STRESS AND COPING TECHNIQUES IN SUCCESSFUL INTERCULTURAL MARRIAGES

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Abstract

The number of intercultural marriages has grown significantly in the past few decades, as have the numbers of intercultural couples presenting for marital and family therapy. Current literature on intercultural relationships states that they are at a high risk for failure, with higher divorce rates and lower marital satisfaction reported than for same culture marriages.

Few actual research studies have been conducted to prove or disprove these theories, and no studies have looked at how successful couples have dealt with the stressors stated in the literature such that they remain married and report high marital satisfaction. This study was an exploratory study on the stress and coping techniques successful couples have utilized in their relationships, based on the ABCX model of stress and coping. Six couples were interviewed on what stressors they have faced, what resources they have accessed and built to combat those stressors, and what their perceptions of their challenges have been.

Several themes emerged. Couples revealed common stressors from family and society disapproval, language barriers, logistics, cultural barriers and traditions, and children. Coping resources included humor, learning about the other's culture, support, communication, personal preparation, working towards common goals, and religion. These couples were found to have attitudes of commitment to their marriage and each other, and a belief that they were not that different from their partner.

Clinical implications include support for the idea of strength-based intervention for intercultural couples. This study will provide a beginning framework for others interested in doing more research on intercultural relationships, and designing models for work with this population.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The Problem and its Setting

As the number of intercultural and interracial couples in the United States has grown, so also has the number of these couples seeking family therapy (Biever, Bobele, & North, 1998; Brown, 1987; Hernandez, 2003; Laird, 2000; Oriti, Bibb, & Mahboubi, 1996). Intercultural couples (meaning couples that consist of partners who are of different cultures, countries, and nationalities, which may or may not include interracial couples) often present with many of the same type of relationship conflicts as intracultural couples (those within the same cultural groups) (Biever et al., 1998), but research and literature available have shown that these couples often face unique challenges and situations that add extra considerations for therapists doing work with these couples (Bonacci, Moon, & Ratliff, 1978). Unfortunately, the marriage and family therapy field has a lack of literature, research, and validated models for working with intercultural couples. Therapists who see these couples have few resources to turn to, and thus are left to come up with their own frameworks, and to find their own techniques and models for how best to address the issues intercultural couples bring into therapy.

This gap in research and information about intercultural marriages exists in part because of the quick rise in the last few decades for the need for this information. Fifty years ago, intercultural marriages were a rarity, and largely consisted of either interracial marriages within a country or societal culture, or war brides, as American soldiers brought home wives from countries they served in with the military (Bonacci et al., 1978). Changes in the political and social atmosphere have lead to an increase in the number and situations of intercultural relationships in the US. In a landmark case in 1967,

the Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting interracial relationships were unconstitutional (Brown, 1987; Killian, 2002; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Oriti et al., 1996; Sung, 1990). In the decade spanning 1970-1980 alone, the US Census count of interracial marriages more than doubled (Brown, 1987). Lewandowski and Jackson (2001) state that interracial marriages in the US have more than tripled in the past three decades, and Fu, Tora, and Kendall (2001) place their proportion among all marriages as having grown from .07% in the 1970's to over 2.2% in the mid 1990's. Immigration and the greater ease of travel have lead to the worldwide movement of people and cultures, brought down barriers to intercultural relationships, and have exposed Americans to wider circles of potential partners (Fu & Heaton, 2000). The world culture as a whole has shrunk, contributing to the increase in intercultural marriages and the need for information about these unions.

While intercultural marriages were much fewer fifty years ago, the societal disapproval of these unions was also much higher. As the numbers of intercultural and interracial couples in the United States have grown at a steady rate, so has the favorable public perception of intercultural unions (Brown, 1987; Killian, 2002; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Oriti et al., 1996; Sung 1990). Even so, the common theme in the literature, and general belief in the population, is that intercultural couples start out their relationships with a higher risk for an unsuccessful union (Brown, 1987), and are more prone to marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Brown, 1987; Fu et al., 2001; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Sung, 1990). Other studies suggest even more serious side affects for those involved in intercultural unions. A study in 1994 suggested that children of intercultural relationships may be at a higher risk for parental abductions when the relationship ends

than children from same-culture relationships (Hegar & Greif, 1994). A study by Chin (1994) suggested that intercultural couples may be at a greater risk for domestic violence than their same-culture peers.

The available literature on intercultural couples states that partners in these unions also have more factors to think about in starting and maintaining their relationships than their same-culture peers. Intercultural couples face the typical relationship adjustments that all couples face, but they also must often reconcile other stressors that result from their differing cultural backgrounds, such as: stereotypes held by our society about them and their families (Brown, 1987; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Sung, 1990), cultural differences about lifestyle and family decisions (Biever et al., 1998; Laird, 2000; Pearlman, 1996), and their personal experiences with oppression (Biever et al., 1998; Fernandez, 1996; Forna, 1992, Killian, 2002; Oriti et al., 1996; Thompson & Jenal, 1994). Intercultural couples often face added stress around ethnicity and culture as it relates to their children and childrearing factors (www.mavinfoundation.org; Atkin, 2001; Forna, 1992; Grove, 1994; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Sung, 1990).

Significance of the Study

Just as the increase in numbers of intercultural couples has come to public attention and become a subject of research in recent years, so also have the problems and concerns facing intercultural couples. The wide variability of cultures involved and situations of the population of intercultural marriages has made finding suitable samples for conclusive research difficult. Very few studies have even been conducted to gain information on intercultural couples, and the few that exist have been done with a limited

number and combination of cultures, and small samples sizes, which affects the ability to generalize these findings, and thus the usefulness of the information. The majority of the data collected on intercultural couples has also been quantitative data, which provides statistical evidence of the instability of these marriages, but is not helpful in practical sense for clinicians seeing these couples. More research needs to be done before specific results can be considered conclusive to the overall population of intercultural marriages. However, the fact that research has been done on this population adds support to the theory that intercultural relationships face additional stressors than do relationships of their same-culture peers. These added stressors could be a factor affecting the higher divorce rate (Sung, 1990), lower marital satisfaction levels (Fu & Heaton, 2000), and the increase in intercultural couples presenting for marital and family therapy (Biever et al., 1998; Brown, 1987; Hernandez, 2003; Laird, 2000; Oriti et al., 1996).

Lloyd Saxton (Brown, 1987) suggests that intercultural couples enter relationships more aware of possible conflicts, and have higher standards for their relationship in areas such as shared interests and personal compatibility because they are aware of the difficulties they will face because of their intercultural differences. Sung (1990, p. 347) states that intercultural couples also have a strong commitment to the relationship and each other, "are willing to make changes and accept the nontraditional", and are "more flexible and resourceful in dealing with differences" than their same-culture peers. These two articles cite some of the strengths and benefits of intercultural unions, but the majority of literature and research available focuses on the negative outcomes, in terms of high divorce rates, low levels of marital satisfaction, and implications for parenting. Again, these findings support the idea of intercultural couples being a unique population

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that needs attention, but are not useful to a clinician interested in helping intercultural couples find ways to improve these areas.

Marriage and Family Therapists seeking information on working with intercultural couples encounter two main gaps in the available research- information specifically geared towards clinical work with these clients, and information focusing on strengths, or geared to be helpful in working towards positive outcomes. No models or valid data exist to help therapists decided how to treat couples who present to therapy wanting to improve their intercultural marriages.

This study will seek to better explain the other half of these statistics- the intercultural relationships that do work, that report high levels of marital satisfaction and long-term, stable relationships. An ethnographic, qualitative study of stable and satisfying intercultural marriages will add to the growing information available to therapists about intercultural couples, provide added support to the need for more in-depth research on this population, and provide a first step towards defining the need for competency-based approaches to helping intercultural couples. This study will focus on how these couples have successfully overcome the odds stated in the literature to build a mutually satisfying marriage, and will examine the participants' views about the stressors facing intercultural couples, the stressors they have faced in their own marriages, and coping skills and strategies used to overcome these stressors. The information gathered in this study will also be a resource to help therapists who are interested in designing treatment programs specifically geared towards intercultural couples, with their unique situations and needs.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of stress and coping theory guides this study. Specifically, the double ABCX family crisis model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) will be used as the framework to examine how successful intercultural couples have built mutually satisfying marriages.

The double ABCX family crisis model is an expansion of Hill's original linear model of stress in which A (the stressor event) interacted with B (the family's crisis meeting resources) and C (the definition the family makes of the event) to produce X (the crisis) (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). The double ABCX model expands the linear model to a circular one, in which the original factors include other variables interacting in each section, to contribute to the overall outcome, or how the family copes with a specific stressor. In the double ABCX model, A is not only a specific stressor, but also a pile-up of all the other stressors the family may be facing. B is not only the resources the family has and uses, but also those resources the family develops and seeks out in response to a specific stressor. C is the meaning the family gives to a specific stressor and the meaning the family makes of the situation and how that meaning has influenced the family's ability to adapt. X encompasses the amount of crisis in a family, the family's adaptation to the crisis, whether good or bad, and the effects of mal or bon adaptation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

In this study the overarching X will be defined as the crisis that did not happen, in that the couple has not divorced or ended up with a marriage in which the partners experience low satisfaction. Through interviews, the other three components of the model in each couple's marriage, A, B, and C, will be explored to discover how the

couple has viewed and structured these factors so that the first level crisis's (X) have not resulted in an outcome of divorce or low marital satisfaction, whereas so many other couples with similar stressors have. Couples will be questioned on what their stressors have been and if they have experienced many of the stressors listed in the literature stemming from cultural differences, what resources were available and sought, and their own and others' perceptions of their situations. These factors will be examined in the context of the environment, the build up of stressors through time, and how they have utilized or developed resources to counteract these stressors such that their overall result is a satisfying and stable marriage for both partners, or bonadaptation.

The framework of stress and coping, and specifically the elements in the double ABCX model, both support and add value to the goals of this study in several different ways. These factors also influence the data's clinical applicability to therapists either working with intercultural couples that have sought out therapy, or designing models or programs specifically for use with intercultural couples. The allowance in the model for consideration of stress and coping factors over time will gather data on how the couples' stressors and resources have changed over the course of their relationship and with the passage of time, leading to understanding of the process of how intercultural couples overcome their added challenges to the developmental adjustments needed for relationship stability throughout the course of a relationship. The strength-based approach of this framework invites exploration of what strengths both brought to these relationships and gained from them can help couples in intercultural relationships.

Research Questions

1. What are the stressors to their marriage experienced by intercultural couples? How do these stressors compare with what the literature states?

2. What are the resources used by these couples to combat these stressors? Are there resources used by individuals in the couple as well as the couple as a whole?

3. What meanings do intercultural couples give to their struggles? How do these meanings affect their perception of challenges?

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction and Organization

Relationships and marriages between people of different cultures is a phenomenon documented throughout world history (Rohrlich, 1988), and a subject severely lacking in current research and data. Even with the dramatic increase in the numbers of intercultural couples in the past few decades (Fu et al., 2001), and the numbers of these couples presenting for therapy (Biever et al., 1998; Hernandez, 2003; Laird, 2000) marriage and family therapists looking for information describing these couples and how to work with them find sparse and often conflicting data (Chan & Wethington, 1998).

Information on intercultural relationships is primarily found in two separate mediums: literature and research. Literature includes articles and papers published in popular and scholarly books, manuals, magazines, and journals. Research includes studies and other data- gathering searches; both will be included in this review. Information available will be discussed along with its limitations, applicability to this study, and how this study will address some of the issues and gaps in information it brings up. The following categories representing the focus of this study will be reviewed: Risk Factors, Characteristics of People in Intercultural Relationships, Stressors Facing Intercultural Couples, Resources/ Coping Skills, and Resources Available to Helping Professionals.

Seven scholarly databases were searched for information for this review. These databases were America: History and Life (prehistoric to present), ERIC Document Reproduction Services (1966-present), Ethnic Newswatch (mid 1980's- present), Family

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and Society Studies Worldwide (1970-present), Historical Abstracts (1450-present), PsycINFO (1872-present), and Women's Studies International (1972-present).

Much of the literature before 1990 often seems to validate and support whatever the social atmosphere surrounding the topic was at the time of publication. Much of the literature after 1990 focuses on theories, either of why people have chosen to marry interculturally, or specific attributes of these relationships, such as communication and social adjustment in intercultural marriages. Neither of these foci is particularly helpful to clinicians working with intercultural couples.

Only one qualitative study was found that specifically looked at successful intercultural couples, a 1986 unpublished doctorial dissertation by Giladi-McKelvie. This study extensively interviewed five couples living in large Eastern cities in which the partners were from different countries, and who were defined as successful by having being married at least ten years and self reporting as such. This study viewed these marriages from a descriptive phenomenological perspective, summarized by the ten participant's views of intercultural marriage. Common themes that emerged from this study were a strong sense of religion, a focus on nuclear family, and an involvement with children. The participants reported growing up feeling different, being intrigued by differences, and making efforts to learn about their spouse's culture. While this study provides a first look at successful couples, more research with wider samples and sizes is needed to further understand and generalize these findings. No studies were found that looked at intercultural couples from the perspective of stress and coping.

Few valid or reliable research studies on intercultural couples or marriages were found. In the majority of the literature, statements and theories about intercultural

couples often fall into one or more of three categories: statements in published books or scholarly journals with no citations, statements included in dated literature (meaning literature and research studies over 20 years old), or research studies with a small and very specific sample. Because of the important legal and social changes in the past 40 years affecting intercultural relationships (laws ruling their legality, social norms changing), early and unsupported literature cannot be generalized, or assured of validity and reliability to the situations of today. Results from studies with small samples sizes and data on specific culture combinations also are difficult to generalize to the whole population of intercultural couples, thus decreasing their usefulness. The conflicting results of recent studies also question the truth of many of these statements.

Interracial Research

Intercultural relationships have been defined and named in many and various terms throughout the literature, most often as intercultural, interethnic, dual-culture, mixed-marriages, outmarriage, and interracial relationships. In this study intercultural relationships have been defined as those in which the partners come from two separate cultures (countries of origin), which may or may not include interracial (from two separate racial groups) relationships. Due to the many definitions used to describe these couples, studies found on interracial relationships that also fit the criteria for this study have been included in this review.

Because interracial relationships have often been identified in the literature as sharing many of the same stressors and risk factors as intercultural relationships, data from strictly interracial studies (such as Black/ White couples in America) are often found as support for statements describing intercultural couples. This study is founded

on the theory that couples in which the partners are from different countries of origin will have unique challenges based on that fact alone. Therefore, for this study, interracial couples from the same country are not considered the same population as intercultural couples, and data from those studies will not be included in this review.

<p style="text-align:center">Risk Factors</p>

All of the literature includes themes that intercultural relationships are at a higher risk for failure (e.g. Fu et al., 2001; Gaines & Liu, 2000; McFadden & Moore, 2002). Failure encompasses such adverse outcomes as divorce, low marital satisfaction, and even domestic violence and child abduction if the relationship ends in divorce.

Divorce

A number of articles stated that intercultural couples have higher divorce rates than their same culture peers, but few cited actual research studies that proved this statement (e.g. Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Markoff, 1977).

A 1990 research study by Sung looked at the outmarriage rates of Chinese Americans in New York City from 1972-1982. Research was gathered from the 1972 and 1982 census, marriage applications in the city, and personal interviews with 50 couples in which one spouse was Chinese. Sung cited research done by Barron (1972) in Los Angeles, Lind (1964), Schewertfeger (1982), and Tseng (1977) in Hawaii, and Monahan (1970) in Iowa, all of which found that Chinese who married outside of their race (culture) had higher divorce rates than those that married within. However, Sung's

1990 study found no significant differences in divorce rates of Chinese in New York who married outside of their culture and those who married within.

Sung (1990) states the cosmopolitan, international atmosphere of New York City, and the changes in social atmosphere as possible factors affecting her findings as opposed to what other studies found, but calls for more research to solidify any of these results. The inconsistency of the literature on whether intercultural marriages do or do not have higher rates of divorce lend support for those calling for more research to be done and shared before intercultural marriages are automatically labeled as more likely to end in divorce than same culture marriages.

Marital Satisfaction

Similar to divorce rates being higher among intercultural couples, literature also states that marital satisfaction in intercultural couples is lower than that of their same-culture peers' marriages, again without research to back these statements.

A study in 2001 by Fu et al. in Hawaii compared marital satisfaction, measured by a 20 question scale including questions about marital adjustment, conflict in financial matters, support to one's marriage from community and extended family, discipline of children, mutual support, marital affection, and self-rated general marital happiness. Intra and intercultural married couples from a university and the small surrounding community were randomly sampled and sent the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 148 wives and 134 husbands, with 122 of these being matched couples, and 87 of them being intercultural couples. Wives in intercultural marriages did report lower levels of

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marital satisfaction than wives in intracultural marriages; husbands' satisfaction did not show a difference.

Although this study does seem to lend support to the theory of marital satisfaction being lower in intercultural marriages than in same-culture marriages, results from two other studies that also looked at relationship satisfaction in intercultural dating relationships contradict this finding.

A 1999 study by Gurung and Duong. and a separate 1998 study by Shibazaki and Brennan also studied undergraduate students involved in relationships outside of their ethnic group (culture), through questionnaire surveys. Both these studies were also done on college campuses with samples relatively equal in size to the Fu et al. study (Gurung and Duong had a sample size of 131 couples, with 73 being intercultural, and Shibazaki and Brennan had a sample of 100, 44 intercultural). Both Gurung and Duong and Shibazaki and Brennan found no differences in relationship satisfaction between respondents in ethnic heterosexual relationships and those in mixed ethnic heterosexual relationships.

As with the statement that divorce rates are higher, studies can be found to support either argument about marital satisfaction among intercultural couples: (1) that there is no difference, or (2) that it is lower than same culture couples. Again, the limited research available and the limitations of these studies call for more research to be done before this statement can truly be considered conclusive.

Domestic Violence and Child Abduction

Some literature also cited concerns of higher rates for domestic violence and the risk of child abductions by the non-custodial parent in intercultural marriages that end in divorce (Augustin, 1986). Only two articles were found that dealt with these two issues, respectively.

Hegar and Greif (1994) studied parental abductions in the US through and found that of their sample of 371, intercultural and interethnic divorced couples were a significantly higher proportion of than is represented in the general population. Interethnic (defined as partners of different racial or ethnic backgrounds) were 12.7 % of the sample, as opposed to 8.4% of the general population (Hegar & Greif, 1994). Intercultural couples (defined as one foreign born partner) made up 15.9 % of the sample, two and a half times the percentages of the US population born abroad (Hegar & Greif, 1994). They also found that of the abductors who had been violent with their spouse while married, intercultural pairings were represented in a higher proportion (66%) than same culture marriages (51%). However, this was not the focus of their research and thus would need to be researched more specifically to find these results conclusive.

Chin (1994) also documented a surge in domestic violence among intercultural couples as Chinese intermarriage has increased. However, Chin's paper was written as a history and background rather than a research study, and was based on media accounts and reports from social service providers rather than researched numbers. In addition, this paper only looked at Chinese immigrants to the US, and not a general population of intercultural relationships.

None of these claims appear to be well documented or supported by research. This study will help to emphasize the need for more research to support or refute such claims by presenting an opposite view of intercultural couples- those who are in long term, successful relationships that report high levels of satisfaction for both partners.

Characteristics of People in Intercultural Relationships

A large portion of the literature available on intercultural couples has concentrated on the individual characteristics of these couples, and their motivations for marriage to partners outside of their ethnic and cultural groups. One of the biggest complaints against this type of research has been the focus of outsider's perceptions, rather than the perception of the couples involved (Gaines & Ickes, 1997; Shibazaki & Brennan, 1998). But even outsiders' perspectives can positively affect the views represented about intercultural relationships in the literature, as a 2001 study by Lewandowski and Jackson concluded.

This study viewed European American's perceptions of interracial (intercultural) couples. A sample of 229 European American undergraduates at a large mid-Western university were asked for their perceptions about the compatibility of different fictitious couples' descriptions provided. This study found that participants only perceived interracial couples in which one partner was African American to be less compatible than same race couples, and that being in an interracial couple themselves had no effect on participant's views of intraracial couples.

Theories of Motivation

One of the foci of researchers of intercultural relationships has been testing and forming theories of why these relationships form (Fu & Heaton, 2000; Gaines & Ickes, 1997; Gaines & Agnew, 2003; McFadden & Moore, 2002). Many of the early studies and theories largely suggested that intercultural couples married for reasons of social mobility, their own personal abnormalities, and social integration in the overall culture. Recent studies both support and refute these claims.

Fong and Yung (1995) studied Japanese and Chinese Americans who married outside of their culture. Interviews of 19 women and 24 men in the San Francisco Area were conducted using open-ended questions about their experience. They found that for this sample, love and proximity factors featured prominently in participant's decisions to marry interculturally. Aversion to pieces of his or her own culture was also a strong theme in participant's decisions. Sung's (1990) study of interviews with 50 Chinese New Yorkers who married outside of their culture also suggested the increase in intercultural marriages was due to proximity.

Fu and Heaton (2000) studied status exchange in a population of intercultural marriages in Hawaii. The sample was 117, 428 marriages registered in the state of Hawaii from 1983-1994. Information included brides and grooms' age, ethnicity, education, occupation, number of prior marriages, and their parent's birthplace. Analysis focused on how mate selection was affected by education and occupation, both indicators of socioeconomic status. Results were consistent with the theory that people intermarry for reasons of social mobility.

The varied methods of data collection and focus of the studies make it hard to compare conclusions found. Again, more studies and various populations need to be researched before any of these results can be considered conclusive as motivators for intercultural marriages for the population as a whole.

Personal Characteristics

The literature and research on personal characteristics of those in intercultural unions is mixed. Much of the literature suggests that partners in intercultural marriages entered such a union to solve their own issues with identity and culture. Atkeson (1970) states that many of the intercultural couples presenting for therapy are "characterized by overwhelming personality disturbance and interpersonal pathology" (p.398). Other authors do not make that distinction of couples seeking clinical help, but generalize to all couples who intermarry. Romano (1988) describes those who marry interculturally as outcasts, rebels, and adventurists, and advises that couples considering such marriages should consider what stress in their lives is pushing them toward this type of marriage.

Some of these statements are backed by research, but generalizability is questionable. The 1995 study by Fong and Yung of interviews with 19 female and 24 male Japanese and Chinese Americans who married outside of their culture did show rejection of pieces of their own culture as a motivation for intercultural marriage.

Sung (1990), who conducted interviews in New York City with 50 Chinese who had married out of their culture states that those who intermarry are unconventional, rebellious, and marrying for the second time around, but also flexible and resourceful in dealing with differences, and willing to make changes and accept the nontraditional.

Again, the limited number of studies and samples prevent these results from being considered conclusive of all people who marry interculturally. The mixed results and small amount of research highlight the difficulty of pining down such a subjective factor as personality traits of a population as varied as intercultural couples. Another consideration is that many of these statements are based on research of Black/White couples in America, and then extrapolated to also describe intercultural couples. However, these original studies were done in primarily the 60's and 70's (Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001), when public perception of Black/White unions was very controversial. That the social environment at the time had some effect on the data is likely, especially since no studies done to replicate these claims were found after 1984.

The present study will add to the information available by again presenting a positive, strength-based view of these couples, to prompt more research into the truthfulness of commonly accepted beliefs in both public perception and the literature.

Stressors Facing Intercultural Couples

As with the literature on personal characteristics of those who marry interculturally, what extra stressors these couples actually face are often uncited and non-research-backed statements. No research was found that specifically looked at these factors, although they were mentioned as side notes in a few studies. These factors seem to be such a given that no proof of their truth is needed, which raises the question of whether these beliefs were really ever based on truths, or rather products of historical societal views on intercultural couples.

The following are all example of commonly held beliefs about intercultural couples that are not backed by empirical research. Romano (1988) lists some of the challenges of intercultural marriages as values, food and drink, sex, male-female roles, time, place of residence, politics, friends, finances, in-laws, social class, religion, raising children, language/ communication, dealing with stress, illness and suffering, and ethnocentrisms. Many of these stressors are common to all marriages, regardless of the culture of the partners. Additionally, Markoff (1977) addresses problems in communication, differences in values and the concept of marriage, autonomous behavior and practices, prejudices and stereotypes, and the surrounding family. Forna (1992), Hegar and Greif (1994), Lewandowski and Jackson (2001), and Sung (1990) all listed stereotypes held by our society about them and their families as challenges. Biever et al. (1998), Bonacci et al. (1996), Gaines and Agnew (2003), Laird (2000), and Pearlman (1996) all raised the issues of cultural differences about lifestyle and family decisions. Akeson (1970), Biever et al. (1998), Fernandez (1996), Forna (1992), Killian (2002), Oriti et al. (1996), and Thompson and Jenal
(1994) listed personal experiences with oppression.

Sung's 1990 interviews in New York City of 50 Chinese who married outside of their culture found that family objections were the biggest hurdle among participants in her study, with societal attitudes, and factors affecting their children being the others mentioned. However, Sung also found that the interviewees did not report major cultural difficulties, which is contrary to the popular opinion in the literature.

That children of intercultural couple will have problems is another prevalent belief in the literature, without research to back it up (www.mavinfoundation.org; Atkins, 2001;

Forna, 1992; Grove, 1994; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Sung, 1990). One study was found that looked at the issue of whether children of intercultural marriages will have difficulties or not.

Grove (1991) compared identity development in a sample of 51 college students in New England, broken down in groups of 17 each: White, Asian, and Asian/White. The white students volunteered after receiving a mailing sent to randomly selected students, while the other groups volunteered after a presentation to the college's Asia Student's Association. Data were taken from coded interviews and found that Asian/White students did not possess significantly different identity statuses than either Asians or Whites, which does not fit with common challenges the literature says children of intercultural unions will face. Again, more research is needed to prove or disprove the validity of this belief.

The present study will add to the research by addressing if the intercultural couples in this sample list the same stressors discussed in the literature, or others. Since the literature does not state whether these stressors affect both successful and unsuccessful couples, this study will add to the knowledge about both what stressors successful couples have faced in their marriages, and if these stressors remain the same throughout the relationship, or only affect the beginning of relationships.

Resources/ Coping Skills

Because the majority of research on intercultural couples either considers them from a negative perspective (Chan & Wethington, 1998) or an outsider's view (Gaines &

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Ickes, 1997), little is know about what resources and coping skills intercultural couples possess.

From the study conducted of interview with 50 Chinese in New York City who married outside of their culture, Sung (1990, p. 347) states that intercultural couples also have a strong commitment to the relationship and each other, "are willing to make changes and accept the nontraditional," and are "more flexible and resourceful in dealing with differences" than their same-culture peers. Lloyd Saxton (Brown, 1987) suggests that intercultural couples enter relationships more aware of possible conflicts, and have higher standards for their relationship in areas such as shared interests and personal compatibility because they are aware of the difficulties they will face due to their different cultures.

The area of coping skills and resources is the least understood and researched of all areas relating to intercultural couples. The present study will provide the first step in identifying what resources and coping skills successful intercultural couples report, and if/ how they feel their challenges were influenced by their cultural differences. This study will also address how successful couples developed new resources to cope with challenges throughout the span of their relationship.

Resources Available to Helping Professionals

The majority of the literature states the need for more research and resources to be available to help intercultural couples, and to help and guide those professionals who work with intercultural couples (Biever et al., 1998; Bonacci et al., 1978; Brown, 1987; Chan & Wethington, 1998; Oriti et al., 1996). The only structured method found for

working specifically with intercultural couples is one developed by Miguel Hernandez of the Ackerman Institute for the Family in NY, and presented at the 2003 Psychotherapy Networker Symposium. This model was based on informal research done at the Ackerman Institute to meet the needs of the clientele they were seeing, and is a strength based model aimed at helping couples understand and work with their cultural and racial differences through acknowledging and exploring each member's racial experiences and cultural expectations brought to the relationship. Even though specific model such as this are rare, much of the literature does offer suggestions to counselors working with intercultural couples.

Two common themes for foundations for work are strength based and through a lens of racial oppression. Chan and Wethington (1998) wrote a chapter citing the need and evidence for strength-based research and work with intercultural couples. References to studies showed the importance of resilience in same-culture marriages, and pointed out the incongruence in research available on intercultural couples.

Oriti et al. (1996) wrote to those working in family centered practices with racially/ ethnically mixed families, combining both case studies and general guidelines to those working with these families, and state "the strengths perspective is essential for the clinicians who wish to avoid perpetuating racist beliefs regarding the unnatural character of racial/ethnic unions".

Bhugra and De Silva (2000), and Laird (2000) wrote to clinicians who might work do work with multicultural clients, the cultural differences being either in the family itself, or in the therapist-client relationship, or both.

Davidson (1992) states that a discussion about the myths of interracial/intercultural marriage is an effective start to problem solving with the couple, but groundwork must first be laid by the therapist, in identifying his/ her racial beliefs and attitudes towards these relationships. Killian (2002) emphasized the need for the therapist to bring racial experiences into the therapy room, regardless of whether the couple felt that race was part of their problems or not. Brown (1987) also stated that race issues will always be present with intercultural couples, either overtly or covertly. Hernandez's model (2003) also is based on conversations of each partner's racial and oppression experiences.

Some of the literature is written for those working with specific cultures, such as Bonacci et al. (1978), who wrote an article specifically for military social workers who work with marriages between American soldiers and Korean nationals. Atkeson (1970) wrote about working with Phillipino- American relationships through a lens of communication. Other literature is more general, using different aspects of culture as a basis for therapy in any intercultural relationship. Rohlrlich (1988) wrote about viewing the challenges in dual-culture marriages and their solutions through communication techniques. Pearlman (1996) wrote specifically about working with intercultural lesbian couples, using culture as a way for couples to teach each other and to take blame for problems rather than personalize them. All of these studies dealt primarily with case examples from the authors' experiences.

Other suggestions for solving the problems of intercultural couples are more straightforward and specific, although not practical or realistic for therapists to use. Markoff (1977) writes that the two best solutions for the problems presented by

intercultural marriages are for one of the partners to almost entirely give up their culture and adopt the culture of the other, or for both to do so and create their own, separate from either. Bonacci et al. (1978) cites that the Army's policy to casework counselors dealing with clients around intercultural marriages is of discouraging these marriages rather than trying to understand them. Both of these suggestions are questionable interventions for therapists today.

While these suggestions and many of the others in the available literature are based on dated literature and un-reviewed publications, the fact that a significant amount of literature has not been created to replace these is concerning. Therapists find themselves charting new territory without reliable maps. The fact that these couples are growing in numbers and presenting for therapy in larger numbers is evidence that this is a subject the marriage and family field cannot afford to ignore much longer.

This study will add to the resources available for clinicians seeking strength-based guides to follow in working with intercultural couples. This study will identify coping skills and resources that contribute to working out some of the stressors these couples face, and can offer clinicians a picture of what a successful intercultural marriage can look like, and a guide to how these couples got that way.

Chapter III: Methods

Design

This was an ethnographic study, designed to gather a basic understanding of how intercultural couples in stable, satisfying marriages have viewed their challenges, and utilized or built resources to overcome these challenges in a way that has not destroyed the marriage or the level of marital satisfaction for either partner. This study was undertaken with the hope that this data will be useful to clinicians working with intercultural couples or in designing strength-based programs to work with these couples. The design was qualitative. Personal interviews with successful couples gathered information on what the specific challenges these couples face and have faced are, what coping skills they use, and how they view their challenges. These interviews were subsequently coding and analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative software.

Participants and Recruitment Process

Participants for this research study were recruited from the Washington, DC metro using a snowball sampling technique. This area was chosen in part because of convenience to the researcher, and because of the large number of intercultural residents here, both due to immigration and work for the government available. Participants sought for this research were married, heterosexual couples in which the partners lived for at least the first 15 years of their lives in different countries. These couples must have been married for at least ten years, have raised or have at least one child residing with them, and have both partners report that their marriage is satisfying. Although interracial couples with different nationalities were included, interracial couples from the same

cultures were not. Ten years of marriage was chosen as to ensure that the relationship is stable and ongoing (Giladi- McKelvie, 1986). Research has also shown that the majority of conflicts between intercultural couples resolve around child rearing (Forna, 1992; Hegar & Greif, 1994), so these couples must have either been raising (or have raised) at least one child together to be included in this study.

Six couples were recruited for this study. Couples referred to the researcher that fit the criteria of different nationalities (culture), children, length of marriage, and a self-report of being satisfied in their marriage were contacted for participation. Couples were approached together by the researcher and given a basic explanation of the study, being that it was a master's thesis study of how successful intercultural couples have built happy and satisfying long-term relationships. They understood that if chosen to be part of the study, they would be asked to participate in about an hour to an hour and a half interview on the stressors they have faced in their marriage, how they have dealt with stressors, and what resources or procedures (coping skills) they have utilized and developed to combat stressors, such that they have not destroyed their marital satisfaction.

Procedures

Couples that agreed to participate were given a packet containing the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey and a demographic information sheet. After ensuring that both partners scored at least a three on the survey, the researcher then explained the informed consent. After the couple had read and signed it, they scheduled an interview. All interviews took place in the participant's homes, and were audio taped by the researcher.

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Interviews consisted of a few warm-up questions, followed by a series of questions investigating each partner's individual and the couple's collective experience of being in an intercultural marriage, and how they have built a lasting marriage with so many odds against this type of relationship. A short review of some of the available research on intercultural couples was shared with the couple as a basis for understanding what the study is researching and why. The questions listed in appendix C were used as a base for this interview, and expanded by the researcher to gain an understanding of the couple's experiences. An example of this expansion was "Tell me a little bit more about that…", or "What was that like for you?"

Instruments

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale was developed by Schumm et al. (1986) at Kansas State University and is a 3-item, Likert-type scale with answers ranging from extremely dissatisfied, 1, to extremely satisfied, 7. The scale assesses relationship satisfaction on three aspects: satisfaction with marriage, satisfaction with spouse, and satisfaction with partner as a spouse. Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, and Grisby (1983) report reliability as alpha's ranging from .89-.98, with intercorrelations among items ranging from .93-.95 and a test-retest reliability of .71 over a 10-week time period. This scale is significantly correlated with the Quality of Marriage Index and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Schumm et al., 1986). The scale asks how satisfied participants are with their current marriage or relationship.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was an effort to identify themes in the experiences of intercultural couples who are in stable, long-lasting, and mutually satisfying marriages. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of what is different about successful couples such that they have overcome the odds against these relationships, and how they have managed in their relationship to work out the common barriers to the success of many intercultural marriages. The data collected for this research were taken from the transcriptions of the interviews, demographic questionnaires, and notes of the interviewer. The information from the demographic questionnaires was used to compile a table of the participant's averages on the survey questions, ages, languages spoken, years of marriage, and number of children.

As the interviews were being conducted, the researcher continually transcribed the data collected. This information was then used to ask about additional areas in subsequent interviews. After the interviews were completed, the transcriptions were coded using Atlas.ti 5.0, a computer program used in qualitative research. All of the transcripts were cross-coded by both the researcher and her advisor. Cross coding helps to control for researcher bias, acts to reinforce the credibility of the research results, and is an effort to get a "sense of the whole" (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996) of the participants' experiences.

The first few interviews were analyzed using an open coding approach to identify major themes of stress and coping within the couples' experiences. Open coding is a method of analyzing qualitative research that allows the researcher to breakdown and examine the data, and then compare and conceptualize it (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). The

themes identified in the first two interviews were primary themes that the researcher then looked for in the rest of the interviews.

The results of the initial open coding were then used to develop selective coding, which allowed the themes initially identified to be generated into a more substantiated understanding of the themes underlying the responses to stress that these couples have experienced and utilized in building a stable marriage (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). The identification of these themes throughout the data collection was then used to develop insights into the stress and coping experience of successful intercultural couples.

Self of the Researcher

This topic was chosen because of the researcher's personal interest in the topic, stemming from her experiences living in other countries and relating to those from other cultures. In order to avoid any personal biases the researcher might have brought to the study, all codes were also cross- coded by her advisor.

Chapter IV: Results Section

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to understand how successful intercultural couples have built and maintained such relationships. Specifically, how did these couples manage to overcome the barriers presented in the literature? What was different in how successful couples managed stressors such that they were able to overcome them and remain happily married? In order to gain their individual perspectives, six interculturally married couples were interviewed together as a couple in their homes. While questions were open ended to allow the participants to reflect and share their experiences, the questions and focus of this research were specifically on what types of stressors and challenges these couples had faced, and what skills and resources they had or developed to overcome their challenges. Couples were asked about their specific challenges as compared to the literature and what previous interviewee's had stated, and about what resources they drew on to resolve their challenges. These responses were then coded to look for themes in both their responses and attitudes towards their experiences.

This chapter will present the demographics and case studies of the participants, followed by the findings and themes that came out of these interviews. While some themes fit into more than one category, they have been organized under the three parts of the double ABCX model: the stressor events, the family's crisis meeting resources, and the definition the family makes of the event. Quotes and statements from the participants will be used to illustrate these findings.

Demographics of the Participants

Before the interviews took place, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Survey. Table 1 shows the average answers for these participants separated by the husbands' and wives' responses.

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants

Question	Husbands (range)	Wives (range)
Satisfaction with current marriage (1-7)	6.7 (6-7)	6.8 (6-7)
Satisfaction with relationship with spouse (1-7)	6.7 (6-7)	6.8 (6-7)
Satisfaction with partner as a spouse (1-7)	6.8 (6-7)	6.8 (6-7)
Age	57 (39-74	57 (42-72)
Languages spoken	1.8 (1-4)	1.7 (1-2)
Highest level of education	Bachelor's degree (High School to PhD)	High school (High school to Bachelor's)
Number of marriages	1.3 (1-2)	1.3 (1-2)
Length of current marriage	30 yrs (14-48)	30 yrs (14-48)
Number of children (by couples, number of boys and girls)	1.7 (1-4)	1.8 (1-3)

Case Studies

Following is a brief biographical sketch of each couple. Fictitious names have been used to ensure the confidentiality of these participants.

Billy and Eva McCarthy

Billy and Eva McCarthy are in their forties, have been married for 19 years, and have two daughters. Billy grew up in a well-to-do New England family while Eva is from a poor Chilean family. They met here in DC, where Eva had come to work as a nanny and learn English. Both have completed two years of college. Eva speaks both English and Spanish, and enjoys being active in community affairs, in part through her

work as a social worker. Billy works for a sports magazine from home. Both are members of the Catholic Church.

Geoffrey and Debbie Baldwin

Geoffrey and Debbie are both in their fifties, have been married 31 years, and have four sons and three daughters. They met while Debbie was living for a few months with a friend in South Africa, where Geoffrey was living with his family. Debbie is from the Midwest USA and Geoffrey grew up in Africa. Geoffrey speaks three African languages in addition to English and works as a government contractor. Debbie is a homemaker. Both are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Jim and Mary Young

Jim and Mary are in their early sixties, have been married for 38 years, and have three sons and a daughter. Jim is from the Midwest and Mary is from Hong Kong. They met at school here in the US, but Jim served a two-year Church mission in Hong Kong, so both speak Chinese and English. Jim has a PHD and works as a college professor and in government intelligence, while Mary has a bachelor's degree in fashion design and is a homemaker. Both are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mike and Lisle Mireles

Mike and Lisle are in their early forties and late thirties, respectively, have been married for 14 years, and have two daughters. Mike is a third generation Hispanic American; Lisle was born and raised in Germany. They met while Mike was stationed in

Germany with the military and married right before he was transferred back to the states. This is a second marriage for both. Lisle learned English and speaks both English and German, as do their children. Lisle completed high school and is a homemaker. Mike has a master's degree and is still in the military. Both are members of the Catholic Church.

Rob and Giselle Conner

Rob and Giselle are in their early seventies and late sixties, respectively, have been married for 48 years, and have one son and three daughters, one of whom is still living. Giselle was born to an Italian family in Africa and speaks Italian and English. Rob grew up in the southern US. They met and married during the war, when Rob was stationed in Giselle's hometown of Tripoli. Rob was a military officer and Giselle was a homemaker until they retired a few years ago. Giselle has a high school diploma and Rob has a master's degree. Both are members of the Church of Christ.

Sam and Betty Fa'amuli

Sam and Betty are in their late sixties and seventies, respectively, have been married for 31 years, and combined have two sons and two daughters. Betty was raised in the Eastern US while Sam grew up in Samoa and learned English when he came to the US after high school. They are both active in Polynesian music and dancing, and met through performing groups; this is a second marriage for both. Both have high school diplomas, and although "retired", work together to manage and run a Polynesian performing group. Both are members of the Assembly of God Church.

Family Demands: Stressors and Hardships (A Factor)

As will be further discussed in the definitions section, the majority of these couples did not immediately see their different cultures as presenting any specific challenges, and only as the discussions went on were they able to articulate examples of stressors. Others were immediately able to talk about the difficulties they experienced because of their being from two different cultures. The stressors and hardships reported by these couples have been divided into normative challenges and culturally based, or those challenges the couple saw as a result of their coming from different cultures and/ or countries.

Normative Challenges

All couples go through challenges and hardships, and all marriages face rough times. Many of these stressors are deemed normative, ones that every marriage faces almost as a right of passage, regardless of where the partners are from (Sung, 1990). The couples interviewed for this study were no different. The first challenges they often spoke of were not necessarily culturally related ones, but challenges common to marriage in general.

The adjustment to marriage.

A few mentioned the adjustment to marriage, to go from being on their own or living with parents to suddenly living with someone else was hard. Mike Mireles (3rd generation Hispanic American), who had been on his own for a while before his marriage, said:

> I think it was just the fear, for me just getting married, in general. It wasn't so much where Lisle was from or where I was from, it was just getting married.

His wife, Lisle (Germany), talked about the difficulties she experienced in having to not only adjust to living with Mike, but also to his lifestyle- to being a military wife, whose home was wherever in the world the Marine Corps decided her husband needed to be. Both Lisle Mireles (Germany) and Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) stated that their marriage was their first time living away from family.

These couples felt that the first few years of marriage were the toughest for them. Eva McCarthy (Chile) talked about her difficulties in letting go of the expectations she had for her marriage and appreciating what it was instead of comparing her marriage to that of her friends. Billy McCarthy verbalized his difficulties adjusting this way:

> And the money issues… It's like I never really had to pay bills because I was living with my father and my mom and my family and it's like, I just broke off from them and Eva and I got married, and then we're on our own, and it's the first time I've been on my own, and I have to pay the bills and the money that I'm earning is no longer just mine, I have to, you know, spend it on bills and there are just other things that, uh, you know, so that caused some discrepancies.

Others also mentioned finances as playing a role in the difficulties adjusting to marriage. The Baldwin's (South Africa, U.S.A) felt financial pressures complicated their already complex lives and took away from their ability to work on their cultural issues. When asked what the biggest challenges they have faced together in their marriage were, Mary Young (Hong Kong) replied "probably financial ones." Jim (U.S.A.) then said:

> Yeah, right. I would agree with that, we were students, and living on the smell of an oily rag, as they say! So yeah, it was the financial pressures, and going to school, and having a child, and making ends meet. It was difficult, and we had to work pretty hard on that. That was the biggest, I would say that was the single most important challenge.

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Personality and gender differences.

Personality and gender differences also came up in the conversations about challenges and stressors to the marriage. The Mireles's (U.S.A., Germany), Connors (U.S.A., Libya) and the Baldwin's (South Africa, U.S.A) all mentioned male/female difference in perspective that caused friction at times in their marriages. For the McCarthy's, personality differences were a huge hurdle. Eva (Chile) was not interested in the sports Billy (U.S.A) spent considerable time involved in, and he had no interest in the political rallies and meetings Eva wanted him to attend. As Eva stated:

> His personality and mine are very different, you know. I could be from here but I'm still very outgoing and Billy can be from the moon and still be shy, so that I think was more of a challenge then being culturally from another part of the world.

Parenting.

The literature on intercultural couples states that they will have conflict because of their cultural differences in disciplining children. Some of the couples mentioned challenges because of culture in this area, but others felt that their cultural views on parenting were in agreement, but their personalities conflicted. Lisle Mireles (Germany) stated:

> That's when personalities set in, where if it was bedtime and they weren't in bed, I would get mad where he'd say, ah, five more minutes is not going to make a difference. And then it's going to be 10 by the time they're in bed!

Giselle Connor (Libya) felt that their friction over parenting was two-fold: Rob (U.S.A.) was not around much due to his military career, and then his temperament was very different from Giselle's. She stated:

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He was too lenient than I wanted, and I sometimes, I wish I would have gotten some help from him, but he just stayed, he stayed politely out of the way. Because he just didn't want to, you know, take, it's just his nature, I guess.

Both the McCarthy's and the Young's mentioned the changing stages of the family lifespan as adding challenges to their marriages. Eva McCarthy (Chile) mentioned difficulties in dealing with children as they grew up and had minds of their own. Her husband Billy (U.S.A.) talked about the challenges that come with each new phase the children go through. Jim Young (U.S.A.) talked about the stressor on the marriage and family of the increase in activities the children were involved in as they grew older. He said:

> We tried to put their interests [first], and that was hard sometimes, like they'd have to go here and to go there, and that. Our time was fragmented, and that was a difficult challenge.

Other Stressors.

The Mirleles's, Fa'amuli's and the Conner's all mentioned as the biggest stressors in their marriage ones that while not normative to every marriage, were not stressors attributed to different cultures. The Mireles's are the primary caretakers of Mike's (3rd generation Hispanic American) mother, and felt that issues dealing with her care have been the catalyst for much of their conflict. Lisle (Germany) said:

> I mean, I think that if our cultural issues were not half as big as, we have a problem with his mom. And she caused us, in my eyes, I mean if I had to choose between solving this problem or solving our cultural problems, then his mom was the bigger problem.

The Fa'amuli's married when the majority of their children were in their late teens and beginning lives of their own. However, Sam's (Samoa) youngest son was only nine, and the adjustment to his father's having a new wife was a stressor to their

marriage. Betty (U.S.A.) felt Sam's son tried to sabotage their marriage, and when asked about any challenges with him, stated:

> Really, Junior was the only one that we had any problems with! He was young… I think he was jealous, he was jealous of me, really, really. And he took it out in evil ways, just really bad ways.

The Connors lost three of their four children in childhood and early adulthood-their firstborn and only son to an accident when he was 18 months, and the other two in their twenties to a terminal genetic disease. This was the challenge that stood out to them. Giselle (Libya) said, "Ah, I think the worst blow in life was loosing our children." Her husband Rob (U.S.A.) added:

> The hardest thing about kids is when you know that they're not going to make it. And they know they're not going to make it. You sit and watch all their dreams vanish. That's the hardest thing.

Cultural Challenges

Literature on intercultural marriages states that these couples will face family and societal disapproval, and have difficulties with their spouse around cultural traditions and holidays, raising children, and language barriers, among other difficulties (Romano, 1994). The couples were all questioned about how their experiences fit with the literature, and what other challenges they faced that they attributed to their cultural differences.

Family disapproval.

The literature often lists family disapproval as the biggest stressor that intercultural couples face (Sung, 1990). Except for the Baldwin's, all the couples initially stated that they did not feel any disapproval from their families, and any that they might

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have felt initially did not last once they had made the decision to marry and their family knew their spouse better. Even though these couples felt this was not a large issue for them, they did state various concerns that their families had, or comments that family members made about their partner's culture or being from a different culture.

Concern by the families about their member marrying out of their culture was mentioned by a few of the couples. Mike Mireles (3rd generation Hispanic American) told of teasing he got from his family along the lines of, "What, you're not marrying an American girl?" Lisle (Germany) said her family did not know what to make of Mike, he was just so different from what they were used to. Before her marriage her parents constantly asked her if she knew what she was getting into, and it this was really what she wanted to do. Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) got into a fistfight with his brother after his brother called Eva (Chile) a racial slur, but felt that was an isolated incident really having more to do with his brother's mood that day rather than his attitude towards Eva.

Both Geoffrey Baldwin (South Africa) and Rob Conner's families felt the timing of the marriage was bad, and that their sons' wanting to get married was a fleeting fad that would go away if waited out. Rob Connor (U.S.A.) stated:

> In my case, my parents were opposed to my getting married to anybody while I was overseas, because they felt perhaps it was just an urge and it would vanish if I returned to this country.

The specific culture their member was marrying into was also a concern to some families. Mary Young (Hong Kong) stated that her family was concerned over the high divorce rate among Americans, but were reassured when she and Jim wrote a letter to them explaining their personal beliefs about marriage. Debbie Baldwin spoke of the large anti-American sentiment she felt being an American in South Africa, and how she

felt that Geoffrey's family's strong disapproval came from their feelings of "number one, not wanting him marrying an American."

Family disapproval was the stressor the Baldwin's labeled as their largest, and one that they still struggle with today. Geoffrey states:

> The root cause of most of the stress that we had wasn't between us, it was by parental involvement again… my parents were relentless, they tried to away, they tried to drive her out. Drive down her self-esteem, and her feeling unworthy of me, nobody could be good enough for me you know, … the majority of what we went through stemmed from that malicious effort to try and separate us.

Language Barriers.

For five of the six couples, English was a second language for one of the partners, and a language learned by that partner primarily as an adult. In only one of these couples (the Young's) do both partners speak the same two languages. The literature states that language barriers will be a stressor (Atkeson, 1970), and for some of these couples, it was.

For Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.), learning to understand Eva's (Chile) accent was a challenge in the beginning. And not being able to understand what was going on when Eva was speaking Spanish with her friends was very frustrating for him. At times he felt excluded, and even wondered if they were talking about him.

For the Fa'amuli's, Sam's (Samoa) limited English is a cause of some misunderstandings not only in their marriage, but for him in other situations too. Betty (U.S.A.) states:

> Because his vocabulary isn't as big; he'll have like maybe one word that he can describe something with, whereas I've got maybe six or eight, you know? And that, that we have, we have at times little misunderstandings over…he'll mean to say this and it will come out meaning that. And if you don't know to

really to get find out which, which is it supposed to be, you might go on thinking that it was the other thing he meant, you know. ...and even with me, like if I'm explaining something to him, he doesn't maybe comprehend it in the way that I mean it, until I said it maybe five or six times and tore it apart, and did this with it, and did that with it, you know, to make it, make it makes sense.

The Mireles's also felt that Lisle's (Germany) lack of command of the English language was a great stressor in their marriage and for Lisle elsewhere. They told the story of Mike (U.S.A.) making a shopping list for a campout and Lisle taking it to the grocery store and looking all over the meat section for marshmallows. She had never heard of them before, and assumed they were a meat because Mike had listed them between hotdogs and hamburgers! Her mother also sent her baking powder on a regular basis for the first few years, because Lisle did not know what to call it in English, couldn't find it in the translation books, and Mike did not cook, so told her they did not have that in the states! Little things like that Lisle said she's able to laugh at now, but at one point were major sources of stress for her and in their marriage.

The Mireles felt that a lot of their misunderstandings and arguments in the beginning of their marriage were due to the fact that due to her lack of English vocabulary, Lisle did not know how to state things in different ways to Mike, and he often felt that she was bossing him around. She lamented:

> I've learned over time is that when you speak a language for long period of time, there are certain norms on how to say something to somebody. I can be very blunt on what I want you to do, or I can put it in a nice roundabout way. This is something you lose completely if you're not, if you don't have a grip on the language, which is something that I did not have.

Cultural norms.

Along with cultural norms such as how people communicate to each other, the couples also mentioned other norms that conflicted or were stressors in their marriage. Geoffrey Baldwin's (South Africa) rigid, strict background was what Debbie (U.S.A.) termed chauvinistic. His clear ideas about "what is a woman's job and what is a man's job and what is a woman's place, and what isn't a woman's place" contrasted sharply with Debbie's when Debbie wanted to go back to work to help with family finances. Geoffrey felt that a mother should stay home, and told her "if she chose to go back to work, it was over for us."

The Mireles's faced a similar challenge early in their marriage. In Lisle's (Germany) words:

> I didn't intend to go to work, I wanted to raise my children, you know, not sending them to boarding school, or day-care all day long, and I think this is something that he had not expected. I don't think he expected me to work right away, but at least part-time or something… in some cultures that's just not done, to take your kids somewhere else.

Lisle also mentioned that the differences in opinion on how close to family you should be were also a big stressor when she first married Mike (U.S.A.). In fact, she stated that she wondered if there was something wrong with his family because they did not talk to each other often like hers did, and other families she knew in Germany did. And to Mike, the amount of time Lisle spent on the phone with her parents, and the frequency of visits she wanted seemed excessive. Both chalked their opinions up to how things were done in their cultures. Lisle stated:

> My husband had at best, what you call, sporadic contact with his family after he started the Marine Corps, when he would go home every so often. While I was in constant contact with my parents, so for me, when I came over here, it was self understood that my parents would come once or

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twice a year, and I would go back once a year. Something that he had not anticipated, that he would have family over that often.

Sam (Samoa) and Betty (U.S.A.) Fa'amuli talked about how cultural norms had caused big problems in Sam's first marriage, which had also been an intercultural marriage, and a pattern of distrust in his son that carried over to Sam and Betty's marriage. Sam stated his first wife had not understood his culture, nor cultural norms:

> Yeah, you know how it is, in Hawaii people, that aloha, aloha kiss, and all that. Well some of the women really slapped me on the mouth, on the, on the aloha kissing, you know, and my son is looking around like, and he'd go home and…

Societal disapproval.

As with family disapproval, most of the couples, with the exception of the Baldwin's, felt that they did not experience much societal disapproval over their intercultural relationship. The few experiences mentioned encompassed a wide spectrum from inconsequential to very consequential in its impact on these couples.

Some felt that what they did experience was minimal, and passed off as silly, as the Young's (U.S.A., Hong Kong) did when other intercultural couples shared rumors they had heard from church leaders that intercultural couples did not meet the same approval in God's eyes. Jim stated they thought those statements were "hogwash," and they dismissed them as not very rational, even though they knew others did believe them. Eva McCarthy (Chile) felt she gets more notice from society when she is with her daughter than with her husband. She stated:

> I think that I have felt that people look at me different in society, look different to me when I am with my older daughter, than when I am with my husband. Because when they see me with my daughter, who is, she is fair, blue eyes, blond, next to this shorter, Hispanic looking woman, they'd never put us together as mother and daughter.

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For other couples though, the disapproval they felt from others was not something easily dismissed and forgotten. The Baldwin's felt deeply hurt by the unexpected, disapproving reactions they got from friends when they announced their engagement. Geoffrey's (South Africa) best friend snubbed Debbie (U.S.A.), and as a result, he and Geoffrey are no longer friends. Debbie tells of another instance that sticks out to her in particular:

> It was very hurtful as a matter-of-fact, because we had people that we thought were really close friends, and we asked them to sing at our wedding, because they had this quartet that was really beautiful, friends from the church…and they said no because they didn't want to sing at our divorce.

Logistics.

For some of these couples, getting married meant leaving one's home country, perhaps for good. And for others, marrying someone of a different nationality meant a lot of paperwork. Both the Mireles's and the Baldwin's mentioned this as a stressor.

For the Mireles', their relationship was put on the fast track by Mike's upcoming transfer with the Marine Corps. For them, it was get married or say goodbye, and they chose to get married. Mike (U.S.A.) remembered that period as a lot of hassle with paperwork, forms, and clearances because of his job:

> I just think my concerns were a little bit from the military side. Marrying a foreign born person, all the security clearance stuff that I had, I had to do a lot more stuff to make that work, so I guess my concern wasn't so much from my family or friends, but more from the institution that I was in, that I belong to.

Thinking back, Lisle (Germany) saw the amount of stress and effort they put into logistics as perhaps a potential deterrent to their getting married in the first place had they been aware of it beforehand. She stated:

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> We were completely unprepared for being married that fast. And I think, thinking back now on how rough the first six months were, we might not have ever married. So…had he been given the chance, so Ok, are we going to marry, maybe this is too much work, we would've chosen not get married, I don't know…I mean the love was there, there's no doubt about it. But was it worth it, that's the question!

Both Lisle Mireles and Debbie Baldwin (U.S.A.) remember at one point the reality hitting of what marrying someone from another country might mean. For Lisle, it was after they were married and had left Germany that she realized how final the decisions she had made were, and how different her life was going to be from then on out. For Debbie, that point came shortly after they became engaged:

> It hit me that could mean, because I was in a foreign country at that time, it could mean that I was never going to see my family again. Because I was 10,000 miles away from my family. So, there was that cause of concern to me.

Children.

Many of the couples felt that when their cultural differences emerged as stressors, it was often around the children. The literature states that children of intercultural couples will have problems, and while these couples say they did not feel their children had problems because of their parent's different cultures, both the Mireles and the Young's mentioned having concerns in the beginning about how their children would be treated by society.

Differences in cultural expectations for the children came up in these conversations. The Young's felt that Mary's (Hong Kong) culture's emphasis on education influenced her to be stricter with their kids in regards to school than Jim (U.S.A.) was. In Mary's culture, children were very respectful to their parents. Her

husband Jim stated he was used to kids talking back and when theirs did, it did not affect him. But he knew it hurt Mary, and that hurt him a lot.

Geoffrey Baldwin (South Africa) also found that his Anglo-Dutch parenting perspective clashed heavily not only with his American wife, but with his American children as well. Neither of them agreed with the strict, harsh discipline that came naturally to him, and that was a challenge for them. About these differences and the stress they brought to their family he stated:

> The cultural impact between the parents and children was a major one…this has to be a significant factor in the survival or failure of a marriage relationship, is bringing children into those cultural differences.

Cultural traditions.

All of the couples mentioned the benefits of now begin able to celebrate double holidays, but for some, the balance of cultural traditions has also been a stressor. Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) stated that while both he and Eva (Chile) felt it was important for their daughters to know their Chilean culture, in the beginning compromising on the time and efforts they put into that was difficult for them. While the Mireles's also felt it was important to expose their children to both cultures, for Lisle (Germany) deciding which way to celebrate certain holidays was hard. She stated:

> For example, Christmas is celebrated different, and uh, I had a hard time letting go of the German way of celebrating Christmas, but it was literally impossible to do it that way. Number one because the children would have been different in school, which is something I did not want to be, and then he liked the American way, so Ok, we celebrate the American way, but it, it hurts.

Family Capabilities: Resistance Resources (B Factor)

Resistance resources, or coping skills, are what these couples turned to in hard times to help them cope. The couples interviewed used a wide range of resources to help them through their stressors. The most common will be listed here, compromising humor, learning about the other's culture, support, communication, personal preparation, working towards common goals, and religion.

Humor

All of the couples specifically mentioned humor as a coping resource for them. In addition, this was obvious in their interactions with each other. An example of this was when Mike Mireles (U.S.A.) was talking about his difficulty accepting that Lisle's (Germany) parents would visit so often, and for so long, she asked, "what, it's just for 3 months- three times in a year!" They both laughed, and then stated that their ability to laugh at the hard things, even while they were going through them, helped. The Young's (U.S.A., Hong Kong) shared that humor is very important to them and that sharing funny things together is a basis of their friendship. All of the interviews were interspersed with laughter, and these couples stated that they enjoyed laughing with each other.

But these couples also clarified that all types of humor were not helpful. Giselle Connor (Libya) was quick to point out that laughter can be stress relieving, but must be well timed and used in a building way. As Debbie Baldwin (U.S.A.) said:

> It's like with, you can't use sarcastic humor with someone who doesn't know for sure that you don't mean it. Because there's always that doubt, is that just their way of putting me down? Without getting in trouble for it? By saying oh, just kidding?

Humor was also part of the core values of these couples, as evidenced by

Geoffrey Baldwin's (South Africa) summary of his life philosophy. He said:

> I read this once and I laugh, and I still laugh, and it's this "if you can't be right, be wrong at the top of your voice". It just rings, doesn't it? By nature that's what we do, when we know we're in the wrong, the tendency is we raise our voices. And so, and so we sometimes make a joke of those kinds of things.

Learning about the other's culture

All of the couples interviewed talked about how important learning each other's

culture was to their relationship, and as a resource to combat stressors. For some, such as

the Fa'amuli's (Samoa, U.S.A.) and the Young's (U.S.A., Hong Kong), an interest in the

other's culture brought them together in the first place. Information in this section has

been divided into two categories: learning about the spouses' specific culture, language,

interests, etc, from the spouse, and seeking formal help together or alone on how to

resolve differences and improve the relationship.

  Specific culture, language, etc of spouse.

An important distinction in these couples from others mentioned in the literature

is that neither spouse in these marriages gave up their own culture when they married

someone from a different one. Instead, all of these couples talked about ways they

worked to incorporate each other's cultures into their personal family culture together.

All of the couples in some ways made efforts to learn about each other's cultures,

and to teach their spouse about their own. In this category, culture was defined broadly

as both the traits and customs of the country of origin, and as the specific interests and

hobbies of their spouse. Those that did not know their spouse's first language made

efforts to pick up words and phrases, even when they communicate with their spouse in English. All had learned some of the background and history of their spouse's country.

For example, when the Young's eat at Chinese restraints, Jim (U.S.A.) orders for them in Chinese, even though Chinese is Mary's (Hong Kong) native tongue and not Jim's. Mary commented on how nice it was to visit her family and know that Jim could communicate with them, and did. Jim and Mary also mentioned specific hobbies and interests they developed because they knew their spouse was interested in those and they wanted to share. Jim accompanied Mary on trips to the fabric stores and supported her projects. Mary read newspapers and was aware of current events because she knew Jim was, and it gave them things to talk about.

Debbie Baldwin (U.S.A.) referred to her husband Geoffrey (South Africa) as "the best American I've ever known" because of his respect for and knowledge of the constitution. They considered his appreciation for America and what it stood for a resource for them. In addition, she was also fascinated by his history and background. Her interest in his family and their genealogy also provided a common ground for them.

These couples have made conscious efforts to better know where their spouse is coming from, and what makes them tick. Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) and Mike Mireles (U.S.A.) both attend community cultural events not because it is their culture or they are that interested in them, but because is their wife's and children's culture, and they want to support the family. Both the Fa'amuli's (Samoa, U.S.A.) and the Connors (U.S.A., Libya) found that in the beginning, religion was a lot more important to one spouse than the other. The other supported that interest and then later converted. Eva McCarthy (Chile) stated of her efforts to become involved in Billy's activities:

> I would never thought, like I said, I was going to know every single player on the Red Sox team, for example. Or what, what positions they play. Never! Never! But now I can talk to him about it. I even know the freaking rules of the game…I go to play softball with him!

These couples also put effort into learning what parts of their own and their partner's cultures were ones they wanted to keep and emphasize in their family, and which traditions they did not want to not have carried on in their family. The couples made conscious effort to not carry on traditions and cultural norms they felt were harmful. Both the McCarthy's and the Baldwin's mentioned working hard to break the cycle of physical discipline they experienced growing up and did not want to continue with their children.

Seeking outside help- books, counseling, etc.

In addition to learning specifically about their spouse and their spouse's culture, some of these couples also talked about specific efforts they have made to learn about marriage, and about the opposite gender. The McCarthy's and the Baldwin's both felt it was important at times to seek professional help in solving their differences. Both couples have sought out counseling at times when they felt they needed a third party to help them resolve something. In addition, they read books, took classes, and sought out others who they thought might be have helpful advice. Debbie McCarthy (U.S.A.) stated:

> I know one of the things that has made a big difference is that I took classes… every time education week came around, I would pack up my little bags and drive a thousand miles and spend a week taking the classes that were pertinent to what was going on in my life. Either how to raise teenagers, how to talk to your teenagers, or marriage relationships… I was constantly taking classes. I did not come into this marriage very well equipped to know what a successful marriage was… I realized early on that I didn't have all the tools that I needed

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to make this a successful marriage, and especially dealing with cultural differences. I sought out professional help and better tools.

Support

The literature states that one of the biggest stressors intercultural couples face is disapproval and lack of support from others for their relationship. These couples did mention some of that disapproval from others as a stressor, but they also listed the support they did get as a coping resource they drew on heavily. This section on support discusses two kinds that came up in the interviews- support from others such as family, friends, and society for their relationship, and the support they felt from each other.

From others- family, friends, society.

Except for the exception of Geoffrey Baldwin's (South Africa) parents, all of the couples stated that their families supported their marriage once it happened, and have remained supportive since. All found that concerns in the beginning were easily laid to rest and that support of their families has been huge resource to them individually and as a couple. Giselle Connor (Libya) spoke of other family that had married outside of their culture before her, and how that normalized her marriage. The Young's (U.S.A., Hong Kong) spoke of strong support from Jim's mother, and the Baldwin's (South Africa, U.S.A.) stated that Debbie's family's completely accepted Geoffrey. Eva McCarthy (Chile) related that seeing the strong reaction both Billy (U.S.A.) and his father took against his brother when he called her a racial slur helped her not retain negative feelings about that event, and feel accepted as member of the family. Lisle Mireles (Germany)

spoke of how knowing her parents were there for her gave her the strength to continue working on her marriage when things got rough:

> Yeah, I had parents I could turn to. Parents that never said fine, then come on home. But always, my parents always did, especially at the beginning, my dad. He would always say, listen, I think you should work on it, but, if there is, if you need to leave, there's always a place for you to come. And that alone, to know that there is somebody behind me if I need it, that was a huge, that was like this, this, this somebody to lean on if I needed to.

Even though Sam (Samoa) and Betty (U.S.A.) Fa'amuli's children were mostly adults when they married, both felt that the other's children and now grandchildren immediately accepted them as a second parent. With recent health problems they have experienced, they have relied heavily on their family for help. Betty spoke of the grandchildren as an "army" who showed up every few weeks to get the house in order and help make things easier for them.

Friends also provided a resource for these couples. When asked about disapproval from friends or society for their relationship, many of the couples replied that they had never felt any at all. On the contrary, they felt that friends and society were very accepting and even encouraging of their intercultural marriage. As Eva McCarthy (Chile) shared of her experience:

> We were married in the courthouse in DC by a black judge, you can't go wrong on that one!

Betty Fa'amuli (U.S.A.) and Giselle Connor (Libya) both talked about how much they relied on support they got from their church community, through social activities and faith based ones, such as the bible study group Betty and Sam attend. Jim (U.S.A.) and Mary (Hong Kong) Young mentioned a few friends they know who are also interculturally married, who shared their experiences with them before their marriage.

For each other.

These couples showed a lot of support for each other, both through the stories they told and experiences mentioned, and observations during the interviews. After one spouse made a comment, he or she would often check in with the other for agreement, or make a statement asking the other to chime in their opinion, such as Eva McCarthy (Chile) did a few times with" At least, that's how it was for me. I can't speak for Billy."

The couples also spoke admiringly of one another and often gave examples and appreciation for what the other had done. When pointed out, the couples stated that this appreciation and support of each other was a resource to them. Rob Connor (U.S.A.) stated that his wife still cooks for him, even when she is not hungry, and that he was grateful, even if he does not show it often. Jim Young (U.S.A.) spoke of how proud he was of his wife's skills in fashion design and cooking. Betty Fa'amuli (U.S.A.) told of her husband's accomplishments in music, and Geoffrey Baldwin (South Africa) talked of his respect for his wife's mathematical abilities and intellect.

A few times during the interviews a statement was made about traits of one spouse, and regardless of who had made the comment, the other would quickly add in more to amend it in a positive light, wanting to make sure it was not understood as a something negative about the spouse. When Lisle Mireles (Germany) spoke of never having lived on her own before her marriage, Mike (U.S.A.) broke in with, "but that's because of your culture, not because you…[couldn't do it]." Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) stated he was not culturally aware when he met Eva (Chile), and she attributed that to his upbringing, and the environment he grew up in, rather than a lack of interest on his part. When Sam (Samoa) mentioned that he probably should have continued with English

classes, and that would have helped out a lot, Betty (U.S.A.) broke in to list all the reasons he had not been able to, and that none of them were his fault.

Examples were also given of times in the past where couples have used this resource in combating stressors. Billy McCarthy physically stood up for Eva against his brother, sending the message that insults against her were now against him as well. Debbie Baldwin attributed Geoffrey's support for her against his parents as being pivotal to their success. She stated:

> I think that if he had ever taken his parents' side against me, I don't think that we would have made it.

Rob Connor spoke of the many military spouses he knew that could not adjust to the lifestyle, and the benefit to both his career and their marriage Giselle's understanding of and support of his career were.

Communication

When asked how they dealt with stressors so as not to let it destroy their marriage, every one of these couples mentioned communication as key. A comment of Sam Fa'amuli's (Samoa) showed the importance of communication to them. When asked if they had ever sought out counseling or professional help, he replied, "we counsel ourselves!" The Fa'amuli's, Young's, McCarthy's, and Mireles's all felt that nonverbal communication was an important resource as well. They talked about knowing when to talk and when to give each other space as another aspect of communication that helped them to cope.

These couples were each other's best friends, and felt about their partners as Billy McCarthy (U.S.A.) stated:

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You know basically Eva's like my best friend, she is the one I talk to most of the time. If something's bothering me, if something comes up, I just talk to her.

They felt this friendship and their ability talk to each other were the first resource they turned to when thing got hard. Debbie Baldwin (U.S.A.)stated:

I, for one, think that one of the reasons that our marriage has endured is because I don't ever get tired of talking to B…I would say talking is one of our pastimes, we enjoy talking to each other. We, we go out on dates regularly… we'd take our friday date night, and sometimes we didn't really go anywhere, or doing anything, but go out to dinner and talk talk talk.

These couples worked to have open lines of communication between them, and to always feel that they could talk to each other. They did not let things build up between them; as Jim Young (U.S.A.) put it, "we didn't let any thing eat at us, so that we got depressed or discouraged." While these couples did not set aside time to talk regularly, they made talking a priority when it was needed. Lisle Mireles (Germany) said "we spend a lot of time talking" and Debbie Baldwin (U.S.A.) stated, "I would say we probably sometimes talked issues to death."

Working towards common goals together

Working towards common goals was listed as a way these couples coped with stressors. The Fa'amuli's (Samoa, U.S.A.) felt that their work together for their business forced them to communicate and work things out, as well as provided an opportunity for them to spend time together and get to know each other more. Betty stated:

If we ever do have a little, uh, misunderstanding about something, there is always that next show down the line, or that next piece of music, or that dance routine, that has to something done with it, you know, has to have something done with it, so we can use it. So by the time we get involved in doing something musically again, whenever the thing was we were upset about passes out the window.

The Conner's (U.S.A., Libya) spent a considerable amount of their time caring for their disabled children, and learning about their disabilities through research and support groups. They felt of their common goal of providing for their children's comfort, happiness, and growth also helped their marriage.

Others spoke of parenting as another common goal they worked on. For the Young's and the Baldwin's, presenting a united from for their children was important. For the McCarthy's and the Mireles's, finding ways to teach their children about both cultures provided a common goal for them to work towards together.

Personal preparation

These couples felt that their own personal preparation for marriage through acculturation, life experience, and personal coping skills was a resource for their marriage. Both Mary Young (Hong Kong) and Eva McCarthy (Chile) stated that their own level of acculturation to America helped in dealing with stressors in their marriage. Rob (U.S.A.) and Giselle (Libya) Connor spoke of how their experiences with hard times in their youth through wars and depressions prepared them to cope with the challenges that came with marriage. Debbie (U.S.A.) and Geoffrey (South Africa) Baldwin credited part of their success to resolutions they made as teens not to perpetuate the cycle of divorce they saw in their own families.

Both partners in the Mireles's (U.S.A., Germany) and the Fa'amuli's (Samoa, U.S.A.) were married for the second time around. They stated that life experience and their experiences from their first marriages have served as resources to them in these marriages. Sam Fa'amuli stated:

> Like she has learned from her other marriage, I learned from my other marriage. And things that didn't go well over there, I don't bring it over here.

Knowing themselves and being able to take care of themselves also fit in this category. These couples worked to develop their own personal coping skills, and to support their spouses. Mike Mireles (U.S.A.) found regular workouts helped him to better cope, while his wife Lisle (Germany) stated that writing in a diary was helpful to her. Rob Conner (U.S.A.) read and learned more about things that interested him, Mary Young (Hong Kong) developed her interests in design, and Eva McCarthy (Chile) became involved in community activist groups she supported.

Religion

All of the couples also listed religion as a resource they used. They felt that both the shared activity of practicing religion and the things taught to them by their faiths served as buffers to stressors. While some of the couples were not of the same faith in the beginning of their marriage, all of the couples now both participate in the same church together. The Young's (U.S.A, Hong Kong) and the Conner's (U.S.A., Libya) stated that following the precepts taught in their churches prevented other problems they feel they might had had without their faith. The Young's and the Baldwin's (South Africa, U.S.A.) both talked about their religious beliefs providing a broader culture that overcame other cultural differences they had. Jim Young said:

> There's a gospel culture, and if you try to live the gospel culture, then the other cultures just sort of follow along…I think the church, as Mary said, brings certain values that tend to overcome cultural differences-not completely, but that creates the commitment… so I think we faced pretty much the same challenges that any married couple faces.

For the Connors, Young's, and the Baldwin's, the feelings of knowing that God wanted them to be together, or had approved their marriage helped them to cope. Geoffrey Baldwin stated:

> We had this religious background where we both had the same experience that said you're right for each other. So to the tough times, one of the things that kept us going was um, that, going back to, to baseline like, we know that this was right for us, and it's good for us…

His wife Debbie added:

> To me it was the knowledge that something beyond myself had chosen him to be my life companion. And, it was so profound that during difficult times, when I wanted to give up, or kick him out, or runaway, or whatever. I would remember that experience and say to myself no, it might be awful right now, but will get better if I continue to try to do the right thing.

The religious practices of praying, reading together, and trying to live their religion were also important. Betty Fa'amuli stated that their recent practice of praying aloud together has made a big difference in their marriage. The Young's, Baldwin's, Mireles's, and Connor's stated that praying and studying scriptures together helped them. All the couples stated that their partner being of the same faith they were was important and provided a sense of security to the relationship. As Rob Connor stated:

> You know the apostle Paul says, has a sentence about being yoked equally, in King James's words… I think it makes life easier.

Family Definition: Making Meaning of the Stressors (C Factor)

The definition a family gives to a certain stressor or situation is often the key to how that situation is resolved for the family- whether bonadaption or maladaption occurs. These couples had in common many perceptions both about their marriages and the stressors they faced. Both what the couples labeled as stressors and felt were their

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resources interacted heavily in the couples' perceptions of how big of a problem any certain stressor or event was for the couple.

We're not different

These couples felt their marriage was not that different from marriages of partners from the same culture, and that they as partners were not that different from each other. With the exception of Debbie Baldwin, none of them had ever thought they would marry outside of their own culture before they met their spouse. They talked about being attracted to their spouse for typical reasons anyone is attracted to someone- physical attraction, the other person having the traits they wanted in a mate, and being ready to start a relationship. All stated they never saw their spouse as being from a different culture, and they did not think of themselves of one nationality and their partner of another. As Jim Young stated, "I just think of Mary as my wife."

The McCarthy's, the Young's, the Connor's, and the Fa'amuli's all stated that they felt their challenges in marriage were the same as any other couple would have. Eva McCarthy (Chile) stated:

> But I think, um I think that some of the challenges that we have had in our relationship are more or less the typical challenges that any couple will, will be challenged with.

Although they admitted that they did fit in the categories of intercultural or interracial couples, all stated they would not put that label on their marriage. Lisle Mireles (Germany) said:

> I'm always, but that was from the first day on, surprised when people talk about interracial marriage, but to me, in our case, I'm like what are you talking about interracial? Color has never been a factor for us. Actually, I'm offended by it, because I don't see it.

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Betty Fa'amuli (U.S.A.) stated:

> Matter-of-fact, I don't feel like I've married someone from another culture…I mean, I don't, I don't really think we, I think, you know, when you say interracial marriages, I never really thought of it as in interracial marriage.

Four of the six couples also identified themselves as being of different races. But they still would not have labeled their marriage as an intercultural or interracial one, and felt that other combinations of races or cultures better fit that title than they did. Mike Mireles (U.S.A.), who identified as Hispanic while his wife identified herself as white, felt that they did not fit those terms because they were from cultures that were fairly similar. He stated:

> I can't imagine coming from the western country and an eastern country, like China or Japan, I mean, that's, that would be a huge difference.

Both the McCarthy's (U.S.A., Chile) and the Fa'amuli's (Samoa, U.S.A.), who also identified as being of different races, felt that they might have had more problems or fit those terms better if their skin tone differences were sharper than they are. Billy stated:

> When you say intercultural it, it, you know, I don't see a big, big difference between Eva and I. I could see if she was an African-American and I was, uh, you know, white, then maybe things would be a little bit different because people might look at us differently… I think it's more a little bit more, if you see a white and black person together, you know, there might be some discrimination things, and you know, you might remark, and that…I think that with Eva and I…yeah, we are differently from two different cultures, so yeah, I understand why you're speaking to us, but our differences… it was, you know, at first, we did have some differences, but, eventually the relationship kind of worked things out, but, so…we don't even see those anymore at all.

Luck

These couples used some form of the words luck or lucky in discussing how they had coped with their stressors. Both the Connor's and the Young's later revised those

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statements, saying what they called luck was really blessings from God, but this attitude

of fate playing a hand in their favor was prevalent in all the couples. The Young's felt

they were lucky that their children had turned out so well. As Mary (Hong Kong) said:

> Yeah, I think we kind of lucked out in that! Because I really, I always said we
> lucked out. Because I don't feel that you know, I did a good job as a mother,
> but I feel like we lucked out, our kids all turned out very, very good.

The McCarthy's (U.S.A., Chile) and the Connor's (U.S.A., Libya) both used the

term "lucky" in talking about finding each other and having that someone they fell in

love with turn out to be a good person, whom the felt that they could work things out

with. The Mireles's (U.S.A., Germany) felt they were lucky in that they had turned out

to be of the same religion and had the same views on raising their children, as they hadn't

talked about these things before marriage. The McCarthy's and the Fa'amuli's (Samoa,

U.S.A.) both felt that they were lucky in avoiding many of the stressors the literature says

is common to intercultural marriages.

Being from different cultures has benefited our relationship

Through these interviews the couples pointed out good aspects of being from

different cultures. The Young's (U.S.A., Hong Kong) and the Mireles's joked about

getting double the holidays to celebrate; Lisle (Germany) stated some of her daughter's

friends had even started celebrating German holidays they thought were "cool". Mike

Mireles (U.S.A.) felt their family's different cultures made their family special. He

stated:

> You have a set of religious holidays and traditions that you guys follow
> and we have a set, and then we have to combine the two. And then that
> makes our family unique because we celebrate in German, and in my case
> Spanish too…Plus the language that we speak. I mean, my wife speaks

German to the kids in the house, and I, we speak English when I come home usually, so I think our family is unique in a way, that we've got the two cultures and we've kind of merged them together.

The Baldwin's (South Africa, U.S.A.) and the Connor's (U.S.A., Libya) both felt their different cultural backgrounds added excitement and adventure to their marriage that neither would have had marrying someone from their own culture. Eva McCarthy (Chile) felt that their different cultures, and the influence their cultures had on their values, is what made their marriage survive. She states:

> I believe that my culture really has made, I mean our culture, has planted the bulb, in a sense, to really make it work. I really believe that Billy and I have been more together because of those differences. I truly believe that… our relationship has been, uh successful because I believe that if I was, um, part of this culture, that perhaps things that Billy did, that I would have been annoyed with, that in my culture, we tend to be kind of more accepting, of certain behaviors, to kind of work with it …I believe that when B and I got married, if I was to think like the typical American culture I would have divorced Billy when I was, in my, not even my first year of marriage.

Commitment to the marriage and their spouse

These couples had a strong sense of commitment to their spouse, and to marriage as an institution. They believed that the love they had for each other was key to their success and all of the couples stated in one form or another their belief in love to overcome any differences they have. As Mike Mireles (U.S.A.) stated, "love has a tendency to override everything." This perception also influenced what these couples saw as stressors.

They believed that "marriage is a for life commitment", as Eva McCarthy (Chile) stated. They were committed to staying in the marriage and working through problems.

They believed that once you make a commitment, you make it work. Giselle Connor (Libya) stated:

> But you have to put it in your mind, I'm doing this because this is the way a woman or a man that have a commitment, and they get married, and have a commitment, ah, is expected of.

Those that had been married before specifically stated that they did not want to get divorced again and were willing to work hard to make this marriage last. Lisle Mireles (Germany) stated:

> I was raised you don't give up on marriage that easily, and he had done it once before, I had done it once before, and I wasn't about to do it again, to just give up. I, I wanted to work it out. I really did.

These couples also were committed to having a good marriage, not just an intact one. They believed in resolving things quickly, and were committed to making their marriage a safe and secure place for both. All stated that having a close relationship was very important to them. Eva McCarthy (Chile) stated "what's the reason to come home if you don't have that in the first place?"

Cutting each other slack, not sweating the small stuff

These couples made room in their relationship for tolerance and understanding. All talked about the importance of forgiveness, accommodation, and acceptance. They allowed their partner to make mistakes, and worked to keep their focus and energy on the importance things. They did not believe in "sweating the small stuff", as Geoffrey Baldwin (South Africa) put it. And as Jim Young (U.S.A.) stated, it was "about not sweating the big stuff!"

The believed in taking personal responsibility for any part they may have played in certain situations, and to give their partner the benefit of the doubt. Lisle Mireles (Germany) stated:

> I think what's important is that you don't immediately get mad… so you don't take every word the way it said right then and there, you, oh wait a second, could that be because we misunderstood each other?

They were cognizant of beliefs and ways of doing things that their partner brought from their culture, and tried to be sensitive to honor each other's cultures. They believed this attitude would help them to succeed. Mike Mireles (U.S.A.) stated:

> Well, I think we made it because we wanted to, first off, but…Give-and-take, understanding, tolerating, excepting the other person for what they are and their beliefs, where they come from, and all that stuff, instead of just imposing what's, this is the American way, this is the German way, this is how we're going to do it.

Geoffrey Baldwin (South Africa) compared this attitude of give and take to the shared activity of being on a swing set with your spouse. Swing sets allow for thrilling bursts of speed and adventure, but also a lot of work and effort. Sometimes you get to sit in the swing and enjoy the efforts of your partner's pushing. Other times you are behind your partner doing all the work for their benefit. But even that should be viewed as a privilege, knowing you are adding to their happiness, and that you'll get your turn too, when they are ready. He stated, "Push the swing this time. You may not be in it, but you get to push it."

Chapter V: Discussion

This study was conducted with three purposes in mind: (1) to add support to the literature that calls for more research to be done on this population of intercultural marriages; (2) to add to the literature available by researching a section that has not been mentioned in the literature- that of successful intercultural marriages; (3) to provide the beginnings of a framework for a clinical method to be developed to use in working with intercultural couples who present for therapy. This section will discuss how the findings in this study are or are not consistent with the literature, the limitations of this study, and clinical implications of this study for therapists seeing intercultural couples in therapy.

Consistency with the Literature

One of the biggest challenges to those searching for information about intercultural couples is the inconsistency of the available literature. Because so few studies have been done on this population, the results are wide-ranging, contradictory, and often limited to specific samples. Much of the literature states that what is written and known is only written and known due to research on small sections of this population- usually specific cultural combinations and only accessing specific areas of the relationship. Because so many other variables exist, research is hard to do, and conclusions in most studies state that more needs to be done in order to prove or disprove any of the findings (Fu et al., 2001; Shibazaki & Bernnan, 1998; Sung, 1990). This study also found that to be true. The wide variability among the sample chosen for this study is typical for most studies already available, and adds to the thought that this is a difficult population to make generalized statements about or to find conclusive findings with.

The majority of the literature on intercultural couples describes a sample that reports lower marital satisfaction (Fu et al., 2001) and higher divorce rates (Brown, 1987; Sung, 1990) than same culture marriages. This study looked at a unique subset of intercultural marriages, that of those in stable and satisfying marriages, who obviously for these reasons do not compare with those couples described in the literature as unstable and unhappy. Therefore, distinguishing the relationship between marital satisfaction and other findings is difficult. Other common beliefs in the literature are that intercultural couples will face stressors resulting from their differing cultural backgrounds, such as stereotypes held by our society about them and their families (Brown, 1987; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Lewandowski & Jackson, 2001; Sung, 1990), cultural differences about lifestyle and family decisions (Biever et al., 1998; Laird, 2000; Pearlman, 1996), their personal experiences with oppression (Biever et al., 1998; Fernandez, 1996; Forna, 1992, Killian, 2002; Oriti et al., 1996; Thompson & Jenal, 1994) and issues relating to their children and childrearing factors (www.mavinfoundation.org; Atkin, 2001; Forna, 1992; Grove, 1994; Hegar & Greif, 1994; Sung, 1990).

Couples in this study, with the exception of one (the Baldwin's, from South Africa and the U.S.A.) who reported they are still struggling with family disapproval, did not report their biggest challenges as stemming from their cultural differences. When first questioned about their challenges, they in fact felt they did not face many challenges at all that were due to their different cultures. However, they did vocalize stories and experiences that fit with the challenges stated in the literature, although they also specifically stated they felt that these incidents were isolated ones, and not descriptive of their entire experience. Two factors may contribute to their not listing these experiences

as challenges. The first could be that the time removed from these challenges (the majority of them occurred before marriage or just after) caused them to remember them as being less of a stressor than they were at the time (the halo effect). Another factor that may have played a part in this finding was the age of the participants involved (three of the couples were in their sixties and seventies) and the time removed from the earliest years of their relationship, when most of these issues stated in the literature will surface. The couples may not have listed challenges because they simply did not remember them.

This finding of not feeling challenges stemmed from cultural differences was in fact consistent with findings in other studies, such as Sung's 1990 study that found that participants did not report major cultural differences. Sung also found that religion posed little or no problems with intercultural couples, another finding supported by this current study and inconsistent with other literature (eg. McFadden & Moore, 2001).

Sung's study researched intercultural couples, not necessarily successful intercultural marriages, as this present study did. Giladi-McKelvie (1986) also conducted qualitative interviews with successful intercultural marriages, and found that participants reported a strong sense of religion and both made efforts to learn about each other's culture. This finding was also true in the experiences of the couples in this study. However, findings in this study contradicted another finding in Giladi-McKelvie's study, namely that participants grew up feeling "different". Participants in this study did not report feeling different; in fact, in this study the opposite was true. Couples felt that they were not different; neither from each other nor from other same-culture marriages. A possible reason for this discrepancy could be the methodologies of the two studies. Part of Giladi-McKelvie's study used a structured, private interview with individual partners,

in which their pasts and motivations for marriage were explored. The present study interviewed both spouses together and concentrated on their experiences getting and being married rather than their motivations.

Limitations

The biggest limitations to this study were the sample size, sampling procedures, and the generalizability of these findings to intercultural couples as a whole. This study was conducted with a small sample in part due to feasibility of the study, and in part so that each couple's experience could be explored in more depth. A larger sample would add more certainty that these findings were common through all successful intercultural marriages and not simply this specific sample.

Participants were chosen by referral to the researcher, fit to the selection criteria, and availability for the interview. A random sample would also add support to the certainty of the findings, although no feasible medium exists to find that random sample. All of the couples participated in hour to an hour and a half interviews together with their spouse and the researcher. Interviewing the spouses alone may have resulted in additional information that perhaps was not shared when they were together. Due to participant's time constraints, this strategy was not employed.

All of the couples in the study included one spouse who was from the United States married to a foreign born partner, which may be a factor affecting these findings. In addition, all the couples eventually chose to move to the U.S to live, which may be another factor affecting both the findings themselves and the generalizabiltity of this

study. Couples where neither spouse was born in the U.S nor that currently live in a country either spouse grew up in may report different experiences.

Clinical Implications and Future Research

This study supports the need for strength-based models to work with these couples (Chan & Wetherington, 1998) by researching some of the strengths in coping that exist in successful intercultural marriages. This positive view of intercultural marriages will allow clinicians working with intercultural couples an in-depth look at how couples who are succeeding have dealt with stress and coping. These strengths can then be used to build these resources in struggling couples.

An underlying concept for work with intercultural couples should be a respectful stance of learning about a particular couple's experience, and their view of their challenges. The findings in this study support the idea that not all intercultural couples face the same stressors and experiences as they merge two cultures into their relationship. Clinicians must be careful to work on problems the client has identified as problems, and not commonly held beliefs or stereotypes. A "client as the expert" stance will allow the clinician to learn not only what might be helpful to a particular couple, but will also set up the couple up to constructively look at what strengths and resources they can bring to their problem solving.

This study found that the perceptions successful couples had about themselves and their relationship heavily impacted whether or not they viewed a particular stressor as such. The themes of seeing similarities between the spouses, learning about each partner's culture, supporting each other, personal preparation, and seeking out support

from others are all areas around which clinicians can focus conversations. As clients recognize what strengths they have in these areas, these strengths can be utilized and supported in interventions which work to build up resources available to the couple. As the positive aspects of intercultural relationships are explored and discussed, clinicians can work with couples to find and take advantage of the unique strengths and resources they have as a result of their different cultural backgrounds.

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Informed Consent for Research Project

Project Title: Stress and Coping Techniques in Successful Intercultural Marriages

Researchers: Sarah Donovan, M. S. Candidate, Department of Human Development,
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Angela J. Huebner, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Human
Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

What is the purpose of this study? The purpose of this study will be to understand how intercultural couples who have built long-term and mutually satisfying marriages have overcome the barriers to doing so.

What will I be asked to do? You will be asked participate in a 1-1.5 hour interview. During this interview you will be asked about the challenges you have experienced in your marriage, what challenges you relate to being part of an intercultural couple, and what you have done to overcome those challenges and build a happy marriage. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience in a mutually agreed upon location, and will be audio taped to make sure we understand exactly what was said.

Are there any risks to me? The researchers anticipate that there will be no risk to you as a result of your participation in this research study. We will ensure that your information will be kept confidential. In an effort to really understand all the components of your experience, the interview will include some questions about emotional issues; however, you may decline to answer any question at any time.

Are there any benefits to me? As a result of participating in this study you may feel empowered and feel a sense of satisfaction because you have contributed to an important study that may benefit both other couples seeking successful intercultural marriages, and those professionals who work with them in building an effective way of working.

Are my responses confidential? Every effort will be made to keep all information you provide in the strictest confidence. Any specific identifying information will be omitted from your transcript (e.g., name changes, age). Your responses will be kept locked for the duration of the project and access will only be allowed to the research team. After the study has been completed your name and any other identifying information will not be reported in any publications or presentations, and videotapes will be destroyed. Once the data collection is complete and the interviews are transcribed, a copy of your interview transcription will be sent to you if you so request. If there are any portions of the interview you wish to change in order to protect your confidentiality, you may do so and send it back to the researcher by the date designated. You may also highlight any portion of your transcription that you do not wish to be quoted later when the research project data analysis is reported. These highlights can be sent back to the researcher as well. If

you do not respond to the interview transcription by the designated date, the researcher will assume that you do not wish to make any changes.

Will I be compensated for my participation? Your participation is completely voluntary and there will be no compensation other than the researcher's appreciation for your time.

Do I have the freedom to withdraw? You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions and you may drop out at anytime.

Approval of Research: This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact:

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Dr. David Moore, IRB Chair
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Participant's Permission:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I have read and understand the Informed Consent and the conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project by signing my name on the line below. I realize that, although I choose to participate right now, I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interviwee#

Demographic Questionnaire

Gender: male   female   Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Country of Birth/ Residence until age 15: _____

First language:_____Other languages spoken:_____

Highest level of education: _____

Number of marriages: _____   Duration:_____

Number of years in current marriage: _____

Sex and Ages of children: _____

Interviewee#:

Interview Questions

Warm Up
How did you two meet?

Had you ever thought that you would marry someone outside of your culture?

Experience of Intercultural Marriage
Tell me about the process of deciding to get married for you- were your different cultures a big consideration?

How did you feel society/ your family viewed your marriage?

Do you feel those views have changes through the duration of your marriage?

Do you feel your marriage is that much different from same culture couples you know? How so, or not?

Experience of Stressors
The literature available on couples who marry outside of their culture says these couples often have extra challenges- usually around gender roles, cultural traditions, raising and disciplining children, interacting with each other's families, and societal and family disapproval. What do you feel your biggest challenges as a married couple have been?

Do you agree with what the literature views as the biggest challenges to couples married outside of their cultures?

Do you feel these challenges were influenced by your different cultures? How or how not?

Experience of Coping and Resources
The literature also says that couples who marry outside of their culture have higher divorce rates and lower marital satisfaction than those that marry within their culture. Knowing what the literature says about the success of intercultural marriages, how have you managed to stay together and build a mutually satisfying relationship?

What resources, meaning strengths, people, things that help you to cope, did you feel you had to draw on in hard times both individually and as a couple, through the stages of your marriage?

How do you feel your different cultural backgrounds influenced or did not influence those resources?

How did you two view challenges to your marriage- both individually and as a couple?

What advice would you give to a newlywed intercultural couple who are wondering how to make their marriage last?

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Please think of your relationship with your current spouse as you answer the following questions.

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER

(A)   How satisfied are you with your current marriage?

| **Extremely** | | | | | | | | **Extremely** |
| **Dissatisfied** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **Satisfied** |

(B)   How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?

| **Extremely** | | | | | | | | **Extremely** |
| **Dissatisfied** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **Satisfied** |

(C)   How satisfied are you with your partner as a spouse?

| **Extremely** | | | | | | | | **Extremely** |
| **Dissatisfied** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **Satisfied** |