

A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES
OF INDIVIDUALS IN INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Education

In

Educational Psychology

University of Regina

By

Krista Sheryl Allen

Regina, Saskatchewan

February 2013

Copyright 2013: K. S. Allen

UNIVERSITY OF REGINA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Krista Sheryl Allen, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Psychology, has presented a thesis titled, ***A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Individuals in Intercultural Relationships***, in an oral examination held on February 8, 2013. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Dr. William Smythe, Department of Psychology

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Tupper, Curriculum & Instruction

Committee Member: Dr. Scott Thompson, Educational Psychology

Committee Member: Dr. Marc Spooner, Educational Psychology

Chair of Defense: Dr. James Farney, Department of Political Science

*Not present at defense

ABSTRACT

This study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships. In total, six individuals (four female and two male) participated. At the time of the study, each participant was in a romantic intercultural relationship (either common-law or married status) and had been in that relationship for at least 3 years. None of the participants had children and the ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 32 years old. Five of the participants self-identified as Canadian citizens, while one participant self-identified both her heritage and citizenship as Hungarian. Of the five Canadian participants, each one self-identified with a unique cultural heritage (Chinese, East-Indian, English, German/Prussian/Ukrainian, Swedish/German).

Each participant was interviewed twice and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher discovered that there were three essential themes that were indicative of the inter-subjective (common) nature of the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships. First, intercultural relationships are a learning experience – an opportunity for gaining knowledge, understanding, and a new perspective. Participants reflected on the process of growth and change that has happened in their relationships. Second, as a correlated theme, the notion of openness and willingness surfaced as important to the individuals in this study. As the participants' descriptions suggested, being open and willing to the opportunities within an intercultural relationship is a key factor in their experience. Third, participants described an implicit message as part of their experience of being in an intercultural relationship; for some participants this was related to experiences with family approval, while for others it was seen within the context of societal discrimination.

In addition to the three main themes, the researcher identified and discussed a significant difference between the experiences of individuals who were in relationships where both partners were born and raised in the same country (Canada) versus the relationships where the partners were born and raised in two different countries. For the participants who were in relationships where both partners were born and raised in Canada, there were concerns regarding family approval. These concerns are framed by the researcher as integrally connected to notions of identity and whiteness.

To conclude this study, the researcher discussed the significance of the findings in light of her goals to gain: (a) a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships and (b) a greater level of thoughtfulness and tact both in her personal and professional capacities. The researcher reflected on her own insights with the hopes that greater awareness for others who are interested in the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships will be fostered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although these words are not sufficient to express how I feel, it is a great pleasure for me to convey my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this thesis.

To my supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Tupper: I will be forever grateful for your thoughtful words, encouraging ways, and compassionate presence. Thank you for believing in me. As a mentor, you have found the perfect balance between guiding me and allowing me to discover what I needed to on my own.

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to my committee members - Dr. Jennifer Tupper, Dr. Marc Spooner, and Dr. Scott Thompson - for the time and effort you put into carefully reading, insightfully questioning, and supportively contributing to this thesis.

To my study participants: this thesis would not have been possible without you. Thank you for giving your time and effort to share your stories. I appreciate your openness to allow me to hear and share in your life stories.

Thank you to Tania and Angela in the Faculty of Education's Research and Graduate Program Office for your assistance. I would also like to thank Dr. Rod Dolmage and Dr. Warren Wessel for the helpful workshop that you offered in the Fall of 2011.

I would like to say thank you to the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Regina for providing me with the funding to pursue my degree and this study.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my husband, Sean. Thank you for encouraging me to continue writing, for your helpful suggestions, and for your editing support.

POST-DEFENSE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. William Smythe for his role as the External Examiner for this thesis. I greatly appreciate the time and effort that he put into carefully reading and considering my research. I thank him for his comments and questions, which helped me to reflect on my research on a deeper level.

DEDICATION

As I am sure anyone who has gone through this process would attest, it takes a lot of patience and perseverance to follow through and complete a thesis. With that said, it was during the times that my strength wavered and my character was tested, that I relied on God, my family, and my friends to see me through. For that reason, I dedicate this thesis to them.

First of all, thanks be to God and my Saviour Jesus Christ: for His divine purpose and plan, for providing me with the opportunities to achieve, and for always providing me with strength and understanding to get through whatever is before me.

To my husband: I owe you the biggest thank you anyone can give. You have been my biggest supporter through this whole process. Thank you for always believing in me and reminding me of what I can accomplish when I set my mind to it. Most of all: thank you for always encouraging me to do and be my best.

To my mother who is the strongest and most supportive woman I know: thank you! You are the one who not only loves me unconditionally, but has instilled me with a sense of confidence in who I am as well as gratitude to remember where I came from. Without your constant love and gentle encouragement, I would not be where I am today. For that, for your role as my mother, and for your everlasting love, I am eternally grateful.

To all my other family and friends: thank you to each one of you for your understanding and encouragement in writing this thesis. Each one of you has done something to help me along the way and I am so appreciative of your presence in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..... i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

POST-DEFENSE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT iv

DEDICATION.....v

TABLE OF CONTENTS vi

PREFACE..... ix

 Interest in Educational Psychology.....x

 Interest in Phenomenologyxi

 Thesis Overview xiii

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

 Background on Intercultural Couples 1

 The Origins of My Study2

 The Complexities of Identity4

 Social Identity5

 Personal Identity6

 Identity and Dualities7

 My Identity: Considering “Who Am I?”8

 The eye-opener.....8

 Growing up.....9

 Where do I belong?10

 My identity today10

 Theoretical Perspective.....12

 Hermeneutics13

 Hermeneutic Phenomenology13

 Fundamental Methodological Concepts.....14

 Limitations.....14

 Inter-subjectivity15

 Natural attitude.....15

 Reflection16

 Wonder.....16

 Intentionality and the phenomenology of practice17

 Study Rationale and Purpose18

 Counselling Considerations19

 Personal Reflections.....20

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW22

 Introduction22

 Intercultural Couples: The Terminology22

 Intercultural Couples: The Prevalence of Mixed Unions23

 Intercultural Couples: The Research Trends24

 Intercultural Couples: The Research.....26

 Interracial Versus Intra-racial Couples.....26

 Attachment26

 Intimate partner violence.....27

 Reasons for dating.....27

 Marital quality.....28

 Intercultural Couples: External Pressures from Family and Society.....32

 Intercultural Couples: Strengths, Challenges, and Strategies.....35

 Strategies and tools for working with intercultural couples35

 Concerns, stressors, and coping.....40

Intercultural Families: Concerns and Strategies.....	42
Intercultural Couples: Summary.....	45
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	47
Introduction	47
Researcher Perspective	47
Data Gathering Method	49
Research Participants	49
Selection criteria.....	49
Invitation to participate	49
Informed consent.....	50
The Participants.....	52
Data Gathering Process	54
The Interview Structure.....	54
The Interview Process	55
Data Analysis Method	56
Phenomenological Literature	57
Descriptive versus Hermeneutic Phenomenology.....	58
Hermeneutic Phenomenology & My Philosophy.....	60
Methodology	60
The hermeneutic circle	62
Reduction: Suspending personal assumptions.....	63
Reduction: Uncovering themes	64
Going beyond: Finding additional resources.....	66
Meaning construction.....	67
Putting the process into practice.....	68
CHAPTER IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS.....	72
Introduction	72
Theme 1: An Intercultural Relationship is a Learning Experience.....	72
Ryan: You Can Learn A Lot	73
Jessica: Opened My Eyes.....	74
Gavin: Pushes My Boundaries	75
Emily: We Peak Each Other’s Curiosity.....	76
Anastasia: A Different Perspective	77
Trisha: Change Is Inevitable	78
Sub-Theme A: Taken-For-Grantedness.....	80
Taken-For-Grantedness: Jessica, Anastasia, and Trisha	80
Taken-For-Grantedness: Ryan and Gavin.....	84
Sub-Theme B: Time	86
Time Brings Understanding	86
Patience	88
It Gets Better With Time.....	88
Theme 2: An Intercultural Relationship Includes Openness and Willingness.....	90
Jessica: We Have to Be Accepting.....	92
Trisha: Unless You Are Willing	93
Anastasia: Patience, Acceptance, and Tolerance	95
Emily: Be Game for That.....	96
Ryan: As Long as They are Open	97
Gavin: More Comfortable.....	98
Sub-Theme: All About the Person.....	100
Theme 3: The Implicit Message for Intercultural Couples	102
Gavin and Emily: The Elephant in the Room	103
Anastasia: A Silent Thing	108

Ryan: Subtle Things.....	109
Jessica and Trisha: There Are Undertones.....	110
A Significant Difference.....	111
Trisha and Anastasia: Cultural Challenges and Effects on The Relationship.....	112
Trisha: Double the amount of work.....	112
Anastasia: It can be misunderstood.....	113
Choose to focus on the positive.....	114
Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily: Family Challenges and Effects on the Person.....	114
Jessica and Ryan: Family challenges.....	115
Emily and Gavin: The grandparents challenge.....	116
Challenges to the person.....	117
The Significance of The Difference: Family Approval.....	118
Whiteness.....	121
The Significance of Whiteness to Intercultural Couples: The Family Concerns.....	125
Ryan: Fitting In.....	126
Gavin: The “Token Asian Guy”.....	128
The Family Concerns: Child’s Identity.....	130
The Family Concerns: Intercultural Relationships.....	130
Fears and Concerns about Culture.....	131
Expectations and Bragging Rights.....	135
Summary of Thematic Analysis.....	137
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION.....	141
Introduction.....	141
Intercultural Relationships: The Significance of Identity and Whiteness.....	141
Final Reflections.....	146
Pre-Understandings and Epiphanies.....	147
Critical Insights and Personal Growth.....	148
Being Mindful: Individual Experience and Social Context.....	150
Concluding Remarks.....	153
REFERENCES.....	155
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM.....	160
APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL.....	162
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT TABLE.....	163
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	164

PREFACE

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when I “became” a graduate student. Although some may see it as the date I received my letter of acceptance or the first night I stepped into a graduate class, for me, the journey to becoming a graduate student began long before that. In fact, I would say it began around the same time that I realized it was my life’s purpose to be a helper of people - a purpose that I discovered during my early adolescence. As the years went on, I continued to take steps to lead me towards where I am today. Now, as I look back over the years, I can see how everything I have done up to this point has been a tangible manifestation of my desire to help others. I know it may sound cliché, but this retrospective realization is quite significant for me - especially considering that the road here was not always easy. Truth is: there were many times when I questioned my path and whether to continue in this direction. Looking back, it is interesting to realize: It was during those times when I questioned my path to becoming a psychologist that I actually found more motivation towards my goal. It was through questioning myself that I became more certain of my purpose; it was through taking time away that I realized how imperative it was that I return.

After completing my undergraduate degree in psychology, I decided to give myself a “break,” which turned into a four year hiatus overseas. Although my friends and family began to question my intent to return for graduate school, I always had that return in mind. In fact, the more time I spent away from university, the more enthusiastic I became for my return. When I finally made my way to graduate school, I was eager: to apply what I had already learned, to learn and apply more, to grow in new ways, and to become that person who I wanted to be. Ultimately, I was eager to become a

psychologist-in-training. As the pressures of grad school mounted, I found myself questioning again. My newfound passion was dwindling as I came to the obvious realization that graduate school was not all kittens and rainbows. I was struggling with the characteristic graduate school “impostor” feeling. It also seemed like graduate school was never going to end. So, although I wanted it to be done quickly, I never felt as though I was ready for the “real world.” I began wrestling with this idea: How do I, on the one hand, always seem to be so excited about university and learning at the outset, and yet, on the other hand, always find myself questioning my sanity during the process? I guess that is what it means to be an academic - no matter how much I gripe about the work and effort needed, I still always find myself pursuing some avenue of knowledge. Once I came to that realization, I felt free to: pursue my studies, gripe about it when I needed to, feel (sometimes) as though I know nothing, and find the love and passion in pursuing a thesis. And so, here I am today: three years since the day I “officially” became a graduate student.

Interest in Educational Psychology

My choice to pursue a degree in educational psychology was a natural one for me. As I discovered early in life, my natural inclination and future purpose was to be a helper. Consequently, as an undergraduate student, I found myself drawn towards the counselling aspects of my psychology degree. In my second year, I was drawn to volunteer with a peer support group on campus that allowed me to practice the Rogerian principles of person-centered counselling. Following that experience, I knew that I had found my life’s calling and I began to see myself as a future psychologist. My decision to live overseas further solidified my choice to pursue a degree in educational psychology,

as I found myself engaging with youth and adults who were concerned with a variety of areas of well-being. Furthermore, I became very aware of the cultural differences that existed and the definite need for cultural awareness and sensitivity on my part when working with individuals. I was drawn to a program that would provide me with not only the appropriate knowledge of counselling theories and cultural matters but also would provide me with the practical skills necessary for counselling with a broad range of individuals and concerns. When I discovered educational psychology, it was obvious to me that it was a perfect fit for my goals.

In retrospect, my life's purpose not only propelled me towards this degree, but it has also been influenced by my choice to pursue educational psychology. That is, it is both something I have always been and something I am working towards. Even once my education is complete, my work towards being a helper will never be complete since I will always be striving to be more compassionate and more skilled at helping others. As such, this step towards educational psychology has not only been a natural one that developed out of my life's purpose but also one that is a clear direction in the way of making me a better helper and psychologist.

Interest in Phenomenology

After living overseas, I came to graduate school with the desire and intent to research intercultural relationships. At the outset, I had no idea how I would do that and so began my journey of discovering phenomenology. I knew from my background in psychology that I was more aligned with qualitative methods than quantitative. Although I recognized the importance of both, I was drawn to qualitative methods because of the richness of knowledge that I could gain about human experience. My desire was to know

the words, experiences, and emotions of the people involved. At my core, I was a human science researcher, someone concerned with the intricacies of daily life (van Manen, 1990).

Knowing these points about myself, the biggest obstacle was discovering *what* qualitative method I would choose to employ in my study. I had first heard about phenomenology in my research methods class and I was intrigued to learn more. Upon the suggestion of my thesis advisor, I looked into hermeneutic phenomenology - in particular, the works of Max van Manen. As I continued to learn and delve deeper into phenomenology, and specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, I became more impassioned by what I was reading. I began making connections between phenomenology, counselling theories, and my own personal philosophy. I was thrilled that I could use phenomenology to learn more about my intended research area, to learn more about counselling and human experience, and to learn more about myself.

In the end, I somehow felt like phenomenology may have chosen me. I was stunned when I read this quote: “But to paraphrase Heidegger, the more important question is not: Can we do something with phenomenology? Rather, we should wonder: Can phenomenology, if we concern ourselves deeply with it, do something with us?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 45). I think phenomenology has done something with me. It has moved me to become more reflective, thoughtful, and creative - as if I had tapped some inner potential that I never realized existed before. More importantly, it has made me more aware, sensitive, and concerned with the ways of others and the world. The best part is: I know my journey with phenomenology has just begun.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is the written manifestation of my curiosity, caring, and investigation. While I began this study as a curious researcher, I also came from the position of caring. That is, while my primary aim was to explore and acquire a richer understanding of the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships, it was with the deeper desire to become more thoughtful and tactful in my personal and professional roles. Moreover, I believed that through my investigation, I could also share that knowledge in an effort to help others who may be interested in: (a) the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships and/or (b) increasing their own tact and thoughtfulness. My secondary aim with this thesis was to enhance my experiential understanding of qualitative research. To be specific, as someone who values working with individuals and hearing their stories, I relished the opportunity to engage in a phenomenological investigation of lived experiences.

With these two aims in mind, I set out to complete a thesis that would provide a rich account of the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships. This thesis document consists of five chapters. In Chapter I, I present an overview of the topic and rationale for this study. To meet that aim, I begin with a brief preamble to intercultural relationships followed by an explanation of my interest in this topic. The chapter continues with an introductory description of my theoretical perspective as that of hermeneutic phenomenology, and it closes with a synopsis of this study's rationale and purpose.

Chapter II and III further explore and address the aspects that are presented in Chapter I. My focus in Chapter II is to provide a deeper look at intercultural relationships

through examination of the relevant literature. In Chapter III, I expand on my discussion of hermeneutic phenomenology through the presentation of this study's methodology. Moreover, Chapter III includes an explanation of my study design, including the processes for participant selection, data collection, and thematic analysis.

In Chapter IV, I present the themes (van Manen, 1990) that were revealed during the thematic analysis. In addition to the themes, I also explain a few other integral notions that surfaced during my discussions with the participants. Chapter V concludes this thesis with a discussion of the significance of my study's findings. Furthermore, I expound on how this process has affected me in personal and professional ways.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to van Manen (1990), hermeneutic phenomenological research is a “search for the fullness of living” (p. 12). That is, the aim is to acquire a richer and deeper understanding of an everyday human experience (van Manen, 1984a; 1984b; 1990). In this study, I aimed to do that: explore and acquire a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within intercultural relationships. With that in mind, this chapter provides an overview of the study’s origins and rationale. First, I give a brief review of intercultural relationships and the emergence of my research focus. Second, I discuss the complexities of identity, including a description of my personal experience. Third, I review the theoretical phenomenological perspective that influenced my study. Last, I conclude with the rationale and purpose for this study.

Background on Intercultural Couples

As a result of increased technology, travel, and relocation, there has been, and continues to be, significant development and change in the diversity of societies, individuals, and relationships. With this continued diversification comes a corresponding focus on culture and the influence that it can have on individuals’ lives, identities, and relationships. Culture has been defined in many different ways, but for the purposes of this research, it will be defined as the “sets of learned behaviors and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society” (Lavenda & Schultz, 2000, p. 3). Culture includes not only expressive behaviors such as rituals, language, customs, music, and religion, but also internalized behaviors in the form of beliefs, values, and norms. It provides us with the backdrop for making sense of our world and relationships. It is an integral part of our being, and as such, it remains an important subject in light of increasing diversity.

Due to the expansion and integration of societies around the globe, the importance of culture and the way cultural differences can influence relationships is gaining attention. With increasing diversification comes more opportunities for individuals of different cultures to meet, fall in love, and enter into committed relationships. As such, one area of interest for current research involves intimate intercultural relationships.

The Origins of My Study

When I told people that I was pursuing a study exploring the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships, I received many different reactions. Mostly, they were interested to know how someone who was not in an intercultural relationship herself would come to be concerned with this topic. I would say to them, “Honestly, it was curiosity!” I would then follow with a long-winded story about my time in South Korea (as explained in my Preface) and the many friends that I met there - some of whom were in intercultural relationships. Those friends would tell me about their experiences of dating someone from a different culture - experiences related to language, meeting family members, and concerns about where they would live. When we were out to dinner, I would hear them talking in a blend of English and Korean. The bouncing back and forth between the two languages helped me to understand what was being said, but often I just simply gazed in amazement, wonder, and awe at their blended-language communication.

There were also occasions where I was blessed to attend wedding ceremonies, baby birthday parties, and other significant events for those friends in intercultural relationships. There, I saw the physical manifestation of the beauty of two cultures and families coming together. As van Manen (2007) describes it, I was “swept up in a spell of wonder” (p. 12) as I started pondering the meaning(s) of intercultural relationships.

As I reflected on my future career path and graduate school plans, my desire to pursue this topic grew. I was curious to learn more - not only to understand the experiences of my friends, but also to expand my thoughtfulness towards them and others in intercultural relationships, especially my future clients. It seems that I was naturally drawn toward what has been called the “phenomenology of practice” (van Manen, 2007). That is, the aim underlying my fascination with intercultural relationships was one of becoming more thoughtful, considerate, and tactful as a practitioner (van Manen, 2007).

As I neared the start of my graduate program, I became more reflective on my time in South Korea, specifically contemplating how my experience in another country had influenced my sense of identity, my personal philosophy, and my future practice as a psychologist. I was not only curious about the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships, but also the experiences of individuals living in new cultures, speaking new languages, and experiencing discrimination. As I pondered intercultural relationships, I realized the importance of this research on a more global scale. Considering the growing prevalence of these relationships, I saw a need for research in this area. Furthermore, I became mindful of the prevalent nature of cultural differences in communication and the need for awareness and training in cultural sensitivity.

As the depth and breadth of my research increased, I was inundated with a growing number of questions that I had to reflect and think about: What do I mean by “intercultural”? What is the difference between “intercultural” and “interracial”? Why does it matter? Are all couples intercultural in some ways? How am I defining “culture”? What is my intended population? Does one person in the couple have to be Canadian? What does “Canadian” mean? These questions, although challenging, served as a guide to

help clarify what I was searching out. As I sought to answer these questions, I discovered that it would be integral to explore identity and how it relates to this topic.

The Complexities of Identity

Identity is a complex concept that can be viewed from many different positions and disciplines. This is why, as Lawler (2008) claims, it is not possible to adequately define or provide a single global definition for identity. Regardless, there are certain notions surrounding the concept of identity that can be seen as universal, which will be discussed shortly. According to Sparrow (2000), identity depends on context and interaction. Specifically, the idea of identity is a personal concept; it varies from person to person. More generally, identity can be viewed as how we see ourselves or how we think others see us in the context of both social and personal identifiers.

When exploring identity, there appears to be a blurred, but partially demarcated, line between the social and the personal aspects of identity. That is, on the one hand, identity is seen as socially associated through group identities such as culture, ethnicity, and nationality. On the other hand, identity is also associated with a person's own self-concept, personality, roles, and preferences. Although these two sides (social and personal) are seen as separate, they are not mutually exclusive. There is an ebb and flow between the two; personal identity is influenced by social aspects of being and vice versa. This concept is important when the identity of individuals in intercultural relationships is considered; it is hard to distinguish whether traits are inherent within the person or influenced by their social background or both and to what degree. Since intercultural relationships include such a variety of different facets from social identity (culture,

ethnicity, nationality, etc.) and personal identity (self-concept, personality, etc.), it is integral to explore these concepts for the purposes of this study.

Social Identity

The social aspects of identity refer to group associations which include, but are not limited to, culture, ethnicity, country, race, heritage, tribe, community, family, school, social groups, socioeconomic status, gender, sex, sexuality, occupation, and religion or spirituality. Among these social categories, sometimes there is confusion about culture, ethnicity, and race. Culture, as stated earlier, refers to the practices, customs, values and beliefs of a particular group. Moreover, these facets of culture are both explicitly and implicitly woven through an individual's experience of culture. Although not always explicitly recognized, cultural beliefs become a large part of an individual's identity. According to Patel, Li, and Sooknanan (2011), the deep-rooted beliefs that come from one's culture often remain unquestioned. Even without awareness, cultural identity heavily influences one's beliefs and practices and, therefore, is an integral part of an individual's identity.

Ethnicity is referred to as "ethnic groups which are communal in nature and form their own communities within cultures in a country" (Patel et al., 2011, p. 94). Cameron and Wycoff (1998) further affirm that ethnicity is embedded within culture. They state that within a larger culture, there are smaller ethnic groups that have their own beliefs and practices. Moreover, although a particular ethnic group might share similar practices with another ethnic group, the groups may or may not follow the larger cultural norms.

Cameron and Wycoff (1998) uphold that race is a widely debated term, and currently, it is conceptualized as a social construct with no biological basis. According to

these researchers, the term *race* has been used to imply a common, hereditary background. Originally, it was created as a term to conceptualize differences in human diversity, but over time, the concept has become more convoluted; it has been used to segregate and repress groups of people who were considered racially “inferior.” As science confirms, there is no biological basis to the concept of race, yet the term continues to be used. Cameron and Wycoff (1998) argue for the removal of the term race from professional lexicon as it: (a) implies a false existence of a biological difference and (b) implies a hierarchy in the ordering of groups of people based on skin colour. The authors posit that counsellors “are hampering their ability to fight the ills of racism by continuing to use the term, *race*” (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998, p. 284).

Personal Identity

The personal aspects of identity are often identified as those characteristics that come from within the person (Lawler, 2008). This idea is difficult to discuss since it is hard to know whether the “within” is truly unique and inherent or whether it is influenced by factors from outside of the person or if it is a combination of both. Furthermore, this notion of individuality ignores the notion that without external influences we would not know who we are (Lawler, 2008). Identity is something produced through our learned understanding and lived experience in relation to other people. In fact, this idea that individual identity can develop as a unique process or out of personal accomplishment is seen as a Eurocentric or Western perspective (Sparrow, 2000). In Sparrow’s (2000) study, international students emphasized that “individuality and self-constructed identity are neither possible nor desirable from their points of view” (p. 175). Interestingly, Sparrow (2000) also purports that the concept of individuality and self-constructed

identity may not just be related to Western culture, but to Western men in particular.

Sparrow (2000) notes that Western boys are encouraged to become strong individuals - separate from their parents, and mother, in particular. For Western girls, emphasis is on being more connected, sensitive, and cooperative. As a result, the individual identities of men and women in the Western world may reflect these social constructions of gender.

Identity and Dualities

Identity, upon closer examination, appears to be riddled with dualities. It is about: social and personal ways of identifying, how individuals identify themselves and how others see them, and external qualities and internal characteristics. As Lawler (2008) states, the term *identity* implies both a categorical way of being as well as the “paradoxical combination of sameness and difference” (p. 2). That is, we share common ways of being with others (e.g. women/men, Korean/Canadian), but these common ways of being also imply a difference from another group. This means that to be something in terms of identity (e.g. Canadian), one is not something else (e.g. American). This identification with a particular group not only provides a sense of identity, but also satisfies the need to belong and fit in (Lawler, 2008). This seems to be a natural identification mechanism; however, as Lawler (2008) points out, this can create tension within an individual. If a person identifies with more than one social group and the two identities are not seen as able to co-exist, conflict may arise. For instance, an individual who has one Black parent and one White parent may identify as being both Black and White, only Black, or only White. This can create tension for someone who identifies with one particular group (White) but is only “seen” and assumed to be part of another because of physical features (Black). Furthermore, identity becomes increasingly more

complex because it is “interactive and mutually constitutive” (Lawler, 2008, p. 3). This implies that there is overlap in identity construction; for example, a woman associates with her gender group but also with her ethnic group (e.g. Korean woman). In addition, although a woman identifies with other women in her gender group, she will also experience identity differences from women of different heritages. Interestingly, identification with a group does not always mean that someone will identify with all aspects of a group, such as when a woman does not identify with particular socially-constructed perspectives of the characteristics a woman should have (Lawler, 2008).

My Identity: Considering “Who Am I?”

The eye-opener. I never really stopped to think about my identity, culture, race, ethnicity, or nationality for any length of time - until I moved overseas. By moving to South Korea, I was thrust into facing various aspects of myself while being immersed in a different culture, language, and set of customs. Living overseas, I became accustomed to culture shock, and I quickly began to realize that my shock was due to the reality that I - a White, Canadian-born woman - came to South Korea with my own set of values and customs. Before moving to South Korea, I identified Canadian “culture” by its explicit and popularized aspects such as that of maple syrup, hockey, “eh,” and the loonie.

After moving to South Korea, it soon became evident that there were subtle cultural aspects that I was unaware of in Canada. The differences that I noticed between South Korean practices and Canadian practices alerted me to these subtle cultural aspects. For instance, in Canada, there is no customary way to hand money to another person (left hand, right hand, on the counter). In South Korea, it is customary and respectful to give and receive money with your right hand while placing your left hand under your right

elbow. The other practice I noticed almost immediately was that women would cover their mouths when they were laughing or smiling with their mouth open. Once I realized these implicit cultural differences existed between Canada and South Korea, I recognized the connection - between culture, with its subtle yet powerful influence, and my own behaviour. I began to realize that when I said I was Canadian, it was not just the place I was from; it was part of my entire way of being.

Another aspect of the awareness that I gained while living in South Korea had to do with becoming a minority. On the one hand, I feel like I can never truly be a minority because I was born into a White, middle-class, Canadian family; on the other hand, when I lived in South Korea, I was often estranged because I was different - sometimes it was a “bad” different and sometimes it was a “good” different. The times when I was ignored, mistreated, or spoken badly of were difficult ones for me - not only because it hurt but because it made me question the way that I participated in my own society. I began realizing the reality of White privilege and minority experience. That experience increased my personal and social awareness; it caused me to consider how I think and act towards others both personally and on a social scale.

Growing up. To discuss my sense of identity, I need to digress a bit. Growing up, my family moved around a lot. I was born in Newfoundland, where my mother, and several generations of my family, were born and raised. We moved to Toronto when I was a toddler and then to Saskatchewan when I was ten years old. Because we moved around so much, aspects of my identity were fluid while others remained static, such as my “Newfie” identity. When I moved to small town Saskatchewan, I was the “different” girl from “out east.” I imagine that in addition to feeling different, I probably experienced

some small form of “culture shock” at that time, although I do not remember. What I do remember is the fascination and excitement I felt the first time I saw a combine and the first time I experienced branding cattle. It did not take long before I came to love the people, landscape, and values in this province. Although I experienced feeling different at first, it did not take long before I was fitting right in to small-town life.

Where do I belong? Regardless of where I have lived over the years, I have always considered myself a Newfie. This identity is particularly strong when I am around my family - mom, aunts, uncles, and cousins, who also self-identify as Newfie; usually our time together includes music, food, and customs that are particular to our Newfie culture. I am fascinated by the fact that I so strongly identify with my Newfoundland roots despite having spent only 3 of my 29 years living there. It seems to be a pride thing; I enjoy talking about my family, our customs, and how beautiful “down home” is to anyone who asks. The complicated part of this aspect of my identity is that when I travel to Newfoundland, as much as it feels like home, it still feels like I do not fit in. I feel as if other Newfoundlanders do not perceive me as a “true Newfie.” This theme was recognized by Moore and Barker (2012) as a sense of belonging. The researchers noted how individuals who grow up in a different culture from their culture of birth often feel as if they do not truly belong anywhere. I can identify with this theme because although I identify as Canadian overall, I have never felt truly Newfie nor truly Saskatchewanian.

My identity today. It is interesting to consider that despite my strong identification with being Newfie and my pride in my heritage, my day-to-day practices do not reflect a Newfie way of life. I do not speak with a “Newfie accent” and I do not use the vernacular present in “Newfie talk,” with a few exceptions: I call my grandparents

nanny and poppy, for example. I do not cook and eat Newfie foods on a daily, or even monthly basis, but only on special occasions. My day-to-day living is more eclectic and reflects more of the experiences that I have had over the past few years. For example, I cook a lot of foods from different cultures. The artifacts in my home reflect the places I have travelled to or lived in - all of which have contributed to my identity. Living in South Korea and falling in love with the people, food, and aspects of the culture has impacted me in so many ways that part of my identity is tied to my time there.

My social identity can be classified as heterogeneous in nature. It is complex and encompassing of a great number of influences that reach far back into my family heritage and continue right up to the present day. In terms of my social identity, the groups that I identify with are complex for a few reasons. First, I have examined my family genealogy and the person I can trace the farthest back (mid 1800's) was born in Newfoundland. As such, I am uncertain of my family's heritage beyond Newfoundland. I can speculate that since the last family name was British, my heritage includes, at the least, some Western European influences. Second, I have lived in and travelled to so many different places in Canada and the world that I see myself as being more than "Canadian." I feel as though each place I have been has affected my identity even in small ways. In this way, who I am is context-dependent (Sparrow, 2000). That is, depending on the situation, I may identify with a particular group or setting, which allows me to fit the surroundings (Moore & Barker, 2012). When I am around my Newfie family, my behaviour and mannerisms change slightly - a fact I was not aware of until my husband pointed it out.

Because of the varied nature of my lived experiences, it is difficult for me to sum up my identity in a few statements. Regardless, what follows is a brief summary of how I

currently view my identity. I am a 5'4", brown-eyed, brown-haired, 29 year-old woman. I am White – a fact that played a bigger part in my research than what I originally anticipated; I will reflect on the significance of whiteness and my own White status in Chapter IV and Chapter V. I am an English-speaker, who can speak and understand small amounts of Spanish, Korean, and French. I am a Canadian, who identifies with both Eastern and Western Canada - Newfoundland and Saskatchewan. I am a Newfie - that is my heritage and that is where my family is from. I also grew up in small town Saskatchewan and I consider myself a “country girl.” South Korea is another one of my homes. Although I was not born or raised there, I feel Korean in many ways; I love many aspects of Korean culture as much as my Canadian culture.

I am a child of God and a Christian. I am a heterosexual female who is legally married. I am a wife, soon-to-be mother, daughter, auntie, sister, granddaughter, cousin, and friend. I am a counsellor and soon-to-be psychologist. I am a life-long learner and student. I love to travel and have adventures. I am a lover of animals, nature, and food. I enjoy cooking, baking, singing, running, traveling, and taking pictures. I am determined, persistent, consistent, and organized. I am also softhearted, compassionate, and sensitive (sometimes to a fault). I love to laugh and enjoy life. I recognize, in light of my discussion of Sparrow's (2000) work on gender and Western construction of identity, that many of my individual traits may not actually come from within, but rather were socially constructed early on in my life. Regardless, they are a part of who I understand myself to be, and I embrace them as they contribute to my personal and professional roles.

Theoretical Perspective

When I discovered hermeneutic phenomenology, I knew I had found a methodology that was complementary to my research aims. With the topic of intercultural relationships in mind, the next step was to learn and apply hermeneutics to my topic. What follows is a description of hermeneutics, hermeneutic phenomenology, and some fundamental aspects as I see them applying to this research topic.

Hermeneutics

Before reviewing some of the fundamental methodological aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important to give attention to the underpinnings of this methodology. The word “hermeneutic” means interpretation, and as such, the terms hermeneutic phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology can be used interchangeably (Schmidt, 2006). Aside from its applications to phenomenology, hermeneutics is a methodology that applies across several other disciplines such as legal, biblical, and philological (linguistic) hermeneutics. Essentially, hermeneutics applies to any discipline in which there is a focus on the interpretation of language or written works (Schmidt, 2006). Moreover, interpretation of language can take place on a semantic or psychological level; that is, one can use the practice of hermeneutics to understand the language used by the author (semantic) or the underlying thoughts of the author (psychological). According to Schmidt (2006), these two levels (semantic and psychological) “depend on each other to complete the task of interpreting” (p. 7). One can understand this to mean that the study of both the grammatical and the psychological aspects of the author’s language are integral to the hermeneutic process.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology, as briefly described earlier, is focused on understanding of lived experiences of individuals (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a branch of phenomenology, is also concerned with the understanding of lived experiences; however, the hermeneutic side implies that the understanding is interpretive rather than purely descriptive. This notion is based on the idea that as researchers, we are also human beings, who are influenced by our history and surroundings (Laverty, 2003). Furthermore, because our method of understanding comes from language, a tool that is uniquely used by each of us, interpretation is inevitable (Schmidt, 2006). Therefore, the methodology underlying hermeneutic phenomenology posits that our understandings of lived experiences will always be “interpretive.”

To begin a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation, the researcher poses the question: What is the experience like? (van Manen, 1982; 1984a; 1984b; 1990). By asking this question, the researcher hopes to gain a richer understanding of a particular phenomenon by uncovering the ‘essence’ of the lived experience in light of the meaning that is embodied within it (van Manen, 1982; 1984a; 1984b; 1990). With this aim in mind, the researcher engages with the text, using an in-depth, interpretive, and dialogic process of reading and writing (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 1984a; 1984b; 1990).

Fundamental Methodological Concepts

Limitations. From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, there are limitations to who has knowledge of a particular lived experience (van Manen, 1990). As “experience” implies, one must have subjectively lived through a phenomenon in order to be able to reflect on its meaning. Therefore, meaning must be gathered from the individuals who have lived through the experience first-hand. When looking at

intercultural relationships, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach would dictate that it is only the individuals in the relationships themselves who can provide a thorough and meaningful account of their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Inter-subjectivity. Although human experience is subjective and unique to individuals, there is a certain amount of commonality amongst the meanings that human beings attribute to experiences (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses these commonalities by dictating that shared qualities may come to light amongst the various expressions of lived experiences; this is referred to as “inter-subjectivity” (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, it stands that because there is inter-subjectivity, common meanings of a particular way of being can be discovered (van Manen, 1990). It holds, then, that for individuals in intercultural relationships, there would be certain shared qualities amongst their experiences that shed light on the common meanings of that lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

Natural attitude. In everyday experiences, individuals experience a type of consciousness that van Manen (1990) refers to as the “natural attitude.” This refers to a person’s sense of familiarity that embeds a “taken-for-granted” nature (van Manen, 1990). That is, when individuals are living through an experience, they are not reflecting on the meaning, rather they are wrapped up in the immediate experience of the phenomena; this is a state of pre-reflection. This natural attitude allows individuals to have an experience without reflecting on its meaning as it is happening. For individuals in intercultural relationships, the natural attitude would be one where they are experiencing their relationships without necessarily stopping to reflect on the meanings of their experiences. This concept of natural attitude also implies that in order to be aware

of the meaning of some lived experience, an individual must change his or her consciousness - from one of pre-reflection to reflection (van Manen, 1990). As such, all reflection on lived experience is done retrospectively since it is not possible for someone to experience something and also be simultaneously reflecting on the experience (van Manen, 1990).

Reflection. As van Manen (1990) proposes, in order to gain a richer understanding of lived experience, one must forego the natural attitude for one of reflection. Through a reflective attitude, an individual can move from an implicit understanding to an explicit awareness of their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). This shift from a natural to a reflective attitude requires some effort, and as such, implies that there is some motivation involved.

Wonder. For many individuals who engage in a reflective attitude, the incentive to do so may be wonder - a kind of amazement about a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Wonder creates questions in the minds of individuals; it creates excitement about the unfamiliar. Often, everyday experiences are not likely to stir a sense of wonder as they are considered ordinary ways of being (van Manen, 1990). As a result, individuals live day-to-day with an implicit sense of understanding their experiences, but rarely stop to reflect on the explicit meaning of *being* or *experiencing* a phenomenon. The focus, then, as hermeneutic phenomenological researchers see it is to either: (a) begin to see these ordinary ways of being as extraordinary, or (b) see the extraordinary meaning that is embedded in the ordinary ways of being (van Manen, 1990). Intercultural relationships may be viewed as extraordinary instead of ordinary in so far as the cultural differences provide a unique circumstance for the relationship. However, since at the core an

intercultural relationship is a relationship between two people, the challenge may also be to find the extraordinary meaning in the ordinary ways of being present in any relationship. For instance, society tends to portray an “ordinary” (dominant) way of being in intimate relationships that includes: finding a mate, getting married, and having a family. In general, this is a taken-for-granted way of being, in which individuals follow the implicit steps without taking a reflective attitude of wonder about their meaning.

Hermeneutic phenomenological researchers, through their wonder about the meaning of common ways of being, may also stir a desire in individuals themselves to make sense of their own lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). In this way, hermeneutic phenomenological research brings an understanding of lived experiences to both those individuals who share in these ways of being as well as those who do not (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, this study has the potential to bring insights for those in intercultural relationships as well as for those who may be concerned with such relationships.

Intentionality and the phenomenology of practice. It is human nature to be inquisitive, to seek out answers for questions, and to aim to solve the mysteries of the world. From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, this questioning is referred to as the “principle of ‘intentionality’” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). That is, individuals intentionally seek out what it means to ‘be’ in the world as a way of becoming “more fully part of it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). The intention behind questioning is to understand experience as a way of becoming more experienced ourselves (van Manen, 1984a; 1990). Van Manen (1990; 2007) affirms that this intention signifies that research is a caring process, one in which we seek to become more thoughtful and tactful towards

others. He also refers to this concern of “how to act [tactfully and thoughtfully] in everyday situations and relations” (p. 13) as the phenomenology of practice.

The concept of phenomenology of practice is rooted in the notion of “pathic” understanding - a type of understanding that is “relational, situational, corporeal, temporal, actional” as opposed to “gnostic, cognitive, intellectual, technical” (van Manen, 2007, p. 20). Moreover, van Manen (2007) posits that pathic knowledge is related to the competence of professional practitioners; that is, he states that professional knowledge includes a level of cognitive ability, but it also includes pathic understanding - “the sense and sensuality of the body, personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices...” (van Manen, 2007, p. 20).

Van Manen (2007) suggests we need a language that can bring pathic knowledge to practitioners by remaining oriented to the experiences of individuals in the lifeworld. This language - as one found in phenomenology - can “speak to us and make a demand on us” (van Manen, 2007, p. 21) to improve our pathic understanding, and hence, our professional practice. Therefore, with phenomenological research and writing, the aim is not only to gain a deeper understanding of a lived experience, but to share that understanding with others in an effort to further develop the “experiential, moral, emotional, and personal dimensions” (van Manen, 2007, p. 22) of our professional lives. Personally, I identify with this notion, as it is my caring – my desire to become more thoughtful towards others – that led me to do this research. Moreover, this research has a place in sharing pathic knowledge and understanding with others.

Study Rationale and Purpose

Counselling Considerations

Given the diversity of communities and their members, the need for counsellors to have cultural sensitivity and intercultural understanding has long been recognized (McClurg, 2004). When working with a client from a different cultural background, counsellors are expected to know, and be sensitive to, how cultural differences between the counsellor and client may affect the counselling process. In working with intercultural couples, cultural differences and their effects on the counselling process can become complex. For instance, a counsellor may come from a different cultural background from that of both partners in a couple or only one partner in a couple.

Such complexities have prompted research in the area of intercultural unions as well as counselling with intercultural couples. Sullivan and Cottone (2006) support this notion by stating that so far, “therapeutic strategies and considerations for intercultural couples generally promoted cultural awareness and knowledge on the part of both the therapist and the clients. At the same time, therapists must be alert to concerns that are specific to intercultural couples” (p. 223). Henriksen, Watts, and Bustamante (2007) also point to the increasing need for new counsellor techniques in order to address the needs of increasing numbers of intercultural couples.

Naturally, an integral step in the direction of creating new counsellor considerations and techniques for working with intercultural couples would be to provide more insight for counsellors to better understand the lived experiences of intercultural couples. Of course, it is not possible that counsellors can know the lived experiences of their clients, since their lived experiences are unique and personally experienced; however, research such as this does provide enhanced understanding. As stated earlier,

phenomenological research provides pathic knowledge for those practitioners looking to expand their relational, emotional, and experiential understanding (van Manen, 2007). It also provides insights, both pathic and cognitive, that will support working with intercultural couples. In these ways, there is potential for this type of research to help counsellors reflect on the efficacy of their approaches to working with intercultural couples and to assist counsellors to develop their professional competence in pathic ways.

Personal Reflections

My initial interest in intercultural relationships was a personal one that began with curiosity. That curiosity led me to begin researching intercultural relationships, which is when I learned of the growing prevalence of these relationships. I also learned of the multi-faceted dimensions of intercultural relationships and the need for continued research in this area. More importantly, I realized the importance of this research as contributing to my personal and professional development.

To investigate the question of what it means to be in an intercultural relationship, I set out to understand the experiences of those individuals who are in such relationships using hermeneutic phenomenology as the framework. I sought to increase awareness for myself as well as others who are interested, namely other couples, researchers, and counsellors. I aimed to improve understanding, tactfulness, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity in my practice as well as in my day-to-day life with friends and members of society.

With this research, I acted with the preconception that the experience itself is as important as understanding the meaning of experience; furthermore, I proceeded from the position that there is a practical sense of wisdom that comes from working with

individuals who have had the lived experiences in question (van Manen, 1984a).

Experiential understanding comes from doing the work out in the world, with the people who have had the experiences and can shed light on them. They are the experts - the ones who can give us insight into what it means to have those experiences.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature on intercultural couples, accessed using several online databases from the University of Regina library. The databases included: CBCA Education, ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals, PsycArticles (Ovid), PsycInfo (Ovid), and Sage Journals Online. A wider variety of search terms were utilized since “intercultural” is not always the term used to define these relationships; the terms included: interethnic, interracial, mixed heritage, and dual-culture. Searching with these terms facilitated finding an array of pertinent literature for the topic, which would have been restricted if only “intercultural” had been used. After finding numerous articles using different terms, I narrowed my search to look for those that specifically used the term “intercultural.” To preface this literature review, I will briefly discuss the pertinent terminology, the prevalence of intercultural couples, and relevant research in this area.

Intercultural Couples: The Terminology

In order to discuss the research on intercultural unions, it is important to understand the many different terms that are used in the literature to refer to these relationships. The terms used, but are not limited to: *intercultural*, *interethnic*, *interracial*, *interfaith*, *mixed*, *dual-culture*, *multiple heritage*, *transnational*, and *transcultural*. Within the body of research, the term *interracial* is often used. As discussed in Chapter I, although the term race has been, and continues to be used in research, the term has been questioned (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998). Despite this, my review would not be extensive unless I included the earlier research that has focused on interracial relationships. This is because interracial relationships can include cultural

differences between the partners (Rosenblatt, Karis, & Powell, 1995). Furthermore, some researchers have specifically chosen to identify cultural differences through the lens of racial differences; for example, McFadden (2001) focused on how racial differences are the principal factor affecting intercultural couples. However, this implies that intercultural couples are also interracial in nature, which is not always the case (Sullivan & Cottone, 2006).

As stated previously, there is a multitude of terms that have been used to refer to mixed unions, and I will be covering a wide selection of literature terms in my review. As such, in order to maintain authenticity, I will use the same terms used by the authors in their publications. However, to maintain simplicity, I will use the term “intercultural” for overall discussions such as when I am referring to many research topics in general.

Intercultural Couples: The Prevalence of Mixed Unions

Intercultural unions have increased significantly over the past few decades. In Canada, from 2001 to 2006, there was a 33 per cent rise in mixed marriages and common-law relationships (Milan, Maheux, & Chui, 2010). Since these statistics do not account for non-married or non-common-law partnerships, the actual number of mixed relationships is difficult to ascertain. The Canadian census reveals that mixed unions are most common among younger age groups, making up 6.8 per cent of 25-34 year-old unions and 5.8 per cent of 15-24 year-old unions (Milan et al., 2010). Moreover, it was found that the numbers of mixed unions correlated with higher education levels (Milan et al., 2010). These statistics not only identify that there is an increasing number of mixed unions, but they also signify that these unions are likely to continue increasing. Yancey and Lewis (2009) addressed these trends by suggesting that “going to college brings

individuals into more contact with people of different races, which provides them with the opportunity to meet a person of a different race that they will marry” (p. 50). Due to the continuing rise in the number of mixed unions and the likelihood that these numbers will continue to increase, many researchers have turned their attention in this direction.

Intercultural Couples: The Research Trends

The research that has been done in the area of intercultural couples is vast and has covered a variety of topics. Much research in this area has compared interracial relationships to same-race relationships on such factors as marriage satisfaction, reasons for dating, attachment patterns, and mental health (Fu, Tora, & Kendall, 2001; Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006; Yancey, 2002; Forry, Leslie, & Letiecq, 2007; Cheng, 2010; Yancey & Yancey, 1998; Gaines, Granrose, Rios, Garcia, Page Youn, Farris, & Bledsoe, 1999; Fusco, 2010). Several studies focused on the external pressures in interracial and intercultural relationships by looking at concerns such as marginalization, racism, and experiences of oppression by family and community (Graham, Moeai, & Shizuru, 1986; Luke, 2003; Molina, Estrada, & Burnett, 2004; Imamura, 1990; Zahedi, 2010; Nelson & Otnes, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Kelaher, Williams, & Manderson, 2001). More recently, some researchers have focused on the internal dimensions of these relationships; they have looked at what the couples themselves experience as challenges and concerns within their relationships (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, & Monakes, 2011; Henriksen, Watts, & Bustamante, 2007; Grearson & Smith, 1995; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Donovan, 2004). Moreover, some research has aimed at helping professionals who work with intercultural couples and families; the researchers provide case studies in order to

bring awareness to the specific concerns of intercultural families and to provide professionals with an understanding of how those concerns affect the family. Also, the research gives suggestions for professionals such as using culturally competent and sensitive interventions, using tools to help the couple learn more about each other, and focusing on strengths and similarities within the couple (Crippen & Brew, 2007; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; McFadden, 2001; Rohrlich, 1988; Heater, 2003; Li, Lin, & Eckstein, 2007; McClurg, 2004; McFadden & Moore, 2001; Atkeson, 1970; Frame, 2004).

In addition to research articles on intercultural unions, several books have contributed to this topic; these have included essays and testimonies from people in intercultural and/or interracial relationships who have shared their experiences on both the challenges and successes in their relationships (Johnson & Warren, 1994; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Grearson & Smith, 1995). This literature has provided invaluable, holistic, and genuine awareness about the experiences of these couples. One of the most significant notions was the importance of duality: That is, intercultural couples are both exceptional and ordinary (Klein & Adams, 1995). They are ordinary because they have many similar experiences as same-culture couples, but they are also exceptional because they have many unique experiences that are not present for same-culture couples.

It is evident through examination of the literature on intercultural couples that there is a shift in perspective that is happening - from one of external examination of intercultural couples to one of internally looking at the couples' experiences as they live through them. This change has also shifted from viewing these relationships as problematic and challenging to viewing them as a duality of experiences. This development is not only important to the couples themselves, but to society as well. More

specifically, by using the couples' words to describe their relationships, researchers and writers are helping to challenge how society perceives these unions. As Rosenblatt et al. (1995) stated: "Interracial partnerships challenge racism" (p. 4). Therefore, bringing awareness to these couples and their experiences helps to promote acceptance - a first and important step in leaving racism behind (Rosenblatt et al., 1995).

Intercultural Couples: The Research

Interracial Versus Intraracial Couples

Much of the research on interracial couples has been conducted with the assumption that interracial couples differ from intraracial (same-race) couples. However, what the researchers often find is that the results are either contrary to their hypothesis or provide an unexpected outcome. Specific areas of focus for interracial versus intraracial couples include attachment, intimate partner violence, reasons for dating, marital quality, and external pressures (Fu et al., 2001; Troy et al., 2006; Yancey, 2002; Forry et al., 2007; Cheng, 2010; Yancey & Yancey, 1998; Gaines et al., 1999; Fusco, 2010; Graham et al., 1986; Luke, 2003; Molina et al., 2004; Imamura, 1990; Zahedi, 2010; Nelson & Otnes, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Kelaher et al., 2001).

Attachment. Gaines et al. (1999) conducted a research study that specifically focused on attachment in interracial and interethnic relationships. The researchers followed Bowlby's (1969) conceptualization of attachment, which includes two basic categories - secure and insecure. Securely attached individuals are those who find it "easy to trust current romantic partners" (p. 277) because they have experienced acceptance in their previous relationships. In contrast, insecurely attached individuals have difficulty with trust in their current relationships as a result of the rejection they felt in earlier

relationships. Gaines et al. (1999) hypothesized that there would be higher numbers of securely attached versus insecurely attached individuals in interracial and interethnic relationships, and they discovered support for this hypothesis. This result, as stated by Gaines et al. (1999), is consistent with previous qualitative findings that found interethnic and interracial couples to be securely attached. More significantly, Gaines et al. (1999) postulate that these results demonstrate interracial relationships are based on socio-emotional intimacy rather than sexual intimacy (Gaines & Ickes, 1997; Gaines & Liu, 1997, as cited in Gaines et al., 1999).

Intimate partner violence. Fusco (2010) conducted a unique study on the differences between interracial, same-race, and White couples on levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) as reported by the police. Results from the investigation showed that, as compared to same-race ethnic minority couples or White couples, interracial couples were more likely to have a history of prior IPV, to engage in mutual assault, to result in perpetrator arrest, and to result in injury to the victim. Moreover, Fusco (2010) also discovered that interracial couples were approximately 50% less likely than White couples to have used alcohol or drugs in conjunction with the IPV event, although this is contrary to previous findings by other researchers (Caetano, Schafer, & Cunradi, 2001; Cunradi et al., 1999, as cited in Fusco, 2010). As such, Fusco (2010) suggests that more research is needed to understand the unique challenges interracial couples face.

Reasons for dating. Another study, conducted by Yancey and Yancey (1998), examined individuals' reasons for entering interracial relationships despite society's disapproval. These researchers hypothesized, based on Merton's (1941) caste theory, that individuals who seek out interracial relationships do so with relational assets, physical

attractiveness, and financial security in mind. This means that a racial minority who has a higher socioeconomic status may 'trade' financial security for racial status by seeking a relationship with an individual of racial majority or vice versa. This research focused on the relations between White and Black people only, as those two racial categories were believed to show the largest behavioral differences. In contrast to Merton's (1941) caste theory, Yancey and Yancey (1998) found that White people who interracially date do not seek relational assets more than Black people who interracially date. Furthermore, the results indicated that Whites who interracially date have more in common (in terms of motivation for dating) with Blacks who interracially date than with Whites who do not interracially date. Based on the results, Yancey and Yancey (1998) conclude that, despite what past theories may have posited, motivation for interracial relationships may not be racially or financially based; these researchers believe that interracial couples become involved for the same reasons as intraracial couples, such as love and compatibility (Davidson, 1991-1992; Porterfield, 1978; as cited in Yancey & Yancey, 1998).

Marital quality. In yet another study on the differences between same-race and interracial couples, researchers examined marital quality, perceived fairness, and sex role ideology between African American/White interracial couples and same-race couples (Forry et al., 2007). Results showed that there were fewer differences between the couples than expected. Regardless of race or type of union, women expressed more feelings of inequality in their relationships. Furthermore, in both interracial and same-race couples, perceived unfairness was related to poor marital quality. The only difference that was found between same-race and interracial couples was with respect to ambivalence. Ambivalence was understood by the researchers as: (a) uncertainty and

confusion about the value of one's relationship and (b) the perceived sacrifices of staying in one's relationship. African American partners, regardless of gender, experienced more ambivalence regarding their relationships than their White partners. Forry et al. (2007) noted that this may indicate that African Americans who marry interracially have concerns regarding their racial identity in the context of their interracial relationship and the race consciousness of society. More specifically, Forry et al. (2007) stated that African Americans in interracial relationships experience a new form of discrimination from family, friends, and community; as such, they may feel the need to renegotiate their racial identity when engaging in interracial relationships. Furthermore, these researchers suggested that the ambivalence felt by African American partners may be related to this identity renegotiation, rather than how much they get along with or love their partners. In the end, Forry et al. (2007) concluded that although this difference of ambivalence was found, interracial and same-race couples have more similarities than they do differences.

Similarly, Fu et al. (2001) investigated the differences between interracial and intraracial couples on marital satisfaction. In this research, interracial couples were those where the partners had different ethnicities, whereas intraracial couples were those where the partners had the same ethnicity. Fu et al. (2001) concluded that interracial couples did report significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction, however, it was specifically the women who reported lower levels of happiness. In fact, happiness for the men did not differ dramatically across the groups (interracial vs. intraracial).

On a similar note, Cheng (2010) investigated marital satisfaction and conflict styles in interethnic couples. Cheng (2010) posited that conflict style is influenced by culture, and as such, any conflict style differences between the individuals in interethnic

couples would lead to lower marital satisfaction. Conflict styles were conceptualized according to Rahim's (1983, as cited in Cheng, 2010) five styles of conflict management: integrating, compromising, dominating, obliging, and avoiding. Integrating style includes a high concern for both self and other, whereas compromising includes a moderate concern for both self and other. Dominating style only includes concern for self, while obliging only includes concern for the other. Avoiding style is one that is a particular concern when it comes to culture. In some cultures, avoidance can be interpreted as disregarding concern for self and other; in other cultures, it is seen as highly regarding both self and other, since it is believed to promote relational harmony (Cheng, 2010). The research, which focused specifically on Taiwanese husbands who were married to women from other parts of Southeastern Asia and China, found that cultural differences in couples were significantly associated with differing conflict styles and, subsequently, lowered marital satisfaction. In particular, the research revealed that the foreign wives most often used the integrating style while their Taiwanese husbands used the avoiding style. Cheng (2010) concluded that these results are consistent with previous research that suggests differing conflict styles between men and women are related to the different gender socializing practices. As Cheng (2010) elaborated, in Taiwan, women are socialized to be more relationship oriented, while men are encouraged to avoid conflict as a way to safeguard their masculinity. Consequently, these social messages that men and women receive have an impact on how they partake in conflict within their relationship.

Another research study exploring relationship quality was conducted by Troy et al. (2006). The researchers hypothesized that, compared to intraracial couples, interracial couples would have greater conflict, less satisfaction, and a differing attachment style.

The results, however, showed no differences, and interracial couples actually reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction than intraracial couples. Troy et al. (2006) concluded that these results are a significant step in demonstrating that interracial couples are not necessarily hampered with more relationship concerns than intraracial couples. This finding is also in support of previous research done by Graham et al. (1986), which found no differences in marriage satisfaction levels between intercultural and intracultural couples. Despite their findings, Graham et al. (1986) noted that intercultural couples did express more external problems related to pressure from family, friends, and community. Fontaine and Dorch (1980) further support these notions; they found that interethnic couples, although more satisfied with their home life, experienced more difficulties with community, family, and friends than intraethnic couples.

Overall, the research on the differences between interracial and intraracial couples demonstrates that the preconceived notions about motivations for entering interracial relationships (i.e. trading for: relational assets, financial security, physical attractiveness) are not well supported. Furthermore, although there are differences between interracial and intraracial couples, lower marital satisfaction should not be assumed in the former compared to the latter. In addition, the reasons for interracial couples to enter into a relationship are not necessarily based on an exchange theory, but rather are the same reasons intraracial couples enter into relationships (i.e. love and compatibility). Yancey and Lewis (2009) supported this notion; they stated that interracial relationships are just like same race relationships in many ways, including reasons for dating. They caution against stereotypes that are formed towards individuals who date interracially. Interestingly, Bizman (1987) conducted a study on perceptions of interethnic versus

intraethnic couples. As hypothesized, interethnic couples were perceived as having more love (than money, social status or physical attractiveness) as a factor in their union than intraethnic couples. Although love was considered an important factor in all unions, participants judged it as a more salient factor for interethnic couples due to their perceived differences. Participants perceived intraethnic couples as being more compatible than interethnic couples.

Intercultural Couples: External Pressures from Family and Society

External concerns, including pressure from family and community, are commonly expressed by intercultural couples (Graham et al., 1986; Luke, 2003; Molina et al., 2004; Imamura, 1990; Zahedi, 2010; Nelson & Otnes, 2005; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Johnson & Warren, 1994; Kelaher et al., 2001). Zahedi (2010) interviewed Filipina women who were married to Iranian men and living in Iran. The study focused on the emotional and social adjustment of the women and their ability to bridge national, cultural, and religious differences between themselves and their husbands, husbands' families, and society. One challenge for the women included pressure to fit in with the in-laws, especially in light of language differences. Furthermore, cultural differences in expectations for the son's (husband's) role in the family were cited as another challenge. On a positive note, Zahedi stated that motherhood was important for these women and helped to ease their adjustment to a new society. In addition, the women bridged gaps through "drawing on the love of their husbands and the shared value they place on family life" (p. 79).

Luke (2003) also discussed external pressures for interracial families, particularly in regards to acceptance of the couple. Not only can tensions mount among extended family members, it can be even more hurtful when an individual's own parents reject the

relationship and/or the individual. As Luke (2003) points out, the “emergence of friends’, relatives’, and parents’ latent racism targeted at a beloved partner leaves emotional scars that take years to heal” (p. 391). Moreover, intercultural couples speak of “cautionary warnings” from their families, which are often interpreted as somewhat racist. Because of parents’ disapproval, many intercultural couples either become estranged from their families or avoid telling their families for as long as possible (Luke, 2003).

Besides “fitting in” with the families, intercultural couples may also be concerned with ensuring that everyone is satisfied with their wedding ceremony choices. Research conducted by Nelson and Otnes (2005) found that brides of intercultural unions were particularly concerned with how and what cultural traditions to include in the wedding ceremony. Brides were apprehensive about how much of each culture to include and the possibility of offending some family members with their choices.

Many books further discuss this struggle with family and societal acceptance. Johnson and Warren (1994) wrote a book on the perceptions, the various concerns, the benefits, and the changing attitudes towards mixed marriages. One individual was quoted as saying, “...marriage never was and is not now (romantic myth notwithstanding) a matter than concerns only two people. Families, neighborhoods, and others may all be involved and their attitudes, values, and expectations regarding the marriage are often critically important” (p. 156). Another individual shared about family pressures; specifically, she spoke about the extreme reaction of her partner’s parents by saying, “When Don returned home from Fisk, his parents had him psychologically evaluated by experts ranging from ministers to marriage counselors” (p. 128). In this example, she was speaking about how she met and started dating her partner at Fisk University in

Nebraska, Tennessee. When he returned home and his parents found out that he was dating a Black woman, they decided that he needed a psychological evaluation.

Rosenblatt et al. (1995) weighed in on the experiences of interracial couples in their book titled *Multiracial Couples: Black and White Voices*. These authors presented themes that emerged from interviewing multiracial couples. Similar to the previous literature, Rosenblatt et al. (1995) commented on the concern for multiracial couples when it comes to familial and societal pressures. From reading the interview excerpts, it is apparent that negative responses from family and society are often hurtful to these couples. Conversely, there are instances where the acceptance and/or reconciliation of the family or society can bring great satisfaction to the couple. It is through writing like this - writing that explores the perspectives of people in intercultural relationships - that the reader can begin to understand the couples' experiences. This type of writing gives a richer and more accurate picture of what intercultural couples experience.

In addition to the research and writing on external pressures from family, some research has focused on external pressures that come from societal practices such as marginalization (Imamura, 1990; Kelaher et al., 2001). Imamura (1990) examined the marginalization faced by interracial married women. Imamura (1990) conducted interviews with women who had met and married their husbands in a Western setting and then moved to their husbands' home countries – Japan and Nigeria. The women reported feeling pressure in the form of marginalization – both in their social life and with their extended family. Because norms for women's roles change across cultures, the wives found themselves pressured in new ways. This study illustrates the challenges involved in

intercultural relationships when one individual in the couple must live in a new and unique culture, with a new set of expectations, while experiencing marginalization.

Another study, by Kelaher et al. (2001), examined external pressures and the effect on mental health for intercultural couples. Kelaher et al. (2001) investigated the health of Filipina women living in Australia: One group was Filipina women married to Australian men and the other was Filipina women married to Filipino men. Results revealed that women who were married to Australian men had better mental health, better English proficiency, and a smoother transition to life in Australia than the women who were married to Filipino men. Kelaher et al. (2001) suggested that this could be indicative of the positive impact of acculturation for the Filipina women married to Australian men.

Intercultural Couples: Strengths, Challenges, and Strategies

Another trend in the research on intercultural couples is one that focuses on their unique strengths, the challenges they face, and the strategies, considerations, and tools for working with these couples (Henriksen et al., 2007; Molina et al., 2004; Bustamante et al., 2011; Crippen & Brew, 2007; Sullivan & Cottone, 2006; McFadden, 2001; Rohrlich, 1988; Heater, 2003; Li et al., 2007; McClurg, 2004; McFadden & Moore, 2001; Atkeson, 1970; Rohrlich, 1988; Frame, 2004; Donovan, 2004).

Strategies and tools for working with intercultural couples. A portion of the literature has focused on strategies and tools that can be used to help counsellors understand couples better and to help couples develop greater understanding of one another within their cultural context (Li et al., 2007; Henriksen et al., 2007). One such piece of literature discusses The Cultural Relationship Interview Matrix (CRIM; Li et al., 2007). This form is filled out by each person in the couple, and then it is used as an

interview tool so the couple can get to know one another better. The process facilitates increased awareness of each person's cultural heritage. In addition, this instrument helps to improve communication through providing the couple with an opportunity to discuss topics that may have been previously too difficult to discuss.

A similar tool is the Multiple Heritage Couple Questionnaire (MHCQ; Henriksen et al., 2007). This questionnaire, created as a revision to the Interracial Couple Questionnaire (ICQ), was developed with counselling in mind. The MHCQ is designed to obtain critical information that can be overlooked when working with these couples; such information may include concerns regarding marginalization or how to raise children in a multiple heritage household. The MHCQ facilitates open communication between the individuals about their concerns, beliefs, and values; it allows the couple to "share their thoughts and emotions with each other as sources of strength and cooperation" (Henriksen et al., 2007, p. 405). To demonstrate the use of the MHCQ, the researchers presented a case study of a couple that wanted to address their differing beliefs before getting married. Their hope was to find a balance between their beliefs; however, they were unsure of where to begin. The partners filled out their MHCQ separately, and afterwards, they commented that some of the questions had been difficult to answer. They explained that some of their answers reminded them of "distasteful things their families had taught them" (Henriksen et al., 2007, p. 406). This recognition of familial beliefs allowed the counsellor to address them. The subsequent process allowed the couple to realize that there were many similarities in the messages they had each received. This branched into a discussion of how the couple could work together to overcome any challenges they would face from their families. Furthermore, the couple

was able to use the MHCQ to find similarities between their gender role perspectives. The counsellor was then able to help them create a plan that would meet each of their needs. Henriksen et al. (2007) concluded that this tool would be a valuable one in helping current and future professionals who work with intercultural couples.

As another resource for counsellors who work with intercultural couples, McFadden (2001) presented various stages of acceptance of intermarriage at both the individual and family level. The author noted that intercultural relationships are heavily influenced by several dimensions – individual, familial and societal. For intercultural couples, McFadden (2001) discussed the importance of empowerment and cultural dignity in the face of challenges. These are integral concepts for the counsellor to keep in mind when working with the couples. In a second paper, McFadden and Moore (2001) further elaborated on the stages of acceptance by observing that as intercultural couples begin to gain a sense of security in society, they also resolve their conflict, communicate more openly, engage in self-disclosure, and gain greater respect for one another's values.

Although it may seem so, these notions of how to facilitate working with intercultural couples are not new. Atkeson (1970) wrote about these ideas several decades ago in her article about building communication in intercultural marriages. She noted that the goal of treatment when working with intercultural couples is communication: Partners should be encouraged to accept cultural influence on behaviour - both for one's own actions and for the actions of the partner. Atkeson (1970) noted that the partners should be encouraged to communicate in a "need-fulfilling and effective way" (p. 403).

Rohrlich (1988) also emphasized the importance of effective communication for dual-culture couples. She argued for the use of the term "dual-culture" since this term

addresses the “specificity of the two cultures that are involved in the union of two people” (p. 36). In regards to effective communication, Rohrlich (1988) presented four guidelines. First, because problems can arise from a lack of communicated interest about the other’s culture, partners should be encouraged to discuss, share, and value each other’s culture. Second, cultural differences can (and should) be used to help the partners to verbalize and express their feelings. Third, difficulties in communication can be minimized by ruling out problems such as inadequate language competence or hearing impairment. Fourth, effective communication about cultural differences includes careful listening, unbiased questioning, and tactful expressing. Rohrlich (1988) concluded by re-emphasizing that communication is at the heart of satisfying dual-culture marriages, and as such, should remain an area of focus and investigation.

Molina et al. (2004) furthered research in this area with their discussion of the unique experiences of intercultural couples as well as a potential approach to intercultural couples counselling. As these researchers pointed out, every union includes “a degree of challenge in understanding each other’s world” (Molina et al., 2004, p. 139); however, for intercultural couples, these challenges can be intensified as they face the unique circumstances of navigating different cultural backgrounds. Molina et al. (2004) stated that many concerns for intercultural couples stem from systemic influences such as societal messages and family influences, which can inevitably take a toll on the relationship. Depending on the social setting of the couple – schools, workplaces, communities, families, places of worship – the pressures of being in an intercultural relationship can vary. Social messages can be overt and covert, one-sided or both-sided, causing the couple to experience pressure in different ways. In some cases, an

intercultural couple may have to withstand some strong pressures from rejecting families and/or communities. In other cases, intercultural couples may not face any or very few of these pressures. As Molina et al. (2004) note, sometimes the difficulties faced by intercultural couples can become sources of strength. Their challenges allow them to deepen their commitment and appreciation for one another. Because of these unique experiences, Molina et al. (2004) posit that it is extremely important for counsellors to assess the potential effects of those systemic influences on the couple.

Molina et al. (2004) made some suggestions for an integrated approach to intercultural couples counselling including family and group counselling, Narrative therapy, and Gestalt therapy. Narrative therapy includes a focus on listening respectively to clients' stories, searching for examples in the clients' lives when they were resourceful, and helping clients' to re-create their life stories in a positive way (Corey, 2009). Gestalt therapy emphasizes holism - the concept that clients are whole people, with many feelings, thoughts, behaviours, bodily sensations, and dreams (Corey, 2009). Gestalt therapy is also based on the principle of context; the environment influences the individual, and since the environment is always changing, so is the individual. Besides these suggestions, Molina et al. (2004) commented that investigation is needed to understand how these couples change over time as well as what is critical in that change. Such research would potentially enhance the lives of couples that seek out counselling.

Similar to the work of Molina et al. (2004), Sullivan and Cottone (2006) presented a literature review on counselling with intercultural couples, including relevant issues that arise in counselling as well as therapeutic strategies for handling them. The authors stated that research in the area of intercultural couples and counselling strategies

for these couples is lacking. Sullivan and Cottone (2006) maintained that more research is needed, especially considering how racism and oppression are often identified as primary concerns for intercultural couples. Moreover, additional work is needed to explore how cultural differences influence couples and how counsellors can assist couples. As Sullivan and Cottone (2006) concluded “Intercultural couples in distress show how partners can be driven apart by differences, whereas successful intercultural couples demonstrate how even the greatest of differences can be overcome” (p. 224).

Concerns, stressors, and coping. Frame (2004) also discussed concerns that arise for intercultural couples and provided suggestions for supporting them. Frame (2004) noted that there are several concerns that surface for all couples, but may be particularly challenging for intercultural couples; these include: values, religion, gender expectations, money, sexuality, child-rearing, social class, and language. In terms of supporting intercultural couples, Frame (2004) suggested using certain strategies to explore and resolve concerns with intercultural couples. First, she suggests assessing the worldview and acculturation level of the individuals. This crucial first step is to find out what values and beliefs the individuals hold, as well as to what extent they have adapted to or accepted the host culture. The second suggestion, creating cultural and spiritual genograms, involves creating a complex and detailed family tree, including demographic information about the relationships (birth, marriage, divorce, etc.) as well as perceptions of the relationships in the tree (conflict, satisfaction, alliances, etc.). The idea behind this step is threefold: to help individuals see generational patterns in their family history, to improve communication and questioning about their family history, and to decrease emotional reactivity in counselling. Frame (2004) presents the third strategy as reframing

cultural challenges; this strategy addresses the importance of helping couples to see their differences in a new light - one that focuses on the opportunities rather than the difficulties. The fourth strategy is collaborating with indigenous healers. Frame (2004) discusses this approach as one that is more culturally sensitive, since Western conventional counselling therapies may not always be the preferred method based on the client's cultural background. Furthermore, as Frame (2004) notes, it is integral for counsellors to learn about the indigenous healing methods that their clients prefer and to maintain alliances with traditional healers. The fifth strategy, inventing new rituals, involves working with the couple to construct rituals in order to help navigate differences, celebrate their unique backgrounds, and bring together the best of both of their worlds. Developing the advocacy role is the final strategy presented by Frame (2004). Since these couples may face challenges related to their family or social network, counsellors may take on an advocacy role for the couple. This final step is focused on creating positive networks for the couple in an effort to improve their system of support.

More recently, Bustamante et al. (2011) studied intercultural couples to identify potential culture-related stressors in their relationships. Their aim was also to discover some of the potential strategies, both unconscious and conscious, that were applied to deal with these stressors. Results revealed the presence of culture-related stressors as well as six main coping strategies including: cultural deference by one partner, gender-role flexibility, humor, recognition of similarities, general appreciation for other cultures, and cultural reframing or blending of values and expectations. Bustamante et al. (2011) provided considerations for counsellors based on their findings, and they encourage further research to investigate intercultural couples and their unique stressors and coping

mechanisms. One suggestion that Bustamante et al. (2011) made was for counsellors to be curious and allow the couple to discover their own narrative about their relationship and cultural values. Bustamante et al. (2011) also point out the importance of counsellors recognizing the ways in which culture shapes marriages. Moreover, it is important for counsellors to recognize that the idea of counselling and therapy, as well as most theories about marriage, has been and continues to be, to greater or lesser extent, influenced by Western concepts (Bustamante et al., 2001). In addition, another important step in working across cultures involves an examination of our own cultural values and attitudes. Patel, Li, & Sooknanan (2011) stated that the way to do this is through self-reflection and awareness of our own perceptions and behaviours. Moreover, the first step in intercultural competence is often seen as gaining an in-depth knowledge of the other's culture. Conversely, as Patel et al. (2011) pointed out, "it is more important to first learn about one's own behaviours, cultural quirks, values, and beliefs..." (p. 52).

A thesis written by Donovan (2004) proposed similar themes to Bustamante et al. (2011). Donovan's (2004) research presented the various stressors that affect intercultural relationships as well as the tools that couples used to cope. Common stressors included: family and society disapproval, language barriers, logistics (immigration procedures), cultural barriers and traditions, and children. Donovan (2004) found that coping resources included: humour, learning about the other's culture, support, communication, personal preparation, working towards common goals, and religion. Furthermore, the researcher noted that coping was facilitated by two things: (a) an underlying belief that one is not that different from his or her partner and (b) an attitude of commitment to each other.

Intercultural Families: Concerns and Strategies

A newer development in the research on intercultural relationships has focused on the intercultural family unit (Crippen & Brew, 2007; McClurg, 2004). One particular concern that comes up for intercultural couples includes raising children. In their review, Crippen and Brew (2007) addressed the topic of intercultural parenting and the differences that arise in child-rearing practices due to cultural beliefs and practices. They also touched on literature addressing the development of the intercultural family. Crippen and Brew (2007) noted concerns around raising children can be a big challenge for intercultural couples and differences in parenting practices can produce conflict. Crippen and Brew (2007) also presented research that addressed concerns about what happens to the family unit when parenting differences are not addressed. They suggested that early communication is a useful tool for avoiding challenges related to parenting differences; it would allow for the discovery of strengths and similarities within the couple's parenting approaches before children come into the picture. Crippen and Brew (2007) concluded their article with an emphasis on the importance of more research, particularly towards a positive perspective on how intercultural couples resolve conflicts around parenting.

The body of literature on intercultural families is further expanded by McClurg's (2004) research on identity formation for children of intercultural couples. McClurg (2004) discussed some of the developmental concerns for intercultural families and provides some suggestions for counsellors working with this population. McClurg (2004) speculated that biracial children would have difficulty relating to, and getting guidance from, their single-race parents. Moreover, McClurg (2004) posited that since the parents have not experienced the difficulty of identifying with more than one race, they would not have an understanding of the conflict their child is facing. Furthermore, in terms of

working with biracial youth, McClurg (2004) stated that racial identity is “the most widely encountered conflict by clinicians who work with biracial youth” (p. 171). Since racial identity, ethnicity, cultural background, and similar constructs are used by individuals to identify themselves, these youth may struggle with which race, culture, heritage, and/or ethnicity to identify with.

As a resource for family therapists, Heater (2003) wrote an article detailing the appropriate factors to consider when intervening with multicultural families. In particular, Heater (2003) pointed to the importance of the therapist’s ability to: (a) understand the basic tenets of a culture, (b) demonstrate respect, and (c) develop an awareness of her own culture. As a way to provide practical examples, Heater (2003) described several clinical cases, an overview of the relevant cultures involved in each case, and the culturally competent interventions suggested for each case. The interventions suggested by Heater (2003) all have a similar undertone: recognize the specific cultural, social, and economic concerns for the particular individual and adapt therapy to meet those concerns. One suggestion for working with African or Black Americans includes helping them to feel a sense of accomplishment in the first session, since this may be critical to their willingness to continue therapy. Heater (2003) suggests this because of the stereotypes and cultural bias that can be present for African or Black Americans seeking therapy, especially with a White therapist. Another example that Heater (2003) gives for culturally competent intervention includes the case of a Chinese Confucian man. In this case, she suggests that the best treatment is one that is authoritative, pedagogical, and based on problem solving. This strategy is suggested because it is aligned with the Confucian culture and its emphasis on self-discipline as the way to mental health (Heater, 2003).

Intercultural Couples: Summary

As a whole, the research on intercultural relationships is varied both in the terms used to refer to these couples and in the topics investigated. Regardless of the choice of terms, the research has focused on some perceived difference (cultural, ethnic, racial) between the individuals in the relationships. Furthermore, much of the research has considered the influence of these differences on the individuals and the couple in several areas such as perceived external pressures, marital satisfaction, and mental health. Yet another focus in the research on intercultural relationships has been investigating how to improve outcomes for intercultural couples that seek the help of therapists. Moreover, as a derivative to research on couples, some research has examined the intercultural family unit and considered concerns for bicultural children.

Although the research on intercultural couples has been helpful in understanding the unique challenges and strengths of these couples, there have been very few qualitative research studies written on this topic and fewer still that were phenomenological in nature. Nonetheless, there have been several books written on the topic of interracial and intercultural couples - ones that include personal essays from the couples themselves (Johnson & Warren, 1994; Rosenblatt et al., 1995; Gearson & Smith, 1995). These books are beneficial because they display the lived experiences of the individuals, illustrating the dual nature of intercultural relationships - that they are both unique and ordinary. In this way, the books provide something that the research does not: the lived experiences of the individuals - a place where deeper understanding of the complexities of intercultural relationships can happen. Similar to the books on intercultural couples,

my phenomenological research aims to push the boundaries of the research on intercultural relationships to a place of richer understanding.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the research process used for this study. First, I provide a description of my perspective as a researcher, including my personal assumptions. Second, I explain the method and process of data collection: (a) the selection criteria and process for obtaining and informing the research participants, (b) a descriptive introduction to the participants, and (c) the process of data gathering that included two interviews with each participant. Lastly, I outline my research methodology and data analysis process as one influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology.

Researcher Perspective

As discussed in Chapter 1, my perspective on intercultural relationships began as one of wonder. Over time, that curiosity evolved into a research interest. As I began to consider this topic, my perspective as a researcher began to develop, especially as I learned more about phenomenology. I was intrigued by notions of “the phenomenology of practice” and the phenomenological researcher as someone who is searching for and sharing “action sensitive knowledge” in the hopes of promoting more thoughtfulness and tact for one’s own actions and the actions of others (van Manen, 1990, p. 21). When I first learned of “action sensitive knowledge,” I fully realized what my perspective was: I wanted to understand the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships in order to increase my thoughtfulness in a personal and a professional manner.

As a researcher new to phenomenology, it was important for me to become as familiar with its theory and application as I could. My process of learning included reading about phenomenology and writing down important ideas, quotes, insights, and

questions. This journaling process is a recommended step in phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990; Lavery, 2003). Of particular importance was keeping track of insights during analysis, which I will discuss further in the Methodology section.

In addition to my journaling process, I worked to recognize my personal assumptions about intercultural relationships. From my experiences growing up in small-town Saskatchewan and living in South Korea, I developed assumptions about the intercultural relationships I observed, cultural differences in communication, and the differences that I perceived between intercultural relationships and same-culture relationships. Recognizing my own assumptions reminded me of the importance of exploring them in order to understand how they might influence this study. Van Manen (1990) supports this and points to the importance of making explicit those pre-understandings that one has about the lived experience. This explication is not for the purpose of fully suspending one's assumptions since that is not possible; rather it brings attention to the effect of personal assumptions on one's reflections (van Manen, 1990).

My personal reflections revealed that I believe: in some ways, intercultural relationships are different from intracultural relationships; in various ways, intercultural relationships are similar to intracultural relationships; intercultural relationships have both unique benefits and challenges; culture is an essential factor in how we relate to and communicate with others; it is important to understand cultural differences and the concerns regarding them; the more vast the differences between two cultures, the more challenge there will be in the relationship.

This process of recognition of my assumptions made me contemplate my pre-understanding of intercultural and intracultural relationships established during my

childhood. Specifically, I realized that many of my memories from growing up in small-town Saskatchewan did not contain individuals from ethnically and/or culturally different backgrounds. Rather, I was surrounded by, and largely influenced by, individuals more closely resembling my own identity – White, middle-class, rural. Furthermore, as far as I could see, there were no intercultural or interethnic relationships in my town. As such, the norm for me growing up was intracultural relationships. This norm, combined with my experiences in South Korea, influenced me to see intercultural relationships as unique, different, and interesting. Moreover, I assumed other individuals would have a similar view of intracultural relationships as the norm. Accordingly, my assumptions held that individuals within intercultural relationships would see their relationships as unique.

Data Gathering Method

Research Participants

Selection criteria. The selection criteria for this study included several factors; each participant identified their current relationship as: (a) romantic and intercultural, where romance was defined as the expression of love, intimacy, and desire to be emotionally close; (b) committed, monogamous, and mutually-agreed upon, which included, but would not be limited to, a legal marriage or a common-law union; and (c) having a length of three or more years. While these criteria may reflect a particular understanding of what constitutes a relationship, it was necessary to create some parameters for the selection of my research participants.

Invitation to participate. Following the establishment of the selection criteria, offers of invitation were posted around the University of Regina campus in the form of paper posters. Offers of invitation were also sent via e-mail to the University of Regina

staff and faculty. In addition to these methods, I spoke to several friends and acquaintances about my study and provided them with the offer of invitation, along with my contact information, in case they knew any prospective participants. In order to avoid coercion, I chose to provide my contact information rather than to accept contact information for prospective participants. As it turned out, all six of my participants heard about the study through either the paper or e-mail invitations at the University. All six participants not only self-identified according to the selection criteria for the study, but they also agreed to the criteria presented in the *Consent Form* (see Appendix A).

Informed consent. Before obtaining participants for my study, I carefully considered the expectations regarding the consent process, and prepared my consent form accordingly. I worked under the guidance of my thesis supervisor, and I consulted the relevant research ethics literature (Tri-Council Policy Statement; CPA Code). Before beginning my study, I sought and received approval to conduct my study from the University of Regina's Ethics Board (see Appendix B).

The consent form advised the participants of their rights: to anonymity and confidentiality; to withdraw at any point up until the thesis was submitted; to discuss details following the interview that the participants did not wish to have revealed as part of the study; to request a referral to an appropriate agency or professional should they have need; and to receive a \$25 gift certificate as a sign of gratitude for participation.

During the informed consent process, the structure of the study was explained to the participants. There would be two audio-recorded and transcribed interviews (approximately one hour each) and each one would be followed by the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy of meaning and/or clarification.

I understood that the experiences of being in any relationship can be challenging. To protect my participants' emotional well being, I informed them of the potential risks involved in talking about experiences of a personal nature. I explained that certain topics of discussion may make them uncomfortable or that they may experience unpleasant emotions. I assured the participants that they could feel free to discuss any concerns with me at any point during the interview, and that the audio recording could be stopped at any time. I also allowed for time following the interview to allow participants to discuss any concerns that surfaced while they were being interviewed. Furthermore, I informed the participants that I could provide them with a referral to an appropriate professional or agency upon request. This discussion proved to be important to all participants, as each one touched on personal experiences that could have evoked unpleasant emotions.

One participant in particular had a moderately strong emotional reaction to our discussion of family concerns. I provided support in several ways. First, I asked the participant if she wanted to stop the recording so we could talk freely about what was distressing. The participant declined so I reassured her and patiently waited for her to be ready to continue. Second, I used active listening and reflection - two basic counselling skills that help the person to feel listened to and understood (Corey, 2009). I recognized that these interview sessions were not intended to be counselling sessions; however, I believe that by using these attending skills, I was able to provide empathy and support for the participants. Furthermore, I believe the participant's experience of feeling understood would minimize any potential negative outcomes. Following the interviews, I allowed a time for debriefing in which the participants could discuss any memories, experiences, or feelings that surfaced during our conversation. None of the participants requested to stop

the recording during the interview; however, two participants took the opportunity to discuss some upsetting feelings after the interview was complete.

Following the informed consent process, all of my participants agreed to participate. Each individual signed and dated two copies of the consent form - one for the participant to keep and one for the researcher's files. As part of the informed consent process, I outlined measures for the protection of identity through the use of pseudonyms in the thesis document. All participants agreed to this method of anonymity. Some participants provided their own pseudonyms to represent themselves and their partners and other participants requested that pseudonyms be assigned for them and their partners.

The Participants

Altogether, my study had a total of six participants (see Appendix C): Trisha (32), Ryan (28), Gavin (27), Jessica (25), Anastasia (25), and Emily (22). Ryan and Gavin were the two male participants and Trisha, Anastasia, Jessica, and Emily were the four female participants. Of the six participants, two were individuals participating on their own (Trisha; Anastasia) and four participants (Ryan/Jessica; Gavin/Emily) were part of a couple where both partners participated. Although there were two couples involved, the partners were each interviewed separately just as were the other two individual participants.

Anastasia was the only legally married participant. The other participants (Trisha, Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily) considered their relationships as common-law unions. Anastasia had the longest relationship, having been with her husband for nine years. Trisha had the second longest relationship at almost five years. The other four participants, Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily had been in their relationships for three

years. None of the participants had children. Three of the participants were in the process of completing their undergraduate degree (Jessica, Gavin, and Emily), while the other three participants had already completed an undergraduate degree (Ryan, Trisha, and Anastasia). Trisha and Anastasia were each working on a graduate level degree.

Trisha was born and raised in Canada and self-identified her heritage as German, Ukrainian, and Prussian. Her first language is English, but she also speaks French, Spanish, and Turkish. Trisha has also lived in Mexico and France. Her partner, Pablo, is a 33-year-old male. He was born in Mexico and speaks Spanish as his first language. He also speaks English.

Anastasia was born and raised in Hungary. Currently, she and her husband live in Canada. Although Anastasia's first language is Hungarian, she also speaks English, Spanish, Portuguese, Bengali, and French. Her husband, Jasim, is 29 years old. He was born and raised in Bangladesh, and he has also lived in Hungary and now Canada. His first language is Bengali, but he also speaks English, Spanish, and some Hungarian.

Ryan was born and raised in Canada and his self-identified cultural heritage is East Indian. Ryan has never lived outside of Canada. His first language is English, and he speaks some Punjabi and French. His partner's name is Jessica and she was also a participant in this study. Like Ryan, Jessica was born and raised in Canada. She identifies her family's cultural heritage as Swedish and German. Her first language is English, and she does not speak any other languages.

Gavin's self-identified cultural heritage is Chinese. He was born and raised in Canada and he has never lived outside Canada. As a young child, Gavin's first language was Taiwanese; however, he no longer speaks it. His current language is English. His

partner, Emily, also participated in this study. Emily was born and raised in Canada. She has never lived in another country. Her self-identified cultural heritage and her first language are both English. She also speaks some Mandarin.

Data Gathering Process

The Interview Structure

The phenomenological view of the interview is two-fold: first, it serves as a way of gathering experiential material that allows the researcher to develop a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon being studied; second, it allows for the development of a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee about the meaning of the experience in question (van Manen, 1990). For these reasons, I choose interviewing as the method by which to investigate the participants' lived experiences. The interviews were conducted with each participant individually, and they were audio-recorded and transcribed. The recording of the interviews allowed me to focus on each participant's verbal and non-verbal language. With my focus on the participants, I was able to engage in a conversation-like interview. This provided an atmosphere where we could freely examine topics as they emerged and I could ask for clarity when needed.

The first interview with each participant was semi-structured; the purpose of the semi-structured interview was twofold: (1) it allowed us to maintain our direction in the goal of understanding the lived experience of the participant, while (2) providing some flexibility for the participants to explore the meaning of their own experiences as they saw fit (van Manen, 1990). The questions in the first interview were broad; however, I included prompts and focused questions to gain more specific details and examples related to their experiences (see Appendix D).

The second interview with each participant was conducted using the transcription of the first interview as a prompt. The purpose of the second interview was to ask more specific questions and to clarify meaning from the first interview. This second conversation was aimed at obtaining more detail to their lived experience so as to enhance understanding. Although most of the second interview included questions prompted by the first interview, it also included many thoughts, impressions, or topics of discussion that had arisen for me during the review of the first interview. Through the sharing of my thoughts and impressions, I was able to clarify my understanding and this allowed me to stay as close to the lived experience as possible (van Manen, 1990).

The interviews were conducted in English and they were held in a location and at a time that was convenient for the participants. Three participants were interviewed in their homes and three were interviewed in a private room at the University of Regina. In the end, the sessions averaged one hour in length, with adequate time to prepare for the interview and for the debriefing afterward. Two of the interview times were significantly longer than one hour to allow the participants time to explain their lived experience.

The Interview Process

As a way to ease into the interview, I began by asking each participant to describe how he or she met his or her partner. The remaining questions asked participants to describe different aspects of their experiences being in an intercultural relationship. Following the completion of each session, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and each participant was presented with a copy in order to validate the accuracy and to make clarifications as necessary. The transcripts were shared with the participants either in person immediately preceding the second interview (four participants) or by

electronic mail a few days before the second interview (two participants). The two participants who received their transcripts by electronic mail had much longer transcripts and needed extra time to review for any errors. The four participants who received their transcripts immediately prior to the second interview had shorter transcripts; they were provided with adequate time (30 minutes) to read through the transcripts for any errors.

When discussing the transcripts, all of the participants noted surprise at the differences in verbal speech as compared to written language. More specifically, they were astonished by the number of incomplete sentences and the quantity of informal words such as “um” and “like.” Aside from the technical aspects, five of the participants expressed intrigue with reading their own words on paper. They expressed fascination with seeing a physical written embodiment of their experiences and stories. Two participants made a few small changes, namely spelling errors. The other four participants were satisfied with the accuracy of their transcripts.

For the second interview, I used the transcript from the first interview to facilitate a bridge into our continued discussions. I found the second interview with each participant to be more casual and relaxed than the first. This increased comfort and allowed for more free-flowing discussion and exploration of their experiences. On the whole, I felt that each participant was personally invested in the interview process. All of my participants expressed an interest in the research, not only for their own experience, but for the benefit of others as well. The participants all stated that they would enjoy to read my thesis once it was complete - to read not only their own experiences but also the experiences of other individuals in intercultural relationships.

Data Analysis Method

One of the major steps to developing the method and methodology for this study included a review of pertinent phenomenological literature. As someone new to this type of research, my goal was to understand both the general concepts of phenomenology and the specific philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology. With my review of hermeneutic phenomenology in particular, I sought to understand the practical applications of this methodology in my own research. Furthermore, I wanted to learn more about the prescribed methods for undertaking thematic analysis. Before I provide an explanation of hermeneutic phenomenology and how that methodology informs my research, I would like to provide a concise review of the literature that I found to be particularly helpful.

Phenomenological Literature

As I reviewed the literature on phenomenology, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of the differences between descriptive and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology - a discussion that will follow. Two articles in particular clarified the differences. The first one by Lavery (2003) gave a brief history of each type of phenomenology, followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences between descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology. The second, by Wojnar and Swanson (2007), carried the discussion one step further and included insights into the importance of selecting the “right” approach for the research that is being conducted. Put together, these two articles helped me to understand my chosen methodology - hermeneutic phenomenology.

Armed with a better understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology, I set out to explore the work of Max van Manen (1982; 1984a; 1984b; 1990; 2007). Of the several pieces of literature I reviewed, there were two in particular that I found to be beneficial.

The first was the book *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990) and the second was an article titled “Phenomenology of Practice” (2007). In the book, van Manen describes both the underpinnings of his hermeneutic phenomenological approach and the methods by which he goes about uncovering meaning in lived experience. In the later article, van Manen describes the practical value of phenomenological research; that is, he asserts how the practice of reading and writing phenomenological texts can make us more thoughtful and tactful, and for these reasons, influence and transform our practice with others.

In addition to the works of van Manen, I discovered four supplementary articles that discussed the process of “doing” phenomenological research (Whitehead, 2004; Norlyk & Harder, 2010; Tesch, 1987; Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984). Two of these articles discussed the trustworthiness involved in doing phenomenological research; the authors commented on the importance of a clear theoretical framework and application of phenomenological principles when conducting an investigation (Whitehead, 2004; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). The other two articles presented suggestions and techniques on the analysis of phenomenological descriptions - namely how to discover emerging “themes” (Tesch, 1987; Barritt et al., 1984). These techniques were important to my research and will be discussed shortly.

Descriptive versus Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined as the study of human experience as it is lived (van Manen, 1990). The philosophy behind phenomenology began with Edmund Husserl - a researcher who believed that true meaning can be discovered through inquiring into deeper levels of reality and human experience (Lavery, 2003). Husserl explained

phenomenological inquiry as a descriptive process, and therefore, his phenomenology is often referred to as descriptive phenomenology (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Husserl proposed that by focusing on some phenomenon, a researcher could discover and describe the essences or “ultimate structures of consciousness” - those aspects which make up our reality (Lavery, 2003, p. 5). As purported by Husserl, this is an intentional process but one that is also influenced by the researcher’s views of the experience. Consequently, he coined the term “bracketing” to refer to the process of suspending one’s views or attitudes about the experience being studied. Husserl not only believed that bracketing was necessary but that the suspension of one’s beliefs and attitudes was a viable process (Lavery, 2003).

Hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, like descriptive phenomenology, is the study of lived experience (Lavery, 2003). Martin Heidegger is credited with the beginnings of hermeneutic phenomenology (Lavery, 2003). As a student of Husserl, he was proficient in the study of descriptive phenomenology, but he disagreed with Husserl on how the exploration of lived experience should proceed (Lavery, 2003). While Husserl proposed the concept of bracketing, Heidegger believed that it was not fully possible since our experience is inextricably linked with our pre-understanding (based on our previous experience) of the world (Lavery, 2003). Heidegger described pre-understanding as the sets of meanings that are influenced by cultural, social, and historical backgrounds. More importantly, a person’s pre-understanding cannot be set aside as it is with the person in the world (Lavery, 2003). Consequently, Heidegger emphasized that when investigating a lived experience, a researcher must consider the historical, social, and cultural context in which it occurs (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Furthermore, in terms of the researcher's bias, Heidegger purported that one can be aware of the influence of his/her own pre-understanding, but the influence cannot be escaped entirely. As such, he stated that when one is engaged in the process of understanding an experience, that process will always be an interpretive one (Lavery, 2003).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology & My Philosophy

Following my review of the literature, I chose to implement hermeneutic phenomenology for my study for a number of reasons. First, when I considered my personal philosophy of being in the world, I realized that I saw lived experiences as context-based; as Wojnar and Swanson (2007) state, "interpretive phenomenology is particularly useful for understanding how context influences, structures, and sustains experience" (p. 179). Moreover, I agreed with Heidegger's notion that a person's social and cultural context and history cannot be removed or set aside from his/her understanding of the world. It is impossible, in my opinion, to "remove" those lenses, although it is possible to be aware of how the lenses shade our view.

Second, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) also stated that "...those who appreciate differences and embrace ambiguity, and view humans as individuals who can have their needs satisfied only from within their own individual framework, may be more given to an interpretive mindset" (p.179). This statement, as it identified and described my personal and professional philosophy about human experience, affirmed my decision to choose hermeneutic phenomenology.

Methodology

Although hermeneutic phenomenological research is not particularly systematic in method, van Manen (1990) points out that there exists a certain "ground" to

phenomenological research that recommends how it should be conducted. For my data analysis, I chose to follow van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological method (1984a; 1984b; 1990). As a starting point for hermeneutic phenomenological research, van Manen (1984a; 1984b) provides a descriptive methodological outline. He divides this outline into four phases: (a) formulating a question, (b) exploring the phenomenon, (c) reflection and thematic analysis, and (d) phenomenological writing. Within each of the four phases, van Manen (1984a; 1984b) gives specific guidelines for how the research should be conducted. For instance, within the reflection and thematic analysis phase, the researcher should focus on uncovering and isolating the thematic aspects in the description, compose "linguistic transformations" of the theme, use artistic sources to glean descriptions of thematic aspects, and determine what the essential themes are. For a complete discussion of the four phases, refer to van Manen's work (1984a; 1984b).

In addition to these four phases, van Manen (1990) suggests that phenomenological analysis should be grounded in two basic processes: reduction and meaning construction. The reduction process can be seen as overlapping with the first three phases as listed above. Reduction involves two steps - first, paying attention to and suspending assumptions about the phenomenon (also sometimes called "bracketing"), and second, conducting a thematic analysis (van Manen, 1990). While bracketing in the traditional sense referred to Heidegger's notion of suspending pre-understandings of the lived experience, as van Manen conceptualizes it, bracketing does not involve a full suspension of pre-understanding; rather it involves identifying and remaining aware of one's pre-understanding throughout the research process. Once one's pre-understanding

has been identified, the researcher begins the secondary step of thematic analysis while simultaneously remaining aware of that pre-understanding and its potential influence.

Meaning construction, the second process of phenomenological research, entails focused writing and re-writing of the uncovered themes in an effort to bring the essence of the lived experience to light (van Manen, 1990). This process seems analogous to the fourth (phenomenological writing) phase mentioned above. The meaning construction process can involve re-orienting to the phenomenon and re-analyzing the data if necessary. In this way, the process presented by van Manen is less of a linear model and more of a circular process, where the researcher revisits and considers the phenomenon, his/her pre-understandings, and the thematic aspects that are being uncovered (van Manen, 1984a; 1984b; 1990). This cyclical process is commonly referred to as the hermeneutic circle.

The hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a term that refers to the process of interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenological research. Unlike a linear approach, the hermeneutic circle facilitates the constant connection between all of the parts as they relate to and make up the whole. When engaged in a hermeneutic phenomenological investigation, the researcher is moving back and forth between not only the parts and the whole of the data, but also between their pre-understanding and their research findings (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Furthermore, this circular approach implies that a researcher needs to understand the parts to understand the whole and vice versa (Ellis, 1998; Schmidt, 2006). As there is no beginning or end to a circle, to engage in the material or “enter” the circle, it is recommended that the researcher begin by looking at the whole and then move to examine the parts; then, once a general

understanding of both is accomplished, the researcher can more easily move between the two to gain an even deeper understanding (Schmidt, 2006).

Within the hermeneutic circle, there is a forward arc (top half) and a backward arc (bottom half). According to Ellis (1998), the forward arc is the initial approach that the researcher takes towards the phenomenon. It is made up of their pre-understandings, interests, and values that propel them toward the research. Although the forward arc would therefore seem biased, “this initial approach is unavoidable” since it provides the “forestructure” for the researcher to make sense of the data (Ellis, 1998, p. 26). The backward arc provides the opportunity for the researcher to reconsider their initial interpretation by examining the data for contradiction or confirmation. Moreover, during this phase the researcher is checking “to see what went unseen before” (Ellis, 1998, p. 26). Ellis (1998) emphasizes that during the backward arcing process, it is crucial to examine what is present as well as what is absent in the data. More importantly, the backward arc includes what Ellis (1998) terms “uncoverings” - instances of discovering new and unexpected dimensions to the data. If the researcher has not experienced “uncovering” or surprise when considering the data, then Ellis (1998) argues that “we either do not yet ‘see’ what can be uncovered, or we have not yet approached the research participant or situation in a way that respects the way it can show itself” (p. 23). Considering this perspective, the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher can use the hermeneutic circle and its guiding tenets to approach the data in a way that will allow what remains unseen to be seen (van Manen, 1990).

Reduction: Suspending personal assumptions. One of the most integral steps to the reduction process, according to van Manen (1990), includes the suspension of

personal assumptions concerning the phenomenon in question. As previously mentioned, Husserl originally coined the term “bracketing” to refer to the process of suspending one’s assumptions so that they do not interfere with the investigation (Lavery, 2003). From a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the process of suspending personal assumptions is seen as more complicated than simply “bracketing” them out. This is because one’s pre-understandings are considered to be a fundamental aspect of the individual that cannot be removed (Lavery, 2003).

For that reason, van Manen (1990) suggests a dynamic process that involves identifying assumptions and then continually working to suspend them. During the identification process, the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher is asked to give considerable thought to their pre-understanding and to “explicitly claim the ways” that it relates to the lived experience being researched (Lavery, 2003, p. 17). In this way, the pre-understanding of the researcher is not seen as bracketed or separate, but rather as recognized, embedded, and essential to the interpretive process involved in conducting hermeneutic-phenomenological research.

Reduction: Uncovering themes. The other essential part of the reduction process includes uncovering “themes” in the data. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, a “theme” is conceptualized as “a means to get at the notion we are addressing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). That is, a theme is not conceptualized in the traditional sense of the word, as an element or topic, but rather it is seen as a tool or “meaning unit” that gives order to the research and writing (van Manen, 1990).

In hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, the researcher does not mechanically count or code for particular themes, rather the researcher allows themes or meanings to

emerge; it “is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (p. 79). Van Manen (1984a) describes this conceptualization of themes as “knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes” (p. 20). Tesch (1987) states that a theme can be thought of as a “partial descriptor of the phenomenon” (p. 231). Therefore, themes can be seen as a focal point or way of conceptualizing the lived experience in a brief way. However, since the theme only provides a quick glimpse of the lived experience, the fullness of the phenomenon can only be understood in its whole description.

As van Manen (1990) posits, themes are a way of identifying and conceptualizing a particularly significant aspect of the lived experience. Moreover, the theme is a phrase that is used to refer to a common aspect of lived experience between descriptions of that same lived experience. This notion, referred to as inter-subjectivity (as discussed in Chapter I), is one of the aims to uncovering themes - to identify commonalities across lived experience. This process, however, is not meant to disqualify unique experiences of individuals, but rather to identify common aspects of the particular lived experience in order to provide a description that is true to the phenomenon.

To uncover themes in the data, van Manen (1990) provides three approaches, the holistic approach, the highlighting approach, and the detailed approach. With the holistic approach, the researcher aims to uncover the main significance to the text as a whole and express that through a particular phrase. For the highlighting approach, the researcher reads a text several times and highlights or underlines particular statements that seem essential to the lived experience. With the detailed approach, the researcher aims to understand what every sentence or cluster of sentences reveals about the phenomenon. In

addition to these instructions, van Manen (1990) emphasizes that the researcher should pay attention to how ideas are expressed (etymology of words and phrases) as well as to what is not spoken, as these can reveal uncovered aspects of the lived experience.

Tesch (1987) provides a unique understanding of van Manen's approach to uncovering themes by referring to his method as "panning and surveying" (p. 232). Panning refers to the highlighting approach, where the researcher looks for "precious elements" that are integral to the lived experience (Tesch, 1987, p. 232). Surveying is considered akin to the detailed approach as the researcher is focused on examining every "square inch of territory" to ensure nothing significant was missed (Tesch, 1987, p. 232).

Going beyond: Finding additional resources. As I was learning about van Manen's (1990) methodological approach to phenomenological research, I had an important discovery: while he focuses on responsible principles and sound judgment for doing phenomenological research, he does not provide an exact step-by-step method to moving through a large amount of data. Consequently, in preparing for my data analysis, I found van Manen's (1990) approach to be helpful, but not sufficient for a new phenomenological researcher. Although he provides a methodological basis for conducting data analysis, his description does not include any instruction for how to move through several phases of uncovering themes or how to keep the data organized.

For that reason, I turned to other resources in an effort to better organize and process the material. My supervisor, as my first line of support, provided me with some advice about how to read through transcripts and highlight for thematic aspects of the lived experience. Her recommendation was to read the transcripts at least three times: the first time to contemplate the overall meaning that was shining through and to formulate

the beginnings of themes, the second time to identify and highlight themes as they presented themselves, and the third time to check for any instances where significant thematic aspects were missed. Furthermore, she instructed me to look for instances of inter-subjectivity while also paying attention to the participants' unique experiences.

In addition to my supervisor's suggestions, I found the article by Barritt et al. (1984) to be helpful as it suggested a method for visually organizing data. In their analysis they used a chart system that had three sections: (1) the theme, (2) descriptive examples for that theme, and (3) any descriptive variations of the theme. Barritt et al. (1984) also discussed important points to keep in mind when conducting phenomenological research. Specifically, they recommended looking at each description with "fresh eyes," which allows the data to "speak for itself" (p. 6). Tesch (1987) also spoke about this idea - the importance of taking time to reflect and allow themes to emerge rather than rushing the process. I heeded this advice and took time between the readings as well as between each stage of the data analysis process to reflect and allow themes to emerge. Between readings, I spent time reflecting on what I had read and making notes about my impressions and insights.

Meaning construction. The second aspect of van Manen's two-part process, meaning construction, involves writing and re-writing in an effort to thoughtfully describe the "essence" of a lived experience. The term "essence" is explained by van Manen (1990) as an accurate description of the phenomenon; that is, a description of a lived experience is good (construes the essence) if it allows the reader to "grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (p. 39). Furthermore, van Manen (1990) posits that the process of grasping and writing about essences is a

“creative attempt” - one that results in a “linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (p. 39).

During meaning construction, the researcher uses the identified thematic aspects of the phenomenon to identify the essence and create a description of the lived experience. The description should make sense of and reflect the richness of the experience for the reader. As van Manen (1990) states, the phenomenological description is linguistically adequate if it demonstrates the “significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). To create a description that reflects the richness of the lived experience, the researcher should shed light on the themes using examples from the text. The examples that are provided should be varied in order to show the fullness of the thematic aspects of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

In addition to giving examples, the researcher should also consider the etymological and idiomatic origins of words and phrases used in the descriptions of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) describes this area as an “inexhaustible source” for phenomenological research (p. 62). This is because the origins of words and phrases can provide researchers with information about where the lived experience “originally sprang” (p. 59). I believe it is important to consider phrases and words, since often people “say” what they truly mean through their choice of words. On the surface, a spoken meaning may seem a particular way, but when looked at more closely can be contradictory or just more complex than originally perceived.

Putting the process into practice. In accordance with van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological method, I began my data analysis with the process of reduction. That included both considering and explicitly outlining, my pre-suppositions

about the phenomenon in question and my pre-understandings coming into this research (as outlined in the previous section on Researcher Perspective).

The reduction process also included the discovery of themes, which went as follows:

1. My initial review of the transcripts involved dividing each transcript according to the topic sections that corresponded to the areas of discussion in the interview (e.g. positive aspects, challenges, family, gender roles, etc.). I wrote these topic sections in the corresponding margins of each transcript.
2. I read each transcript thoroughly and underlined any phrases or ideas that I felt were significant to the lived experience of the participant. Following the review of each transcript I spent some time reflecting on the content and meaning before moving on to the next one. My aim was to gain a holistic sense of the lived experiences of the participants.
3. My second reading of the transcripts was conducted in two steps:
 - a. I read to find and underline any additional significant pieces that I overlooked during the first reading.
 - b. I created a separate document for each participant. For each participant, I transferred the significant (underlined) pieces of information from his/her interviews into that document. I also made sure to keep the topic headings that I created in Step 1 next to the significant piece so that I knew which aspect of the lived experience the piece was referring to.
4. As a result of the richness of my data and the sheer number of pages of “significant pieces” I had for each participant, I created another document aimed

at recognizing instances of thematic inter-subjectivity. This document was not organized by participant, but by the topic section headings as outlined in Step 1. Within each heading, I inserted the relevant significant piece or statement from each participant. To remain organized and help with the visualization of data, I created an initial for each participant instead of using full names. I placed the initial next to any significant piece that came from that particular participant.

By creating this document, I was able to look under each topic heading to see where there were instances of participants saying similar things about their experience. I was also able to see when participants used similar language to describe their experiences and I was able to see when there were large differences across participants' experiences. This document was very beneficial in beginning to uncover themes and to discover unique patterns and experiences amongst the participants. Furthermore, it was during this part of the data analysis that I experienced the "surprise uncoverings" that Ellis (1998) described in working within the hermeneutic circle. During the process of reading, re-reading, pondering, and then writing the documents, some of the unexpected themes began to reveal themselves.

5. Following my document creation and reduction, I read my transcripts for a third time. I looked for any significant instances that were missed, any contradictions to the theme, and/or any support for themes that were overlooked.

To find themes, I used a combination of the suggestions provided by van Manen (1990), my supervisor, and Barritt et al. (1984). Although my method did not specifically follow Barritt et al. (1984), I did use the underlying idea of their method, which is to

categorize, organize, and display the material visually. I reduced the data in different ways until I was able to see it displayed in a way that allowed the themes to emerge.

After completing the reduction analysis I moved into the meaning construction phase. This step involved creating a description that would make sense of the themes presented in the data. The aim was to create a rich and deep phenomenological description - one that resonated with the sense of lived life for individuals in intercultural relationships (van Manen, 1990). This included the use of descriptions from the participants' transcripts to demonstrate the fullness of the themes identified. Additionally, it included exploring the etymological and idiomatic meanings behind the words and phrases used by the participants to describe their experience (van Manen, 1990). In identifying those origins, I followed van Manen's (1990) technique, which focuses on a combination of personal experience, dictionaries, and thesauri. Furthermore, it is important to note that, in following van Manen's (1990) technique, none of the sources for idiomatic or etymological meanings are cited within the description of the lived experience (see van Manen, 1990, p. 58).

It is essential to mention that while the material has been presented in a linear fashion, the whole process was more synonymous with the hermeneutic circle. During my analysis, I jumped back to previous steps or back to previously examined transcript pieces to confirm my thematic meanderings. Through my note-keeping process, I was able to recognize that my initial understanding of the themes that emerged were founded in my pre-understanding and personal bias. However as I became more intimately involved in the maneuvering of the data, several surprises emerged and revealed more genuine themes that were truly and accurately reflective of the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

When I first read through the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences, the number of similarities and differences between participants astounded me. The first task in my thematic analysis was to examine the interviews for instances of intersubjectivity and commonality. While doing this I was also attentive to what made each participant's experience unique. In addition, I worked to maintain awareness of my pre-understandings in order to avoid "searching" for themes that I thought should be there. It was my intention to allow the themes to emerge on their own.

In this chapter I will provide a rich description that highlights both the commonalities and unique aspects found within the participants' experiences. This description will include a discussion of the three main themes along with their pertinent sub-themes. It will also include an explanation of a significant difference that I discovered. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of family approval of intercultural relationships as another major characteristic that emerged.

Theme 1: An Intercultural Relationship Is a Learning Experience

One of the major thematic aspects that came shining through the participants' descriptions was that an intercultural relationship is a learning experience. This theme first appeared in Jessica's sharing about being in an intercultural relationship:

It's good and it's hard. And it's just a learning experience, I think.

When I reflected on this passage, I thought about the term "learning experience" and all that it suggests. As the term learning implies, there is some knowledge or awareness that is gained. Unlike traditional or scholarly learning methods, a learning

experience connotes that understanding comes from an experiential encounter. As I considered Jessica's statement and the notion of "learning experience," I began to make connections with what the other participants had shared. I re-read the transcripts and discovered that the other participants had described their experience in similar ways. Although each participant's experience was described in a unique way, the common thread running through all of them was the notion of experiential learning.

While I read how each participant described his/her relationship as a learning experience, two sub-themes emerged: taken-for-grantedness and time. Each participant's description suggested that experiential learning occurred over time and without present realization. That is, during the experience, participants were not aware of the learning that was taking place. It was only later, after reflecting on the experience, that participants realized the learning that happened. They noted that their relationships had provided opportunities for learning, growth, change, and the adoption of a new perspective.

Ryan: You Can Learn A Lot

At one point in my first interview with Ryan, he was expressing what he would like others to know about being in an intercultural relationship when he said:

I mean it's good, like, you'll learn cool stuff about the other person, as long as they are open about that stuff. You know? Like, different cultural things, customs, traditions. I mean there's Christmas here, and there's other things, you know, other celebrations in my culture or maybe some other ones that you could learn about. So, it's kinda cool at times. I mean, you might get the odd person say something. I've never really experienced that, like, out in the open, but again, like, those are just ignorant people...It's good times if you let it - if you don't worry about the, uh -- don't sweat the small stuff, I guess, then you can learn a lot. It would be good.

This passage suggests there is a learning component to being in an intercultural relationship that: (a) is present as long as the people involved are open to it, and (b) is

available as long as they do not “sweat the small stuff.” The notion of “openness” to learning suggests that there are integral characteristics necessary for the experience of learning to occur. As will be discussed in the next thematic section, the notion of openness or willingness within intercultural relationships was also a prominent theme.

As Ryan suggested, there is a lot of benefit to being in an intercultural relationship, including learning about another culture. However, he also pointed out that there is “small stuff” that can be bothersome to the couple. In this instance, it seems he was specifically referring to the opinions and actions of others who may say something negative about the intercultural nature of the relationship. If someone “sweats the small stuff” or allows others’ opinions to affect them, it can influence the experience of the relationship. To say it another way, the bad may outweigh the good; the negative reactions of others might mask the learning and “good” that is present in the relationship.

Jessica: Opened My Eyes

As I mentioned above, it was Jessica’s statement about her relationship being a “learning experience” that peaked my curiosity about this theme. In addition, Jessica used a specific idiomatic phrase to explain her learning experience. She was speaking about what she sees as the positive aspects of an intercultural relationship when she said:

I’ve been to the Sikh temple and I’ve been to a mass there, so that was interesting. And it opened my eyes to a new religion. And, um, you just get to meet a whole new group of people and it’s fun. It’s interesting learning about a new - a different culture. And, overall, it’s been a good experience. It’s been a positive experience for sure.

Jessica referred to being “opened up” and having her “eyes opened” at several points throughout her interviews. For her, these phrases help her to describe her experience of learning. To have one’s “eyes opened” implies that one’s eyes were

previously closed and, as such, were not able to “see.” Of course, this “seeing” is metaphorical; it is a representation of awareness. When Jessica had her “eyes opened,” she “saw” something that she had not previously “seen,” meaning she learned something new through experience. Furthermore, as the phrase “eyes opened” is often used to refer to learning something that changes one’s way of thinking, Jessica’s use of this idiom implies that she has been changed by what she has learned. This notion was reflected in her interview when she talked about how her thoughts and feelings about being in an intercultural relationship have changed. She said:

I’ve definitely grown as a person and it’s opened my eyes, um, to different experiences.

Through the description of her lived experience, Jessica made clear how her intercultural relationship has been a learning experience - one that has “opened her eyes” and aided her in “growing as a person.”

Gavin: Pushes My Boundaries

In Gavin’s interview, he spoke about a very unique experience of learning in his relationship. He stated:

Um, you know, it pushes my boundaries. You know? Things that I’m used to, just to see someone who has never experienced it before. For example, Emily’s never tried some of the foods I’ve introduced her to, right? And seeing her excitement in it gives me an opportunity to get excited about it all over again, if you will. And at the same time, you know, even in my culture, things I haven’t experienced yet. For example, if I haven’t tried everything on the menu when it comes to a restaurant, for example. Emily will go ahead and be like, “Oh, because I like this, I guess -- let’s try this!” And I’m like, “I don’t know. I’m not sure if I should.” And then she pushes my -- my comfort zone to try out my own culture further.

Gavin used the idiomatic phrase “pushes my boundaries” to describe the experience of learning within his relationship. This idiom suggests that there are certain limits that a person has - limits that are confined by “boundaries.” During an experience

that “pushes one’s boundaries,” those limits are tested or encouraged to expand. As a result, the person must re-evaluate where their boundaries lie and in cases where one is willing, go beyond those limits or boundaries.

Gavin outlined two aspects that have influenced the “pushing” of his boundaries. First, he expressed how seeing his partner experiencing new aspects of his own culture allowed him an opportunity to become excited about it “all over again.” This suggests that, through his partner’s reaction, Gavin developed a heightened awareness (re-learning) of aspects of his own culture that he may have previously taken for granted. Second, he described how he experienced another “pushing” of his boundaries when his partner encouraged him to try aspects of his own culture that he had not previously tried. Gavin explained it as a pushing of his comfort zone - to a place past his “boundaries.” In this way, Gavin’s learning included an aspect of new learning about his own culture.

Emily: We Peak Each Other’s Curiosity

Emily’s description was distinct from the other participants with regards to this theme. That is, while Emily did not explicitly refer to the notion of an intercultural relationship as a “learning experience,” her description did imply that there had been knowledge gained from her relationship. In Emily’s interview, she spoke about the experience of trying to understand where Gavin’s grandparents were coming from in terms of their approach to Emily’s and Gavin’s relationship (an experience that will be explored more later). As this implied, there had been some learning on Emily’s part because she had grown to understand different perspectives, and specifically the perspective of Gavin’s grandparents toward their relationship. In addition, Emily also shared some learning aspects of her relationship with Gavin when she said:

I think we have a lot in common and we're -- we're very much on the same wavelength but we're also very different from each other. So, I think we just peak each other's curiosity in odd ways.

Her description suggests that while she and Gavin have a lot in common, they are also "very different from each other." The fact that she stated they "peak each other's curiosity" implies that there is an interest to explore and learn something that is unknown about the other person.

Anastasia: A Different Perspective

Anastasia's description provided yet another angle to the learning theme. At several points throughout her interview, she referred to gaining a "different point of view" and a "different perspective," stating that her relationship has helped her to "see the other side." One of the examples that Anastasia used to demonstrate her learning involved a comparison between her culture and her husband's culture. Of this she said:

...you can get to know more cultures, and you can, as I said, see things from different perspectives. Like, for example, I always thought that my husband was just rude.

In this instance, Anastasia was talking about the experience of dating her husband. She explained how, at that time, she did not understand why he was not opening doors for her or putting his jacket on her when she was cold - examples of the gender norms (male chivalry) that she was used to experiencing in her culture. Anastasia recounted being surprised and confused about his non-chivalrous nature and she made assumptions about his nature based on his actions (or lack thereof). She stated that until she learned about the differences between their two cultures, she assumed her husband was "just rude." Once she learned about his culture, she gained a "different perspective" on her husband's behaviour. She commented on her learning about her husband's culture when she said:

So, it was a good learning for me. Like, Oh! That's why it's not happening. Like, it's just not natural for them.

Anastasia gave another example of how she has gained perspective through her relationship when she said:

It has given me a different -- different point of view. I can interact with more kinds of people. Like, for example, I couldn't talk to conservative people. I was completely like, "Oh, I don't understand why are these people like this." But, after seeing, like, how they are brought up. Like, men and women are separate and the way it has an affect on people. So, I can see why certain people don't do certain things and it has helped to understand the other side. Not just saying, like, "Oh, you're, I don't know, an extremist or extreme conservative or something." So it has helped me to see the other side.

Similar to Jessica's experience of having her "eyes opened," Anastasia's experience speaks to the awareness that one can gain from being in an intercultural relationship. In Anastasia's experience, her learning resulted in giving her a new "point of view" or perspective on her husband's culture as well as in other areas of her life. She spoke about "seeing the other side" as having a new understanding of other points of view such as conservatism. At one point in her interview, Anastasia also expressed that her relationship with Jasim had changed her view of family, and that as a result, she had learned to be "more understanding" toward her own family.

Trisha: Change Is Inevitable

During her second interview, Trisha talked about her experience of attending couples counselling. She stated that counselling was instrumental in helping them work through some of their concerns regarding cultural differences. For Trisha, the counsellor aided her in understanding that part of Pablo's behaviour could be attributed to his culture. As she explained, the counsellor noted that many people from Pablo's culture participate in similar behaviour. For instance, the counsellor explained to Trisha that

many individuals from Mexico take pride in owning their own business – a desire of Pablo’s that Trisha was concerned about. Trisha expressed that she was relieved to know that his adamant desire to open his own business could be influenced by his cultural background rather than being an inherent part of his personality. Later on, she said:

‘Cause it’s like you can’t change a person, right? But yet -- when it’s -- when it’s a personality thing. But when it’s a cultural thing, well you can always open your eyes. And I think you can with a personality too. But, I think for me, I saw it as because it is his culture, that he can learn, maybe, other things from this culture, too. Right? That are going to work for the relationship -- for the betterment of the relationship. So, whereas if it was his personality, I think it would be tougher. Because it’s like, you know, that’s to me, so much more ingrained. Like, you can’t really change a person’s personality. They have to do that....But with culture, you can open your eyes to another culture.

What I noticed first about Trisha’s description was that she used the same idiom as Jessica (open eyes) to express her ideas. Trisha’s explanation of why she was relieved to know that Pablo’s behaviour could be culturally-related rather than personally-related involved using the idiom “open your eyes” to demonstrate the power that awareness could have. Her description suggested that she believed that cultural awareness (having one’s eyes opened) is much less difficult to accomplish than personality change. An important aspect of Trisha’s description was the relief that she expressed at having the knowledge of her partner’s culture, which helped her to better understand his behaviour. Similar to Anastasia’s experience of gaining a different perspective on her husband’s behaviour, the perspective that Trisha gained was part of her learned experience.

In addition to gaining perspective, Trisha spoke to the growth and change that can happen within the context of intercultural relationships. When speaking about how her relationship had benefited herself personally, she said:

Um, I love to see people grow. So, it’s benefited me to see him grow - to see myself grow.

A little while later, while she talked about intercultural relationships in general, she added:

There's lots of change! I think a lot more change than in the same-culture type of relationship...it's inevitable that you do in this type of situation. You have to! I mean, there's got to be change that happens, so.

Trisha has experienced a lot of "change" through her relationship. Throughout both interviews, she spoke about: the experience of "learning" to speak another language fluently, the "progress" she made in learning to communicate with her partner in a way he understood, and the "change" she experienced in her views because of dating someone from a different culture. All of these experiences had worked to create her "learning experience." Moreover, as a result of Trisha's learning experience, she has grown as a person - a change that she sees as inevitable within an intercultural relationship.

Sub-Theme A: Taken-For-Grantedness

Within the context of the learning experience theme, there were two other significant aspects that surfaced: a taken-for-granted way of being and the notion of time. Although not all participants in the study described these aspects, they appeared significant for the individuals who did discuss them.

Taken-For-Grantedness: Jessica, Anastasia, and Trisha

Within the context of an intercultural relationship as a "learning experience," there were a few participants who expressed a taken-for-granted way of being. To be precise, these participants expressed that they had not considered either the intercultural nature of their relationship or the learning opportunities that would arise.

Both Jessica and Anastasia expressed that they never really thought about being in a relationship with someone from another culture. Jessica stated:

And, like, honestly, I never saw myself being with another culture. Like, it just never occurred to me. I just always pictured myself with someone White. I don't know why. Like, that's just the cultural norm, I guess.

Anastasia expressed a similar notion when she said:

And it's not the way we planned. I never woke up and thought, "Oh, I need a foreigner boyfriend because Hungarian guys are not nice or something." It's just how this happens.

These expressions suggest that Jessica and Anastasia did not have any preconceptions about getting into an intercultural relationship. In fact, the idea never even crossed their minds. As such, they had a taken-for-grantedness or assumption that they would have a relationship with someone from their own culture. One possible explanation for this, as Jessica brought forth, is that being in a relationship with someone from the same culture and/or race is the norm.

Another unique component of Jessica and Anastasia's descriptions was when they commented on the "realization" that occurred about being in an intercultural relationship. For Jessica, her realization came when she first visited the Sikh temple with Ryan's family. In describing her experience, she said:

His parents still, you know, they act normal -- like a White family, on a day-to-day basis. But once you go into the temple, it's a totally different world and it opens your eyes up and it's, like, oh, wow! I really am dating someone from a totally different culture and they just have different customs and different traditions.

Anastasia also described this experience of realization when she said:

I -- I didn't think that I would be in an intercultural relationship. Um, I never liked the guy that was browner than -- not because I'm racist or anything, it's just -- for me, it seemed so distant. And when we got together, I was, like -- when we were holding hands, I was just watching, like, Wow! He's so brown. I'm so white! (Laughs). Because it was just like, like, so foreign.

For these two participants, the taken-for-granted nature of their relationship was challenged when they experienced the realization that they were dating someone from another culture. As suggested by their “Wow!” exclamations, the realization was an intense and surprising one. This implies that the taken-for-granted way of being is a powerful one, as individuals were shocked by the realization of the differences between themselves and their partners. When I consider the taken-for-granted way of being and the shocking realization that these participants experienced, my assumption is that it had to do with norms as Jessica suggested in her description. The implications of norms within our society will be discussed at length in the later section on whiteness, but for now, it is important to say that these norms have greatly influenced the experiences of these individuals in intercultural relationships. For these participants, the White norm and the norm of same-culture relationships are, as I postulate, the source of their taken-for-grantedness. They did not have an opportunity to contemplate dating someone from a different culture, as that was just not something that was ever part of their society’s standard. Because it was never a real possibility according to the standard, the realization of actually dating someone racially/culturally different went against the standard picture that they had in their mind. Hence, their realization was an astounding one.

In addition to realizing the intercultural nature of their relationships, Jessica, Anastasia, and Trisha noted that they experienced a realization about the challenges that were present in such a relationship. Jessica stated:

Well at first, I didn’t even -- I just thought it was cool. I didn’t even really think about it. And then you kind of start to realize the struggles of it.

Anastasia also spoke about the challenges that she had in her relationship that, at first, she did not realize as being related to culture. In her second interview she said:

I didn't realize it could be a cultural thing...

As discussed previously, Anastasia expressed that her realization of cultural differences helped her to understand why her husband seemed so "serious" and "rude."

Similarly, Trisha's description also suggested that she experienced a taken-for-grantedness regarding cultural differences in her relationship. At one point, when reflecting on the challenges, she stated:

I never in my wildest dreams would've thought there would be so many things, just even small things like that.

Trisha used the phrase "never in my wildest dreams," which yet again implies the shock that individuals can experience when they realize the cultural challenges in their relationships. The other unique experience that Trisha shared was a comparison between her current (intercultural) relationship and previous (same-culture) relationships. Through her description, Trisha explained how she had a lot of expectations for her current relationship that were based on previous experience. Because her past relationships had been with individuals from the same culture, her expectations were based on that experience. As such, in her relationship with Pablo she went in expecting the behaviour to which she had become accustomed to in her previous same-culture relationships. Trisha noted in her interviews that one of her realizations included recognizing that her current relationship was different from what she was used to, and as such, she could not place the same expectations on her partner. This taken-for-granted way of being and her subsequent realization, although somewhat helpful, still left Trisha feeling like she was "longing" for something to which she was accustomed. Furthermore, because her partner immigrated to Canada to be with Trisha, she had the unique experience of helping him to become accustomed to life here. She reflected on one aspect of this when she said:

You take it for granted that your partner is going to pick up the home phone and take a message and write it down on a piece of paper. He wouldn't do that because he didn't know how to answer the phone and he was too shy.

In addition to commenting on the missing and taken-for-granted aspects of her relationship, Trisha also commented on aspects of her relationship that were added - aspects she never experienced in her previous same-culture relationships. As an example, she discussed her concerns about her partner's immigration to Canada and how that created a lot of questioning about motives. She stated:

I mean, that's an added aspect that I had never had in another relationship - where I was asking, "What's the person's motive for being with me?"

In Trisha's concluding remarks, she uniquely expressed that the taken-for-granted aspect of her relationship provided a positive outcome for her. Specifically, she said:

Those small things that I really longed for in the beginning, um, maybe it was good that I longed for them because the more I longed for them, the more I appreciate them now.

Taken-For-Grantedness: Ryan and Gavin

Interestingly, while Jessica and Anastasia said that they had never thought they would marry someone from a different cultural background, Ryan and Gavin "assumed" they would. As in Jessica and Anastasia's experience, this perspective of Ryan and Gavin could be attributed to the socio-cultural norm that they grew up with. Ryan and Gavin's recognition of the norm also explained why neither of them experienced the "realization" of the intercultural nature of the relationship that Jessica and Anastasia had experienced. In Ryan's interview, he spoke about "assuming he would marry a White girl." He stated:

To me, it was always who I was around and I was always around like, you know, White girls. And not really any Brown girls - the odd Brown girl, I guess, here. But, I mean, that's just kind of what I grew up in. So, to me, it was -- I guess, maybe I did assume I'd marry a White girl but that's just because this is probably

where I'd live, so I'm not uh -- I don't try to discriminate against just 'cause they are a Brown girl.

Throughout Ryan's interview, he did not mention anything that suggested he had any "realization" regarding the intercultural nature of his relationship. Rather, as his description here suggests, he actually had become accustomed to the idea of dating a White girl. Moreover, as he explained, that assumption that he would "marry a White girl" came from the fact that it was the norm. That is, most of the girls he was surrounded by were White and because he assumed he would continue to live in Canada, most likely he would end up marrying a White girl. In this way, Ryan's experience shows how getting involved in an intercultural relationship can be a very real possibility for some individuals. It further illustrates that this possibility can be pre-conceived and anticipated.

Gavin had a very similar view to Ryan in that he always anticipated having an intercultural relationship. Just as Ryan mentioned that there were not many "Brown girls" around for him to even try being in a relationship with, Gavin stated that there were "not many Asians" where he grew up. As a result, he said that he had only ever dated White girls. Despite the fact that it seemed as though Gavin did not have much of a choice in dating White girls, he actually talked about choosing to date them because of the "comfort level" that he had with them. He shared:

But, uh, my brother and I, like, we're just so Canadian that we find the, the Chinese culture, like from China, a little bit shocking, if you will. Like, we want a girl that is open-minded as well, is not a pushover, who isn't like "Oh this isn't any fun, like, this relationship is not even a challenge anymore"... So there is that and maybe because we are used to the dialogue being so easy. With Emily because she's White and I'm mainly Canadian myself, I don't have that, uh, accent trouble, if you will - where there's trouble trying to communicate something. So we know exactly what the other person is saying. Plus I'm so used to interacting with other Caucasians that, uh, I can read them on non-verbal language as well.... So there's this comfort thing maybe for me.

As Gavin implied, the idea of dating someone from China was not ideal, as he found the cultural difference to be a “bit shocking.” Part of this had to do with Gavin’s identification with Canadian culture and way of life, as will be discussed later in the section on family concerns about intercultural relationships. Gavin noted that there was no difficulty between him and Emily in the area of communication, whereas he believed there might be “accent trouble” or non-verbal communication challenges with a girlfriend who was born and raised in China. All of this boiled down to a “comfort thing” for Gavin. His description suggests that he had given a lot of consideration to the idea of relationships and the potential challenges that he would face in a same-culture versus an intercultural relationship. Because of his awareness, Gavin’s experience also suggests he had always been aware of the intercultural nature of his relationships.

Sub-Theme B: Time

Just like the taken-for-granted aspect, the notion of time was another sub-theme that surfaced within the context of the “learning experience” that happens in intercultural relationships. This aspect, although a significant one, only surfaced for certain participants. Time appeared to be significant as it is important to the evolution and progression in any relationship and in particular to intercultural relationships. For Trisha and Anastasia, time was a significant factor in coming to understand the cultural differences between themselves and their partners. For Jessica and Gavin, time was discussed in the context of adjustment, either for the partners within the relationship or in regards to family adjustment to their relationship.

Time Brings Understanding

From Trisha's perspective, it took time to learn about her partner and his culture and to recognize aspects of her own culture that may be influencing the relationship. She was discussing how important communication was within an intercultural relationship when she commented:

...there should have been some preliminary discussion. And, I mean, too, even talking about our own beliefs -- when you talk about our own personal beliefs it's different than our own cultural beliefs. Because sometimes we don't recognize our own cultural beliefs because we are so tied into those. And those sometimes come out and are brought to our attention because of our partner. Because that person that isn't a part of that culture that can observe it. And that takes time to evolve, so.

Here, she emphasized that within the framework of the relationship, time is needed for each partner to recognize and realize his/her own cultural beliefs. As her experience implies, it may not be possible for each partner to recognize his/her own cultural beliefs until the relationship is underway. It is through being in an intercultural relationship that awareness of one's own beliefs can develop. Moreover, as Trisha pointed out, this is a process that must "evolve" - meaning it takes time.

Anastasia also used the term "evolve" to explain how her relationship changed over time. She said:

But I think over the time, it has evolved.

For her, time was considered a key factor in the evolution of her relationship. She spoke about how both she and her husband have evolved over time to accept the aspects about one another that were initially confusing or upsetting. To illustrate her point, Anastasia gave a specific example regarding her husband's tendency to speak loudly. His habit of speaking loudly bothered her because, in her culture, people do not speak loudly

unless they are extremely upset. She noted that although she quickly became aware of their culturally different communication styles, it still took her some time to adjust it.

Patience

Patience, another time-related topic, appeared within the participants' descriptions. For both Trisha and Anastasia, developing patience throughout the course of their relationships was one of the key factors in their experiences. For Trisha, her experience involved developing patience to allow things to take their course. As she said:

It required a ton of patience of, like, letting things kind of evolve on their own time. And I wanted to fast-forward so badly.

Trisha's need for patience and desire to "fast-forward" reflected what was discussed earlier in the taken-for-granted nature of her experience. That is, she had a desire to have the relationship "be" at a place where they were both comfortable - a place where her partner was comfortable enough to do the things that she was accustomed to in a relationship. She felt a need to "fast-forward" to the future place where that would be, and so, in hindsight, she reflected on her need to exhibit patience. In her experience, it seems that some patience was already present and some would have developed from having to "let things evolve on their own time."

Anastasia's reference to patience was in the context of what she had learned from her husband's culture. She stated that her husband and his culture had taught her that if you are patient, things have a way of working themselves out. In Anastasia's words:

What I have learned from him and his culture is that you have problem, but if you are patient, then eventually things will turn out to be just fine.

It Gets Better with Time

In both Trisha and Anastasia's experience, the notion of time and evolution implies that there had been some positive change; things had improved over time. Although the participants do not directly state this, it is an implied outcome of their experience. For Jessica and Gavin, this notion was explicitly shared.

In Jessica's interview, when discussing the challenges presented by the cultural differences between her and Ryan's parents, she commented:

We didn't really see eye to eye on that, but it's -- it's getting better all the time.

In this instance, Jessica referred to how she and Ryan did not share the same perspective on how his parents participated in their life as a couple. As she implied with her description, they still do not necessarily see "eye to eye" on things, although their situation is getting "better all the time." Her words suggest that, with time, she and Ryan have learned how to adjust and accept one another's understandings of the role of the family within their relationship. In Jessica's example, time is not necessarily implied as the factor that influenced their adjustment, but time could be seen as a correlated aspect. As time went on, things got better in this area of their lives.

In Gavin's interviews, the main concept that repeatedly surfaced was the challenge he faced with his grandparents who did not necessarily approve of his relationship. He was discussing this topic when he said:

It's one of those things. And, you know, it's something that I know -- it only gets better as time goes on.

As his statement suggests, Gavin saw his situation as improving with time. He went on to state that his grandparents have lived in Canada for a while and so they have many "Caucasian friends." As such, Gavin explained how he believed that his grandparents would be influenced by Canadian culture, and that, with time, they would

be less aggressive about their desires for him to marry a Chinese girl. Similar to Jessica's experience, time is not necessarily the key factor in the difference that Gavin has experienced, but he saw it as a correlating factor in the improvement of the situation.

Theme 2: An Intercultural Relationship Includes Openness and Willingness

There was another major theme that surfaced through the participants' descriptions as one related to the learning experience theme. The second emerging thematic aspect was that an intercultural relationship includes openness and willingness on the part of the individuals. As I touched on briefly in the learning experience theme, much of the ability for an individual to learn or gain awareness in an intercultural relationship hinges on their openness and willingness to that process. As such, I see these two themes as interconnected; however, because the participants referred to this concept in its own unique way, I have included it as a separate second theme.

While reading the transcripts, I discovered that all of the participants' descriptions contained some reference to a need for the partners to be open and willing. This openness and willingness manifested in many ways; participants spoke of being open and willing to: learn, share, try new things, tolerate, be patient, understand, and trust.

The word "open" and the concept of "openness," when referring to people, can conjure up images of open hands, open arms, open minds, and open hearts. It suggests that someone is flexible in their thinking regarding new ideas or a new culture, for example. Being "open" suggests that a person is not resistant to hearing or learning about new concepts; it suggests an acceptance. As the participants in this study emphasized, this open way of being has been integral in their relationships; it has facilitated their communication, growth, and learning. What is interesting to note is that while each

participant pointed out openness as important, each one conceptualized the significance of openness in a different way.

Willingness was the second component to this theme, as participants equally shared this concept as embedded in their relationship. The word willing is synonymous with eager, inclined, disposed, and compliant. Willingness plays a role in the participants' experiences as the complement to openness. That is, while individuals can be open to new ideas, they may not necessarily be willing to try new things or change their way of being. The participants in this study emphasized that both openness and willingness are important; partners need to be open (accepting) *but also* willing to try new things, learn about the other culture, examine one's own values, tolerate the other's behaviour, and understand the perspective of the partner's family.

As I discuss at the end of this thematic section, there was a sub-theme that emerged within the context of openness and willingness. The description of this sub-theme explains how some of the participants emphasized that although openness and willingness are factors that are integral to an intercultural relationship, those are also characteristics that were important for them to find in a partner. The participants stressed that the intercultural nature of their relationships was not a big concern for them; rather, they saw the characteristics of their partners as the focus. That is, when looking for a partner, they were focused on finding someone who had qualities they were looking for (such as openness and willingness), but they were not concerned about the cultural background of the person. This idea appears to promote a false dichotomy between personality and culture by suggesting that an individual's personality can be seen as separate from their culture. Moreover, this false dichotomy is a mainly Western notion as

traditionally the individual is viewed as separate and unique from his/her culture and surrounding world (Church, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). While it is possible that the participants do subscribe to this idea, I believe that what they were trying to emphasize was that their choice of partner was based in finding someone with compatible personality characteristics, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, or racial heritage.

Moreover, as the participants' descriptions also suggested, the underlying motivation behind the openness and willingness that participants had experienced was based in love and desire. That is, they were interested in their partner as a person and they desired to be closer to their partner, and as such, were willing and open to do whatever it took to accomplish that. Therefore, while the participants conceptualized openness and willingness as integral to the success of their intercultural relationships, they were also seen as necessary characteristics that developed out of love and desire for their partner, rather than out of necessity due to the cultural differences between them.

Jessica: We Have to Be Accepting

Throughout Jessica's interviews, she mentioned the importance of being open and accepting at several points. In her experience, these were integral characteristics to the success of her relationship. At one point, Jessica described her relationship in this way:

We're just open and, like, very accepting of each other, I guess. And I think that might also have to do -- we have to be accepting because we are from different cultural backgrounds.

Jessica emphasized that openness and acceptance were particularly important given the intercultural nature of her relationship. From her perspective, these characteristics are necessary for intercultural couples. In her interview, Jessica elaborated on the necessary nature of these characteristics for intercultural couples by stating that:

Because if you aren't, I don't see how it could work. 'Cause if you're not open and accepting of, like, you know, say an African-American's culture, like a traditional -- then, I just don't understand how that could work. You're gonna be fighting and you're gonna be butting heads and you're not gonna be seeing things in the same light, almost.

Her description suggests that these qualities are necessary for intercultural couples because without them, the couple would argue more and have more difficulty agreeing or "seeing things in the same light." This notion was further explored when Jessica discussed overcoming challenges related to cultural differences. She shared:

Um, always being open to each other. Always talking about, like -- if you're bottling everything up, you are just going to explode one day. But, yeah, we are very open and we talk about everything and he's very understanding. If he has any questions, like, we just -- I think, if you talk about it and, like, just understand it - get to the root of it - that really helps. And then you can have a better understanding and yeah.

In this excerpt, Jessica explained how she and her partner had used openness within their relationship to overcome challenges. More specifically, the openness that she spoke of appears to be connected to better communication and the willingness to try to understand the concern. As she stated, open communication allows the partners to "get to the root" of it - a phrase that implies that there is some "digging" to fully understand the problem and come to a possible solution. This example demonstrates that openness is not only important for going into an intercultural relationship, but it is important to maintain within the relationship for better communication and understanding.

Trisha: Unless You Are Willing

Trisha's description referred to openness in the context of being "open-minded." She was speaking about gender roles in her relationship when she referred to both her and her partner as being "open-minded people." She said:

I mean, for us personally, I think because we are both kind of open-minded people, um, uh, and we both met each other and knew we each kind of had our own thing going, like, it wasn't like we met when we were really young -- um, we both knew that, you know, like, he knew I'm a worker, like, I'm obviously not a woman that's just looking for a man and I want to settle down and stay at home.

In this example, she referred to how their open-mindedness contributed to the successful balance of gender roles within the relationship. Furthermore, as Trisha said "we are both kind of open-minded people" the implication was that both partners were at least somewhat open-minded when they came into the relationship, particularly with regards to gender role expectations. From this example, openness could be seen as keeping an open mind for any differences or unique challenges that may surface.

In addition, Trisha also referred to the concept of willingness. She was discussing the unforeseen challenges in intercultural relationships when she said:

Like (Laughs) that's usually what I'll say to people. It sounds really cool, but unless you're willing to, um, look at yourself and make some changes and look at your own belief system and be able to kind of challenge the other person's but also respect it, you know...

Her description referred not only to the willingness to challenge and respect the other person's belief system but the willingness to examine and change one's own. This is an interesting concept to consider within the context of relationships, as the focus thus far has been on what each partner can do to understand and accept the other. However, as Trisha's description implied, there is also an element of self-examination. Her account stated that someone in an intercultural relationship must be willing to, first, become aware and, second, examine and possibly change his/her own belief system. As I learned from Trisha's experience (as presented in the first theme), change in an intercultural relationship is inevitable. Complementary to this, the description of "willingness"

suggests that change happens on both sides of the relationship but it requires willing individuals who keep an open mind.

Anastasia: Patience, Acceptance, and Tolerance

Anastasia also expressed that she is someone who is “very open” in her relationship. At one point in her first interview she said:

I’m very open and I’m very much open about most of the things, not everything, but most of the things.

This description demonstrates how Anastasia’s openness has allowed her to communicate with her husband about her concerns. As I touched on earlier in the learning experience theme, it also appears that Anastasia’s openness had contributed to the understanding and acceptance that she had acquired about her husband’s culture and behaviour. In addition to her open mindset, Anastasia also emphasized other important characteristics for intercultural relationships when she said:

They can be fascinating at the beginning, but if they eventually want to be together again, need lots of patience and acceptance and tolerance. Lots of patience and tolerance.

From her point of view, Anastasia suggested that in order for an intercultural couple to stay together, they need to have certain characteristics - namely, patience, acceptance, and tolerance. The way that Anastasia emphasized patience and tolerance in particular suggests that these two characteristics are especially important when it comes to intercultural relationships. Interestingly enough, when one considers what is necessary for the development of patience and tolerance, willingness and openness come to mind. That is, one cannot develop tolerance or patience without an open mind and willing heart.

The notion of willingness plays another unique role in Anastasia’s description. At one point, while discussing her husband’s efforts toward her native language, she stated:

He knows a little bit, but he cannot communicate or he wouldn't communicate with me. So, so that's why it was a painful point. Like, I can make step towards his culture, knowing a little bit his language... But if I can make steps towards his culture, then he should also make some steps towards my culture. So it feels like it's not really a mutual -- I mean a mutual thing.

Anastasia expressed her hurt feelings towards her husband's lack of effort to learn an integral part of her heritage - her language. Furthermore, her experience of pain was deepened because she had taken "steps towards his culture" but those steps were unreciprocated. In this instance, the notion of willingness to work towards an understanding of the other partner's culture is very prevalent. The fact that her willingness was not countered by willingness on his part is what caused Anastasia to feel hurt. As such, Anastasia's experience demonstrates how willingness on behalf of both partners is imperative to an intercultural relationship. Her description implies that willingness is integral because of what it suggests to the other person - a desire to get to know their partner and their partner's culture. In this way, Anastasia's experience demonstrates how willingness is a component that can bring the partners closer together.

Emily: Be Game for That

Emily's focus on open-mindedness was quite prevalent throughout both of her interviews. She was stating positive aspects to her relationship when she said:

So, like, if we wanted to, um -- so if I wanted to, like, eat out and go to like dim sum, which is like a Chinese breakfast/dessert meal then he would always be game for that. Or go out for Sushi and he'd always be game for that.

Then, in her second interview, Emily was responding to a question about open-mindedness, when she stated:

I would want that out of any partner, like, regardless of what their background is. Like, if I was in a relationship with somebody who could only eat steaks and potatoes 'cause they thought everything else was disgusting, it would be a little bit like, "Uh, that's not very fun for me!" It's kind of boring. But, yeah, I think that's

pretty important. It's pretty important for Gavin, too, 'cause he was saying I had to pass the "food test" when I first met him. I had to be able to eat sushi and chicken's feet and not blink an eye.

In these two examples, Emily emphasized that both her partner and herself are open-minded, especially when it comes to food. She used the idiom "game for that" to explain that Gavin is always open and willing to go and try out a wide variety of foods with her. She also explained how being open-minded was a characteristic that Gavin expected from her as she had to pass the "food test" when they started dating. Emily underscored how important it was for her to "not blink an eye" during the "food test." The suggested meaning is that she had to be open and willing to try new foods without hesitation or negative reaction.

Moreover, Emily explained how open-mindedness is "pretty important" and something that she would want in any partner, regardless of whether they had a different cultural background or not. As such, in Emily's description, open-mindedness was not necessarily conceptualized as a necessary component of an intercultural relationship, but rather for any of her relationships - intercultural or not.

Ryan: As Long as They Are Open

In Ryan's description, openness came shining through as an important quality to intercultural relationships, but from a bit of a different perspective. He stated:

You'll learn cool stuff about the other person, as long as they are open about that stuff...

As Ryan suggested here, the individuals' learning in intercultural relationships hinges on the openness of their partner about "that stuff." While the other participants' descriptions focused on the openness or willingness of each partner to *learn* about the other partner, Ryan's description provided a uniquely different view. That is, Ryan

emphasized that partners need to be open to *sharing* about themselves and their background. His experience offers a fresh angle to look at openness - not just as something necessary for learning about the other person, but as something necessary for teaching or sharing with the other person about oneself.

Ryan's emphasis on openness continued through his interview. Later, when discussing the concerns around family acceptance, Ryan said:

And, I mean, a lot of the time, maybe they just don't understand that the family is prejudice. Like, they don't -- they judge a lot people for not knowing them. So, I mean, if you could explain that to your girlfriend, and have them understand and not -- and just understand that's who they are and where they come from, you know, like a lot of things you can't change, you know. So, if you could make them understand that it's -- that's just the way it is, you know? Some people have views and you can't really fight those. You just gotta be like, "Okay, whatever." So, I mean, stay strong. Don't uh -- stay strong! Find someone who can maybe understand that, and, uh, yeah, like, I'm sure it would be fine.

In this instance, Ryan did not use the words open or willing; however, they are implied with his use of the term "understanding." Understanding indicates that a person is open-minded and willing to consider another perspective and work toward making sense of it. For Ryan, understanding - and by extension, openness and willingness - are key characteristics for an intercultural relationship, especially when there are concerns regarding family approval.

Gavin: More Comfortable

In Gavin's interviews, he spoke of the importance of being open and having an open-mind at several points. In his first interview, Gavin was sharing what he would want others to know about intercultural relationships when he said:

And at the same time, the other person has to be open as well, right?

Moreover, in his second interview, when speaking about the characteristics that attracted him to Emily, he said:

Open-minded was a big one for me 'cause that translated into so much of how I live my life, so.

In these two examples, Gavin not only implied the importance of openness and being open-minded, but he stated that being open is important for both people in a relationship. In this way, being open is a common characteristic that two people in an intercultural relationship should share. Each one should be open to the other's background in order to bring a balance and symmetry to the relationship. In Gavin's experience, he found open-mindedness in someone else to be attractive, as it resonated with his own personal way of being.

In addition to his points on openness, Gavin also emphasized willingness as an essential component to intercultural relationships. In his description, he suggested that paying "your due diligence" to the other culture was something each partner had to be willing to do in the relationship. He stated:

You have to pay your due diligence when it comes to different cultures, right?

Gavin also emphasized willingness when he spoke about how intercultural couples need to be "more comfortable" than same-culture couples. In Gavin's first interview, he stated:

You have to be more comfortable than the average relationship 'cause there's gonna be those extra hurdles that you didn't anticipate.

In Gavin's second interview, he elaborated on the notion of "more comfortable" by stating that:

Um, comfortable involves 50/50 if you will. So, you know, I give some and you give some. Yes, we're going to come across situations where you can expect

something to happen that you're not used to. So, then how do you approach that? Do you immediately shun it? Do you avoid it? Or do you work together and try to resolve it or even see why it was uncomfortable to begin with? So, yeah, it's 50/50 and trust - trust in the other person's judgment. Like, you know, this actually is a good thing. I'm not trying to poison you or I'm not trying to do this or that, pretty much. It's just trust in the other person and the willingness to go an extra mile.

In the last part of Gavin's description, he concluded that "more comfortable" essentially means being trusting and willing to go "an extra mile." Being trusting implies a willingness to trust or believe in the other person. In Gavin's experience, trusting in the "other person's judgment" was significant, particularly when it came to trying new aspects of the partner's culture. Anastasia also mentioned this idea of trust in a partner, as she was trusting that her partner "would eventually introduce" her to his family. She explained how her trust was based in her understanding and acceptance that he had not already introduced her because of his cultural customs.

Gavin further explained "comfortable" by saying it means a willingness to go the "extra mile." Going the "extra mile" suggests that both individuals in the couple must be willing to go further than they would normally. It seems as though the intercultural nature of the relationship is what manifests the importance of this; it requires a willingness to try new things and go beyond what one has experienced in the past. Without that willingness, the implied consequence is stagnation in the relationship, as one partner is not moving closer towards the other partner through exploration of their cultural background.

Sub-Theme: All About the Person

Although the participants emphasized that the characteristics of openness and willingness had been integral in helping them to handle the challenges related to their different cultural backgrounds, several (but not all) of the participants emphasized the

importance of the person you are with. They stated that regardless of whether they had an intercultural or same-culture relationship, these are qualities that they would look for in any partner. When they spoke of the nature of the challenges in their relationships, Emily and Jessica emphasized that there would be complications in any relationship, despite cultural differences. Emily pointed out that regardless of the relationship type, it would be “complicated any time with any person.” Jessica stated that her relationship has “got its ups and downs, with everything else,” but that at the end of the day, it is really about the “type of person you are getting involved with.” Emily also maintained this, saying that personalities vary a lot within cultures, so “it really depends on the person.”

Gavin and Ryan elaborated on this notion by suggesting that you do not necessarily have more in common with a partner just because you come from the same culture. In fact, as Gavin pointed out, you may have less in common. When he was discussing family pressures for him to marry within his culture, Ryan said:

I know that, at the end of the day when you are at home, that's the most important thing. It's not -- it's not that, like -- I can see where they are coming from. Maybe you have more in common, but I mean, you don't necessarily have more in common just because you come from the same cultural background.

Similar to Emily's suggestion, Ryan explicitly stated that there is not necessarily more commonality between individuals in the same culture. As such, from his point of view, rather than choose a partner simply based on cultural similarity, he would prefer to choose someone that he can enjoy time with when they are alone together at home - regardless of cultural similarities or differences. He further emphasized this compatibility aspect of his experience when he said:

I mean, at the end of the day, for me, you have to get along with the person.

Choosing a partner for compatibility rather than cultural similarity also resonated with Gavin. In Gavin's description, he spoke about how he enjoyed Emily's qualities, and in particular her open-mindedness, because that "translated into so much" of how he lives his life. This description demonstrated how important compatibility, rather than having the same cultural background, was to Gavin in choosing a partner.

While these participant descriptions did not negate the challenges within their relationship based on culture, they did reframe them. Namely, as much as culture can matter in relationships, it does not matter as much as finding a compatible mate. These participants felt that finding someone you could truly be happy with, regardless of cultural heritage, was the most important factor in choosing a partner. When looking for a partner, it seemed that they were "culture-blind," meaning they looked first at the person and his/her characteristics rather than at his/her cultural background. Aside from the "norm idea" that was presented earlier, this might also suggest why there was such a surprise that occurred for some participants at the realization that they were in an intercultural relationship. Because they were looking first for qualities and characteristics that attracted them to the person, they may have been taken aback when they realized that there were some cultural differences that at first did not seem apparent.

Theme 3: The Implicit Message for Intercultural Couples

The third theme that was revealed centered around the dynamic between implicit and explicit ways of expressing oneself. In terms of information sharing, the term explicit refers to when it is overt, open, and direct. There is nothing hidden and the meaning behind what one is sharing is clearly expressed. Alternatively, the term implicit refers to information that is implied, hidden, and unspoken. With implicit messages, there is

meaning behind what is shared; however, that meaning is not expressed directly but rather indirectly. As Thomas (2008) points to, with implicit messages, the words only convey a small amount of the information shared; the full message comes from using previous knowledge of the context in order to “fill in the gaps” (p. 122). As such, comprehension of implicit messages relies on an understanding of the aspects of the context - whether they be personal, social, cultural, or otherwise.

With regards to this theme, all of the participants referred to some form of implicit, rather than explicit, communication that was influencing their experience as part of an intercultural couple. For some participants, this implied experience was rooted in family approval and cultural norms. That is, participants expressed that although they did not receive explicit messages regarding their families’ feelings towards their relationship, they were able to infer their feelings from the implicit messages they received. Likewise, the participants also spoke about a “sense” or “knowing” regarding implied cultural norms and behaviour within their families.

For other participants, the implicit versus explicit dynamic surfaced during their discussion of societal prejudice and discrimination. In their experience, they did not receive explicit messages that told them there was societal prejudice towards their relationship. Rather, they sensed that there are implied “undertones” in society that reflect prejudice and/or discrimination.

Gavin and Emily: The Elephant in the Room

Gavin and Emily’s experience has been unique in terms of family acceptance. As they both expressed in their interviews, their relationship has been accepted by both sets of parents, but Gavin’s grandparents have yet to be explicitly “told” about their

relationship. As Gavin expressed in his interviews, although his grandparents have lived in Canada for quite some time, they remain very traditional and heavily connected to the Chinese community. Because of this powerful connection to their heritage, Gavin explained, their hope still rests on the possibility that Gavin will marry a Chinese woman. In fact, he shared how his grandparents have “bribed” him with money and expensive gifts if he would “marry Chinese.” The situation with Gavin’s grandparents is an interesting one as they have explicitly stated their desires for Gavin to marry Chinese, yet they have not had an explicit discussion with Gavin regarding his current intercultural relationship. As both Gavin and Emily expressed, the grandparents have not been “told” of their relationship, yet they “know.” In Emily’s interview, she stated:

Oh they know! We’re just not allowed to tell them. They just don’t acknowledge it’s there.

When we discussed the situation further, Emily elaborated that they are “not allowed” to tell the grandparents because that is what Gavin’s parents want. She said:

Well, oh, she’s just told me not to tell them ‘cause they know if they tell them, that they’ll have to acknowledge it and then they’ll have to -- they said that they would nag them to no end.

The other interesting factor to this situation is that despite the fact that Gavin’s grandparents “know” implicitly that he is dating Emily, they refuse to explicitly acknowledge the relationship. That is, they have acted courteous when they have run into Gavin and Emily together, but Emily was referred to as Gavin’s “friend.” In Emily’s interview, she spoke about how the grandparents have sent food for Gavin with a note that stated they included a little extra food for his “friend,” acknowledging that they are aware of the fact that Emily and Gavin live together. When Gavin was discussing why he has not explicitly talked to his grandparents about his relationship, he stated:

‘Cause I know it’s a taboo subject. And they’re courteous. They’ll smile. They’re nice, but then they’re just like, “She’s not Chinese.” (Laughs). And then that’s it. That’s the only argument they have.

In this description, Gavin was talking about introducing his “friend” Emily to his grandparents. What he stated suggests that there is a dynamic between the explicit actions of his grandparents and the implied meanings behind those actions. He is aware of the fact that although they are courteous to his “friend,” they are aware of the fact that this is his girlfriend and they do not approve of the fact that she is not Chinese. Moreover, he stated that it is a “taboo subject,” which demonstrates that he is aware of his grandparents’ cultural expectations for his behaviour. It would be “taboo” for Gavin to explicitly introduce a non-Chinese girlfriend to his grandparents. The fact that Gavin mentioned this as a “taboo subject” suggests that it is an unthinkable, prohibited, or forbidden subject - something that should never be discussed explicitly. This suggests that while the action (dating someone from another culture) could be considered taboo, it is equally if not more forbidden to discuss that fact openly, especially in light of the grandparents’ wishes for him to marry a Chinese girl.

In Gavin’s interview, he commented on the nature of this situation with his grandparents by saying “it’s one of those things.” As his phrase suggests, there is some implied knowledge of this situation. For Gavin, growing up in a Chinese family, he is aware of the expectations placed on him and he is aware of the cultural norms that he is expected to follow. Because of that and because of the “taboo” nature of the subject, he has not addressed his current relationship status with his grandparents. Furthermore, he is aware of the implied meanings behind their actions without having to explicitly ask them what their actions mean. In his second interview, Gavin elaborated by saying:

It's one of those things where you just don't address. Everyone knows it's there, like the elephant in the room.

The use of the metaphorical idiom "elephant in the room" further supports the notion of an implied aspect to Gavin's experience with his grandparents. This idiom, while referring to an obvious truth that is ignored or unaddressed, is usually reserved for emotionally charged subjects. That is why an elephant is chosen as the animal to represent the taboo subject in the room; its large size conjures up images of an animal that is awkwardly squished into a room where everyone conveniently ignores the elephant's presence. An elephant is such a large animal, it is impossible to overlook yet everyone attempts to. The implied meaning behind this idiom is that while everyone is aware of the concern or situation, no one addresses it because they have decided that it would be better to avoid the issue than discuss it. In Gavin's case, it seems culturally implied that no one should talk about the elephant in the room, which is his relationship.

From Emily's perspective, she believes that the grandparents' non-approval is based in fear and cultural expectations. She said:

I think it's probably a lot out of fear of embarrassing themselves and sounding like children trying to speak English and thinking that I'm not going to fit them culturally and I won't know the traditions and stuff like that. So, they just want somebody who will be easy to handle and know everything.

A little later in her interview she said:

So, I think a lot of it is just, it's what they are supposed to do.

Again, this hints at the idea that cultural norms and expectations dictate a lot of the implied interactions that happen between Gavin, Emily, and his grandparents. Emily also discussed the idea of addressing the "taboo subject" with Gavin's grandparents.

From her point of view, they may be avoiding it because they just do not want to deal with the subject until it is unavoidable. She said:

I think it's the kind of: it's not official unless you're married ideology. I guess, we (referring to grandparents) don't want to deal with the consequences until it's too late to change anything.

Because of the implied disapproval of Gavin's grandparents, Gavin and Emily have noticed some effects. Even though the couple said there have been no effects on their relationship, it has affected them individually. For instance, Emily is not "allowed" to attend certain family functions where the grandparents will be present. Again, in these instances the explicit actions do not always match the implied meaning. For example, in Gavin's interview, he was talking about this topic when he said:

My uncle's wedding, um, she was invited but she shouldn't come, pretty much. It was a situation. So, it was like, "Oooohh!"

In this instance, the explicit action was to be polite and send the invitation. However, the implied meaning was that she should not come because their relationship is not yet explicitly "recognized" by the grandparents - a fact that is reinforced by the implied cultural expectation to avoid the "taboo subject."

Gavin has also been impacted by the implied cultural expectations that have been placed on him. When asked about how this challenge has affected him, Gavin responded:

It puts me in an awkward position because, like I said, I have the utmost respect for my grandparents because I've seen what they've done - where they came from. At the same time, you know, there's Emily on the other side, who I also have a bunch of respect for as well.

Gavin's description suggested that he is caught between two sides - his grandparents and Emily. As he stated, he has respect for both sides and because of that, it is assumed that he is trying to balance and keep both sides happy. Furthermore, although

he is trying to keep everyone else happy, he has ended up in an “awkward position,” which suggests that he does not feel comfortable being in between these two sides.

Anastasia: A Silent Thing

Similar to Gavin and Emily’s experience, Anastasia’s experience also included implicit elements regarding communication with family members about her relationship. In her first interview, Anastasia discussed family acceptance and the experience that she had with her husband (then boyfriend) telling his family about their relationship. As she stated, they were dating for four years before his family was told about her. During that time, she worried a lot about: if they were very conservative, if they would accept her, and if they would force her boyfriend to leave her and marry a Bangladeshi girl. While speaking about her experience of being accepted by Jasim’s family, Anastasia said:

So the mother was also supportive. Of course, the details were not discussed, like, if we live with each other and these kinds of things.

As this statement implied some form of “taboo” about telling the family that they were living together before marriage, Anastasia elaborated on her experience in her second interview by saying:

It’s a silent thing. Like, of course, the sister knows, like, we have been living together. Like, after the mother knew that -- that my husband is dating me. Like, of course, I think that silently she knew that we are living together, not in a marriage. So I think, like, of course, explicitly nobody knows anything. Like, it’s -- no, they are just dating. For sure, she doesn’t sleep at his place, something like this, is how I imagine.

As Anastasia described her experience of telling Jasim’s family about their relationship, she expressed how certain things would not be explicitly told, such as the fact that they lived together before marriage. Explicitly, it was not acceptable to mention; although, in her experience, she felt they implicitly “knew” that they were living together.

That is why she referred to it as a “silent thing” - the knowing is silent. It does not have to be explicit. Because of the implicit nature of the “knowing,” Anastasia assumed that the mother was able to tell herself that they were not living together during that time.

Similar to Gavin and Emily’s experience, Anastasia went on to explain how this implicit way of communicating appears to be a cultural norm for her husband’s family. She discussed in her interview about how her husband explicitly avoids certain topics with his family, even though implicitly, they know what is going on. She reflected on the differences between her culture and her husband’s culture when she stated:

Like, once in my culture if somebody knows about something, there is no point in keeping it a secret or hiding it.

Ryan: Subtle Things

Ryan also alluded to this theme when he spoke about the reasons his parents would have concerns about the intercultural nature of his relationship. As Ryan expressed, his parents have never said anything directly or explicitly to him, but they have implied their concerns in “subtle” ways. At one point in his interview, Ryan was talking about his parents’ possible fears regarding grandchildren when he said:

The fact that their grandkids won’t have -- will lose that, so. I mean they haven’t said that outright, but I mean, subtle things like my dad recording all the shows on like, you know, on like, the East -- on like, the -- I guess, East Indian day or cultural -- like when they have all the dancing and singing and stuff like that. I mean, really make sure that I’m watching that and stuff like that. So, uh, no, not outright, but I’m sure they are worried about it.

In Ryan’s experience, his parents’ subtle gestures implied concern about him maintaining his East Indian culture. He postulated that their worry might revolve around the fear that their grandchildren will “lose” their East Indian culture. This is a significant idea and will be discussed later in the section on family concerns regarding intercultural

relationships. Although this was not something that his parents had expressed to him “outright,” it is a message that he has received implicitly from their “subtle” actions.

Jessica and Trisha: There Are Undertones

For Trisha and Jessica, the notion of implied meaning did not surface when they were discussing family concerns but rather during a discussion of societal prejudice. In the context of our discussions, societal prejudice was seen as the attitudes that the participants sensed from others in society regarding their intercultural relationships. Both Trisha and Jessica used the term “undertone” to refer to their experience. The term undertone suggests that although there is no explicit statement or action, there is some implied meaning; hence, the word “under” is used, which refers to something beneath or below. It may be hidden from view, but it is still present. With an “undertone,” because the message is not direct or clearly seen, the implied meaning may come through a “sense” that one gets about the words and actions of another. Jessica elaborated on this when she spoke about racist attitudes regarding intercultural relationships. She said:

I do think there are undertones of it in society. Um, I don't really face it, like, I have -- nothing's been brought to my attention, specifically. But I -- just from things I hear and read and see, I still think that there are undertones in society of that Whites should be with Whites and you know, but yeah.

In Jessica's experience, she has sensed undertones in society regarding intercultural/interracial relationships. Specifically, she sensed that there is an implied message that “Whites should be with Whites.” Interestingly, even though there was no one particular instance that she explicitly experienced, she still got that message implicitly from what she was hearing, reading, and seeing. When I read and considered this description that Jessica provided, I began to see how social constructs of norms and

whiteness were playing a part in her experience. Moreover, this notion was prevalent throughout a few other participants' experiences, and as such, will be discussed shortly.

While Jessica sensed undertones regarding intercultural relationships, Trisha's experience of undertones was related solely to society's perspective of and treatment of her partner. As she noted:

And I'm sure there's an undertone, too, of you know, we want to conserve our culture, like our "Canadianness." And we don't want, you know other foreigners coming in and taking that work, or, um -- or because he doesn't understand the language fully maybe, um, we can, you know, take advantage of him with certain things.

As Trisha said, there is an undertone regarding Canadian society's conservation of culture or "Canadianness." This, like Jessica's description, suggests that her experience was influenced by social constructs of the "norm" - an important notion that will be discussed shortly. In addition to conservation of culture, Trisha's description suggests that the undertone she perceives includes an implicit prejudicial and unwelcoming attitude towards "foreigners." It appears that she was noticing a perceived threat, which would explain why there is an implied sense of conservation against outsiders - culturally and work-wise. As she also stated, she feels there is an implied undertone of prejudice toward foreigners who may be perceived as people of which to take advantage.

A Significant Difference

While digging through the descriptions and uncovering themes, I came across a significant difference in the experiences of the participants in this study. Although this difference was not conceptualized as a theme in the participants' experiences, it was an integral component. The difference was found between the participants who were in relationships with a partner who had been born and raised in a different country from

themselves (Trisha; Anastasia) and the participants who were in relationships where both partners were born and raised in Canada but came from different cultural heritages (Ryan/Jessica; Gavin/Emily). The difference between the couples was in regards to the challenges in the relationships. More specifically, for Trisha and Anastasia, challenges in their relationships were related to cultural differences, whereas for Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily, challenges were related to family. Another noted difference was that the challenges affected the relationships of Trisha and Anastasia, but for the other four participants, the challenges only affected the individuals and not the relationships.

Trisha and Anastasia: Cultural Challenges and Effects on The Relationship

Trisha and Anastasia have partners who were born and raised in countries different from those they were born and raised in. They spoke significantly about the challenges in their relationships that were related to cultural differences. Furthermore, they both elaborated on how those challenges had greatly influenced them and their relationships. From reading their descriptions, it appeared that most of their challenges stemmed from differences in language/communication and cultural norms/behaviour.

Trisha: Double the amount of work. As Trisha pointed out in her interviews, many of the challenges she and Pablo faced revolved around cultural differences, language differences, and immigration issues. Later on, she elaborated on this idea. When speaking about intercultural couples in general, she said:

There's gonna be double the amount of work to do on communication if they don't speak the two -- the same language. Double the amount of work to do on learning about the person's background, their views towards sex, towards women, towards men, roles, you know, responsibilities within the home, um, finances, what kind of job they want, uh, children and upbringing, like how to raise children. There's gonna be all these different types of views.

As Trisha pointed out, there is “double the amount of work” to do in intercultural relationships in many areas. In Trisha’s experience, these are all areas that she and Pablo had to navigate based on their cultural differences and while facing the communication struggle of speaking two different languages. At another point in her interview, she emphasized how in the beginning of their relationship, all of these concerns piled up and compounded on top of one another to make their life as a couple extremely complicated and confusing. Trisha described herself as feeling “guarded” because there were “so many unknowns” in her relationship, especially involving Pablo’s immigration status and his plans for future work or school. She described how that situation, coupled with their language and communication differences, intensified her frustration and fear, eventually leading her and Pablo to break-up for a period of time. During her interview, Trisha explained how, despite their challenges, she and Pablo reunited and decided to go to counselling. As she concluded, the process, while difficult, was “worth it,” and now she is able to see all of the positives that have come out of the struggles.

Anastasia: It can be misunderstood. Anastasia’s experience was very similar to Trisha’s in many ways. She and Jasim grew up in different cultures and spoke different languages; as such, they were challenged to learn about each other’s culture within the context of learning a new language. Moreover, because English is a second language for both Anastasia and Jasim, their situation is unique in that neither of them can speak their first language to communicate with one another. Because of that, just as Trisha pointed out, Anastasia stated they have had challenges related to communication - both because of language ability and cultural differences in communication. In Anastasia’s words:

Language is a big challenge. At least it is for us, even, even now. Like, I speak English in a Hungarian way. I translate everything from my language into

English. Sometimes it can be very funny. Sometimes it can sound very rude. And it can be misunderstood. Plus, he speaks, his -- I mean, for him, English is not his first language.

Anastasia talked in another part of her interview about how their “misunderstandings” based on their cultural and communication differences would cause them to “argue a lot” and “break-up maybe every second day.” She expressed how it was “hard to adjust” to the cultural differences within their relationship; nonetheless, with time and the development of patience, acceptance, and tolerance, they seem to have overcome their challenges.

Choose to focus on the positive. During my discussion with Trisha, she emphasized an inspiring notion regarding challenges in her relationship. She stated:

I think I’m always proud to be able to say, you know, we’ve been able to be together this long and we have a cross-lingual, cultural, everything, you know? Um, to be able to say that, is -- is I think really cool.

In her experience, Trisha has found that being able to overcome the numerous challenges has provided her with satisfaction. She feels proud to be able to say that despite the differences and challenges they had to overcome, they made it through the tough times and are still together. Moreover, as Trisha described in another part of her interview, this process of overcoming challenges has given her confidence, and not just in her relationship, but in life as well. Trisha’s description provides an account for how intercultural couples can see challenges in a positive light. She stated that when she said:

It’s benefited my person in that I feel more confident that, not just in relationships, but in life. That it’s, like, okay, if there’s something difficult, like, anything’s possible, you know? That there can be so many things that look negative, but there can be a lot of positive that comes through if we choose to focus on it.

Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily: Family Challenges and Effects on The Person

While both Trisha and Anastasia spoke of challenges based in culture that had surfaced in their relationships, the other four participants did not perceive that there were challenges related to cultural differences. Since they all speak English fluently, there are no language concerns. Furthermore, since Ryan and Gavin were born and raised in Canada, they talked about how they feel more aligned with Canadian culture than with their family's traditional heritage. As such, their behaviour and norms are the same as their partners who were also born and raised in Canada. This would explain why there are no apparent challenges experienced within the relationship related to cultural differences. Despite the similarities in cultural behaviour within their relationships, participants did note that there were some challenges related to the intercultural nature of their relationship - challenges based in family approval and involvement.

Jessica and Ryan: Family challenges. The challenges Jessica perceived in her relationship revolve around family. Specifically, she stated there are cultural differences between how Ryan's family functions and what she is accustomed to. She said:

Well, one is, like, I guess his parents. Like, it's because -- they don't put pressure on me, but sometimes I wonder if they are thinking that eventually I will religiously turn over to Sikhism and I won't because I have my own. But I just -- I wonder sometimes if that's kind of what they are thinking. Um, challenges I found that, like, I don't know if this is culturally-related or just his family -- is that, um, they are a very close knit family. And I have found that with a lot of East Indian families - that they are very close knit. But his mom calls him every day and it really annoys me. And I brought that to his attention. Um, he has a very close relationship with his parents and it's good, but you need to set up boundaries, I feel like, with your parents. And he doesn't have boundaries with his parents. So that has been the biggest challenge for me. And, like, he'll never say "no" to his parents even if it's like -- like, no matter what.

She also expressed a concern about family acceptance, although as she explained, this was not something she knew about for sure when it came to Ryan's family. She said:

His parents have been very accepting, but at some points, I wonder...(Short pause. Starts crying.) Sometimes, I just wonder if they would rather him be with someone East Indian. And that's a bit hard sometimes. Like, like, I don't know, like, I don't know. But, like, I know, like, I'm sure they would. If they had a choice, they would choose that - someone to share their religious views with. So that's kind of hard....I never said anything, but I just wonder if that's what they are thinking sometimes.

Ryan also mentioned that one potential challenge for intercultural couples is family and community acceptance. He discussed how it could be really difficult to bring a "Western girl" into an East Indian family and community because some people may have "preconceived notions about what a Western girl is like in comparison to a traditional East Indian girl." He stated that intercultural couples would have an easier time "if everyone was extremely welcoming." With his family, Ryan stated that:

With a lot of families, not really mine -- even though I'm sure it's there a little bit. But my parents are a lot more welcoming and stuff like that. So, I mean, yeah, there are definite challenges, but nothing that, I guess, can't be overcome - in my situation at least.

Emily and Gavin: The grandparents challenge. As I previously presented, Gavin and Emily have had an interesting experience with Gavin's grandparents and the approval of their relationship. Both of them noted that this has been the only significant challenge in light of their relationship being intercultural. When it comes to their parents, however, Gavin and Emily expressed that their relationship is accepted. Emily said:

My parents' friends don't care and my parents are fine with it.

Gavin described his experience with his parents like this:

My parents are very, uh, open and comfortable and actually nice when it comes to who I choose to date. They leave it up to me and trust my judgment. And they've never really pressured any of my past girlfriends or even Emily when it comes to, you know, being Caucasian and not being Chinese. Of course, there will be the odd joke because, you know, they always have to watch out for my grandparents' interests. But for the most part they are very accepting.

In Gavin's description, it was interesting to note how he stated that even though they accept Emily for being Caucasian or not being Chinese, they make the "odd joke" as a way to "watch out" for the grandparents' interests. This suggests that like Gavin, his parents are in the middle between the grandparents and Emily. Gavin suggested this when he stated that his parents take "precautions" to make sure that his grandparents "are always happy with everything." This part of Gavin's description may help to further explain the implicit dynamic with not wanting to discuss their relationship openly with the grandparents. Since it is something that would disappoint them or make them unhappy, the topic is avoided. This "keeping them happy" could also be related to the "respect for his elders" that Gavin spoke of earlier in his interview.

Challenges to the person. As I briefly mentioned before, the other difference between Trisha and Anastasia versus Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily was that for the latter four participants, their family-based challenges seem to have not affected their relationship. Nonetheless, these four were personally affected by family challenges.

For Ryan, his situation with family approval has bothered him. He said it "makes him upset" when family members have suggested that he should try to find an East Indian girl to marry. He also talked about how he does not just "let it go" rather he says something back. Ryan said he will "argue right back" with his family and tell them why he is choosing for love instead of culture.

Jessica's experience with the cultural differences between her and Ryan's family has, as she said, "annoyed" her. She expressed that the challenge has not really impacted their relationship, just her "personally." As explained earlier, in the section on time, this was a challenge that has improved itself over time and with some adjustments. In terms

of feeling accepted by Ryan's family, it is a challenge that is close to Jessica's heart, as evident in her strong emotional reaction to speaking about it. Jessica expressed at several points in her interview that she worries about being fully accepted by his parents. She also stated that because of cultural differences, she does not feel that she can ever be really close with Ryan's mom. She said:

His mom is very, very nice. She's a very, very nice lady, but I just -- I don't think I'll ever feel really close with her because we just have this cultural barrier. So that's hard.

For Gavin and Emily, as mentioned earlier, their challenge with the grandparents makes their situation "awkward" - particularly for Gavin who is caught in the middle. It has also affected both of them because Emily is "not allowed" to attend formal family functions. Emily also talked about the awkwardness of a situation where she was expected to hide in Gavin's parent's bedroom when the grandparents unexpectedly came over. In Emily's words, she finds it all "very childishly amusing," which suggests that she has been able to laugh off this situation. This implies that although the situation with Gavin's grandparents has affected some of Emily's opportunities with the family, she has not allowed it to impact her sense of self in a negative way.

The Significance of The Difference: Family Approval

As I alluded to earlier, while I was considering this "challenge" difference between the couples, another underlying notion began to emerge. That is, I began to consider why it might be that Ryan, Jessica, Gavin, and Emily had concerns about family acceptance of their relationship, whereas Trisha and Anastasia felt completely supported and accepted by their partner's family. More specifically, it seemed that while Jessica's family and Emily's family had no concerns about accepting their partners who were from

different cultural backgrounds, Ryan's family and Gavin's family were the ones implicitly and sometimes explicitly expressing concerns.

At first, I wondered if it could be simply a product of proximity, as Trisha and Anastasia do not live near their partner's family and so they have less face-to-face time where they may possibly be confronted with feelings of disapproval. While this may be the case, I also thought this difference may have something to do with the fact that Ryan and Gavin were born and raised in Canada. As such, their families may be coming from a unique perspective in that they have immigrated to, and raised children within, a system of whiteness. Therefore, it would seem likely that their feelings towards their child's relationship may be influenced by that experience.

Moreover, when I went back through the transcripts and looked specifically at the descriptions of Ryan and Gavin regarding family approval of their relationships, I found some potential clues for why their families might feel and implicitly behave the way they do. Again, although this cannot be classified as a theme in the participants' experiences - as it only relates to the descriptions of a few individuals - it is a fundamental aspect to the experience of these individuals and deserves discussion.

The first significant glimpse I had into the complexity of this situation was while I was reading through Ryan's interview. At one point, he was discussing the challenges of intercultural relationships when he mentioned the "preconceived notions" of the East Indian community towards "Western girls" and how the East Indian community can "look down" on intercultural relationships. Then, he said:

...It's kind of like a reverse thing. You would think...traditionally, you would think that it would be more -- it would be more difficult for an East Indian to be welcomed by a Western - Western family. But it's -- it's almost the other way

around a little bit. With a lot of families, not really mine - even though I'm sure it's there a little a bit. But my parents are a lot more welcoming and stuff like that.

When I read this, it became apparent that this situation was a little more complicated than I had originally understood. Ryan described this experience as a “reverse thing,” suggesting that there is a usual or normal way of which this situation was the opposite. That usual or “traditional” way as Ryan called it would be regarding a Western family’s acceptance of an East Indian partner. He went on to describe the “reverse” pattern as being “almost the other way around a little bit.” Two things about this statement struck me as significant: (a) that he described it as the “other way around,” meaning he felt there were concerns with the East Indian family accepting the Western partner; and (b) that he described it as “almost” and “a little bit,” suggesting that it is not quite as simple as a “reverse” but rather a different dynamic that was difficult to describe. That is, where he may have seen the “traditional” way as being racist or discriminatory towards an East Indian partner, the “reverse” towards the Western partner did not necessarily fit the form of racism or discrimination.

The context of this idea and possible reasons that Ryan described it as “the other way around” will be explored shortly. Upon my supervisor’s recommendation, I gave considerable thought to the notion of whiteness and the ways that the societal system may be influencing the experiences of these individuals and their families. Accordingly, before discussing Ryan’s statement, it is important to explore the concept of whiteness.

Before beginning the discussion of whiteness, a brief explanation of why this topic was not covered in the literature review is necessary. Going into the research and data analysis, I was not aware of the influence that whiteness would have on the experience of my participants. Whiteness as an influence in the experience of individuals

in intercultural relationships was not something covered in the literature I read. Furthermore, as I will elaborate on in Chapter V, my own position as a White researcher clouded my ability to see the potential for whiteness as a factor in the experience of my participants. Therefore, it was only through the thematic analysis that I began to see whiteness as a construct that may shed light on the experiences of the participants. As such, to reflect the unfolding of that surprising discovery, I chose to place the discussion of whiteness within the thematic analysis rather than within the literature review.

Whiteness

Whiteness is a term that refers to a social construction that provides: (a) a standpoint from which White people view the world and (b) a position of privilege and power from which White people benefit. The whiteness standpoint, through which White people view the world, refers to the notion of “White as raceless.” That is, from a White point of view, “other people are raced, we are just people” (Dyer, 1997, p. 1). This can be illustrated by an example: a White person who refers to their White friend as “my friend Joe” but refers to his/her racially different friend as “my Asian friend Sue.” As Dyer (1997) posits, from a whiteness perspective, race is something that only refers to non-White people; White people thereby view themselves as raceless or colourless. In that way, whiteness and White people function as the “human norm” by which all other races are compared, judged, and measured (Dyer, 1997). The term “norm” implies that it is a “normal” standard, and that anything that deviates from the norm would be abnormal - a notion that carries negative connotations.

The norm that is established by whiteness creates a complicated situation in which “whiteness is nowhere and everywhere” (Leonardo, 2007, p. 263). What that means is

that whiteness often goes unnoticed by White people (appears to be nowhere), but in reality it affects the ways society and its people relate to one another (it is everywhere). As Leonardo (2007) describes, society's system is based on whiteness and everyone participates in it; however, only White people gain from it. This is how White privilege goes hand-in-hand with whiteness. As McIntosh (1989) presents, White privilege is a corollary to racism; that is, while racism puts others at a disadvantage, White privilege puts White people at an advantage. White privilege means that White skin colour is an asset, especially in the socio-economic arena, where it helps "open doors" for people through no merits of their own; as such, this privilege or advantage is one that is unearned. Moreover, not only does White skin provide many advantages, it enables one to avoid disadvantages such as hostility or fear based on one's race (McIntosh, 1989).

Unfortunately, whiteness and White privilege are everywhere and they influence many interactions between people of different backgrounds in society. However because whiteness as a social construction goes unnoticed and unchanged by White people, the cycle of White privilege and power continues (Dyer, 1997). The power of being White goes unnoticed under a mask of society being "fair and equal" to all people. While many White people are not aware of this phenomenon, it is pervasive and provides the basis on which our entire society and way of thinking about others is founded.

This system that is in place allows many White people to live in the world without ever having to think about race and their own racialization if they do not want to. The sheer fact that they do not have to think about race unless they want to shows the power of "White as raceless." The opportunity to live while being unaware of your race or how it affects your daily life is a privilege that many White people take for granted. Of course

there are those White people who grow up in places where they are not the norm and in that case, they are more likely to be aware of their “whiteness.” However, once they step out of that community, into a White dominant world, they receive benefits from society for being identified as White. That White people are not necessarily aware of whiteness is a fact that unfortunately allows the cycle of privilege and oppression to continue.

It is interesting that whiteness as dominance is pervasive since the concept of “White” is relatively new. In fact, as a form of skin organization, “White people did not exist about 500 years ago” (Leonardo, 2007). As such, “White” is a term that has come to be used to refer to a large number of groups of people who have varying and diverse backgrounds, but are all categorized and identified socially as White. Throughout history, there are numerous examples of groups that were not initially considered White, but because of the social and political changes of the time, were assimilated into the White category (e.g. the Irish; Dyer, 1997). These historical adjustments to the White category demonstrate how “whiteness has been able to accommodate or make certain compromises to maintain its ideological hegemony” (Leonardo, 2007, p. 263).

As Dyer (1997) discusses, this past assimilation brought fear amongst the White people that the White group would no longer be the “pure” category that it once was considered. In today’s society, “White” includes more than one category of people that may not have necessarily been considered White in the past, although the White label has not failed to lose its “pure” status. In fact, the power of assimilation has created a very dominant, extensive, and normative standard of whiteness. Furthermore, as society has grown, it has continued to propagate the initial prejudice that created the “White as pure” mentality, thereby increasing the pervasive nature of whiteness. As stated earlier, the

notion of White as the pure, raceless standard is often recognized by those who do not identify as White, but not often recognized by those who do.

The notion of whiteness helps to explain why, in the context of a society that is aware of the importance of multiculturalism and anti-racist policies, we continue to see concerns regarding race relations. As was indicated by some of the participants, although there appears to be less overt racism in today's society, there still seems to be some "undertones" or implied sense that it exists. This notion of implied racism coincides with the notion of whiteness, as we do not necessarily explicitly "see" or "hear" of the "goodness of White," yet it is inferred. Sometimes it is inferred through what is *not* said or shown or through *how* something is said or shown. In the past, for example, there were very few media images that included people with varying skin tones; most used only white-toned individuals. Nowadays, although we see a greater variety of images of individuals with varying skin tones, those images often "portray" a particular view of those people. While White individuals are portrayed in the media in a variety of ways (most of which have positive connotations such as power and beauty), non-White individuals are portrayed in less favorable or even negative ways. For example, as Dixon and Linz (2002) point to, "Blacks and Latinos, particularly those who victimize Whites, may get extra attention from the media..." (p. 117), which acts to perpetuate societal stereotypes and prejudice towards those groups. In this way, racism or prejudicial attitudes can continue to be propagated through implied means. Leonardo (2007) explains how implied undertones of racism, along with whiteness, goes unnoticed by most White people. This is part of what allows the "White as norm" attitude to prevail in society.

As Dyer (1997) purports, one way to begin changing this prevailing attitude is to bring awareness to whiteness and thereby challenge White people to identify their own race and privileged position in society. Leonardo (2007) refers to this as “race treason.” He explains this concept by stating that although White individuals and whiteness are linked, they are not one in the same. As such, although whiteness will always be oppressive and racist, a White person can choose to be aware of whiteness and fight back against its nature. “Race treason” means White people have a choice when it comes to their own behaviour and their participation in whiteness (Leonardo, 2007).

The Significance of Whiteness to Intercultural Couples: The Family Concerns

Considering the prevalence of whiteness as a normalized social construct, I can begin to postulate why, as Ryan described, it is the “other way around” when it comes to family acceptance for intercultural couples. As Ryan’s description suggests, some families who do not consider themselves White may have concerns about their son or daughter partnering with a White individual. Although these concerns may or may not be influenced by whiteness, it is important to consider its influence, especially in light of how powerful this social construct is. For these families, they are not only living within the context of a new and different culture, they are living within the context of whiteness.

For those families who are raising children within the context of a new culture and whiteness, it affects both the parents and the children. On the one hand, for the parents, they are faced with the possibility of their children choosing White partners. The significance of this will be addressed shortly. On the other hand, for the children in these families, as both Ryan and Gavin stated in their interviews, they have the unique experience of having to “balance” between two cultures/races.

Ryan: Fitting In

In his interview, Ryan commented on his experience as a child growing up in a community and going to a school where he felt different from everyone else. Ryan stated:

And I mean, like, you hear that stuff, like, even on the radio and, like, you should just teach -- you should, just you know, teach it this way 'cause it's always been that way. But it -- when I was little it affected me for sure. It made me feel -- 'cause you -- it points out those differences that you have and if you're -- if there's a bunch of people who are different and then a bunch of other people then it's probably a little bit easier. But if you're the only person and then everyone else is totally different, it's hard on someone. I think, so yeah.

In this description, Ryan pointed to the significance of inclusion versus segregation. As he stated, he was greatly affected by the fact that he felt “different” from everyone else - a fact that was accentuated because he was the only one who was “different.” As he suggested, we need to consider changing the way we teach and do things in society because we do have people who are different from “the White norm.” By teaching and continuing to do things the same way we always have, we are continuing to point out those differences and make people feel “different” and not “normal.”

Ryan also described how that experience of growing up and going to school affected him and his sense of cultural identity. He said:

I guess when I was little, it was -- I guess it was kind of uncomfortable when I was little - just adapting to, I guess, probably cultural norms that were here....So I probably tried hard just to fit in as I was growing up. But now that I'm getting a little bit older, I'm trying to -- I know there is value in -- in, like, where I've come from - where my family's come from. So, it's like a kind of a balancing act. And I'm trying not to lose where I've come from and I want to make that important for my kids and, like, down the line and stuff like that. So, it's kind of just, like, a balancing act - I guess kind of hard when I was little 'cause you wanna be just like everyone else, I really just wanted to leave that. But now that I'm getting older, I appreciate that more, so yeah.

In this segment, Ryan described feeling “uncomfortable” because of those “norms” that surrounded him. As he expressed, he “tried hard to fit in” by “leaving”

some of his own family heritage in order to meet the “norm.” Ryan stated that it was “hard” as a child because he wanted to “be just like everyone else.” This was an experience that, as I postulate, came out of the natural human desire to “fit in.” However, more importantly, Ryan’s experience was probably influenced by implicitly or explicitly receiving the message that he did not fit in the way he was, and as such, he should change or give up some of his East Indian heritage in order to become more like the standard. I can see through this example how powerful the notion of “White as the norm” can be - especially for a child. Ryan also described how he feels now; he stated that he has been able to recognize how he felt as a child and how he now sees the value in his cultural heritage and wants to keep that for his children and their children. He sees his current situation as a “balancing act” - meaning that while he has integrated concepts of being both East Indian and Canadian into his identity, that process requires constant flexibility and movement in order to maintain the “balance.”

The other unique aspect about Ryan’s experience in regards to growing up in Canada is how he related his experience to that of his partner. To be specific, he stated:

It’s probably hard for her at times because for me, it was hard at times when I was younger even though I was really little. So yeah, mine’s been kind of just like a gradual process of the years. But for her, she probably feels that way.

Ryan explained how he believes she has had a harder time fitting in with his family because for her, it has been a new experience. For Ryan, because he grew up here, his experience has been a “gradual process” that has allowed him to become accustomed to “balancing” between the two cultures. In this way, his experience of growing up here has afforded him a unique perspective where he can predict what his partner may be feeling as she has been learning and adjusting to a new family and culture.

Gavin: The “Token Asian Guy”

Similar to Ryan, Gavin described how his experience growing up in Canada has influenced how he experiences his intercultural relationship. He stated:

For me, since I was born in Canada, I’m pretty well-cultured to the, to the, uh, the Canadian culture. But for Emily, I feel I always bring a little flare to something. For example, my, uh, my taste in foods, my willingness to go and try something different when it comes to cuisine, cooking, and stuff like that. But, I’m not quite sure, like, it’s a daily thing for me, so it’s nothing new I guess.

As he suggested in this description, because Gavin grew up in Canada and he is “well-cultured to Canadian culture,” there is “nothing new” for him to learn or experience within the context of a relationship with a Canadian girl. However, when it comes to Emily’s experience, he stated he brings a “little flare,” meaning he adds some spark to her experience with his “willingness” to try different things. The suggestion was that he is willing to try different things because he has experienced so much variety in his history - between growing up in Canada and having a Chinese heritage.

When talking about growing up in Canada, Gavin did mention that he grew up in a community where there were “not a lot of Asians.” However, he did not express the same concern as Ryan did with trying to fit in. Despite this, Gavin did discuss ways in which he identifies with Canadian culture. He described himself as “well cultured to the Canadian culture” and “so Canadian,” while also being the “token Asian guy,” which suggest that he has incorporated aspects of being Canadian and Chinese into his identity.

When Gavin was discussing what it means to be the “token Asian guy,” he said:

Because it feels like I get more attention that way. And every once in a while when I meet a new group of people and I’m just myself, they’re like, “Whoa!” And I’m like, “Yeah! Be surprised!” And at the same time, when I meet someone else who’s Asian - who looks completely Asian - and they have the same Canadian personality that I hold, then it’s, like, that doesn’t look right either. (Laughs).

As Gavin suggested, he enjoys being the “token Asian guy” because it makes him stand out. In this way, he has embodied being unique and different and made that an aspect of his identity that he enjoys. Gavin also suggested another integral notion here - that it is not the norm for “Asian looks” to match a “Canadian personality.” From a whiteness perspective, this is because the norm or standard expectation would be that someone who “appears” different should act different. As such, a White person may be surprised when someone who appears non-White acts according to the White norm. In Gavin’s experience, he has enjoyed “surprising” people in this way. Moreover, he pointed out that he has also been “surprised” by other individuals like himself who “look Asian” but have a “Canadian personality.” This suggests that while Gavin is aware of his “unique” position in terms of the whiteness norm, he still expects the norm to apply to others. Gavin reflected on this more in another part of his interview when he said:

So there’s always that fun stuff where you analyze someone that is like you but looks, you know, Asian, or, or, or another culture, for example. If you’re not Caucasian, but you have that Caucasian personality, I find that different, for some odd reason. I don’t know, maybe it’s just me self-reflecting a lot...

When I read this description, Gavin’s words, “I find that different, for some odd reason,” stood out as significant. As mentioned earlier, whiteness is a pervasive and often unrecognized social construct. Because of this, as seen in Gavin’s experience, one can recognize the effects of whiteness without understanding what is causing them. Gavin’s words suggest that he was aware of some reason he found a “non-Caucasian” with a “Caucasian” personality different, but he did not know what the reason was. As noted earlier, this is because the “whiteness as norm” standard creates the illusion that someone who is “non-Caucasian” or not White should not act White. When one experiences that, as Gavin did, it creates dissonance based on the expectation of what the norm is.

The Family Concerns: Child's Identity

Considering the experiences of Ryan and Gavin with regards to their identity development and growing up in Canada, I began to see why the families might hesitate when it comes to their child dating someone outside their culture. It is likely that the parents of these children see how their identities have been molded and shaped by living within a dominantly White culture and they may fear the implications of their child identifying more with White culture than their cultural heritage. As Jessica noted in her interview, Ryan's family has referred to him as "White-washed," suggesting that they are not only aware of his identification with White culture but that they see a distinction between themselves and their son - that he is "White-washed" and they are not. This term was also used by Gavin as he referred to his grandparents becoming "White-washed," meaning he saw them changing or adapting in certain cultural practices and ideas to fit the norm. As such, this term "White-washed" is a powerful one in the context of whiteness. It is also a term that demonstrates the concern and awareness that these families have about whiteness and the power that it has to influence personal identity and behaviour. Accordingly, the concern for their children's current and future identity may be one prospective starting place for a family's hesitation towards an intercultural relationship. Keeping this starting place in mind, the next section will address the potential underlying concerns for these families regarding intercultural relationships.

The Family Concerns: Intercultural Relationships

The descriptions that Ryan and Gavin gave during their interviews suggest that there may be several reasons why families would be tentative towards their children having an intercultural relationship. The first major concern that surfaced was based in

fear. For instance, fear that the partner will not understand or accept their culture or fear of their family (kids and grandkids) losing their traditional heritage. The second notion had to do with the benefits of having a same-culture relationship. Benefits included social approval and bragging rights. Each of these two major areas will be explored further in light of whiteness, while providing support from Ryan and Gavin's descriptions.

Fears and Concerns About Culture

Ryan brought attention to the first major concern for families when he was discussing family approval of intercultural relationships. He stated:

Like I was saying, traditional, you know, a traditional East Indian family, they, yeah -- I mean, they -- a lot of them don't approve of their son or daughter dating someone outside of their cultural background. Um, so, yeah, I mean, it is there. I guess it's just different degrees, different families and stuff like that. So, yeah, I mean their concerns are more that, I don't know, there's no culture there - culture meaning there's no sense of family, no sense of real loyalty, things like that, I guess. Yeah.

With this description, Ryan suggested that one possible reason why an East Indian family would have concerns about their child dating outside of their cultural background is due to different cultural values. That is, they view the cultures as having disparate values in areas such as family or loyalty. As this notion suggests, there may be a fear that their child will become involved with someone with different cultural values - ones that do not align with theirs. This concern also relates to another fear of the families - a fear of their child losing his/her own culture. Ryan explicitly pointed to this when he said:

They're scared that I'll lose that. And there are a lot of really good aspects about the, uh, I guess the loyalty and things like that about East Indian culture, I guess.

In addition to fear about their children losing the culture, as Ryan illustrated, the families might also be afraid for their grandchildren.

That's probably something else that scares, you know, the families and stuff like that. Like, you'll lose your culture -- when you have kids, they are not going to be able to speak that, you know, your native language and stuff like that. So, and yeah, I mean, it's quite possible that will happen, but, I don't know. I guess if you make -- if you value that, I'm sure you could instill that in your kids still, you know?

As Ryan described, one of the family fears is over keeping the culture alive for the grandchildren. Furthermore, he acknowledged this is a legitimate fear because it is "quite possible that will happen." I can postulate that this might happen because of the "whiteness as norm" construct and the fact that it promotes assimilation of all individuals to within the dominant (White) culture. As Ryan went on to note, it is possible to "instill" your cultural heritage in your children just as his parents have done with him. However, he also qualified that statement by saying "if you value that." This could also explain why families have concerns regarding relationships. That is to say, if one considers the power of whiteness as the standard, these families may be anticipating that their children will not be able to uphold the value of their heritage in light of a whiteness system that only values being White. Furthermore, these families may be considering the future of their grandchildren and how they will identify themselves. They may fear that grandchildren will not identify strongly with their heritage - a notion that would be very upsetting for grandparents. I can imagine that grandparents would want their grandchildren to identify with them as a way of honouring their heritage and solidifying their bond as kin.

In addition to the families wanting to keep their cultural heritage alive, Gavin mentioned another related concern for families. During his interview, Gavin was talking about his grandparents push for him to marry Chinese when he stated:

...I personally think that my grandparents don't -- they want me to date someone that I actually like and that's a good person. Now the whole Chinese thing is a bonus that they're always gonna push for because everyone wants what they can't

have, right? And to keep the bloodline straight Chinese, I think for them, is something that is old school, but it's not that much influence anymore 'cause they're getting "White-washed" in their own ways as well.

For Gavin, he stated that he believes his grandparents want him to be happy, but ideally, they would like that happiness to come with a Chinese woman. As he implied, that is something they want even though they "can't have" it, which suggests that there is still some hope there. Part of that hope is that they can, as Gavin said, "keep the bloodline straight Chinese," which is an "old school" notion. The term "old school" that Gavin used suggests that this bloodline notion is one that is outdated or one that used to be followed but is not anymore. Moreover, his point was that this bloodline notion no longer has as much influence on his grandparents because of the "White-washing" that has occurred. Of course, regardless of becoming "White-washed," the overall sense that Gavin portrayed with his description was that it would still be ideal, from his grandparents' perspective, for him to marry a Chinese woman as it would keep their family line straight Chinese. This perspective, similar to the fear of losing culture, could be related to the concern that the White side of a family may become dominant over the Chinese side. Over the years, the result may be that the heritage of the family becomes diluted to the point where Chinese heritage and customs are no longer valued or upheld in the family. Rather, whiteness becomes the norm - both valued and recognized. For these families, and Gavin's grandparents in particular, this may be a concern given what they have seen happen in the context of a "White as good and valued" society.

There was one other fear that surfaced within the interviews with Ryan and Gavin. As their descriptions suggested, families may fear that the White partner will not

understand or accept their culture. Moreover, that fear results in a type of protective action, which can appear as “judging” or “hostile.” As Gavin stated in his interview:

I, in a way, see it as they are just scared of -- of a non-Chinese girlfriend that I would have, or any of my brothers or sisters would have or boyfriends, that they are the other way. So it's that -- there's that “I don't talk to you” kind of thing and then it comes off hostile almost, if you will.

Gavin pointed to a few ideas in this description. First, that the grandparents are fearful of a non-Chinese girlfriend. Those fears could be based in the previously discussed notions of desiring to keep the culture and bloodline secure. They could also be based in something more personal like feeling misunderstood or fearing racism or judgment. Second, that fear results in them being “the other way,” meaning their fear results in them being protective and defensive. Third, that protectiveness is interpreted as “hostile,” when in actuality it is a defensive mechanism that comes from a place of fear.

In Ryan's interview, when referring to East Indian families and their attitudes towards intercultural relationships, he stated that:

They judge a lot of people for not knowing them.

At this point, Ryan was discussing how it could be difficult for a White partner to be accepted into an East Indian family, especially if they are a family that “judges people for not knowing them.” Although this statement seems severe, in the context of whiteness, it makes sense. Because whiteness is the norm, it is a likely possibility that a White partner would not be as familiar with the culture of their non-White partner. As Ryan's experience and description suggest, an East Indian family living within a dominantly White community may feel unknown by Whites and, just as Gavin's experience suggested, seem hostile or judging of those who do not understand them or their culture. Conversely, if their children choose partners from the same culture, the

families would be comfortable knowing that the partner would understand them and their culture. Furthermore, they would not have to fear being judged or accepted by someone from their own culture. With a White partner, however, that fear of being misunderstood, judged, or not accepted could be very real. After all, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a White partner to understand what it is like for these families to be living within the context of whiteness. In addition to this, they may also fear this for their children and grandchildren. That is, they may fear the acceptance of their child into a White family and the acceptance of their grandchildren into a White society.

Expectations and Bragging Rights

Besides these fears that families have regarding intercultural relationships, Ryan and Gavin's descriptions suggested a second reason why families may prefer their children to marry within their culture. This second reason has to do with expectations and bragging rights. Gavin's description of his experience provided a good example of the expectations within his family when it comes to marrying within his culture. He stated:

But there is that strong root especially because I'm the eldest son on the eldest son's side. So I'm the most expected of all the grandchildren to go ahead and find that Chinese girlfriend, pretty much.

As this suggests, there are not only expectations for children to marry within the culture, but those expectations intensify within a cultural framework. That is, because he is the "eldest son on the eldest son's side," which is a cultural standard that implies more responsibility, there is more pressure and expectation for him to marry within the culture.

Ryan also pointed to these familial expectations when he said:

I mean relatives, like, back in let's say England and stuff like that, they are pretty old school. So they would maybe say stuff like, "Make sure you marry a Brown girl!" and stuff like that.

In his description, Ryan, like Gavin, used the term “old school” to refer to his family’s expectations for him to “marry a Brown girl.” The use of the term “old school” implies that Ryan sees these expectations as outdated.

As the descriptions of Gavin and Ryan suggest, if a child marries within their culture, the family expectation is fulfilled. This expectation, although seeming to be on a family level, may also relate to a social expectation that they feel pressured to follow. That appeared evident when Ryan and Gavin discussed the idea of “pride” and “bragging.” As Ryan stated in his interview:

I guess it’s a sense of pride for some families when they see their kids marry into the same culture. Like, go to India and find a wife or something like that. It’s something they brag about to probably other families. So, socially, they probably, you know -- they probably really put that on their kids and then they end up doing it, so yeah.

Ryan’s description suggests that one of the possible reasons families want children to marry within culture is because it provides them with a “sense of pride.” Although Ryan does not mention it, I can postulate that this pride comes from feeling like the child is upholding their culture, values, and family heritage. Moreover, by marrying within the culture, the child is keeping the culture strong. Hence, there is less chance of losing the culture or identity in light of a White dominant society. The other part of Ryan’s description alludes to “bragging” and the social connotations of marrying within versus outside the culture. As he suggested, these families feel a social pressure because they want to “brag” about their child marrying within the culture. As a result, there is extra pressure placed on the child, and sometimes that pressure results in the child “doing it,” meaning they marry within their culture.

Gavin also mentioned the idea of “bragging” in his interview when he stated:

It's like bragging rights. Look at my grandkid, he has a Chinese wife now. Oh, your grandchildren are dating White or whatever.

Gavin's description is unique. He mentioned the notion of "bragging rights" (social approval) for marrying within culture and he implied that there is a distinct reaction towards those who "date White." As this suggests, there is a social disapproval for those whose children or grandchildren date White individuals. This social disapproval may provide another concern for these families who wish for their children to marry within culture. For some families, the thought of social disapproval from their own cultural group may be a concern behind their push to get their children to marry within culture. Moreover, this social concern may create subsequent pressure on the couple.

Summary of Thematic Analysis

As I read through the interviews of my participants, I discovered that their experiences related to being in an intercultural relationship were abundant and complex. More importantly, their descriptions contained a much deeper meaning than what originally appeared on the surface. Throughout all the participants' explanations, there appeared to be an importance of learning within their relationships. Interestingly, while learning can be seen as an aspect of any relationship, for these participants, the understanding they gained was attributed to the intercultural nature of their relationships. Also, although each participant conceptualized his/her experience of learning a little differently, each one commented that he/she had learned something new through the course of his/her relationship. The "learning experience" happened in many ways: learning about a new culture, re-learning about one's own culture, "seeing" something previously unseen, learning about one's beliefs, or gaining a new perspective. Several of

the participants spoke about how they have been “changed” by their learning - another factor related to the intercultural nature of the relationships.

While participants noted that they had learned a lot in their relationships, some reported that in the beginning, they had not considered the intercultural nature of their relationship or all that it might entail. As a result, those participants referred to a “realization” where they experienced a sudden awareness of the intercultural nature of their relationship. For some of the other participants, the opposite was true - they experienced a preparedness regarding the intercultural nature of their relationship due to their experience of growing up in a mostly White community.

Intersecting with the theme of learning experience, the notion of openness and willingness surfaced as essential components of the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships. The participants in this study described how individuals in intercultural relationships need to be open and willing: to learn about other cultures, to try new foods, to accept differences, to tolerate different perspectives, and to challenge one’s own beliefs. It appeared that openness and willingness were not only characteristics necessary to the success of these relationships, they were ones that attracted the partners to each other. Some participants expressed a certain “culture-blindness” when choosing their partner. That is, they were looking to find someone with certain characteristics, and it just so happened that the person they found was from a different cultural background.

Another significant aspect of the participants’ experiences was that of implied meanings, especially in relation to their families and society. Some participants referred to the inability to explicitly tell their family members about their relationship, while others received implicit messages from their family regarding expectations for behaviour.

Other participants discussed implied prejudicial messages from society. They described societal “undertones” about intercultural relationships and immigrants living in Canada.

While there were a few inter-subjective themes found in the participants’ descriptions, there was one major difference that stood out as significant. That is, for two of the participants, cultural differences between the partners were stated as a big challenge to the relationship; for the other four participants, family challenges as a function of cultural differences (as opposed to cultural differences between the partners) were the prevalent concern. Moreover, for those four participants, although the family challenges were cited as affecting them personally, they did not see them as affecting their relationships. This major difference between the couples highlights the concern of family approval for intercultural couples. Through an examination of whiteness, I came to understand the deeper meaning behind the seeming disapproval of the families. An exploration of that deeper meaning revealed that there are many possible concerns for those families, all of which are influenced by their experience of living within the “White as norm” system. Among those concerns for families, the most pertinent appeared to be a desire to maintain culture and family heritage - especially for future kin.

Taken together as a whole, the impression I received from their descriptions was one of a fascinating duality. It appeared that the experiences of being in an intercultural relationship were a melding of two ostensibly opposite, yet combinable, aspects. That is, the participants spoke of their relationships being both similar to same-culture relationships and unique from same-culture relationships. While some participants noted that their relationships were fascinating in some ways, they also viewed them as not out of the ordinary from any other couple relationship. Participants expressed that their

experiences were challenging and uplifting. They stated their differences as founded both in culture and personality (and sometimes a combination of the two). Moreover, some participants noted that while they felt there was explicit acceptance from family and friends, there were also some implicitly felt messages of disapproval. In addition, some participants who experienced growing up in a different culture from their family heritage noted that although they are not identified as White, they identify with the behavioural norms of White culture. Furthermore, while participants expressed the importance of maintaining their cultural heritage (a notion that was equally emphasized by their families), they have to do so within a system of whiteness that is contrary to that goal.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Introduction

As my findings demonstrated, the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships, while displaying commonalities, also reflect a unique way of being for each individual. More precisely, although the participants expressed common factors (themes) in their experiences (learning, openness, implied meaning), each individual described that experience in his/her own unique way. Accordingly, the opportunity to see both the shared and exceptional experiences provided me with a greater understanding and appreciation for the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships.

While I was surprised by the number of themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study, I was particularly amazed to discover the significance of underlying notions of identity and whiteness. It was from my deeper investigation into the third theme - the implicit message - that I found the connection between identity, whiteness, and the experiences of being in an intercultural relationship. My purpose for this chapter is to present the significance of that connection. Moreover, to conclude my study, I will reflect on how I have been affected both personally and professionally by this research. While it is not my intention to provide theoretical or practical guidelines to those who work with intercultural couples, it is my hope that this research will inform those who are interested in becoming more thoughtful and tactful in their own practice.

Intercultural Relationships: The Significance of Identity and Whiteness

The notion of identity emerged repeatedly throughout the participants' descriptions, demonstrating its critical relevance - not just to the participants personally but to their relationships. Jessica and Anastasia, for instance, spoke to the importance of maintaining a sense of their unique cultural identity within the context of their

relationships. They discussed how although they participated in many of their partners' cultural activities, they would not "take on" that cultural identity; rather, they stated they were strongly rooted in their own cultural identity and had no intentions of giving that up. Trisha's description was similar as she implied that cultural identity is deeply ingrained. She was discussing intercultural dating challenges when she said:

It sounds really cool, but unless you're willing to, um, look at yourself and make some changes and look at your own belief system and be able to kind of challenge the other person's but also respect it, you know? It's -- 'cause he's never gonna be a Canadian man. He isn't, you know? His upbringing is in Mexico and so he has - - he carries that identity with him. Um, and even now when I say, "Do you identify as a Mexican or Canadian?" He's like, "I'm Mexican." You know? He's like, "I can understand myself within Canada, but I am still a Mexican." You know? He still identifies with that part of his culture.

As Trisha stated, "he's never gonna be a Canadian man," it implies that notions surrounding identity are constantly present within intercultural relationships. Each partner identifies with a unique background, and both partners must understand and accept that reality. Moreover, each person in a couple must understand and accept that his/her partner's cultural identity will not likely change.

In Trisha's second interview, she further reflected on the notion of identity. Her description was profound because as she explicitly discussed the concepts of identity and society, she implicitly pointed to notions of whiteness. She said:

... "What is a Canadian?" You know? And I work with people that are Canadian and yet they speak Turkish as a first language. Well, am I more Canadian than them? Just because I happen to be third generation where now my English is, you know, my first language... I think that kind of runs throughout our society of, like, you know, the White settler is more Canadian than maybe the people coming. They're still "the other." ... like, we say we're multicultural but we're not really... Even my own perceptions I have to dig into and kind of review what -- what I'm doing and what my thoughts are, you know? And that question, "Am I more Canadian than some of my students?" is a really good question to ask myself. And the answer would be, "Yes." *I feel* more Canadian. Well, why do I feel that way? You know? Why do I feel like I am kind of superior to them?... they

are Canadian citizens.... We both have the same rights and freedoms....what do I want for Pablo? Do I want him to feel as though he's Canadian and he just forgets his culture?...I remember asking him, like, "Do you feel Canadian?" And I really wanted him to just say, "Yes! I feel like a Canadian!"... Why do I want him to just feel like he's Canadian? Why do I feel that there's not value in just living in a country but still feeling like you are Mexican? Like, why do I have those perceptions?...I think those are good questions for me to ask. Because I think what it -- those questions kind of bring about that idea of - am I above that person? Do I have more value than that person? And I don't -- that's not who I want to be, you know?

Throughout her description, Trisha pointed to a few notions surrounding identity. First, as she noted, one question to consider is "What is Canadian?" This is an important question to think about since it appears that, from Trisha's perspective, some Canadians may "feel" that they are more Canadian than others. What this "feeling" is based on is not exactly clear. As Trisha suggested, it could be based on being "third generation" or speaking English as a first language. Regardless of what the rationale behind the "feeling" might be, it seems as though there could be undertones of whiteness in her experience. That is, for some Canadians the idea of being a "true" Canadian is associated with being White (Cappello, 2012). Whiteness is the norm against which judgments are made about who is more or less Canadian. As Trisha articulated, she believes the undertone is that the "White settler" is more Canadian than the "people coming over" - they are still considered the "other." Therefore, while individuals can maintain Canadian citizenship and proclaim their nationality as Canadian, they may not be viewed by other Canadians as "truly" Canadian or "as Canadian" as them.

The second point that Trisha brought up in her description is that we "claim to be multicultural" in Canada but in reality we are not. Although she does not explain this idea, I can hypothesize that it has to do with how we do not consider all peoples living within Canada to be equally Canadian. There are "levels" of "Canadianness," and these

levels insinuate a lack of authentic acceptance of other cultures and identities within the Canadian nation. Therefore if we do not accept those other cultural backgrounds as being “truly” Canadian, then Canada is only superficially multicultural.

The third point in Trisha’s description is the concept of a value judgment that goes along with “feeling more Canadian.” She directly posed the question “Why do I have those perceptions?”, implying that while she understands that she has these judgments and perceptions, she does not necessarily know where they are coming from. I believe the answer to Trisha’s question is whiteness. The system of whiteness has created the norm by which White Canadians understand themselves to be “more Canadian” than others because they are White, speak English, and their ancestors settled here. Moreover, she asked “Why do I feel like there’s not value in just living in a country but still feeling like you are Mexican?” Again, I believe this is because of whiteness, especially as it teaches us that there is greater value in being White (and in this case “truly” Canadian) - anything else is de-valued. Through this example, I can see how white normativity might influence an individual to give up important aspects of their cultural identity and heritage in order to conform to the norm and feel more valued as a “true” Canadian.

Thinking back to the descriptions of Ryan and Gavin, I can see how this applied to their experiences of growing up in Canada and their need to “balance” between two aspects of their identity; especially for Ryan as he spoke about purposely turning away from his family’s cultural heritage when he was growing up. It appears that, growing up, Ryan received the whiteness normative message that in order to “fit in”, he had to give up important aspects of his own cultural identity.

Considering the experiences of Ryan and Gavin brings me back to the discussion of identity and dualities that was presented in Chapter I. Namely, that it is difficult for one to incorporate a dualistic nature to his/her identity because being one thing implies that one is not something else. For example, being Canadian implies that one is not American. In some instances, dual identities can co-exist harmoniously within a person. However, in other cases, there exists tension between the identities; hence, it appears that an individual must “balance” between two aspects of his/her identity. Either that, or for some individuals, one aspect of identity would be chosen over another. I wonder if this is a natural process or if it is influenced by whiteness and this notion of giving up integral aspects of one’s identity in order to conform? Furthermore, for individuals who live and grow up in Canada, they identify with being Canadian. However, as the concept of whiteness implies, if one is not White, then one cannot be a “true” Canadian. Therefore, for some individuals, being Canadian means being an “insert-your-race/ethnicity/heritage-here Canadian” (e.g. Chinese Canadian). This idea also helps to understand why, as Gavin termed it, some individuals refer to themselves as “Canadianized” - it is yet another “version” of Canadian that is not “true.” Moreover, one’s identity may also be influenced by whiteness in-so-far-as an individual may identify him/herself as Canadian but be identified by others as belonging to “another” group based on physical characteristics. That is, others may assume that one is not Canadian simply because he/she does not “look” like a “true” Canadian.

Considering these notions within the context of the intercultural relationship, whiteness does not just affect how individuals view themselves but it influences how they relate to their partners. For instance, as Trisha’s earlier description suggested, individuals

in intercultural relationships may desire to “feel” the same as their partner (identity-wise). Another example of how intercultural relationships can be influenced by identity was demonstrated through Ryan and Gavin’s experiences. Growing up in Canada made it easier for them to fit in with their partners’ families. As Ryan stated, he is comfortable with his partner’s family and with going back and forth between the different cultures of the two families because he had that experience with his White friends while growing up. Conversely, he believes that it may be harder for his partner to “balance” or move between the two cultures since she has not had the experience that he had growing up.

As acknowledged in this study, identity is interwoven with experiences of being in an intercultural relationship. Being in an intercultural relationship can mean becoming aware of one’s own identity and how it is influenced by whiteness. As discussed earlier, whiteness theory postulates that many Whites do not ever have to be aware of the fact that they are White (McIntosh, 1989; Dyer, 1997; Leonardo, 2007). Although for White individuals in relationships with non-White individuals, I believe that awareness is inevitable. White partners have the opportunity to become aware of: (a) the experiences of their non-White partners and (b) their own White privilege. I also believe they begin to feel “undertones” as the participants pointed to - the implied messages that white normativity reinforces throughout society. Moreover, the families of individuals in intercultural relationships may sense these undertones and see how their children and grandchildren develop their identities. This awareness may generate concern, which influences their reactions toward intercultural relationships. As such, this adds another layer to how individuals in these relationships are affected by whiteness and identity.

Final Reflections

I believe that to conduct a hermeneutic phenomenological study, a researcher first and foremost must learn about the meaning of the lived experience at hand. Nevertheless, the researcher also learns about him/herself and reflects on that learning throughout the process. Therefore, in my understanding, hermeneutic phenomenological research is a deeply intimate and self-progressing process.

Throughout the thesis process, I have been profoundly affected, and I am positive this experience is far from over. Much of my learning has influenced me in deeply personal ways - ways I never would have imagined at the start. Moreover, although van Manen (1990) has taught me that a taken-for-granted way of being is a natural part of the human experience, I have also learned the power of awakening one's attention to phenomena and to reflect on its meaning and grow from that process. In light of this, as a way of not taking-for-granted my thesis experience, I turn my attention toward the learning that I have experienced in order to bring to light the ways in which I have grown in/through this process. What follows are my reflections on how I have been affected personally but also how my personal growth can be applied in some cases to my professional capacities. This reflection is, in my mind, a way for me to deepen my understanding and to continue moving toward a phenomenology of practice: that is, to develop my thoughtfulness and tact towards others.

Pre-Understandings and Epiphanies

One of the most important realizations that I had while writing this thesis was in regards to pre-understandings. While studying phenomenology, I learned to recognize my preconceptions, and more importantly, through the process of identifying what they were, I was able to better acknowledge their influence on my perceptions. I began to see that

while the experiences of the individuals in my study could be interpreted in a way that would support my pre-understandings, it would not necessarily be true to their experiences. Because of that acknowledgement, I was able to search the participants' descriptions in a way that allowed their deeper and genuine meaning to emerge. As I conducted my thematic analysis, I knew that the themes were revealing themselves regardless of my pre-understandings because I had several epiphanies or "surprise uncoverings" as discussed in Chapter IV. More importantly, I have applied this process of acknowledging my pre-understandings in both personal and professional capacities; as I have come to appreciate, it is integral for me to be aware of my pre-understandings and how they influence my perceptions if I desire to be as thoughtful and tactful as possible.

Critical Insights and Personal Growth

Aside from becoming more aware of my own pre-understandings about intercultural relationships, the most critical insight I had during this process was that of the influence of identity and whiteness on the experiences of individuals. Prior to beginning this study, I had no concept of how much the notions of identity and whiteness would inform and transform the experiences of individuals both within and without intercultural relationships. Moreover, I was also fortunate enough to gain awareness of the experiences of the participants outside of their relationships. That is, I learned of how the notions of identity and whiteness influence the experiences of individuals who grow up in Canada within families that may be identified by society as non-White or not "truly" Canadian. I came to know about the implicit nature of a lot of these experiences. This was a shocking realization for me because, as a White person, I do not often "see" racism or discrimination because I am not personally affected. However, after reading my

participants' descriptions about the implied sense of racism they get from society, and while considering the context of whiteness, I came to see that racism is still prevalent.

In addition to the insights I have had regarding the experiences of others, I have become more aware of my own identity, White status, and way of seeing the world. The fact that whiteness surfaced during the process of thematic analysis, rather than as a part of recognizing my own pre-understandings or presumptions about the world demonstrates its invisible power. The notion of whiteness never even crossed my mind as a construct that would potentially surface through my participants experiences, which is why it was not covered as a topic during my literature review or identifying my pre-understandings. Looking back, I can see how while I believed that my eyes were partially "opened" at the beginning of this study (through my experiences living overseas), my earlier "understanding" had been influenced by a whiteness way of thinking. I use the term "understanding" in quotations because at some points I was very confused about how to make sense of my participants' experiences - something I believe was influenced by my inability to see past the veil of whiteness that was covering my eyes.

Once I learned about whiteness, I was able to reframe my "understanding" of my participants' descriptions within that context and in so doing, I gained clarity regarding their experiences. Of course, I recognize that my White status and the influence that whiteness has on my perspective are things I will never be able to fully escape. However, my hope is that I can continue to gain awareness of the ways that I am being affected and use that awareness to clarify my understanding.

With this insight into my own White status, I have grown in both personal and professional ways. Not only do I have a more transparent view of the ways identity and

whiteness play a part in the experiences of individuals, I have new insight into my own identity and privilege and how that influences my experience in the world. In addition, I now see the importance of recognizing identity and privilege in order to change my own behaviour and work towards my goal of becoming more considerate and tactful.

As a counsellor, it is important for me to be aware of my own identity and how it influences the counsellor-client relationship. In my formal education and training, I had learned of the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity; however, the importance of considering one's own identity and/or whiteness in light of how it would affect interactions with others was not a readily discussed topic. Ancis and Szymanski (2001) discussed this idea in their research regarding the awareness of White privilege among counselling trainees. As they suggested, training for all counsellors (and especially White counsellors) should involve lessons in White privilege; lessons should be aimed at bringing a greater level of personal awareness to the implications of White privilege – particularly for White counselling trainees who may not have been previously aware of their White privilege or how they may affect their interactions with non-White clients.

While I did not have the opportunity to learn about White privilege during my counselling training, this study has afforded me that chance. I am more aware of my position as a White counsellor and as a result, I can be mindful of how White privilege and whiteness may influence me to think about and treat others. Moreover, with this newfound awareness, I can challenge myself and others to see instances of White privilege and take action either personally or publicly.

Being Mindful: Individual Experience and Social Context

Doing a hermeneutic phenomenological study has afforded me the opportunity to see the inter-subjective nature of experiences as well as the unique perspectives that each individual brings to his/her experience. As I became aware of this fact, I reflected on the importance of avoiding presumptions. That is, while the inter-subjective nature of experience can help to inform me (both personally and professionally) what aspects of an individual's experience might be like, I must be mindful to allow the individual to fully explain his/her experience in his/her own way.

Just as this study helped my sensitivity to the variety of individuals' experiences, it also allowed me to grasp the influence of social context. Moreover, although I recognized identity as an important concept to discuss in light of intercultural relationships, I did not anticipate the elaborate connection between identity, whiteness, and the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships that would be revealed. While I am a person who has always believed in the influence of social context on individual life, I have now been made acutely aware of new ways in which it can be tied to an individual's experience. In this study, the social context (whiteness) was intricately interwoven with family concerns about the future of children and grandchildren - a connection that I had not previously considered.

As I pondered the importance of social context, I gave thought to globalization and potential future concerns. It appears to me that there may be increasing numbers of intercultural relationships with families who will be concerned about maintaining their cultural heritage within a "White as norm" society. In fact, some of the participants in this study mentioned their concerns about the future and raising children had to do with incorporating both cultures into the family. In Jessica's interview, she discussed the

importance for her and Ryan to focus on incorporating Ryan's East Indian heritage. Since their kids will be growing up in Canada, Jessica expressed that they would have plenty of opportunity to know Canadian culture; as such, effort would be needed to make Ryan's culture a considerable part of their children's lives. As a counsellor, it is important for me to keep these concepts in mind in order to be as thoughtful as possible.

There was one other bit of information that some of my participants shared that I believe to be important in the context of counselling. At one point in Trisha's interview, she brought up the importance of having someone to talk to who could understand what she was going through in her relationship. She stated:

I actually even at one point, like, considered, like, is there a support group in the city for people that are in intercultural relationships that they can go - they can talk?...Um and I never found anything or never heard of anything but I think it would be a wonderful idea....Because, you know, people that are in it can understand it better than people who aren't, I think. Because they live it everyday.

Ryan also brought up this idea in his interview. He stated:

...well, most of my close East Indian friends kind of think the way I do, so. And it's good to have people to talk to about that....I have a friend, we talk about stuff like that, just how difficult his parents are and, like, and how they didn't want anyone to know that he was dating this girl...

At this point in Ryan's interview, he was discussing how good it was for him to have friends from East Indian families who could identify with him and relate to his situation with his family. Trisha's description also suggested that she would have benefited from having talked to someone she felt she could relate to. Although at one point in her interview she stated her friends were very supportive, but as she said, they could only understand to a certain point. Often times, Trisha noted, her friends would downplay the cultural challenges in her relationship, which made her extremely frustrated and discouraged her from speaking to them about her concerns.

Both Trisha and Ryan's experiences speak to the importance of connecting people who can relate, share stories, and give helpful suggestions. From my perspective, I can incorporate this idea into my counselling to help build a support network for those individuals who need one. As Trisha pointed out, it would be nice to have a group for intercultural couples. I can see the value of creating support networks or counselling groups for intercultural couples who are willing to share and support one another. These would be safe places where individuals and couples could express their interests and concerns about intercultural relationships and receive validation and encouragement.

Concluding Remarks

While the aim of this study was to gain a deeper personal understanding of individuals in intercultural relationships, it was also to develop greater consideration in my personal and professional interactions. As I realized, this study has taught me and changed me in more ways than I could have originally anticipated. Through doing this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I have gained a: richer understanding of the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships, greater awareness of my personal identity and how that influences my view of the world, and deeper pathic knowledge and thoughtfulness that I can apply in both personal and professional situations.

Furthermore, it is my hope that, by sharing my insights, others may experience enhanced awareness, deeper understanding, and increased thoughtfulness when it comes to the experiences of individuals in intercultural relationships. As previously noted, my goal was not to provide practical guidelines for counsellors, but rather to share knowledge so that others may consider applying it to their own roles.

To conclude this thesis, while the formal research part of my investigation is complete, I will continue to reflect on the significance of my discoveries. Furthermore, as I have come to realize about hermeneutic phenomenology, the effects of such research are not short-lived; rather, the impact will be long-lasting and ever evolving. In moving forward I will strive to not take-for-granted the knowledge gained. I aspire to maintain openness to new insights that will emerge from this research. In doing so, I anticipate that I will continue to challenge, develop, and expand my way of being in the world.

REFERENCES

- Ancis, J.R., & Szymanski, D.M. (2001). Awareness of white privilege among white counseling trainees. *The Counseling Psychologist, 29*(4), 548-569.
- Atkeson, P. (1970). Building communication in intercultural marriage. *Psychiatry, 33*(3), 396-408.
- Barritt, L., Beekman, T., Bleeker, H., & Mulderij, K. (1984). Analyzing phenomenological descriptions. *Phenomenology & Pedagogy, 2*(1), 1-17.
- Bizman, A. (1987). Perceived causes and compatibility of interethnic marriage: An attributional analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 11*, 387-399.
- Bustamante, R.M., Nelson, J.A., Henriksen, R.C., Jr., & Monakes, S. (2011). Intercultural couples: Coping with culture-related stressors. *The Family Journal, 19*(2), 154-164.
- Cameron, S.C., & Wycoff, S.M. (1998). The destructive nature of the term race: Growing beyond a false paradigm. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 76*, 277-285.
- Cappello, M.P. (2012). *Producing (white) teachers: A genealogy of secondary teacher education in Regina*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Regina: University of Regina.
- Cheng, C.C. (2010). A study of intercultural marital conflict and satisfaction in Taiwan. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 354-362.
- Church, T. (2000). Culture and personality: Toward an integrated cultural trait psychology. *Journal of Personality, 68*(4), 651-703.
- Corey, G. (2009). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (8th ed.). Belmont, California: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Crippen, C., & Brew, L. (2007). Intercultural parenting and the transcultural family: A literature review. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 15*(2), 107-115.
- Dixon, T. L., & Linz, D. (2002). Television news, prejudicial pretrial publicity, and the depiction of race. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 46*(1), 112-136.
- Donovan, S. (2004). *Stress and coping techniques in successful intercultural marriages*. (Unpublished master's thesis) Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia.

- Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Ellis, J. (1998). *Teaching from Understanding: Teacher as Interpretive Inquirer*. New York, New York: Garland Publishing.
- Fontaine, G., & Dorch, E. (1980). Problems and benefits of close intercultural relationships. *International Journal of Intercultural Relationships*, 4, 329-337.
- Forry, N.D., Leslie, L.A., & Letiecq, B.L. (2007). Marital quality in interracial relationships: The role of sex role ideology and perceived fairness. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(12), 1538-1552.
- Frame, M.W. (2004). The challenges of intercultural marriage: Strategies for pastoral care. *Pastoral Psychology*, 52(3), 219-232.
- Fu, X., Tora, J., & Kendall, H. (2001). Marital happiness and inter-racial marriage: A study in a multi-ethnic community in Hawaii. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 32(1), 47-60.
- Fusco, R.A. (2010). Intimate partner violence in interracial couples: A comparison to white and ethnic minority monoracial couples. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, X, 1-16.
- Gaines, S.O., Jr., Granrose, C.S., Rios, D.I., Garcia, B.F., Page Youn, M.S., Farris, K.R., & Bledsoe, K.L. (1999). Patterns of attachment and responses to accommodative dilemmas among interethnic/interracial couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16(2), 275-285.
- Graham, M.A., Moeai, J., & Shizuru, L.S. (1986). Intercultural marriages: An intrareligious perspective. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9, 427-434.
- Grearson, J.C., & Smith, L.B. (1995). *Swaying: Essays on Intercultural Love*. Iowa, Iowa: University of Iowa Press.
- Heater, M.L. (2003). Ethnocultural considerations in family therapy. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 9(2), 46-53.
- Henriksen, R.C. Jr., Watts, R.E., & Bustamante, R. (2007). The multiple heritage couple questionnaire. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 15(4), 405-408.
- Imamura, A.E. (1990). Strangers in a strange land: coping with marginality in international marriage. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 21(2), 171-191.

- Johnson, W.R., & Warren, D.M. (1994). *Inside the Mixed Marriage: Accounts of Changing Attitudes, Patterns, and Perceptions of Cross-Cultural and Interracial Marriages*. New York, New York: University Press of America.
- Kelaher, M., Williams, G.M., & Manderson, L. (2001). The effect of partners' ethnicity on the health of Filipinas in Australia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25, 531-543.
- Klein, D.M., & Adams, B.N. (1995). Series Editors' Introduction. In P.C. Rosenblatt, T.A. Karis, & R.D. Powell (Eds.), *Multiracial Couples: Black & White Voices* (pp. xi-xii). California, USA: Sage Publications.
- Lavenda, R.H., & Schultz, E.A. (2000). *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*. California, USA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), 1-29.
- Lawler, S. (2008). *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.
- Leonardo, Z. (2007). The war on schools: NCLB, nation creation and the educational construction of whiteness. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(3), 261-278.
- Li, C., Lin, Y., & Eckstein, D. (2007). The cultural relationship interview matrix: Four activities for couples. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 15(2), 143-151.
- Luke, C. (2003). Glocal mobilities: Crafting identities in interracial families. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(4), 379-401.
- Markus, H.R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
- McClurg, L. (2004). Biracial youth and their parents: Counseling considerations for family therapists. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 12(2), 170-173.
- McFadden, J. (2001). Intercultural marriage and family: Beyond the racial divide. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 9(1), 39-42.
- McFadden, J., & Moore, J.L., III. (2001). Intercultural marriage and intimacy: Beyond the continental divide. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 23, 261-268.

- McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*, July/August, 10-12.
- Milan, A., Maheux, H., & Chui, T. (2010). A portrait of couples in mixed unions. *Canadian Social Trends: A Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no.11-008-X*.
- Molina, B., Estrada, D., & Burnett, J.A. (2004). Cultural communities: Challenges and opportunities in the creation of “happily ever after” stories of intercultural couplehood. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 12(2), 139-147.
- Moore, A.M., & Barker, G.G. (2012). Confused or multicultural: Third culture individuals’ cultural identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(4), 553-562.
- Nelson, M.R., & Otnes, C.C. (2005). Exploring cross-cultural ambivalence: A netnography of intercultural wedding message boards. *Journal of Business Research*, 58, 89-95. doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(02)00477-0
- Norlyk, A., & Harder, I. (2010). What makes a phenomenological study phenomenological? An analysis of peer-reviewed empirical nursing studies. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(3), 420-431.
- Patel, F., Li, M., & Sooknanan, P. (2011). *Intercultural Communication: Building a Global Community*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.
- Rohrlich, B. (1988). Dual-culture marriage and communication. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12, 35-44.
- Rosenblatt, P.C., Karis, T.A., & Powell, R.D. (1995). *Multiracial Couples: Black & White Voices*. California, USA: Sage Publications.
- Schmidt, L.K. (2006). *Understanding Hermeneutics*. Stocksfield, United Kingdom: Acumen.
- Sparrow, L.M. (2000). Beyond multicultural man: Complexities of identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 173-201.
- Sullivan, C., & Cottone, R.R. (2006). Culturally based couple therapy and intercultural relationships: A review of the literature. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 14(3), 221-225.
- Tesch, R. (1987). Emerging themes: The researcher’s experience. *Phenomenology & Pedagogy*, 5(3), 230-241.

- Thomas, D. (2008). *Cross-Cultural Management: Essential Concepts* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Troy, A.B., Lewis-Smith, J., & Laurenceau, J. (2006). Interracial and intraracial romantic relationships: The search for differences in satisfaction, conflict, and attachment style. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 23(1), 65-80.
- van Manen, M. (1982). Phenomenological pedagogy. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 12(3), 283-299.
- van Manen, M. (1984a). "Doing phenomenological research and writing: An introduction. *Curriculum Praxis Monograph Series*, 7.
- van Manen, M. (1984b). Practicing phenomenological writing. *Phenomenology & Pedagogy*, 2(1), 36-69.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2007). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), 11-30.
- Whitehead, L. (2004). Enhancing the quality of hermeneutic research: Decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 45(5), 512-518.
- Wojnar, D.M., & Swanson, K.M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 25(3), 172-180.
- Yancey, G. (2002). Who interracially dates: An examination of the characteristics of those who have interracially dated. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 33(2), 179-190.
- Yancey, G., & Lewis, R., Jr. (2009). *Interracial Families: Current Concepts and Controversies*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Yancey, G., & Yancey, S. (1998). Interracial dating: Evidence from personal advertisements. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19(3), 334-348.
- Zahedi, A. (2010). Transnational marriages of Filipinas and Iranian men: Adjustment and social integration. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33, 70-80.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

I, _____, hereby

(Printed Name of Participant)

consent to participate in the research study *Intercultural Relationships: A Phenomenological Investigation* being undertaken by Krista Allen in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. By signing below, I agree that I have read and understand this consent form.

I understand that:

- There will be two interviews, for approximately one hour each, and they will include questions about my experiences pertaining to being in an intercultural relationship.
- The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially, discussed only with the research supervisor, and securely stored.
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting from this research. My real name will not be used in any of the documents.
- The questions in the interviews are of a personal nature, and as such, it is possible that I may feel some discomfort. No other risks are known to the investigator at this time.
- Following the interviews, I will have a chance to discuss any concerns with the investigator that I do not wish to be audio recorded as part of the study.
- Upon my request, the interviewer can give me a referral to an appropriate professional or agency.
- I am free to withdraw my consent and/or discontinue my participation in the interviews or study at anytime. My right to withdraw my data will apply until the thesis document is submitted.

- I will receive an honorarium in the amount of a \$25 gift certificate. There are no conditions to this honorarium and I will still receive it if I withdraw from the study or do not choose to finish the interviews.
- I understand that the results of this research will be used only in presentations and written articles for other educators and in the thesis document.

Signature of Participant

Date

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact my research supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Tupper, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, 585-5353, Jennifer.Tupper@uregina.ca

This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [306-585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca]. Out of town participants may call collect.

APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 29, 2011

TO: Krista Allen
231 Centennial Street
Regina, SK S4S 6W3

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Intercultural Relationships: A Phenomenological Investigation (File # 13S1112)**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

- 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.
- 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
- 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
- 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.


Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Jennifer Tupper - Education

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893
www.uregina.ca/research

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT TABLE

Participant	Country of Birth	Self-Identified Heritage	Language(s) Spoken	Partner	Partner's Country of Birth	Partner's Heritage	Partner's Language(s)
Trisha	Canada	German Ukrainian Prussian	English French Spanish Turkish	Pablo	Mexico	Mexican	Spanish English
Anastasia	Hungary	Hungarian	Hungarian English Spanish Portuguese Bengali French	Jasim	Bangladesh	Bangladeshi	Bengali English Spanish Hungarian (some)
Ryan	Canada	East Indian	English Punjabi French	Jessica	Canada	Swedish German	English
Jessica	Canada	Swedish German	English	Ryan	Canada	East Indian	English Punjabi French
Gavin	Canada	Chinese	English	Emily	Canada	English	English Mandarin (some)
Emily	Canada	English	English Mandarin (some)	Gavin	Canada	Chinese	English

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-interview Demographic Questions

Participant:

Sex:

Age:

Self-Identified Cultural Heritage:

Country of birth:

Countries of residence:

First language:

Other languages spoken:

Highest level of education:

Partner:

Sex:

Age:

Cultural Heritage:

Country of birth:

Countries of residence:

First language:

Other languages spoken:

Highest level of education:

Number of years in relationship:

Relationship status (Married, Common-law, etc):

If you have children, how many?:

How old are they?:

Interview Questions

How did you and your partner meet?

How would you describe your relationship?

What have you experienced being in an intercultural relationship? What are some of your unique experiences?

Can you give me an example of that?

What do you think the challenges are of being in an intercultural relationship?

Some of the literature on intercultural couples suggests that there are specific concerns around societal and familial approval, concerns about raising children, and gender roles. To what extent do you agree that these are concerns for intercultural couples?

Have you had experiences with these concerns?

What have been the effects of these experiences on your relationship?

Have you experienced prejudice, discrimination, or opposition from your family, friends or community? If yes, what did you experience?

What are some of the ways you have handled the challenges in your relationship?

What are the positive aspects of being in an intercultural relationship?

Have your thoughts and feelings about being in an intercultural relationship changed over time? How?

What would you want to share or let others know about being in an intercultural relationship?

Any final comments?