representing the data in figures, tables, or discussions" (p. 148). For this phenomenological

study, the researcher described her experience of the phenomenon to allow the focus to be

directed to the participants and not the researcher's personal experience. Setting aside one's

biases is called epoche (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From the transcribed interviews and notes, the

researcher found significant statements with an equal value, which Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) called horizontalizing. Horizontalizing entails listing all relevant expressions. The significant statements must be grouped into a larger unit of information by separating the repetitive and intersecting statements, and these clusters are called themes or categories.

Qualitative researchers are called to identify these themes for a holistic data view (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The procedures for data analysis included recording all statements, reviewing the statements for accuracy, eliminating repeated information, and following the steps for phenomenological reductions. Horizontalizing was also about removing the overlapping information irrelevant to the phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological reductions comprise clustering the data into themes and then organizing the themes into a clear textural and structural description. The researcher was also called to compare multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituent. For example, the themes from the participants' experiences collected during the semi-structured interviews were compared to the focus group interview. This comparison guaranteed an accurate and precise representation across all data sources.

Textural Description

Creswell (2013) mentioned how the researcher must transcribe verbatim the interviews and write a description of what the participants experienced; in phenomenological research, this is called textural description. The textural description helps the researcher create a full written report of the participants' experiences. First, the researcher transcribed the participants' accounts of their experiences in an intercultural marriage before coding the data to acquire a detailed textural description. Then, as Moustakas (1994) advised, the researcher used member-checking to assess the process and the validity of the instruments and research questions.

Structural Description

A study's textural and structural descriptions provide the experience's meaning and essence. After writing a description of the participants' experiences, the textural description, it is essential to write how the experience happened, which is called the structural description. Moustakas (1994) stated that the structural description issues a vivid account of the participants' underlying dynamic experience. The researcher provided a structural description of the customs and values that are part of each culture and the participants' attitudes regarding their relationships and their respective cultures.

Composite Description

The last step will be to compile all data into a single transmission by writing a composite description of the participants' lived experiences of devotion to their culture and its influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages. This step represents the nature of the participants' experiences and the peak of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013). When writing the composite description, the text was a narrative of what happened and how it happened. Researchers provide a complete picture of what they found to be the phenomenon's essence using the composite description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a phenomenological study, the description of the lived experience needs to be explanatory and not interpretive (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research must pass the trustworthiness criteria, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). Qualitative researchers do not strive for the concept of reliability and validity; instead, their goal is trustworthiness so that whenever the readers interpret the data, they can have

confidence in what has been reported (Miller et al., 2015; Stahl & King, 2020). Investigator's bias is addressed adequately and culturally with corresponding assessments and measurement strategies (Wagner et al., 2014). Many terms may not have the same meaning in different cultures. For example, marital success and failure may have different definitions depending on one's culture or language.

Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative research study refers to confidence in the truth (Connelly, 2016). Peer debriefing can be used to ensure the study's credibility and provide the researcher with noninvolved reactions to the initial research procedures (Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher used member checking by involving the participants in the study to verify the accuracy of the interpretation of the data. The researcher also kept a reflective journal throughout the research process. Achieving triangulation with various data collection methods was one way for the researcher to establish credibility (Connelly, 2016). For example, the demographic screening questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus group, and reflective journal allowed the researcher to gather detailed information about the participants' lived experiences of their attachment to their respective cultures and its influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages. Bracketing can help amplify the study's credibility by addressing and eliminating existing biases and assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). An expert in qualitative research methodology reviewed the credibility of developing the research questions. The participants also should be able to review, clarify, and respond to gather their perspectives regarding the credibility of the findings and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability and Confirmability

A qualitative research study's dependability refers to the data's stability or trust over time (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability of a qualitative research study refers to the researcher's ability to get as close to the objective reality as possible; it is how the findings can be consistent and repeated (Connelly, 2016, Stahl & King, 2020). The researcher ensured the dependability and confirmability of the study through peer debriefing. Using a peer-level member to read and react to field notes conveys a sense of self-credibility (Stahl & King, 2020). Member checks and substantial descriptions aid confirmability since they ensure clarity. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested keeping an audit trail as a record of the research path used in the study. The audit trail (see Appendix I) helped to secure the inter-subjectivity of the data in the study by confirming that the data were based on the participants' points of view and not the researcher's perspective, which ensured that the findings were not figments of the researcher's imagination. Triangulation and bracketing also promoted the confirmability of the study. Bracketing and triangulation reduce the investigator's bias and allow the findings to be focused solely on the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability is like the concept of generalizability in quantitative research. The transferability of the study refers to how practical the investigation is in other settings (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Other researchers must be able to adapt the methods described in this study's design and relate them to another context. To help with transferability, the researcher thoroughly described the study's context and participants (Connelly, 2016). The researcher's writing was clear enough for future researchers to use it as the foundation for future studies they may want to conduct. The researcher also addressed transferability through member-

checking, where the participants confirm the themes from the data analysis and the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A detailed description of the study was provided with the participants' behavior, experiences, and context so that the findings were meaningful to anyone who read the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations should be addressed before and throughout the study to minimize harm to the participants (Hennessy et al., 2022). The first step was to seek IRB approval before conducting the research. The second step was to inform the participants about the study's purpose, nature, and requirements; they were also assured that their participation was voluntary. Giving the participants sufficient information regarding the study is essential for them to make well-informed decisions on participation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The third step was to discuss anonymity with the participants, which was addressed using pseudonyms to prevent the identification of the participants. The participants' confidentiality was respected throughout the study. The fourth step was to send the consent form to the participants to be filled out. The fifth step was to provide a copy of the report to the participants. All information was accumulated, stored, and locked on a password-protected laptop to safeguard the participants' safety, privacy, and security (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, a hard copy of the data and notes collected was safeguarded, controlled, and stored in a sealed container. All identifying information associated with this study will be shredded and destroyed after three years, as required by the IRB.

Summary

This study used a transcendental phenomenological design to explore the influence of couples' attachment to their culture on the success or dissolution of their marriages. The data was

collected via a demographic screening survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interview. Trustworthiness was addressed, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. This chapter provided the research questions that guided the study and the details of the study's design, the participants, the selection criteria and process, and the questions asked. The role of the researcher and the manner of handling implicit assumptions and biases were discussed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of intercultural couples' devotion to their respective cultures and how it influences the success or dissolution of their marriages. This chapter provides an extensive inquiry into the findings obtained from the 15 participants about their lived experiences of being in intercultural marriages. Three participants were added to understand the first two years in an intercultural marriage. Each participant completed a demographic survey and an interview. Four of the participants also participated in a focus group discussion. This chapter includes a description of each participant and a discussion of the data from their perspectives. The research questions were answered based on codes and themes identified from the data analysis, and the results were discussed.

Participants

A total of 14 participants were chosen for this study via purposeful sampling from various social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, and interviewed with the intention that they would be able to provide enough details of their experiences to allow for a description of the phenomena. In addition, four of the participants joined in a focus group interview. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Yene

Yene is a 46-year-old female from a middle-class background. She has been married for 20 years and lives in Nigeria. She has two children with her current husband. She has a doctoral degree and is a curriculum studies lecturer. The couple met while attending a wedding. Her husband's friend was getting married to her friend, and they met during the ceremony. Her husband was in the military and stationed in her state. They were friends for a short period before

the relationship turned romantic, and they were married within one year. There was no language barrier between them as they both spoke English.

Yene described her experience of being in an intercultural marriage as being challenging and beautiful. She stated that she likes that her children get to speak different languages and that she gets to learn a different language. In addition, she mentioned how she interacts with a group of people who are entirely different from what she was accustomed to. So, it makes her life beautiful and colorful somehow.

Samie

Samie is a Haitian American female from a middle-class background who has been married for almost nine years, but the couple has been together for ten years. She is 39 years old, served as an active-duty soldier living in the United States, and has a master's degree. Samie and her husband met during military training at the school they both attended. The relationship turned romantic within one month. There were no language barriers as they both spoke English even though she was born in a different country. They have one child together.

Samie described her experience of being in an intercultural marriage as being able to accept someone and their family as one would like them to do for oneself. Knowing whom someone's partner is and accepting what they give them will make a big difference. Because when people look and stare and when conflict occurs, they can have a strong foundation on which to rely. Because no one will have to compromise anything; therefore, there will be no resentment.

Esia

Esia is an African American female, approximately 40 to 49 years old, from a middle-class background, and has been married for three to five years. She is in the United States

military and has a bachelor's degree. Esia and her husband met in the military while they were on assignment. They were assigned a humanitarian mission to Palau, called a civic action team, for six months together. They started as friends, and the relationship quickly turned romantic; they married shortly after returning to the United States. They have no children together. Esia completed two marathons, and she loves God.

Esia described her experience of being in an intercultural marriage as much easier than it would have been 20 or 40 years ago. As she reminisced about growing up, she stated, "it was more private. It was not as public and pronounced.

Sesion

Sesion is a Caucasian male, approximately 40-49 years old, from a middle-class background, who has been married for three to five years. He is in the United States military and has a bachelor's degree. Sesion and his wife met in the military while they were on assignment. They were assigned a humanitarian mission to Palau, called a civic action team, for six months together. They started as friends, and the relationship quickly turned romantic, and they got married shortly after returning to the United States. They have no children together. Sesion is studying to be a botanist. He likes gardening and growing things as a hobby and would like to do this for a living in the future.

Sesion mentioned his first marriage to an African American woman about ten years ago. They used to notice many people staring at them and giving them the side eye. However, now, it is never an issue in this new marriage. They overlook that and feel they have been wholly accepted in their community.

Tona

Tona is a Haitian American, approximately 21-30 years old, born in Florida from a middle-class background. She loves the Lord. She has a bachelor's degree and recently became a nurse. She and her husband have a child and have been married for five to ten years. They met when they would ride the same train in the morning. After running into each other a few times, they started talking and became friends. He asked her to be his girlfriend a year and a half after meeting each other. There was no language barrier between the couple; however, there was a language barrier between other individuals within the two families.

Tona described her experience in an intercultural marriage as different because she gets to see the world from a different perspective. In addition, it allows her to work on things she did not know were an issue because that is all she used to know.

Ramon

Ramon is a Caucasian male from the United States; he is approximately 50-59 years old and from a middle-class background. His educational level is a high school diploma. He has been married for more than ten years. He is a pastor of a small church. The couple recently moved to another state. They met at their workplace after his previous marriage had been dissolved and her marriage was in shambles. They were friends for about one year, and then the relationship turned romantic. They each have children from their previous marriages but no children together.

Ramon described his experience in an intercultural marriage as being more aware of a different culture. He stated that starting as friends made things easier for them. He also said that he does not notice the differences, only the similarities. They had more commonalities than cultural differences. He believed that because his wife is light-skin, that played a big part in his

family and friends accepting her without any pushback. He stated, "I guess I have adapted to her culture more in a sense, and I get defensive of that. I always want to defend my wife's race".

Nola

Nola is a Caucasian woman, approximately 50-59 years old, from a middle-class background. Her education level is a doctorate. She is a native of Germany. She is a teacher and has been teaching math and German for over 20 years. She went to Liberty University to get her doctorate in curriculum and instruction. She hopes to be teaching at a community college or a four-year college. She and her husband have been married for more than ten years. They met at a club, began talking, and then the romance started. There was a slight language barrier between them as she is from Germany, and even though everyone in Germany must learn English, they learn British English. Her husband is an African American who speaks American English, so she had to have him slow down when he spoke fast. They have two children together.

Regarding her experience in an intercultural marriage, she mentioned that their successes are because they love and respect each other. Nola stated:

> It gets hard when you have family that does not accept you or when you experience racism going places. It probably broke some relationships because they were not strong enough. Some people may have said, "I do not know if I can do this for the rest of my life." Nevertheless, I love my husband so much, and I love my family. I would do anything for my family. I will keep letting the haters hate and continue to educate students to broaden their horizons so that they are not so stuck in their outdated views and become more accepting of other cultures and people.

Lory

Lory is a Caucasian male from the United States of America; he is approximately 30-39 years old and from a lower-class background. His educational level is a bachelor's degree. He is a veteran who joined the army right after high school. He and his wife have been married for five to ten years. They met at a leadership school, the second stage of leadership training in the military. After showing persistence, they started dating four weeks into the course. Then, they got married. They have a four-year-old together. There was no language barrier between them; however, there was some between the extended families.

Lory described his experience in an intercultural marriage as beautiful and that the years flew by fast. He mentioned how every couple has issues, and the first year is always excellent because they are in their honeymoon phase. However, the second and third years are the hardest because most relationships are past the honeymoon phase, and couples must learn to live with their partners. He stated, "I do not see any issues that would come up just because I am White, and she is Black, besides outside forces."

Mari

Mari is a Caucasian female from the United States of America; she is approximately 40-49 years old and from a middle-class background. Her educational level is a technical certificate. She is a painter, and she likes to play games. She and her husband have been married for over three years. They met while playing a board game online; he was still living in Scotland, and she was in the United States. After six months of talking online, Mari invited him to visit the United States, and they met in person for the first time. After two more visits, the relationship turned romantic, and they married shortly after that. There was a language barrier between the two because many words in the United Kingdom's English have different meanings in the United

States. Mari must talk slower for her husband to understand what she is saying. Their family members usually use each other to translate when the other is speaking. Her husband has a child from a previous relationship, but together they have no children.

Mari described her experience of being in an intercultural marriage as a learning experience. She mentioned that it is challenging, mainly because they have only been living together for a little over one year, and the first two years of their marriage were spent living apart because they were in the United States and the United Kingdom. She mentioned how they are very open with each other. Their differences may make things seem to be too much at times. However, then, they get over it, and they are fine. When they were communicating and making plans at the beginning of the relationship and the marriage, she did not think it would be this difficult, even though they had planned out every scenario.

Cody

Cody is a Scottish from Scotland; he is between the age of 40-49 and from a middle-class background. He has been married for three years and he has been living in the US for one year. His educational level is a technical college degree. Him and his wife met while playing an online game with other participants.

Cody described his experience of being in an intercultural marriage as being a learning experience. He mentioned how he is learning something new every day. Especially because he had to leave his native country to come live in the US with his wife

Rika

Rika is an African American from the United States; she is 56 years old and from a middle-class background. She is divorced and met her ex-husband while she was a waitress for a party service, where she would work different private jobs. Her ex-husband was in the band that

played there. The relationship turned romantic just a few days after meeting. They have been married for ten years. Even though there was not a language barrier between the couple, there was one between his family and friends and hers. They have two children together.

Rika's description of her experience of being in an intercultural marriage is as follows:

The cultural expectation of me doing everything and him only doing this much. That pushed it clean over the edge because if I raise the kids by myself, why are you here? I knew he had a problem before we married, but I always hoped he would change because I was very young. I used to say that he would change when we had a baby. He will change when we have the second baby, stupid. I must take responsibility for ignoring things. I had to come to a point where I had to accept responsibility for ignoring that and continuing.

Losu

Losu is a Haitian American, approximately 21-30 years old, and from a lower-class background. His educational level is a technical/occupational certificate. He is outgoing. He and his wife met in high school, and the relationship was strictly friends while they were in school. The relationship turned romantic three years after they graduated high school. They have been married for two years and have a child together. There was no language barrier between the couple except between their extended families.

Losu described his experience in an intercultural marriage as very difficult. He mentioned how he always thought he wanted to be with someone from a different culture and background: someone who is not from the same place. He stated:

However, when the dust settles, because they are so different from you, nothing resonates with you. Do you get what I am saying? At the end of the day, when you come home to somebody and want to be with somebody, you always want that piece of home.

Moreover, the only way to get that is to get something initially from your home, like

something from your mom or your sisters and how you grew up. She would have to be

that, or she would have to have that. So, the biggest thing I would have to say about that

is that unless you do not have that connection to your culture and are open to certain

things, it will be fine. However, indulging in an interracial and intercultural relationship

can be challenging if that connection is solid if you are not ready for it.

Rein

Rein is a Caucasian female from Germany, approximately 30-39 years old, and from a

middle-class background. Her educational level is a technical/occupational certificate. She and

her husband met while he was stationed in Germany. They started as friends and then slowly

progressed into a romantic relationship and got married. They have been married for less than

three years. They both have children from previous relationships but no children together. Even

though Rein speaks English well, she still asks her husband to slow down when he is speaking

too fast. There are some words that she still does not understand.

Rein's description of her experience of being in an intercultural marriage is as follows:

The interests are different from a German guy to an American guy. I even said that I am

not getting married to an American ever again because I had terrible taste; I had a bad

experience. However, I also had a good experience at the same time because I learned

from mistakes or, you know, from that marriage and know how to operate, dissolve, or,

you know. So, it was the best decision I have made, you know, to divorce the German

one to get married to an American one.

Roro

Roro is an African American from the United States, approximately 30-39 years old, with a middle-class background. He and his wife started as friends, then slowly progressed into a romantic relationship resulting in marriage. They have been married for less than three years. They both have children from previous relationships but no children together.

Roro's description of his experience of being in an intercultural marriage is as follows: I was married twice before. Both are American women. I have dated many American women, and I have found that the culture coming from somewhere like Europe versus the culture in America is vastly different. Furthermore, I think getting married to a German woman or a European woman was probably the smartest thing I could have done if I was ever going to get married again just because the values and the culture line more closely with my values and culture. A lot of American women tend to feel entitled or that they compete with men. Moreover, I would never say I compete with a woman or a woman in competition with me. I can do things that she literally cannot do, and she can do things that I literally cannot do. Moreover, I would rather be with somebody who understands that. Furthermore, we complement each other versus butting heads, trying to fight with each other to accomplish one goal.

Results

The data of this study provided a comprehensive list of codes used to categorize comments and responses that were then formulated into themes representing the participants' ideas and experiences. The following section contains a detailed description of the participants' experiences; their words have often been used to define and describe the phenomena being studied. This section also discussed how the themes addressed the research questions.

Theme Development

Table 1

Theme Development

Themes	Codes
Lived Experience with Partner	Acculturation (1)
	Gender Role Expectations (6)
	Family Support (7)
	Family Opposition (12)
	Conflict Resolution (14)
	Communication (10)
	Marital Success (4)
	Creation of Own Culture (9)
Connection to Respective Culture	Orchestrated by God (6)
	Prayer (8)
	Child Rearing (7)
	Good Communication (10)
	Military Dynamic (13)
	Open-Minded (8)
Connection to Partner's Culture	Attachment to Own Culture (9)
	Impact of Attachment (3)
	Benefits (6)
	Challenges (2)
	Cultures' View of Intercultural Marriage (7)
	Adaptation (3)
	Diversity (7)
	Special Treatment (2)
	Marital Stability (1)
	Compromise (1)
	Deal-Breakers (11)
	Strong Bond (4)
	Open-Minded (3)
	Learning Experience (6)
	Patience (3)
	Understanding (7)
	Disagreement (10)

*The numbers in parentheses are the frequency of occurrences of each code in the data analysis from the participants' responses.

After coding all the data, it was necessary to review everything again to understand what had been analyzed. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), thematic analysis can be described as a creative process where the researcher finds connections, associations, and links between the different parts of the study process, identifying the themes shared by the participants. All the codes resulted in four overall themes from the participants' comments during the individual and focus group interviews. The participant's answers identified by each of these four codes seemed to have played an essential part in what was perceived as the components of the lived experiences with their partners. The first theme, the lived experience with a partner, included the following codes: acculturation, gender role expectations, family support, family opposition, and conflict resolution.

The second theme, connection to respective culture, included the following codes: attachment to own culture, the impact of attachment to relationship quality, benefits of unification of cultures, challenges of unification of cultures, and cultures' view of intercultural marriage. This theme emerged as the participants noted their connection or lack thereof with their respective cultures. Different understandings of the overall culture and family culture exist regarding cultural views on intercultural marriage. Data coded as an attachment to own culture often overlapped with relationship quality.

The third theme, connection to the partner's culture, included the following codes: marital stability, compromise, and deal-breakers. This theme and these codes presented themselves and showed overlapping in the data codes. Even though many participants did not want to think of anything that could be a deal-breaker, they were encouraged to think of a hypothetical scenario. Data coded as deal-breakers often overlapped with compromise.

Emerging Themes

Review and analysis of the data resulted in numerous themes that echoed throughout the participants' responses. These were as follows: the lived experiences with their partner or ex-partner, their connection to their respective culture, and their connection to their partner's culture. This section includes a detailed explanation of each theme expressed in the participants' words.

Theme One: Their Lived Experience with Partner or Ex-Partner

This first theme emerged as the participants described whether there was a problem with acculturation, whether they had to overcome or get used to any gender role expectations, some things they wished they knew before marrying someone from a different culture, support and opposition received from each other's family members, and how conflicts were resolved. When asked to share whether they were any problems with acculturation, two of the participants responded negatively, and the rest of the participants responded positively. In addition, several participants described how difficult it was for them to assimilate into their partner's culture. Yene said:

> He is from the north. I am from the south. So, we had to adjust to many things. They are more conservative in the north. Yeah, they are conservative. In dressing, their women are conservatives. As women in the north, you do not have to speak. You do not and all that. So gradually, although I did not take off all of my southern robes, somehow you just learn in some instances to look and say, oh, I am here. I just really need to let this be. So yes, even in dressing, they are conservative and speaking. Their ceremonies are not as elaborate as where I come from. Ceremonies, like weddings and burials, are quite elaborate and seem to be expensive in my part of the country.

Tona mentioned how she had to understand why her family or culture did something. Tona said:

> It was just understanding our mind and why we do things the way we do them. However,
> why are my parents…so strict, and why could we not do things the traditional way,
> dating and things like that? Why can't we just go to the movies and come back? Breathe.
> I always have that little disconnect, like, why can we just go to dinner?

> When asked whether they had to overcome or get used to gender role expectations, Mari

mentioned how in her husband's culture, the man is expected to be the breadwinner while the
woman stays at home. The husband had that expectation initially; however, he quickly realized
that they both would need to work to pay the bills. He was also apprehensive when they had to
live with her parents to save some money to get their own place. Mari stated:

> But at first, it was difficult because he was a man, and then we had to live with my
> parents for a year. Just to get on our feet, you know, and everything. So, to get a job, a
> Social Security number, and a driver's license. That just takes a while, too. So, thus, he
> had many challenges.

For Tona, the gender role expectations came from her own family in her culture. They expected
the man to be the breadwinner and the wife to be submissive and stay at home to be a good wife.
Tona expressed:

> As the only daughter, the only girl in my family, there is this high level of standards that
> to be the perfect wife, there is A, B, C, D, E, G that I have to do or that I should not. So,
> there was that, you know, to be a good wife, I have to do all these things like my work is
> in cooking. If I do not do this, if I do not do that, you know, he will leave me. Because
> there was always that disconnect, and he was always like, in my culture, he is always

placed on a pedestal. He is the guy, and I have to serve him, bowed down to him after

God, I bowed out to him.

Regarding support and opposition, many participants responded positively and affirmed

that they received much more support than opposition from each other's family members. Some

participants expressed how at the beginning of the relationship, they received opposition, and

when the family realized that the relationship was a lot more serious than they wanted it to be,

they warmed up to the idea of integrating them into the family. Samie stated that:

> It was just the difference in opinion. You know, my mother-in-law made it a point to
>
> remind us that…regardless, we love you. However, nevertheless, I had to explain why
>
> some of the stuff I noticed she would share on social media was problematic. Although
>
> they are not as open-minded as I would like them to be, one thing they do focus on is
>
> family, and they are very family-oriented. So, I had to overcome it, like just get over it.

Nola mentioned how her husband's sister had a problem with her because of her skin color and

where she was from. Nola stated:

> His family was okay with me; it was just his sister who was uncomfortable with a White
>
> person being with her brother. She would call our apartment and would not even greet
>
> me. She talks to me because she must because, after 30 years, she realizes I am not going
>
> anywhere. Our children, now 29 and 21, have never gotten a card or anything from her on
>
> their birthdays or holidays.

She also mentioned how her father had a problem with her marrying an outsider. Nola expressed:

> My dad owned a moving business. He wanted me to marry a German man who would
>
> take over the family business and drive the trucks when he retired. He wanted me to do
>
> secretarial work, like schedules and invoices, in the office. He would use the "n" word

when he referred to my husband, but I told him not to do that. There was also a language

barrier between them because my dad's generation did not have to learn English in

school. When I got pregnant, it was awful. My dad did not come to the hospital right after

I gave birth to our daughter. His first sentence when he finally went to the hospital was,

"she is not as dark as I thought she would be." My dad told me not to bring the baby to

his house and refused to go anywhere together, but he would come to our apartment and

be the best grandpa ever. He eventually came around and completely accepted my family,

but it took quite some time.

All the participants stated that they have different conflict resolution methods from their

partners. At the beginning of their marriages, they all mentioned that their differences made it

hard to resolve their issues; however, over the years, they have learned to find ways to make

things work. Samie mentioned how she and her husband had found a way that worked well for

them. Samie stated:

Oddly enough, we do text messaging. I will send long, lengthy four, five, or six

paragraphs. I get everything I need to get out. Moreover, he does the same with me. It

allows us to read and understand what the other person is trying to say without

interruptions. That is how we resolve conflict through effective communication.

Tona provided a rich explanation of how her culture played a role in how they communicate.

Tona stated:

Being intercultural, being with someone outside of my family, my race, and the culture,

you know, I have learned to say sorry. I have learned to be like, well, I cannot just say

things like that because we say things disgustingly, like we just say whatever comes to

the top of our mind, and we do not care how it comes out. We just say it. Furthermore,

being with somebody of a different culture makes you step back and say, okay, let me not

say it like that. So, when we disagree, on my part, I always realize, okay, maybe I should

not have said that. Maybe, it is okay not to give a response. It is okay to let the other

person win this one time. It is okay to walk away.

Theme Two: Their Connection to Respective Culture

The second theme emerged from one of the research questions. The participants shared

their connections to their respective cultures. Some of them shared that not being too attached to

their culture of origin made it easier for them to adapt to their partners. Others shared that they

are very attached to their culture of origin and that their attachment has made things more

beautiful because they expose their children to two different cultures. Nola stated:

I am very attached to my culture. On a scale of one to 10, I would say 10. I incorporate

many traditions and customs into the relationship, like cooking. I cook German food; we

celebrate Saint Nicholas. Germans celebrate Christmas on the evening of the 24th of

December, so my children opened their presents on the evening of the 24th of December.

Germans do not have bridal showers or baby showers, so I did not have any of these

things, and my husband fully supported it. Germans also do not celebrate birthdays early,

so none of our children ever had a birthday party before their actual birthday.

When asked how her culture has impacted her relationship quality, she replied that it allows her

husband to be exposed to a different culture. In addition, it gives their children the experience of

what they grew up accustomed to in their country of origin. She shared that if her partner were to

ask her to completely stray away from her culture and show allegiance to his culture only, that

would be a deal-breaker.

On the other hand, Mari shared that being exposed to her partner's culture made her

appreciate her culture even more. She would take many things for granted because she thought

they were the norms everywhere, but she realized that was not the case. Mari stated:

> It has been a learning and growing experience for me. I did not know how attached I was
>
> to my culture when I was younger. I did not think it was a big deal, but I went to another
>
> country. Moreover, I think it made me appreciate America. I did not appreciate America
>
> at all. I thought you lived a particular style of life. You do not realize it. And then when
>
> you go somewhere else, which I said, that has nothing to do with Scotland, it just was a
>
> different culture. I was like, oh my goodness. Furthermore, it is a wonderful country with
>
> many beautiful things. I did not realize how attached to the culture I was until I went
>
> there, but I would say a ten. I do not think I would ever move anywhere.

Esia shared that she and her husband do not even care about their culture. They are not

attached to any culture and do not incorporate anything from their culture into the relationship;

therefore, it has no impact on the relationship quality.

Lory mentioned how he and his wife had created their own culture within the

relationship, which helped them as they are not very attached to their cultures and their cultures

have no impact on the relationship quality. However, they shared that they struggle with

identifying with any culture even though they incorporate some traditions and customs adopted

from different cultures, such as Christmas.

When it comes to the benefits and challenges of unifying cultures, Rika shared that when

it comes to the benefits:

> I think the benefit is making sure each person is comfortable. Do you know what I mean?
>
> I know if you love somebody, you will surely do different things, or you will change or
>
> adapt. However, I do not think anybody should give up their life or how they have been

raised for anybody. I think a marriage is and should be a blending of things. Nevertheless, there were no challenges when it came to incorporating my culture except that he would have wished the bond between my family and I was not that strong.

Yene replied:

Well, everyone is going to blow their trumpet. So, I will say my culture is beautiful. I mean, and somehow remember, he lived amongst my people for a while, so he accepted the food. Moreover, generally, in dressing, I just interchange. So, it has been okay. We have not had cultural conflicts. Well, it has given my husband and my children some form of diversity, you know, and variety. Furthermore, I think they like it. I like it.

She also mentioned no challenges when incorporating her culture into the relationship.

Tona commented, "I have discipline. I am goal oriented. In my culture, we are raised to always strive for better. Because of those things, I could bring that to the relationship. I am always hustling and getting everything for our family." She also mentioned how, when incorporating both cultures into the marriage, she must unlearn many things, such as not being an alpha male and letting her husband lead the family.

For Samie, the challenges were more about the language barrier between her husband and her family members because when they came over, she spoke her language. As Samie stated:

I do not think I have found too many challenges. Maybe the language barrier between my husband and my parents. It takes my husband longer to understand what my mom is saying and a little longer to understand what my dad is saying. Aside from a slight language barrier, I have not met any challenges.

When it comes to the benefits, Samie shared that:

It gives my husband; it gives his family a different perspective. He is from North

Carolina, where he did not grow up with many Black people. Fortunately for him, he

entered the army at a very young age. So, he got exposed to many other cultures.

However, I do not believe it was the case for my in-laws like my mother-in-law came to

visit and stay with us for a couple of weeks. She got to see things differently. Something

like when my child does something, she will be disciplined. Furthermore, sometimes, that

discipline may be a spanking. It gives my husband a different perspective on culture and

differences. Yeah, I think it just makes them more well-rounded and willing to accept

things that may be different from theirs.

Many cultures have different views when it comes to intercultural relationships or

marriages. The participants' responses to their culture's view on intercultural relationships or

marriages show that it is true. Samie, who is a Haitian American, noted:

I thought it might have been forbidden. I think many cultures place certain ethnicities on

a higher pedestal. I have heard it both ways. I have heard that you cannot trust White

people, but I have heard that White people are better. So, I have heard both sides of my

culture. I do not know if you have had that experience, but I have heard both.

Samie continued:

My mom first said that you have to be careful with the ones with blue eyes. Moreover, I

was like, what are you talking about? She was like, the ones with the blue eyes. Like the

ones with blue eyes.

Whereas Esia mentioned, "as a Black American female, culturally, I would probably receive

more slack and more adversity in marrying a Caucasian/Italian."

Lory, a Caucasian man, stated:

From our family perspective, no issues from outside people. Here in the United States is not noticeable. However, when we were living in Germany, it was very noticeable. We would get stared at a lot. Furthermore, of course, they would be speaking Deutsch, so we did not know what they were saying, but you could feel the eyes everywhere. Moreover, we would catch some looks when we traveled to Europe to Italy. However, in Germany, they were apparent with it. They did not hide that.

Theme Three: Their Connection to Partner's Culture

The third theme also emerged from one of the research questions. Many participants found that connecting to their partner's culture usually involved some compromise. However, if their partners were to ask them to completely stray away from their cultures and show allegiance to their own, that would be a deal-breaker. Four codes surfaced, which are as follows: marital stability, compromise, deal-breaker, or strong bond.

Samie shared:

That is a no because I do not subscribe to neglecting everything that made me who I am. However, if that is something that someone chooses to do, then I choose not to participate. You know, my parents are amazing people. My sisters are amazing. My culture is impressive. The food is fantastic, and the food is the best. So, there is no way I can rid myself of who I am authentic to please someone else, you know? So, a deal breaker for me.

However, when it comes to renouncing her culture and adopting her partner's if it means having marital stability. Samie showed some hesitancy, and her response was not as adverse as it was previously. Samie's answer was:

Well, I would need to pray about that. That is an interesting question because I feel like the further we get into our relationship, the more we begin to establish our traditions and ways of doing things. Moreover, we have integrated and incorporated many things that have brought us to this point. So, if he prefers not to have soup on July 1st, that is fine. You know what? I would still make it and enjoy it. So, yes, but I think there may be things we have established as our own at that point.

Lory stated that his loyalty is to his wife and that nothing she could say would be a deal-breaker. Ramon, Nola, Yene, and Sesion shared the same sentiment. Sesion stated, "looking at a Black culture and a White culture. Yeah. Furthermore, I am saying this with a grain of salt. White does not have a culture. We just adopt other people's cultures, to begin with." Tona discussed how this would be the norm if people followed God's instructions. Moreover, as a Christian, she considered doing that if that ever came up between her and her husband. She shared some things she had to stay away from for the relationship. Tona noted:

I had to step away from the elder mentality [and] their overbearingness. Because, at some point, they were trying to make me feel like I was not doing things right. They were just being so burdensome and just trying to say, "Oh, that is if I do this, he is going to leave you." Furthermore, the ideations that they have, like I had to go and just stop caring what other people thought of our relationship and truly focus on us.

Research Question Responses

The participants' responses were analyzed and coded, and three themes emerged. The emerging themes related to the research questions guided this study. The research questions related to the participants' responses are explored in this section.

RQ1: How Do Intercultural Couples' Lived Experiences Impact Their Marriages?

Participants in this study have been in an intercultural marriage for at least three years. All the participants had only positive things to say about their experiences in intercultural marriages, except for the one participant who had been divorced. The researcher interviewed three couples who have been married for less than three years, and their perspectives on their lived experiences are more negative than those who have been married for a longer time. Losu, who has been married for two years, described his experience in an intercultural marriage as very difficult. Losu shared:

> I always wanted to be with someone from a different culture and background. Someone who is not from where I came from. However, nothing resonates with me when the dust settles because we are so different. Do you get what I am saying? At the end of the day, when you come home to somebody and want to be with somebody, you always want that piece of home. Nevertheless, the only way to get that is to get something at least initially from your home, like something from your mom, your sisters, or how you grew up. She would have to be that, or she would have to have that. The biggest thing I would have to say about that is that unless you do not have that connection to your culture and are open to certain things, it will be fine. However, indulging in an interracial and intercultural relationship can be challenging if that connection is solid. If you are not ready for it.

Roro and Rein decided to be interviewed together instead of separately. However, the researcher noticed that the husband influenced many of the wife's answers. The wife, who just moved here from Germany and has an accent, is very cautious when speaking. She would start by saying something, and he would then interrupt her by asking, "are you sure that is how you

feel." Furthermore, she would often look at her husband to get his approval. She shared, "the interests are different from a German guy to an American guy. I even said that I am not getting married to an American ever again because I had terrible taste; I had a bad experience." After looking at her husband, Rein added,

> However, I also had a good experience at the same time because I learned from mistakes or, you know, from that marriage and know how to operate, dissolve, or, you know. So, therefore, it was the best decision I have made, you know, to divorce the German one to get married to an American one.

The husband's response seemed to show hatred toward assertive women. Roro shared:

> I was married twice before. Both are American women. I have dated many American women, and I have found that the culture coming from somewhere like Europe versus the culture in America is vastly different. Moreover, I think getting married to a German woman or a European woman was probably the smartest thing I could have done if I was ever going to get married again just because the values and the culture line more closely with my values and culture. A lot of American women tend to feel entitled or that they compete with men. Furthermore, I would never say I compete with a woman or a woman in competition with me. I can do things that she literally cannot do, and she can do things that I literally cannot do. Moreover, I would rather be with somebody who understands that. Moreover, we complement each other versus butting heads, trying to fight with each other to accomplish one goal.

The first theme in the study was that of the individual's attitudes and understanding of acculturation, conflict resolution, support and opposition from family and friends, and gender role expectations impact on the relationships' quality. Those who expressed a thorough

understanding of their differences and the impact of these differences on the relationships'

stability consistently shared about finding something that works for the couple while maintaining

one's identity. Samie commented,

> I think it is important not to lose yourself in your relationship, whether it be cultural
>
> whatever it is. Do not lose yourself in that relationship. It is essential to see yourself and
>
> to be able to see that individual because once you start to lose yourself, you have become
>
> what someone wants you to be. Moreover, you are no longer really in an authentic
>
> relationship. So, definitely not losing yourself.

Samie continued to say:

Moreover, I know I know this conversation is about culture. For me, my culture is

important to me. I do not subscribe to everything in my culture, but the things that I do subscribe

to, like I make those. Those are important, so my child will know about them. Moreover, that is

what I mean by not losing myself in a relationship but inviting my partner to take part in those

cultural things I enjoy about my culture. I think for me, that is that would be it.

SQ1: What Benefits Do Intercultural Couples Face in Maintaining Involvement in One's Culture in an Intercultural Marriage?

The participants shared positive experiences of maintaining involvement in their own

cultures in their intercultural marriage. Even the participants who claimed no connection to any

culture supported this concept. Many participants stated that having joint interests helped with

cultural upbringing practices. Cody mentioned how he had a solid connection to his culture;

however, he said:

> Every day we learn something about each other, whether good or bad. Like, we could
>
> have talked on the phone for ten years, but living together brings a whole new thing, you

know, of our daily getting along or daily struggles, our daily laughter, and all the things

you know. However, we like many things that are the same, like the music we like a lot

the same. Movies halfway. I do not want. I do not like scary movies and stuff. However,

we love games. We know stuff.

Nola added, "he exposed me to things I have never done before, food that I have never eaten."

Tona said that it allowed both to be more open-minded. Tona shared:

When you grow up with the same type of people, all your friends live the same type of

life, and all that seeps into your personal life, and it becomes a cycle. Moreover, having

another culture just gives you a different perspective on life. The little things we make a

big deal about are not that big.

Samie shared the same sentiment by elaborating on how her husband's cultural upbringing

helped in some of the traditions they incorporated into the marriage and their family. Samie

shared:

I appreciate the family dynamics of this culture. I think that that is family-centered,

having dinner together every night. It is not something that I grew up seeing. You ate

whenever you were hungry. We were not sitting down as a family to eat dinner.

However, every night, we sit down to have family dinners, have those conversations with

our daughter, and ask about our days. That is an excellent incorporation of what sitting

down and talking to your family is like and being intentional about it. So, yeah, that was

an excellent incorporation.

Rika shared that maintaining involvement with her culture certainly brought variety to the

food. Her ex-husband brought in the sense of family, hospitality, and love for people. She said

that even after getting divorced, she still talks to his family.

Mari talked about how incorporating her culture into the relationship helped her husband navigate life in the United States. She also talked about how her husband's accent comes with some privilege. People would be nicer to them whenever they heard his accent. She shared a story about how they got a better room in a hotel because the concierge liked her husband's accent. Mari stated, "his accent gets us things. That is a benefit for him being here because everyone loves his accent. It works well for him and for me too. However, you know, he gets unique benefits and special treatment here."

Yene noted that her husband's culture is big on saving, which he brings into the relationship to help them save. She said that this is the one thing he maintains that she likes. She does not incorporate her husband's cultural cuisine. However, Yene said:

> We save a lot on meals, dressings, occasions, burials, and weddings. In my own culture, we spend too much. It is too extravagant. You know, but in his culture, within a space of one or two days, when someone is dead, they bury the person without any ceremonies. However, in my culture, they keep the person for three, four, or five months. So we are trying to save. So that aspect, I think I like it.

Esia said that her husband's connection to cuisine in his culture is a significant addition to the relationship. Esia noted:

> He seems to know how to dance around the kitchen, and that is one thing I would love to be able to do. I know that Italians are more family-oriented; they typically remind me of Latin Americans, and they are very family-oriented and very close-knit. So that has been nice to incorporate. So these three things that come to mind instantly are the language, the family, and food.

One of the participants who had been married for less than three years had more negative sentiments regarding maintaining involvement in one's culture in the relationship. Losu shared, "the only benefit would probably be her happiness. And maybe, maybe, the gifts like the holidays. That is about it. Honestly, she is American. Americans do not have an authentic culture. So that is very hard too." On the other hand, Roro talked about his wife's caring nature, culture's food, and architecture as the benefits of maintaining involvement in her culture in the marriage. Roro stated:

> I think this would be more her incorporating and maintaining a connection to culture. However, when I first met her, this was probably the second day she was over at my house. I was doing laundry when she came over. I went to the kitchen to get something to drink, and when I returned to the bedroom, she is sitting cross-legged on my bed, folding my socks. Moreover, I am like. What are you doing? This is not normal. That is just who she is as a person. She takes care of her man. So, I would say that is a benefit, but something that I can incorporate into her culture. Oh, yeah, the food is. That is a double-edged sword. It is excellent but does terrible things to my figure. However, her culture in Europe generally has very, very beautiful architecture and work, and she has brought a lot of that into the home. So, I use her ideas to make things. I work with wood and stuff. So, she has a vision. She is like the mastermind, and I got the working hands, so she has the vision. I make it come to happen. I do not know if you can see the wall here where the television is. It is like a wooden wall.

SQ2: What Challenges Do Intercultural Couples Face Maintaining Involvement in One's

Culture in an Intercultural Marriage?

Some participants shared that they can maintain involvement in their culture in the

relationship, but there have been challenges. Cody shared that his accent is a big challenge in the

marriage. Although he speaks English, certain words and sayings have different meanings here

in the United States than in Ireland. Lory added that not understanding why specific things were

being done or the particular food were some challenges in maintaining involvement with culture.

He added that his wife and her family are big on attending church, and they would attend church

every day and some days all day. However, he did not feel he could have her dedication and

commitment to the church.

Tona shared the struggle she has to deal with regarding how she was raised and her

husband. Tona noted, "I am…trying not to sweat the little stuff. His culture does not care about

what other people think. Like my culture does. My culture is very heavy on what you think about

me versus his." Samie commented on how her husband's connection to his culture has her

participate in activities she does not like. Samie shared:

> I have to participate in activities I am not interested in, like racing…I do not know if they
>
> are huge on the car races and the football games. What else would bother me besides
>
> watching a car go around? I do not know.

Sesion mentioned how being a White person and maintaining involvement in his culture

instantly put him in the light of racism. Sesion shared, "racism. I am White, so I am just flat-

viewed as racist. However, it just kind of comes with being Caucasian, so that is always an

obstacle to overcome.

Rika could only find a challenge in her ex-husband's culture. She talked about how in his culture, women are very submissive and that he wanted her to be as submissive, and she did not want to do that. Rika shared:

I think the degree to which the women are so subservient is probably one of the things that broke up the marriage. He wanted me to work and take care of everything in the house. So, I had to tell him he could not have things both ways.

Lory noted that voicing one's opinion and understanding where one's partner is can be challenging. He mentioned how he thought there was no way he could be racist because he married a Black person; however, he had to let go of some thought processes and be open-minded about some of the issues about the whole culture and race. Lory shared:

Understanding points of view could be challenging. When [Black Lives Matters]…kicked off, and there were all these things happening with police, we would have some intense conversations. I tried to get my point across, but I did not understand where she came from. It took a lot for me to understand how she was making her feel inside, you know? So, that was challenging. Do you know? My biggest thing was that I could not be racist. Like, I am married to a Black person. After plenty of conversations, I started to understand that it could be more than that. Moreover, that makes sense.

Esia, an African American woman, felt that that was also the case for her. She would feel like her partner was not trying to understand her perspective. Nevertheless, she also felt she could not express some of her feelings freely; this would prompt her to either remain neutral or not voice her concern or opinion. Esia shared:

It started coming up with Black Lives Matter. Yeah. Because I would see certain things and feel like systemic racism is prominent, which would bring up some conversations, but they would be short-lived. So I had to hold some things inside about what I felt.

The main challenge for Losu, who had been married for less than three years, was finding the culture they could incorporate. He would like to maintain complete allegiance to his own culture, and his wife would like to do the same. He does not even want to consider some traditions and customs his wife brings into the relationship. He feels his culture is superior and that they should only incorporate his culture when it comes to child-rearing, household management, and gender role expectations. They have yet to make some compromises regarding their cultural differences. Losu shared, "well, I mean, that will be the challenge in itself, finding the culture that you would want to incorporate."

Rein commented that her husband brings in his alertness. She mentioned that in the United States, the news industry is very open, and people know more about what is happening in terms of crimes. Therefore, they are more alert. While in Germany, the news industry is more subtle when it comes to crime. She said that if there were many crimes, she was not aware of that. Anyone would be roaming the streets at any time of the night without any hesitancy. Rein shared:

> I would also say his alert being alert because of the crime. That is a challenge because, as I said, the way I grew up was surrounded by lovely trees and stuff, and now you are surrounded by bad people. So, you know, that is a challenge.

Roro commented that his wife's obliviousness to danger because of how she grew up in Germany is one of the challenges of maintaining involvement in her culture. She has yet to

comprehend that she is no longer in Germany and that things are different here in the United States. Roro shared:

> One of the challenges for me is along the same lines of being alert. She is oblivious to danger. For example, in Germany, you can walk the streets, go window shopping until the sun goes down, then walk back to the train station by yourself, get on the train, and go home; and you will be fine. Here in the States, someone who is 115 pounds, five feet two inches tall, walking by herself down the street after dark, will probably never be seen again. Moreover, that is probably one of the challenges I have, is just trying to get her to see, like, hey, look at this vehicle that is right by us with no license plates and no windows. That is probably a danger sign. She does not always see that. That is one of the challenging things.

Nola added that social cues were an area of adjustment for her. At the beginning of the relationship, when she moved to the United States, she had difficulty understanding some social cues, which could be stressful. Nola noted, "the different cultures in America are so vast. This is because there are so many of them. Moreover, it takes a lifetime to understand how to interact with certain people."

Most of the male participants had no interest in maintaining involvement with their respective culture in the relationship; they even mentioned that if their partner asked them to completely stray away from their own culture and only show allegiance to theirs, they would do that and that their loyalty is to their wives. Excluding one of the participants who mentioned how he is very attached to his culture and that if his partner were to ask him to do something like that, it would be a deal-breaker.

Focus Group

The focus group was intended to be conducted with six participants; however, one participant canceled the day before, and another canceled the same day of the planned focus group. Therefore, four participants were interviewed, and they all shared similar experiences. They all met their spouses while serving in the military. Both husbands are veterans, and the wives are still active in the military. The interview included ten questions and was conducted via Zoom. After the meeting, the data was transcribed using the Sonix application. Because it was the second time the researcher interviewed all four participants, they were more comfortable and could provide more detailed answers to the questions.

Sesion was very dismissive of the hypothetical questions. His answer to whether he would be able to recognize the signs that his marriage was dissolved was:

> I am going to say no because it is not going to be dissolved. So, I am not going to be aware of any signs because whatever I need to do to make sure that we are in any group, that's what's going to happen. So, no.

Again, when they were asked what are some things that could potentially break the bond between him and his spouse. He responded:

> Oh, well, I mean, there is a lot of what-ifs and a lot of good things between us; I would say nothing. Because I know there is going to be nothing that is going to break that bond. I mean, I could speculate all day, but. No, nothing is going to break that bond. That's the reality of the situation.

He said, "my wife doesn't agree, apparently," when he noticed that his wife wanted to respond. Her response was:

I will say my walk with God. And if God says whatever the situation is, that I cannot

handle it. Not only say that because I could start listing things, like fornication and drugs,

and I could start listing like the worst-case scenarios. But ultimately, if God says I want

you out of this situation, then it's no longer what I want anymore.

Samie and Lory mentioned trust as the deal-breaker in their marriage when they were asked what

is something that could potentially break the bond between them. They both agreed with each

other. Samie stated,

If trust was broken and it's not something that I could get back and God knows I would

try. Then I think that might be the one thing that would dissolve our marriage.

Journal Entry

The researcher kept a journal of the potential participants. This tracking included who

consent forms were sent to, the participants who returned them, the date and time of the

individual and the focus group interviews, the pseudonyms provided to the study participants,

and the themes and codes that surfaced during the data collection process. The journal was also

used to gather perception data from the participants. The researcher jotted down notes about all

the collected data types and what she wanted to remember.

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Summary

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Overall, the study participants experienced positive feelings about being in an

intercultural marriage. As a result of being in an intercultural marriage, they have become more

aware of social, racial, and cultural differences. No participants said they had to make any

compromises about their belief system for their relationship. Many participants received support

from their partners' family members; very few received opposition at the beginning of the

relationship because the family members had doubts about their intentions for their partners.

Many participants expressed gratitude because they discovered their marriages' strengths and weaknesses and were allowed to imagine a scenario they had been scared to discuss.

The study participants have validated previous research about how some intercultural couples incorporate both cultures in their homes without validating one culture over the other. In other intercultural marriages, one person will often assimilate more with the other's culture; therefore, it is the one culture they use in the homes. The third category is where the couple finds it best to create a third culture about themselves. The success of an intercultural marriage depends on whether both partners' needs are being met. Both people must want the relationship to work and respect the other's culture (Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Intercultural couples often have higher stress levels than intracultural couples (Holzapfel et al., 2018). Many intercultural couples feel ashamed for not meeting their parents' expectations. They feel shameful that they have let their families down and may have humiliated them in front of others (Iwakabe, 2019). Intercultural couples frequently experience marital problems in a different way than other couples. Many problems are caused because people in their families or groups of friends have doubts about relationships. They may even question why they married each other or if the relationship will even last (Leslie & Young, 2015). Nothing can predict whether a marriage can survive with one hundred percent accuracy; however, these behaviors can heavily impact the relationship or the marriage.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of intercultural couples' devotion to their respective cultures and how it influences the success or dissolution of their marriages. This study primarily targeted intercultural couples residing in the United States; however, due to the advancement of technology, it was opened virtually to others on social media. This study gave insight into how intercultural couples' experiences impact their marriages and the benefits and challenges of maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage. This chapter includes a summary of the study's findings and a discussion of how those findings relate to the current body of research. Finally, the study's limitations are identified, and recommendations for future research are made.

Summary of Findings

A thorough analysis of the experiences shared by the participants resulted in multiple codes relating to support and opposition from family members, the impact of attachment on relationship quality, the benefits and challenges of unification of cultures, and the culture's view of intercultural relationships. From these codes, three major themes emerged: lived experience with their partner, connection to their respective culture, and connection to their partners' culture.

The first theme exposed the couples' lived experiences with their partners. The participants who expressed and used positive words when describing their experiences with their partner were able to acknowledge and were more aware of the challenges that come from being in an intercultural marriage. However, they can shut off anything from the outside world as time passes, and they seem to have open communication with each other. Several participants wished

they had researched and understood their partners' culture before merging the families. Some participants shared that they wanted their parents to be more open-minded regarding other cultures. Others shared that they wished their parents would have always believed in them when choosing someone who makes them happy and treats them with love and respect. The participants who expressed and used negative words when describing their experiences with their partner tended to have the desire to let their relationships dissolve and expressed having no desire to assimilate into their partner's culture.

The second theme exposed the couples' connection to their respective cultures. The participants who were married for more than five years tended to keep some ties to their cultures in the marriage while creating a third culture that includes both cultures within the family. The participants who have been married for three to five years tended to be less connected to their respective cultures and search for cultural traditions that fit their families. The participants who have been married for less than three years tended to be more connected to their respective cultures while trying to understand their partner's culture. The male participants had less connection to their cultures, and most were aware of how their culture played a significant part in who they are but expressed no desire to integrate it into the marriage.

The final theme exposed the couples' connection to their partners' cultures. Every participant had a unique story because every marriage is different, regardless of whether it is intracultural or intercultural. Some participants shared their admiration for their partners' cultures and expressed how they were happy to integrate it into the marriage. Other participants had no connection whatsoever to their partners' cultures as the partner either did not express any interest in maintaining involvement with their respective culture or lacked interest in researching and understanding their partner's culture. Three research questions guided the study.

RQ1: How do intercultural couples' lived experiences impact their marriages?

Most participants found the experiences of being in an intercultural marriage rewarding as they expressed how this has helped them be open-minded about other cultures. Their experiences have also helped them understand other people's realities. Marrying someone outside their culture and race allows relinquishing connection to some old traditions, habits, generational myths, and narratives about different racial and cultural groups. Nola shared that her father tried to discourage her from marrying someone outside of her culture by telling her that all Black men are debauchers. Samie shared how her mother told her to avoid White men with blue eyes. After meeting them and getting to know them personally, they had a different perspective of the individual.

SQ1: What benefits do intercultural couples face in maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

Participants in the study expressed the benefits of maintaining involvement with their respective cultures, allowing them to remain true to who they are. Nola mentioned that it gives their children different perspectives and appreciation for other cultures. Tona said it gives their extended family member a different outlook on life and people in general. Yene said that it creates diversity in the marriage, providing their partner and children with some diversity and variety. Samie said it allows each person to be comfortable by remaining true to themselves because a marriage should be a blending of different things. The participants in the study shared how this gives their children different perspectives and appreciation for other cultures. It gives their extended family member a different outlook on life and people in general. Also, it Creates diversity and variety in the marriage

SQ2: What challenges do intercultural couples face maintaining involvement in one's culture in an intercultural marriage?

Participants in the study expressed their challenges of maintaining involvement in their native culture in their intercultural marriage. Sometimes, one person may want to impose things on their partner and want something to remain as they were raised. Losu shared that deciding which culture to incorporate in different situations makes things challenging. Rein stated that understanding that inevitable innuendo and double entendre have a different interpretation for other races and diverse cultures. Nesi mentioned her fear of promoting separation if she maintains some degree of involvement with her culture within her marriage. The socioeconomic background had no impact on the relationship except for the participants' choice of words.

Much research indicated that intercultural couples, usually without realizing it, tend to revert to their childhood to find a parenting model. All the participants in the study who have children shared that they adopt the style of one partner, usually the mother, when disciplining the children. Educationally, they tend to adopt the customs of the country where they reside. All the participants who are parents expressed how, when it comes to values and beliefs, they always expose their children to both cultures without elevating one over the other. The children are aware of the culturally different values, and the exposure consistently benefits them.

Discussion

This study showed that maintaining involvement in one's culture while refraining from valuing one culture over the other can play a significant role in the success of an intercultural marriage. The result of this study added a unique perspective to the existing body of literature on intercultural relationships and marriage by sharing the experience of individuals in both

successful and dissolved intercultural marriages. This section is meant to connect the previous research and theories with the findings of this study.

Cultural Attachment Theory

The cultural attachment theory comes from the attachment theory, which states that cultures play a vital role in how individuals and their caregivers use secure-base relationships; the notion can be considered a full spectrum for learning and enculturation (Chao, 2001). These secure-base relationships can impact individuals' romantic relationships later in life. People who have secured relationships with their caregivers growing up tend to be socially competent in their relationships with others. This study supported that idea in that many participants who had a secure attachment with their caregivers growing up were inclined to acquire more information and understanding about other cultures. The participants who grew up with an adopted family tend to still be in search of their identities. The study showed that they have problems with enculturation and are often more inclined to either adopt their partner's culture or create a third culture separate from the one in which they grew up. Attachment theory has been viewed as a valuable framework for assessing the relationship between biology and culture.

Intersubjectivity Theory

Even though there is no monolithic definition for intersubjectivity, the intersubjectivity theory can be viewed as an inborn capacity to form a connection to others through events and interpretations of others shared between two minds via patterns of behaviors (Christian, 2015). This study supported the notion that the individuals' lives and their partners' experiences shape experiences. Two couples were interviewed together, and others were interviewed individually; in both scenarios, the partners' experiences were intentionally related. There was some correlation between the individual's experiences with their partner's experiences. This study

showed that the longer the partners have been married, their experiences will mimic each other. However, there was more discrepancy between the experiences of the couples who have been married for less than three years.

Appropriate Procedures for Intercultural Couples

Intercultural married couples face the challenges of being married to another human and being married to someone from a different culture. Many of the challenges they face are related to cultural differences. Previous research recommended strategies for intercultural couples (Fonseca et al., 2021; Romano, .2008).

Couples can employ appropriate procedures to benefit their marriages: effective communication, support, understanding, and adaptability. Findings from this study indicated the importance of effective communication and how it is vital in any relationship and perhaps an essential component in an intercultural one. Effective communication will facilitate an understanding of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Intercultural couples have to understand, accept, and accommodate each other's communication styles in the relationship. Understanding their partner's cultural upbringing, customs, and practices will ensure that everyone in the relationship feels comfortable incorporating both cultures without prioritizing one over the other. Finally, adaptability refers to being able to assimilate to and integrate the culture of one's partner into the relationship. Many individuals do not have the support of their family members when it comes to marrying someone outside of their cultural groups; having the unsolicited and full support of their partners is beneficial for the success of the marriage.

Implications

The study-generated findings have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. This section addresses the study's theoretical, empirical, and practical implications and provides

recommendations to stakeholders, including counselors, ministers, and family members.

Theoretical

This study was guided by John Bowlby's cultural attachment theory and Edmund Husserl's intersubjectivity theory. Cultural attachment theory states that individuals can feel comfort and refuge when they build an emotional connection with their cultural group (Hong et al., 2013; Phua et al., 2017). Intersubjectivity theory implies that individuals are influenced by their friends, family members, and the culture they are surrounded which can impact their actions and interconnectedness with the world around them (Moustakas, 1994).

The three main themes that were developed by the data in this study include lived experiences with their partners or ex-partners, connection to their respective culture, and connection to their partner's culture; each theme contained cultural and intersubjectivity components, and they have all reinforced the ideas and theories of cultural attachment and intersubjectivity. When participants in the study described their experiences of being in an intercultural marriage, many noted the importance of adaptation and understanding. Some mentioned being aware of the differences between themselves and their spouses. Others shared the importance of not ignoring anything, especially at the beginning of the relationship. One participant mentioned the importance of loving and respecting each other, which will keep the bond strong when things get challenging.

The study's findings showed that marriage lengths contributed to an individual's level of connection to their respective culture and that an individual's level of connection to their culture affects their relationship quality, especially for females. The most important thing was that individuals need to have a conscious awareness of their cultural upbringing, an understanding of the traditions and practices that constitute intercultural relationships and marriages are shaped by

their surrounding zones of contact that each person brings with them, and that the demographic composition of one's settings provide specific zones of contact. Seven out of the 14 participants were in the military and met their spouses on base, and one participant met her husband in her native country where he was stationed. However, in the focus group, the participants shared their faith and believed they would have crossed paths with their spouses regardless of whether they were in the military. The study participants supported the idea of being knowledgeable and connecting to one's cultural upbringing and group to be better equipped when cultural challenges arise. Everyone who is thinking of entering an intercultural relationship can benefit from continuing to recognize and embrace this information.

Individuals who are or have the desire to enter a romantic relationship with someone who is culturally different from them, whether it is international, interracial, or interethnic, must be aware of the historical memories either via myths or narratives that the person may bring with them into the relationship (Huang, 2017). In addition, they must be mindful of the role of social capital in who and of which specific cultural groups one selects for intercultural relationships and marriages; this refers to the social advantage or leverage one gains when marrying someone of a particular cultural, ethnic, or racial background (Moody, 2019). For example, Esia who is an African American, shared that she takes advantage of the fact that her husband is White and would have him complete a particular task and engage in specific conversations on her behalf because they would otherwise have different outcomes. Sesion mentioned how his friends and coworkers give him "props" for marrying an African American woman. Lastly, Ramon shared that his family did not opposed his African American wife, most likely because she is light-skinned and has the same skin color as himself.

An intercultural desire could be classified as an internal apparatus for how one feels,

thinks, and even acts toward certain cultural group members. The desire can be both conscious and unconscious. People's social experiences and the media can influence their intercultural desire. For example, Roro who is an African American male shared that he has lost the desire to be with women from his cultural group because they are "too entitled" and "stubborn" and would prefer someone more submissive. A common theme the researcher noticed with most study participants was that their previous relationships or marriages were with someone from the same ethnic or cultural background as their current partner.

Empirical

This study supplied research to support the existing literature in many instances and provided some additions and noticeable differences. While investigating intercultural couples' experiences and their impact on the success or dissolution of their marriages, this study confirmed that being in an intercultural marriage will bring a sense of diversity. Yene mentioned, "it has given my husband and my children some form of diversity, you know, and variety." The implication is that being in an intercultural marriage, even with as difficult as things may become at times, is rewarding as it gives the individuals the opportunity to learn about another culture.

The findings of this study also supported the notion that some individuals will question why they got married or if the relationship will last (Leslie & Young, 2015). Losu mentioned how it is challenging to be in an intercultural marriage. The findings of this study also supported the different concepts contributing to the success of an intercultural marriage, such as practical and good communication. Ramon stated, "by allowing another culture into your life in a close relationship, whether it be a spouse or a really, really close friend…you get an understanding. So, I've understood more about Black history than I got from my schoolbooks". The couples must develop profound understanding, awareness, acceptance, open-mindedness, and the

willingness to learn new things.

The couples became aware of each other's conflict styles and the right strategies to resolve the inherent conflicts in the marital relationship. Areas of adjustment are where the couples must be willing to make some marital adjustments which are signs of progress believed to be necessary to achieve a functional relationship. Nola expressed, "we both shared our heritage and our cultures. We adopted what worked for us as a family."

Intercultural couples need to know that their cultural differences do not have to indicate conflicting values, and their children may benefit from being exposed to both systems (Romano, 2008). Yene shared:

> I like the fact that my children get to speak, like, two different languages. I like the fact that I get to learn a different language. I mean, I have interacted with a group of people that are entirely different from what I know about. So, it just makes life beautiful and colorful somehow.

The findings of this study also supported the different aspects that can contribute to the dissolution of an intercultural marriage, such as household responsibility. When the couples refuse to share all the household responsibilities and feelings by withholding things from each other and not prioritizing their intimate relationship and family over their jobs, the couple may move into a downward spiral, and the connection will fail. Rika expressed, "the cultural expectation of me doing everything and him only doing this much. Yeah. That that just pushed it clean over the edge because if I am going to be raising the kids by myself, why are you here?"

The mismanagement or the avoidance of conflicts in any relationship can be detrimental. Losu shared, "it never comes to a resolution because we can never come to like, you know, a common ground. I am more confrontational. I want to go towards the problem. She has more of

an avoidance attitude".

The study's findings extensively supported most of the existing literature while adding some additional data to it. The implications of the study supported four recommendations. The first is to continue to recognize the challenges that intercultural couples face in their daily lives. The second is that effective communication is essential in a marriage. It takes time to establish; therefore, the couple must be patient with one another. The third is that if the couple takes time to recognize and understand each other's conflict resolution style, they will eventually find an effective technique. The fourth is that intercultural couples must be willing to make many adjustments, such as incorporating both cultures into the relationship and exposing their children to different cultures, customs, and traditions.

Practical

This study was undertaken to understand better the lived experiences of intercultural couples and their influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages. The researcher's goal was that this study's data and the themes would help illuminate the lived experiences of intercultural couples' attachment to their respective culture and its influence on the success or dissolution of their marriages. The researcher believed this information was valuable for couples already in intercultural relationships and those considering entering one. The researcher anticipated that the data would help develop procedures and models to encourage and promote an equitable connection to one's cultural background in an intercultural marriage. The three themes generated by this study, lived experience with partner or ex-partner, connection to respective culture, and connection to partner's culture, offered practical implications not entirely covered by the theoretical and empirical implication sections.

Regarding their lived experiences with a partner or ex-partner, this study showed that an

individual's experiences could be impacted by the support or opposition received from their

family members and friends. Nola mentioned how sad she used to be when her father disallowed

her to bring her children to his house for fear of others seeing him being associated with a Black

person. She said this impacted her life until he eventually accepted her choice of a partner and

grandchildren. Samie mentioned that she did not receive any opposition, even though they may

have had different opinions. They accepted her as part of the family as soon as they met her. She

never had any concerns about their support for her.

Regarding their connection to their respective cultures, the study demonstrated that the

wives' connection to their respective cultures was ideal for marital satisfaction, which was not

always the case for the husbands who seldom had any connections to their cultural upbringing.

Regarding connection to their partner's culture, the study showed that connection to their

partner's culture is not always associated with marital satisfaction or dissolution.

True love happens in an atmosphere of totally unrestricted freedom. God designed the

entire human experience for liberty. The gift of freedom is one of the most inalienable gifts and

rights given to humankind by God. God, Himself, does not force anything against humanity's

free will. If God does not violate humanity's freedom, then no one in this world, including a

spouse, has the right to force their spouse to do anything, even to do what is right. Husband and

wife must not enslave each other in the name of love. Marriage flourishes and love abounds

when husband and wife love each other free from fear or force. Therefore, individuals should

allow the person they love the freedom to be themselves.

Participants mentioned open communication as knowing how to employ effective

communication techniques and discussing everything with their partner, humor as not taking

everything too seriously, and having a strong desire to commit to one another every day even

when things seem to not go as planned as the strengths of the marriages. The participants mentioned patience as in their partners getting on their nerves and communication because, sometimes, they would want their partners to talk, but they remained silent. Child rearing never came up as a difficulty in the marriages because the participants shared that they always agreed on making both cultures prevalent in the children's lives and utilizing the techniques they both agreed on when disciplining them.

In all relationships, couples will face difficulties; it is refreshing to know that multiple resources and support systems are available today, such as pastoral or Christian counselors, professional counselors, and licensed marriage and family therapists. These community supports and services are available to assist people in dealing with conflicts in their relationships. These professionals' jobs are to help couples of all ages enter a union with one another with more outstanding opportunities for the marriages to last and for each partner to be fulfilled throughout the years (Wright, 1992). In addition, a substantial amount of research has shown the benefit of attending premarital and re-marital counseling before deciding to spend the rest of one's life with another person. For example, Prato (2015) noted that couples who have invested in premarital or re-marital counseling have a decreased risk of divorce and report that they are generally more satisfied; couples also say they experience fewer marital conflicts and are more committed to their marriage partners.

The findings of this study offered various recommendations. This study provides ample support for pastoral or Christian counselors, professional counselors, and licensed marriage and family therapists to help intercultural couples understand the impact of their cultural upbringing within their marriages. These professionals can also help the couple identify the factors contributing to the success or dissolution of an intercultural marriage. The study also provided

some insight that prospective spouses can contemplate before entering marriage with someone from a different culture. Intercultural marriages are not for many to enter lightly; therefore, they should take every opportunity to understand the implications of being in an intercultural marriage. The marital outcome will depend on the individuals' expectations, adaptability, and outside circumstances.

Christian Worldview Considerations

Some people are willing to date and marry someone from different faith and religious traditions if they commit to change after the marriage and join them in practicing the same faith and spiritual traditions. However, they usually have no intention of changing their partners' cultural behaviors. Christians are more inclined to engage in interfaith or intercultural relationships than Muslims and Jewish people (Yahya & Boag, 2014). All the participants in the study were Christians, even though they may not be devout or zealous. Many participants mentioned how God played a significant part in them finding their spouses and that their faith in the Lord will most likely be the one deal-breaker in the relationship.

The findings of this study showed that couples could evaluate their relationship with the Lord, which might help them make the necessary adjustments in an intercultural marriage. Many participants had to leave their congregations to find one to accommodate both spouses. Tona shared, "I had to compromise my home church. I had to compromise for us…to grow in our faith together. I had to leave my home church and find a home church that we both can participate in." Lory said he had to compromise when it came to church because he believes that the Lord is always with him, and he does not need to attend church regularly. Lory shared:

So, they go to church religiously, and I'm not big on church. I feel like He is always with

me wherever I am. That would cause problems in our marriage if I had to attend it all the

time. But, it has not come to that.

Communication between intercultural couples demands that they learn to accept,

understand, and accommodate each other's communication styles. The couples needed to learn to

understand the cultural dimension and expression of their and their spouse's faiths and articulate

what support they need from each other to do well spiritually. Intercultural couples must also be

willing to be led by God, who can impact their communication. Colossians 4:6 says, "let your

speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer

every man" (*King James Version,* 1769/2017). Intercultural marriage comes with many

challenges; however, couples can be reminded that struggles are designed to make people

stronger. In Mark 9:49, Jesus promised, "for everyone shall be salted with fire, and every

sacrifice shall be salted with salt." Christianity promotes oneness which entails adaptability. It

says in Genesis 2:24, "therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto

his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Delimitation and Limitations

The participants in the study were required to be over 18 years of age and had to have

been married for at least three years, apart from three individuals who had been married for less

than three years for comparison. The reasoning behind this delimitation is that the first three

years of marriage tend to be the "honeymoon" phase, where the partners are still learning about

each other (Finkel et al., 2015). After that, they must learn to live with their spouse and get

accustomed to their true nature, not the embellished version they had put forth at the beginning

of the relationship. The researcher used transcendental phenomenology as a research design for

this study. This research design was appropriate for this study because it focuses on conscious experiences in the participants' daily lives, which they then conveyed to the researcher during the individualized and focus group interviews.

As with any study involving human subjects, this study had limitations. The qualitative description of the investigation involving self-reported data is most likely to be impacted by factors unassociated with the study.

The study's sample size was a limitation because it only gave the perspectives of 15 individuals. In addition, there was only one divorced participant; therefore, the viewpoint of divorcees in intercultural marriages was lacking. Finally, the participants were volunteers, which could be considered a limitation; they may have been more confident about their marriages, which could have influenced their choice of words when answering the questions.

Another limitation of this study is that the current research only assessed heterosexual couples. However, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual population is growing worldwide; therefore, all the stressful aspects and benefits of being in an intercultural relationship can also be applied to these couples. Thereby, it would be helpful to examine the correlation between marital quality and attachment to one's culture for couples in these communities.

The use of self-reported data may have some limitations considering that the participants may have embellished some of the answers to portray a strong and thriving marriage. In the focus group discussion, the individuals could have felt pressured to change their answers if they were speaking after someone else. During the focus group interview, one participant asked if this interview would also be transcribed right before answering some questions, which may have

prevented her from sharing as honestly as possible, even though they were reminded that their identities would be protected throughout the study.

Any study comes with researcher's bias which was addressed by using bracketing for the researcher's thought processes throughout the data analysis so that they would be aware of these biases while determining the results of the study. Bracketing is the process of holding assumption throughout the data analysis to amplify the study's credibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the present study's findings and limitations, the researcher has multiple recommendations for future studies. Some researchers condemn intercultural marriages; others encourage intercultural and inter-faith marriages. However, awareness of the differences in cultures and the different activities and characteristics considered the norms in certain cultures and not others is essential to understanding how and why people do what they do. In addition, knowledge about the effect of intercultural couples' attachment to their own culture on their marriages is crucial for the pair to recognize the indications of a long-lasting relationship or one that will eventually end in divorce. Depending on the couples' perspectives and attitudes, the same attributes and characteristics that can lead to marital satisfaction can lead to marital dissolution. Unfortunately, very few researchers have focused on the contributing factors of successful intercultural marriages. Few studies have focused on declining intercultural marriage determinant factors while missing crucial aspects, such as gender roles and family support. In the same sense, no researcher has attempted to combine the two, as in this study.

This study addressed the gap in the literature about an understudied population worldwide, intercultural couples. There is a moderate amount of empirical research on cross-cultural experiences and sensitivity for individual people; there are even fewer empirical studies

about intercultural couples (Fonseca et al., 2020). The articles mentioned in this paper addressed the issues that arise in an intercultural relationship; however, the lack of research on cross-cultural marriages and marital quality was the reason for this study. Findings from this study can positively affect intercultural couples' marriages provided they are willing to work to understand the venture of marrying outside their culture.

Additional studies can also help illuminate divorce, which has been rising in recent decades (Sadeghi & Agadjanian, 2019). With the growing number of intercultural marriages worldwide, it is unfortunate that this topic is still not being researched more in-depth. It would be beneficial to know one of the contributors to divorce. Further research is needed on the topic to bring awareness on the contributing factors of successful marriages and the ones that are on the verge of dissolution. It would be beneficial to conduct the study in other geographical areas. It would also be beneficial to research how intercultural couples develop communication competency to bridge differences as well as the process of building a third culture.

Summary

Marriage comes with the daunting responsibility of choosing a mate who will fulfill one's fantasies, meet one's wants and needs, and help one raise a family. While some people are looking for a partner, frequently, they will only think about just one thing on that list. Then, they realize that the person they chose does not fulfill all their needs, which is when they seek divorce. Wright (1992) mentioned that most people do not think about mate selection logically and analytically. Still, they are all unconsciously influenced by these factors and probably subtly adhere to them. People tend to select their mates based on similarities, status, personalities, preferences, desirabilities, and geographical closeness. Culture plays a significant role in mate selection; in some cultures, people have evolved while others stay stagnant regarding meddling

in people's choice of a life partner. Recently, intercultural relationships and marriages have become prominent, prompting the need for this study.

This study disclosed that many attributes could contribute to the success or dissolution of marriages, including acculturation, language and communication, attitudes on marriage, societal attitudes, family support, gender roles, and individual traits. First, intercultural couples need to better acculturate into one of the cultures or build a third that incorporates both cultures equally to serve the family. Second, the pair will need to use better communication strategies that will result in higher marital satisfaction. Third, the couples' attitudes toward marriage based on their respective culture should be considered and discussed. Based on the study, family support and opposition had no impact on the success or dissolution of the union. The society in which the couples live significantly influences marital satisfaction or whether they stay married. Different cultures have disparate ideas regarding gender roles; therefore, couples need to familiarize themselves with these customs and not enter the marriage blindly and then belabor with the reality of things. Finally, language and communication are something that intercultural couples need to address and understand each partner's verbal, non-verbal, and communication styles.

This study aimed to understand the impact of intercultural couples' attachments and devotion to their respective cultures on the success or dissolution of their marriages. Considering the lack of research regarding this population, it has become increasingly important to question and research the challenges and opportunities intercultural couples face and overcome when they keep an attachment to their respective culture. The results indicated some benefits and challenges that can be invoked when intercultural couples maintain involvement with their cultures. Each participant in the study had a different degree of involvement with their culture. The longer they were married, resulted in feeling less attached to their respective culture because they often

created a culture that benefits everyone in the family. The fewer years they had been married resulted in feeling more attached to their own culture because they were adapting to being in an intercultural marriage. Intercultural marriage requires the partners to develop understanding and adaptability to integrate both cultures without invalidating one over the other and finding a balance that allows them to accept each other's individuality and the variety they bring to the relationship. It is essential that intercultural couples understand the impact that their connection to their respective cultures has on their marital quality and how this can significantly influence their everyday experiences.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Screening Survey

Please answer each of the questions with one of the responses provided

1. What is your gender?

Female   Male   I do not want to disclose that

2. What is your ethnicity?

White/Caucasian/European American

African/African American

Spanish/Latino

Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American

Middle Eastern

Multiracial

3. Which range below includes your age?

18-20 21-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60 or older

5. What is your socioeconomic background?

Upper-class   Middle-class   Lower-class

6. What is your education level?

Less than a high school diplomat

High school diploma or equivalent

Technical or occupational certificate

Associate degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate

Professional

7. What is your marital status?

Married   Separated   Divorced

8. Are you currently married or have been married to someone from a different culture?

Yes   No

9. How long have you been married or were you married?

Less than three years   3-5 years   5-10 years   More than 10 years

10. If you are qualified, will you share your email address?

Yes   No

APPENDIX B

Consent

Title of the Project: The Influence of Couples' Attachment to their Respective Culture on the Success or Dissolution of their Marriages

Principal Investigator: Emmanuella Etienne Denis, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation To Be Part Of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be or have been in an intercultural marriage (a marriage between two people of different cultures, which may or may not include differences in race, ethnicity, and geographical regions). Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What Is the Study About, and Why Is it Being Done?

The purpose of the study is to examine the influence of cultural attachment on the success or dissolution of intercultural couples' marriages

What Will Happen If You Take Part in This Study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Take a demographic survey that includes 10 questions which may take about five minutes
2. Participate in a Zoom interview and answer 23 questions which may take about 45-60 minutes
3. Focus group interviews may be conducted if necessary

How Could You or Others Benefit From This Study?

Participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study. However, four participants will be entered into a raffle to win a $25 gift card.

Benefits to society include helping professionals and other researchers understand the influence of intercultural couples' attachment to their respective cultures and the success or dissolution of their marriages.

What Risks Might You Experience From Being In This Study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life

How Will Personal Information Be Protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants' responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased.
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased.

How Will You Be Compensated For Being Part of the Study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is Study Participation Voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What Should You Do If You Decide to Withdraw From the Study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom Do You Contact If You Have Questions or Concerns About the Study?

The researcher conducting this study is Emmanuella Etienne Denis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at █████████ ████ or ██████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Mollie Evans Boyd, at ████████████████.

Whom to Contact if You Have Questions About Your Rights as a Research Participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and

viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interviews

Opening Questions

1. How would you describe yourself if we were meeting for the first time?

2. How did you meet your current or ex-partner?

3. When did the relationship turn romantic?

4. Was there a language barrier or communication difficulty?

5. Are there any children involved?

Questions Related to Their Lived Experience with Their Partner or Ex-Partner

6. Was there a problem with acculturation on anyone's part?

   If so, describe the problem in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

7. Did you have to overcome or get used to any gender role expectations?

   b. If so, what were they? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

8. What things did you wish you knew before marrying someone from a different culture?

   Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

9. Did you receive any support or opposition from each other's families?

   A. In what form? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

10. Try to remember the last time you were in a disagreement with each other.

    A. How did you resolve the issue?

    B. Does each of you have a different style of conflict resolution?

    C. What are they?

Questions Related to Their Connection to Their Respective Culture

11. How attached are you to your own culture?

    A. Do you incorporate many of the traditions and customs from your culture in the relationship?

    B. What are they? Describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

12. How has your culture impacted your relationship quality? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

13. What is your culture's view on intercultural relationships?

14. Would it be a deal-breaker if your partner asked you to completely stray from your culture and only show allegiance to their own?

15. What are the benefits of incorporating your culture into the relationship?

16. What are the challenges of incorporating your culture into the relationship?

17. Finally, is there anything you would like to add about your experience of being in an intercultural marriage?

Questions Related to Their Connection to Their Partner's Culture

18. Would you forgo everything about your culture and adopt your partner's culture if it means having marital stability and satisfaction?

19. Did you have to compromise your belief system and anything you were accustomed to in your culture?

    A. If so, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

20. Are there any parts of your culture you had to neglect or stay away from for your relationship?

    A. If so, what are they?

    B. How has that affected your well-being? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

21. What aspects of your partner's culture are deal-breakers if they were to be enforced fully

    by them? Again, describe in as much detail as you feel comfortable.

22. What are the benefits of incorporating your partner's or ex-partner's culture into the

    relationship?

23. What would you describe as the challenges of incorporating your partner's or ex-

    partner's culture into the relationship?

APPENDIX D

Social Media Post

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to examine the influence of cultural attachment on the success or dissolution of intercultural couples' marriages. To participate, you must be or have been in an intercultural marriage (a marriage between two people of different cultures, which may or may not include differences in race, ethnicity, and geographical regions). Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online demographic survey, which should take about five minutes. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the link at the end of this post. If you qualify to participate, then a confidential document will be provided, and you will need to sign and return it before the interview.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

To take the demographic survey, please click on the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeLbEaVAAp-z2HYuz7vwRysZawRNyhG-BNQ7SnWTe6dwHcM0w/viewform?usp=sf_link

Thank you!

Emmanuella Etienne Denis, MS

Doctoral Student

███████████████

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter

Date: 9-23-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-197

Title: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INTERCULTURAL COUPLES' ATTACHMENT TO THEIR RESPECTIVE CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SUCCESS OR DISSOLUTION OF THEIR MARRIAGES

Creation Date: 8-15-2022

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Emmanuella Etienne

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

APPENDIX F

Request Letters to Individual Participants

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. For my dissertation, I am examining the influence of couples' attachment to their respective culture on the success or dissolution of their marriages. I invite you to participate in this research study by completing a demographic survey. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all your responses are anonymous.

The demographic survey contains 10 questions, and the individuals who are qualified for the study based on the answers to the survey will be contacted to participate in a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews will require approximately 45 to 60 minutes. If you choose to participate in this study, please provide your email address.

To take the demographic survey, please click on the following link:

…

If you have any questions about this survey or difficulty accessing the site or completing the questions, please contact me at ████████████ or ████████████

Thank you in advance for providing this vital feedback.

Emmanuella Etienne Denis, MS

Doctoral Student

████████████

APPENDIX G

Request Letter to Social Media Pages

Greetings,

My name is Emmanuella Etienne Denis. I am a Doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I want to ask permission to allow me to conduct a demographic survey among your followers for my dissertation. The survey contains ten questions, and based on the answers, they will have a chance to be contacted for an interview. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes. Rest assured that the data gathered will remain anonymous for academic purposes only. I am hoping that this request will merit your approval.

Topic: The Influence of Couples' Attachment to the Respective Culture on the Success or Dissolution of the Marriages

P.S. It is only for intercultural couples.

Emmanuella Etienne Denis, MS

Doctoral Student

██████████████

APPENDIX H

Participants' Profile Table

Pseudonyms	Age Range	Gender	Marital Status	Socio-economic Background	Marriage length	Nationality	Educational Level
Yene	40-49	Female	Married	Middle class	More than 10 years	African	Doctoral
Samie	30-39	Female	Married	Middle class	5-10 years	Haitian American	Master's
Esia	40-49	Female	Married	Middle class	3-5 years	African-America	Bachelor's degree
Sesion	40-49	Male	Married	Middle class	3-5 years	Multiracial	Associate degree
Tona	21-30	Female	Married	Middle class	5-10 years	Haitian American	Bachelor's degree
Rike	50-59	Male	Married	Middle class	More than 10 years	Caucasian	High School diplomat
Nola	50-59	Female	Married	Middle class	More than 10 years	German	Doctorate
Lory	30-39	Male	Married	Lower class	5-10 years	Caucasian	Bachelor's degree
Mari	4049	Female	Married	Middle class	3-5 years	Caucasian	Technical College
Rika	50-59	Female	Divorce	Middle class	More than 10 years	African American	Bachelor's degree
Cody	40-49	Male	Married	Middle class	3-5 years	Scottish	Technical College
Rein	30-39	Female	Married	Middle class	Less than 3 years	German	Technical
Roro	30-39	Male	Married	Middle class	Less than 3 years	African American	Technical
Losu	21-30	Male	Married	Lower class	Less than 3 years	Haitian-American	Technical

APPENDIX I

Focus Group Questions

•   What do you think are the strengths of your marriage?

•   What do you think are the weaknesses of your marriage?

•   What kind of difficulties have you experienced after having children?

•   What words or feelings come to mind when you think of your spouse?

•   What is the biggest challenge you face in being in an intercultural marriage?

•   What would be your definition of marital success?

•   Would you be aware of the signs that your marriage is being dissolved?

•   What are some things that could potentially break the bond between you and your

partner?

•   Do you think things would have been different if you were not in the military? How?

•   Is there anything else you would like to share about your marriage?